

“Our Biblical World View”

(1) God is the Creator Who is Judging His Creation

This is the first occasion of this new sermon series, “Our Biblical Worldview”, the duration of which I am uncertain. I thought of entitling our subject, “The Christian Worldview”, but settled on “Our Biblical Word View” in an attempt to narrow our subject from the many world views that various Christians purport to have that diverge from one another in significant ways. The biblical world view is the way that God has revealed in the Holy Scriptures that is true and right, the way of thinking and living that He has purposed and promised to bless.¹

Now in the series we recently completed, which we called “The Unconverted ‘Christian’”, we assumed that the ones listening or reading the notes would be mostly professing Christians, even church attendees. But as we begin this series we assume a different starting point. We will assume that the ones who may begin to hear us or begin to read these notes are not professing Christians at all. In fact, they may not even be theists, that is, ones who believe in the existence of a divine being or beings. We will move past that starting point quickly, but it is here we want to begin.

We are living in an increasing secular world. We are now in a world in which we cannot assume that a person that we meet and with whom we engage conversation knows or believes anything regarding the God of the Bible, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And yet, in comparison to the nations of the world, the USA is still quite religious and remains dominantly “Christian” in its self-perception. I have read that only about 3% of Americans claim to be atheist, but others have asserted that as many as 10% deny the existence of God. About 23% say that they are not affiliated with any organized religion. One might say that these people may claim to believe in God, but their faith has not brought them to a serious or sincere commitment to their faith. Their faith does not impinge greatly on how they think and live. Interestingly, about 40% of Americans classify themselves as very religious.

Actually the population of this northeast region of the United States is least religious than any other in our nation. Here is the result of one study:

In a Gallup poll, citizens from across the US were surveyed to determine whether “religion is not important in their lives and say they seldom or never attend religious services.” From this poll, Vermont and Maine were considered to be the least religious, as more than half of their respective respondents stated that religion was not very important in their lives. Closely following these two far northeastern US states in religious indifference or disbelief were New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Colorado, and Connecticut, all of whom had more than 40% of their respondents state that religion was not a focal point of their regular lives.²

But even among Christians there are a wide range of beliefs about who God is and how He relates and interacts with the people of this world. This is more so today than at any time in history. There are those who assert that one significant reason for this is the increased exposure to various religious beliefs of people, whose cultures were formerly localized and isolated. The influence of our modern world has had a dramatic effect especially among the younger generation of people, the so-called Millennials and those of Generation Z. who are decidedly more unreligious than are older Americans. Our world contains a diverse and disparate number of religions and philosophies to which our Lord has called us to proclaim Jesus Christ to be the only Lord and Savior of sinners.

Let us first answer the question...

I. What is a biblical worldview?

¹ Of course in our opinion the biblical world view is the only true Christian world view.

² <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/states-with-the-most-atheism-in-america.html>

More specifically, what is one's worldview? One's worldview refers to a comprehensive conception of the world from a specific standpoint. An individual's worldview is his understanding of the overall picture of life and of his beliefs about the world. It is his way of understanding reality. Your worldview is the context in which you see "reality" and make decisions in day to day living. A biblical worldview, then, is a comprehensive understanding of the world from the perspective of the Bible, God's Word to Christians.

Here is a more formal definition and description of the idea of a worldview:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.³

Here is a more simple explanation:

The term "worldview" is used to describe a core set of values and principles through which the world is understood. A worldview is a compilation of an individual's perceptions of the world, essentially the way a person understands reality. A person's worldview is very important, as it impacts virtually every decision in life. A specifically Christian worldview, then, would be viewing the world through a Christian/biblical lens. A Christian worldview is one in which the Bible is formative.⁴

Every rational person has a worldview that shapes what he thinks and why he orders his daily life as he does. This author stated the matter accurately:

Everyone has a worldview, whether they are conscious or unconscious of having one and whether their worldview is relatively simple or sophisticated, consistent or inconsistent, true (i.e. biblical) or false.

Moreover, everyone *necessarily* has a view of themselves and the universe; God and man; right and wrong; the beginning, the meaning and the goal of all things—a worldview...

The issue is what worldview will we hold? The worldview taught in the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions or one of the lying worldviews which suppress and pervert God's truth in unrighteousness and call forth His wrath from heaven (Rom. 1:18)?⁵

A person's worldview, therefore, is a set of personal convictions about values, principles of living, and the purpose for living in this world. One's worldview is how a person understands what is true, real, and valuable. If one has a biblical worldview, his perceptions and values are shaped by his understanding of God is his Creator and the Ruler of this world, and that it is his responsibility to live in manner that is in accordance with His will, that which pleases Him.

