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In preparation for the study of the Word of God, let's take a moment to organize our thoughts and free our minds from the distractions that we tend to accumulate during the day and seek the ministry of God's Spirit. Father, what a privilege it is to gather with fellow believers and be nourished up by the truth of your Word. We thank you for the wonderful opportunity we have to come to a better understanding of you and of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We thank you for the plan and the glory, the revelation of your character that we find in the pages of Scripture. And we pray that tonight as we look at these things that were written by the Apostle Paul, that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us and that these things will become a part of the resources in our soul, that we will have a greater understanding and a better appreciation for everything that you have done for us and the wonderful future that lies in store. We pray that through these things, our lives will reflect your glory.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. We resume our study tonight in Romans 1.16. We saw that verses 16 and 17 are the transition from the personal letter introduction that Paul has given us here to the doctrinal section of the book which will occupy our attention for the next 14 and a half chapters.

We, just to initiate our minds once again into the context of what we're looking at, this is a letter that Paul wrote to a group of believers he had never seen. He is writing for the purpose of refreshing their minds about the gospel. We saw that because it's aimed at believers, we know that this gospel encompasses more than that information which saves us from the lake of fire.

It encompasses everything that God has revealed by way of truth about Himself and about His plan. That revelation began in the Old Testament. Often we see Paul building on what people should know from the Old Testament.

God began to reveal His character and His plan, especially the plan of salvation, as far back as the Garden of Eden. What we call the progress of revelation has taken place throughout the Old Testament age and we find its culmination in the coming of Jesus Christ. We saw that in Hebrews 1. The writer says, God in many parts and many ways spoke to us in times past, but in these latter days He has spoken to us by His Son.

The New Testament is by and large the revelation of the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ fulfills, He is the culmination and the pinnacle of the salvation history that unfolds in the Bible. It's a combination of previous understanding and revealed mystery doctrine that we find in the pages of the New Testament.

The writers in the New Testament take things that we see in the Old Testament, things that they learned as Jews, and show how those things were the foundation upon which the mystery that had not been revealed in times past is built on that foundation. This is what we saw when we

looked at verse 17 last time when Paul was talking about the gospel of Christ. He says, I'm not ashamed of that gospel.

It is the power of God with a view to salvation or for the purpose of deliverance for everyone who is believing, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. In it, the righteousness of God is revealed. And then we have these two prepositional phrases, ek, and then the word for faith, and eis, and the word for faith.

And that's out from or by means of, through faith, for faith. And then he gives a quote that uses the same prepositional phrase when he says the just shall live by faith. That's the same prepositional phrase, ek pisteos.

And so, the righteousness of God is revealed by faith for faith. And this reminds us of the principle that looking at the truth that's revealed to us and believing it, making it the object of faith, opens up opportunities for additional faith. It's sort of like everybody's seen a set of Tinkertoys and you know that in a Tinkertoy box, if you spill it out on the floor, you've got the sticks and then you've got other parts.

And some of the parts are these little round wheels. They have a hole through the center and then they have, I think, eight holes around the edge. Well, if you start out and you have one stick, there's not a whole lot you can do.

But as soon as you add one of those wheels in there, now you've got seven or eight or nine other places that you can add more sticks just because you've made that one wheel a part of your construction because there's so many more opportunities to put additional sticks in. And when you put another wheel in there, now you've got eight or nine additional places for connections. And each wheel that you add opens up a myriad of new possibilities.

And it's the same way in faith. And this is the concept that Paul is introducing here that he's going to expand on in chapter one, is that faith in revealed truth opens up opportunities for additional faith in additional truth. The righteousness of God is revealed by faith.

And when that righteousness is revealed, and when we see it and we respond to it in faith, there are new opportunities for faith. The righteousness of God is revealed by faith for faith. We don't just latch on to salvation truth and seize on that, and that's pretty much the article of faith that we carry with us to the grave.