II. Do professing "Christians" have a biblical worldview?

Just because people call themselves "Christians" does not necessarily mean that they espouse a biblical worldview. There have been formal studies about this subject, one having been conducted very recently. There is an organization entitled *Center for Biblical Worldview*. Which conducted a national survey, "Perceptions about Biblical Worldview and its Application." Here is a description of this study:

In May 2021 Family Research Council's Center for Biblical Worldview commissioned Metaformation Inc., under the direction of George Barna, to conduct a nationwide survey regarding aspects of biblical worldview. The objective was to provide original, news-worthy research-based insights about how many people believe they possess a biblical worldview; if and to what extent they seek to integrate that worldview

³ James Sire, *The Universe Next Door; A Basic Worldview Catalog*, Fourth Edition (Intervarsity Press, 2004), p. 17.

⁴ <https://www.compellingtruth.org/Christian-worldview.html>

⁵ David J. Engelsma, *The Reformed Worldview* (British Reformed Fellowship, 2012), p. v.

into every dimension of life; what influences have helped them to do so; and whether they believe that such integration matters to God. The results of the survey were publicly announced and launched at an event in Washington, D.C., on May 27, 2021.⁶

Aside from the very broad way in which this study defined who is a Christian, and even though the questions regarding a Christian world view were very weak and sketchy, here are some of their overall conclusions:

Across America, approximately two out of every three adults describe themselves as Christian. However, based on the American Worldview Inventory conducted annually by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, just 6% of adults – and just 9% of those who call themselves Christian – possess a biblical worldview.

-- 81% who attend an evangelical church claim they have a biblical worldview; 21% actually have one

-- 73% of adults who attend a Pentecostal or charismatic church claim they have a biblical worldview; 16% actually have one

-- 69% of adults who attend a mainline Protestant church claim they have a biblical worldview; 8% actually have one

57% of adults who attend a Catholic church claim they have a biblical world view; 1% actually have one⁷

-- Two-thirds of the people (68%) who consider themselves to be Christians claim to have a worldview, yet the American Worldview Inventory indicates that only 9% do.

What this study reveals is that relatively few professing Christians in America actually affirm a biblical worldview that was set before them through this survey. It is all important what we understand the Word of God reveals about who God is and how He relates and involves Himself in His world. What we think about God will have a direct effect on how we live in His world. “For as he (any man) thinks in his heart, so is he” (Pro. 23:7). How people think about God will impinge on how they will live in God’s world. Let us now give our attention to a passage which addresses the need and importance to have a biblical worldview. Let us turn to Romans 1:18-32.

III. God’s revelation of Himself in His creation (Romans 1:18-32)

The Holy Scriptures, which are the written Word of God, reveals to us that God is the creator of all that exists and that He is actively watching and judging all people through history. God not only exists, but He is working in all that transpires in His world; He is, as **Francis Schaeffer** (1912-1984) once expressed, “*The God Who is There*.”⁸ The Apostle Paul’s message to the church at Rome both presumes and proclaims this truth. Here in Romans 1 we read of the great importance for people everywhere to hold and live according to this world-view that God is the Creator who is actively governing and superintending His world. Paul wrote these words to the Christians in the church located in the city of Rome, the seat of the world empire of the first century.

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

⁶ **Center for Biblical Worldview**, “Perceptions about Biblical Worldview and Its Application” (May, 2021), p. 3.

⁷ Source of these figures: Cultural Research Center @ Arizona Christian University

⁸ Francis A. Schaeffer, **The God Who is There; Speaking Historic Christianity into the Twentieth Century** (InterVarsity Press, 1986), pp. 191.

²⁴Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. ²⁷Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

²⁸And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, ³⁰backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³²who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Rom. 1:18-32)

This is a very direct and hard-hitting passage, particularly in this present day. For this passage is one of the clearest declarations in the Word of God against the sin of homosexuality, though it is included with quite an extensive list of other sins against God. The Scriptures depict the sin of homosexuality to be unnatural and shameful. It is the manifestation of the descent of mankind into decadence that is the result of God's judgment for having turned away from Him. It is probably the most offensive and objectionable passage of the Scriptures to the world in which we are living in this first quarter of the 21st century. But although this passage is rejected by today's world, we embrace and proclaim without apology what God's Word teaches us regarding these matters. And so, even though we expose ourselves to ridicule and hostility in the community, even as this message is broadcast on a number of local access television stations in the area, we will not apologize for God's Word, diminish or obscure its clarity, or "soft-pedal" its implications. But again we stress that much more than homosexual sin is condemned in this passage, as we will see. But further, we should understand that this pronouncement of God's judgment against sin is necessary and preparatory for bringing forth God's mercy and grace in salvation for sinners such as the ones described before us.

As we approach this passage of Holy Scripture, it is important that we understand its role in the apostle's teaching to this church at Rome. Paul gave his formal introduction to his epistle in the two verses that precede our passage. Paul had written,

¹⁶"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Rom. 1:16f)

The gospel that Paul would present to his readers concerned the righteousness of God to save sinners through faith. This gospel was the same for all people everywhere, to both Jew and Greek. But the people of the first century would not have readily embraced this message for there was a great difference in opinion about the need of salvation and the way of salvation from the perspective of both the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul would show that all the world was in need of this gospel in order to commend it fully to his readers. Paul began to lay out a case that both Gentiles and Jewish people were sinners, who were under the wrath of God, who were all in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, beginning with verse 18, Paul argued that the whole world is under sin and was in need of the grace of God for salvation that is in Jesus Christ alone. As one once described Paul's effort:

Every person is "without excuse" because every person—whether a first-century pagan or a twentieth-century materialist—has been given a knowledge of God and has spurned that knowledge in favor of idolatry, in all its varied manifestations. All therefore stand under the awful reality of the wrath of God, and all are in desperate need of the justifying power of the gospel of Christ. We will never come to grips with

the importance of the gospel, or be motivated as we should be to proclaim it, until this sad truth has been fully integrated into our worldview.⁹

Paul began his argument with the passage that we read. He continues his argument through Romans 2 and then completes and concludes this aspect of his teaching with **Romans 3:9** and **10**, as well as **verses 19** and **20**.

⁹“What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands; no one seeks for God.’” (Rom. 3:9, 10)

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:19, 20)

And so, between Romans 1:18 and Romans 3:20, the apostle Paul set before his readers the guilt of all the world and he declared the need for sinners to experience the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let us begin to work through these verses in which we read of **Paul’s indictment against idolaters**. We read in **verse 18**, “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*” In verse 17 Paul had declared that “the *righteousness* of God is being revealed.” Here, Paul declares that “the *wrath* of God is being revealed.” Both of these statements speak of the present, on-going work of God in history in judging the people of this world.

Many people, who are at least theists in their belief system in that they believe God exists, do not believe that God is actively involved in His world. And we could also say sadly that there are many professing Christians who believe that the true God is withdrawn from history most of the time. They long to see God at work in their lives and in the world. They pray for God to intervene, to manifest His presence and power in His world. Many are puzzled and even perplexed because they do not see Him at work. They believe God is an absent, uninvolved God. But Paul has assured his readers that God is not only revealing His righteousness in bringing salvation, he declares that God is also actively revealing His wrath upon sin in the unfolding of history. God is actively involved in His world. “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*”

What is God’s wrath? **Arthur Pink** described it well:

The wrath of God is His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It is the displeasure and indignation of Divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which He passes upon evil-doers. God is angry against sin because it is a rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God’s government shall be made to know that God is the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded. Not that God’s anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No; while God will vindicate His dominion as the Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive.¹⁰

John Gill wrote of God’s wrath:

The wrath of God is the heat of His great anger (Deut. 29:24). It is His anger not only kindled and incensed, but blown up into a flame; it is the “indignation” of His anger, the “fury” and “fierceness” of it, (Isa. 30:30, 42:25; Hosea 11:9) and it seems to be no other than His punitive justice, and includes His will to punish sinners according to the demerit of their sins in strict justice; His threatenings to do it, and the actual

⁹ Douglas Moo, **The Epistle to the Romans** (Eerdmans, 1996), p. 98.

¹⁰ Arthur Pink, **The Attributes of God** (Reiner Publications, n.d.), p. 97.

execution of it; which is the vengeance that belongs to Him, and He will recompense; even His vindictive wrath, or vengeful judgment...¹¹

Let us not be ashamed or make apology for the wrath of God. It is a holy and righteous attribute of our God. Again, **Pink** had once introduced the topic of God's wrath with these words:

It is sad to find so many professing Christians who appear to regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to make an apology, or at least they wish there were no such thing. While some would not go so far as to openly admit that they consider it a blemish on the Divine character, yet they are far from regarding it with delight, they like not to think about it, and they rarely hear it mentioned without a secret resentment rising up in their hearts against it. Even with those who are more sober in their judgment, not a few seem to imagine that there is a severity about the Divine wrath which is too terrifying to form a theme for profitable contemplation. Others harbor the delusion that God's wrath is not consistent with His goodness, and so seek to banish it from their thoughts.¹²

J. I. Packer wrote about the relative little attention given to the wrath of God in the church's proclamation to the world.

The modern habit throughout the Christian church is to play this subject down. Those who still believe in the wrath of God (not all do) say little about it; perhaps they do not think much about it. To an age which has unashamedly sold itself to the gods of greed, pride, sex and self-will, the church mumbles on about God's kindness but says virtually nothing about His judgment. How often during the past year did you hear, or if you are a minister, did you preach, a sermon on the wrath of God? How long is it, I wonder, since a Christian spoke straight on this subject on radio or television, or in one of those half-column sermonettes that appear in some national dailies and magazines? (And if one did so, how long would it be before he would be asked to speak or wrote again?) The fact is that the subject of divine wrath has become taboo and conditioned themselves never to raise the matter.

We may well ask whether this is as it should be, for the Bible behaves very differently. One cannot imagine that talk of divine judgment was ever very popular, yet the biblical writers engage in it constantly. One of the most striking things about the Bible is the vigor with which both Testaments emphasize the reality and terror of God's wrath. "A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness" (Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God*).¹³

We should be able to look about in our world, in our society, in our culture, in our lives, and we should see that "***the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.***" "The wrath of God is dynamically, effectively, operative in the world of men and it is proceeding from heaven, the throne of God, that it is thus active... There is a positive outgoing of the divine displeasure."¹⁴ A biblical world view sees the wrath of God as being manifest to a great degree through His world.

God's wrath is revealed "***against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.***" There may be a distinction in these two forms of sin. The first, ungodliness, is the sin within the realm of one's duty before God; it is religious in nature. Paul shows that the manifestation of the sin of ungodliness is the sin of idolatry. The second, unrighteousness, is in the realm of morality. Paul shows that the manifestation of unrighteousness is immorality.¹⁵ God is actively, judicially, administering justice, manifesting His wrath against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

God is just in the administration of His wrath, for the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men is conducted even as they "***suppress the truth***" (v. 18). This suggests that there is full culpability on their part.

¹¹ John Gill, **The Body of Divinity** (Turner Lasiter, 1965), p. 97.

¹² Ibid, p. 96.

¹³ J. I. Packer, **Knowing God** (Intervarsity Press, 1993), p. 148f.

¹⁴ John Murray, **The Epistle to the Romans**, vol. 1 (Eerdmans, 1959), pp.35f.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The wrath of God is revealed to people who sin, but who know that they are sinning against God. The fact that they may not seem to understand or be aware of God's judicial dealings among them is because they actively and energetically "suppress the truth."

Paul then explains what he meant by this idea of their suppressing the truth. **Verse 19** reads, "***For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.***" Paul declares that God had revealed knowledge about Himself to these ones who were on the receiving end of His wrath. They knew better. Their guilt is great. God's wrath upon them is just. People know intuitively that there is a God and that they are accountable to Him. That knowledge is actively suppressed by them as they sin. People are born into this world and are naturally theists; they must be trained and "educated" to become atheists and their sin motivates them and moves them to do so.

What was it that God had shown to these people, indeed, to all people everywhere? **Verse 20** records, "***For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.***" God has revealed in the things that He made and in the manner that He made them certain aspects of His nature. This is what is commonly referred to as *natural revelation*, that is, the revelation of God in nature. We might turn to Psalm 19 regarding this matter:

¹The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
²Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
³There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
⁴Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.
In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,
⁵Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.
⁶Its rising is from one end of heaven,
And its circuit to the other end;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat. (Psa. 19:1-6)

The psalmist described the creation as a verbal witness of the God who created it. The day and night are twin witnesses that are continuously heralding the presence and power of God. When honest people look at the world about them, they have ample witness from God. God Himself is revealing His existence and a measure of His wisdom, power, and goodness through the things that He has made.

Paul declared that God's *invisible attributes* of His *eternal power and divine nature* have been clearly displayed before all people. God's eternal power describes the eternal existence of God and the unlimited degree of His power. His divine nature depicts God's "Godness", His deity, as the One who is the sum of His attributes. God has revealed Himself clearly as the eternal all-powerful God in that He had created all things.

Paul stated that all people everywhere have fallen from their former position of privilege and knowledge. **Verse 21** reads, "***For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.***" The worldview that most people embrace is that which is taught by the evolutionist and the materialist. They understand history to record the gradual development of primitive man into a more sophisticated and thinking person, whose religions also developed from primitive ideas to higher and more complex systems as the millennia unfolded. But the Scriptures present mankind in decline. There was a time when all mankind "knew" about the God who had created them more clearly and fully than they do now. But their suppression of the truth resulted in a decay and departure from their former privilege and knowledge. This historical degradation is suggested in Paul's words, "***For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.***"

When Paul wrote, "although they knew God", he was not saying that they knew God in a personal and saving relationship; rather, they knew of God's existence and they knew in a measure what He is like. But they failed to respond in a manner that their knowledge should have led them. Two great sins that unbelievers

commit is their disregard of God in failing to *honor* Him, that is, to *glorify* Him as God, and secondly, in their failure to render *thanksgiving* to God for who He is and for all that He has done. And so, people refuse to glorify God as God. They are in this way failing in the major purpose for which God had created them.

When people live in disregard of God, when they do not respond to God in a right manner, they experience degradation in their reasoning and in their moral standards. Those who fail or refuse to glorify God and thank God for who He is and for what He has done experience a judicial diminishment in their ability to understand spiritual matters rightly and clearly. People become “futile” in their thinking. They are “foolish”, that is, as the Word of God describes a foolish person as one who fails to order his life according to God’s ways and will. Their “foolish hearts” become darkened. Here Paul uses the term “heart” to describe a person’s thinking and reasoning capability. In other words, when people fail or refuse to order their lives according to a biblical worldview of God, there will be consequences in their thinking and in their moral behavior. This is the manifestation of God’s wrath upon them.

And then in **verses 22 and 23** Paul shows the level to which these people fall because of their willful rejection of God and failure to worship Him: *“Claiming to be wise, they became fools,²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”* People who do not acknowledge the true God and who fail to honor and thank the true God become idolaters. They begin to render what they should have given to God alone, to the things that God has made. They elevate the creature in their minds, giving more attention and value in their hearts to those things than to God, to whom they should be rendering honor and thanksgiving. At first glance we might view these verses only to be addressing pagan primitives in obscure places untouched by civilization. But this is not so. There are many man worshippers today to be found in every so-called civilized city and place in the world. Much of the sports’ world is idolatry. Don’t misunderstand, the enjoyment of sports need not be idolatry. But some Christians may need to strive more than others not to make it an idol. And what is Hollywood but a place in which men and women are worshipped for their beauty or power? And do not those in Hollywood strive to set themselves up as idols that others may worship? Much of the environmental movement and the focus on climate change is manifestation of idolatry toward our physical world rather than to God who made and gave us this world.

More specifically, what is idolatry? **J. C. Ryle** provided this definition: “Idolatry is a worship in which the honor due to God in Trinity, and to Him only, is given to some of His creatures, or to some invention of His creatures.”¹⁶ We might tend to think that idolatry is committed only in primitive lands where uneducated people carve a god from a tree and bow down and serve it. But this is wrong. Idolatry is present wherever and whenever the true God is not worshipped or is not worshipped rightly. For God created man as a worshipping creature. He will devote himself to something. When he devotes himself to honor God and be appreciative to God throughout his existence, then his relationship to everything about him may be enjoyed in its proper role in God’s world and purposes. The true worshipper of the true God will be truly in harmony with God and all that He has made. But the one who refuses to honor God as God and thank God as God, as these ones described in Romans 1, he will twist and abuse the things that God made for man’s use and pleasure, and make them into idols. Those things then become snares to him and troublers of his soul. The idolater gives his time, talent and treasure to these matters. God regards this as idolatry when people give themselves to live for, to serve these ends. And so, fallen man can make an idol out of anything other than God. Again, **Ryle** wrote:

Let us mark this well. It is high time to dismiss from our minds those loose ideas of idolatry which are common in this day. We must not think, as many do, that there are only two sorts of idolatry—the spiritual idolatry of the man who loves his wife, or child, or money more than God; and the open, gross idolatry of the man who bows down to an image of wood, or metal, or stone, because he knows no better. We may rest assured that idolatry is a sin which occupies a far wider field than this. It is not merely a thing in Hindostan that we may hear of and pity at missionary meetings; nor yet is it a thing confined in our own hearts that we may confess before the mercyseat upon our knees. It is a pestilence that walks in the Church of Christ to a much greater extent than many suppose. It is an evil that, like the man of sin, “sits in the temple of God” (2 Thess. 2:4). It is a sin that we all need to watch and pray against continually. It creeps into our religious worship insensibly and is upon us before we are aware.¹⁷

¹⁶ J. C. Ryle, **Knots Untied** (Charles Nolan Publishers, 2000, orig. 1874), p. 420.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 421.

Because we are sinners, we are prone to the sin of idolatry, departing from the true God and making someone or something more important to us than God. We can make an idol of anything. It can be a spouse or a child, a car or a television, our hobby or our work, our wealth or our health. We must resolve to keep the commandments of God of the first tablet, in which God declared:

³You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁴You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness *of anything* that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; ⁵you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Exod. 20:3-6)

And just because you or I have not literally *carved* a god of anything, do not think that we have been innocent of idolatry. If you have *carved* any space of your heart to give to something or someone chiefly instead of God, you are an idolater in heart. This is a common problem of mankind, both Christian and non-Christian alike. It is in our nature. The cause of all idolatry is the natural corruption of man's heart.

Ignorance of God, carnal and low conceptions of His nature and attributes, earthly and sensual notions of the service which is acceptable to Him, all characterize the religion of the natural man. There is a craving in his mind after something he can see, and feel, and touch in his divinity. He would fain bring his God down to his own crawling level. He would make his religion a thing of sense and sight. He has no idea of the religion of the heart, and faith, and spirit. In short, just as he is willing to live on God's earth, but, until renewed by the Holy Ghost, it is always with a fallen worship. In one word, idolatry is a natural product of man's heart. It is a weed which, like the earth uncultivated, the heart is always ready to bring forth.¹⁸

Idolatry is what characterizes fallen man. Idolatry is a problem which all Christians must contend and defeat. It was to Christians that the apostle John wrote, "*Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen*" (1 John 5:21).

Now, how is the wrath of God being revealed from heaven, that is, from God, against idolaters? Paul writes in **Romans 1:24-31**:

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Paul had declared in verse 18 that the wrath of God was being revealed in history against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Beginning with **verse 24**, we read of the manner in which God's wrath is revealed. God manifests His wrath upon a people in that He gives them up "in the lusts of their hearts to impurity." God lets them have their way. I would say that here we have one manner in which God works in history subtly suggested, and another work of God in history forthrightly stated. First, what is suggested is that God commonly restrains non-Christians from sinning to the degree that they desire to sin and are capable of sinning. Secondly, what is clearly stated is that God takes away His controlling restraint upon sinners, letting them go on in their sin and into more flagrant sin.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 423f.

When God determines to reveal His wrath “*against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*”, He gives them over to indulge their sin as a punishment for sin. Three times Paul said that “God gave them up.” (1) He gave them up to “*impurity*” (1:24). (2) He gave them up to “*dishonourable passions*” (1:26). (3) He gave them up to “*a debased mind to do what ought not to be done*” (1:28).

In every instance the giving up to sin is a result of idolatry, the refusal to make God the center and circumference of all existence, so that in practice the creature is exalted over the Creator. Hence, all individual sins are a consequence of the failure to prize and praise God as the giver of all good things.¹⁹

The Word of God clearly identifies and condemns homosexual sin clearly identified. This sin is the result of *dishonourable passions*. Of course within our society great effort is made to normalize and dignify homosexual behavior. Our culture is now at the place where no one can speak out against homosexual practice without being dismissed or disregarded as the worst kind of bigot. The homosexual supporters have waged a very effective campaign to change people’s opinions about their behavior. They began by changing the terminology that had long been commonly associated with the behavior. For example, they referred to themselves as “gay.” Those who practiced homosexual behavior were once known and referred to as *sodomites*. There were once coarse, demeaning terms used by all people in society. But that is all changed. Promoters and apologists of this sin have convinced society that what two consenting adults do in private is their business and does not affect anyone but them. This is a lie. For we who know Scripture know that no sin is exclusively a private matter. Others are always affected by our failures. And when a society and government come to the place they legally endorse such behavior, then that nation, that people, have crossed a threshold. That people has passed into the place in which they forfeit God’s blessing and incur God’s displeasure and active opposition of them. Proverbs 14:34 reads, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” Because of where we are and the direction we are going, our nation will not be able to anticipate God’s continual blessing and preservation of our nation’s stature, prosperity, or security. God appears to have “given us up.”

God declares that homosexual relations are the manifestation of “*dishonourable passions*” (1:26). God declares that women and men who embrace that way of living have “exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature” and that they are “consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error” (Rom. 1:26-27).

What is the due penalty for their error? **John Murray** (1898-1975) wrote,

The “error” recompensed by abandonment to these unnatural vices is the apostasy from the worship of God described in verses 21-23, 25 and the recompense itself consists, to use Shedd’s words, in “the gnawing unsatisfied lust itself, together with the dreadful physical and moral consequences of debauchery.” In the apostle’s delineation of the moral squalor we must discover a conspicuous example of the wrath of God revealed from heaven (vs. 18). And the degeneracy invoices the degradation which follows in the wake of idolatrous worship. The proprieties which our own nature would dictate are shameful desecrated and “we become blind at noonday.”²⁰

We read that God gave them up to “*a debased mind to do what ought not to be done*” (1:28). This is the third instance in this passage in which Paul declared that “God gave them up” to their sin.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

¹⁹ **The ESV Study Bible**, note on 1:24, p. 2159.

²⁰ John Murray, **The Epistle to the Romans** (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 48.

This third occasion of God having given them up is slightly different than the previous two. One described Paul's words in this way. One wrote,

For the third time Paul describes God's response to people's spurning of him with the words "God gave them over" (cf. vv. 24, 26). Whereas in the previous instances it was to immoral acts that God consigned people, in this case it is to a "worthless mind." People who have refused to acknowledge God end up with minds that are "disqualified" from being able to understand and acknowledge the will of God. The result, of course, is that they do things that are "not proper." As in 1:21, Paul stresses that people who have turned from God are fundamentally unable to think and decide correctly about God and his will. This tragic incapacity is the explanation for biblical ethical principles. Only the work of the Spirit in "renewing the mind" (Rom. 12:2) can overcome this deep-seated blindness and perversity.²¹

In these verses many more sins are listed as the consequence of idolatrous thinking and practice. They are 21 in number. We will not read them again.

Paul concludes this section stating that these people know intuitively that they deserve God's punishment for their sin. **Verse 32a** reads, "***Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die.***" God has placed in the soul of every human being knowledge of His law that condemns them when they sin. People know better, even though they try to deny or dismiss their culpability.

And then lastly, Paul declares that not only the ones who do these things are worthy of death, but those who would excuse or encourage them in their behavior are also deserving of God's severe punishment. "They not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (1:32). When those commit the actual sins, they may have done so out of temptation and compulsion. But the ones who approve or promote such behavior are under no such compulsion. They seem to be shown to be more culpable than the ones who are doing these things.

He (Cranfield) notes correctly that the person who commits evil, even though his or her actions are inexcusable can at least plead the mitigating circumstances of the passion of the moment. Those who encourage others to practice evil do so from a settled and impassioned conviction.²²

Let me conclude on this note: Let us remember that these words of Paul are designed to prove that all people everywhere are in need of Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Savior. In all of our speaking about these matters of sin today, it is not with the desire or design to humiliate or marginalize people. First of all, because all people are created in the image of God, we purpose to regard them and treat them with dignity and respect, even though their own sin is aggravated because of their noble identify and calling and yet have chosen to degrade themselves.

But most of all, we desire the salvation of all peoples. We want the forgiveness of sin by God, their deliverance from sinning through faith and Jesus Christ and through the power that He is able to give to His people. The great prerequisite to salvation, however, is to recognize and acknowledge sin to be sin, as God sees it, before His remedy will be sought and received. And so, we will continue to proclaim it to be so, and we will be willing to endure the heat and hostility for doing so, for we care about the well-being of their eternal souls.

Lastly, let us reaffirm that these more egregious forms of sin are not unpardonable. Paul wrote of the Christians in the church at Corinth:

⁹Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹***And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*** (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

²¹ Douglas Moo, **The Epistle to the Romans** (Eerdmans, 1996), p. 118.

²² Ibid, p. 100.