It's the beginning of a process of building faith and continuing faith. And each new truth that we come to understand, and each new truth that we accept as truth and make it a part of the reality in our soul, opens up new possibilities, new areas of faith. And these things build one upon another.

We have that well-known passage in the Old Testament where it talks about the line upon line,

line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, building up of understanding in the soul of a believer. And that's the idea here. The righteousness of God is at the very center of the plan of God.

That's the reason God saved us. It's a demonstration of His righteousness. The fact that not everyone is saved is also a demonstration of God's righteousness.

God's character is revealed and is expressed in His dealing both with those who respond and with those who reject. So whatever happens, whatever kind of response we as creatures make, God's character is revealed. And that's His purpose, is to reveal Himself.

Which, by the way, is something we can keep in mind. If we ever find ourselves being taught a theology or accepting a theology that obscures God and begins to emphasize His inscrutability and His unknowability, we're probably moving in the wrong direction because God's purpose is not to obscure Himself, it's to reveal Himself. And that's a great thing to think about when we think about our lives and the decisions we have to make and the path that we're going to take.

And we oftentimes face decision points or we face the unknown and we don't know what's going to happen next week or next month or next year. We're not sure perhaps exactly where we should be or what we should be doing or what sort of things. One of my personal areas of decision is with the whole idea of insurance.

If you think about insurance, on the one hand, if we knew what the future was and we knew that we were never going to get sick and never going to need a doctor, we wouldn't buy insurance. If we knew for sure that we were going to get sick, we would take out insurance and take advantage of that. But we don't know if we're going to or not.

So the insurance company basically gambles that we're not going to get sick or not get very sick. We gamble that we are going to get sick and sick enough to justify the premiums. And when we take out insurance, then we feel a measure of security.

We think, well, if disaster strikes, I have insurance. And I'm not sure that everybody wrestles with this, but I do. I think, well, what am I putting my faith in? Am I putting my faith in my insurance policy, or am I putting my faith in God's plan for my life and God's provision for my life? Is insurance a part of God's provision for my life? And you can tie yourself in mental knots, at least I can.

But these are the kinds of things. And this is where faith in God comes into play. How much do we trust God? Do we trust that whatever lies in store for us is a part of his plan? And do we trust that whatever lies in store, he will make provision in whatever circumstance we find ourselves? If we accept that as reality, it opens up a lot of other possibilities for us to express faith, because now we are starting to live by faith and not by sight.

Living by sight grabs the actuarial tables and looks up age and family history and says, well, there's a high degree of probability that X may happen to me, so I want to make some sort of human provision. That's one argument anyway. I'm not arguing for or against, but it is a good example of where this comes into practical terms when we start thinking about this kind of thing.

And so it says here that the gospel of Christ, the good news of Christ, and this good news is Old Testament truth and it's New Testament truth. We've seen before the definition of Paul's gospel, haven't we? It's more than the idea that Jesus Christ died for your sins, believe in him and be delivered from the lake of fire. In fact, if you read the entire 16 chapters of the book of Romans, you discover that Paul probably doesn't have as his purpose in writing this book to evangelize because nowhere does he set down and set forth the gospel in those terms.

He doesn't say, for all of you that have not yet accepted Christ, let me tell you that the status that you're in has separated you from God. There's no way that you can please him and so forth. And then hard on the heels that that thought is, but Jesus Christ came and died on the cross for your sins and if you accept him as your Savior, you will be saved.

He could have put in here Acts 16.31, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. He could have encapsulated the gospel of sin, righteousness, and judgment followed by the grace expressed in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and put it in a great one paragraph presentation of the gospel. All of those principles show up in Romans, don't they? We have the wages of sin as death.

We have the gift of God being eternal life. We have all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But there's three chapters between those two verses and we get the idea that even though these principles are coming up, we don't seem to see Paul talking to an unbelieving audience here.

And we're going to see how he addresses an unbelieving audience as we get further into our study. But he's talking to believers and he's talking about principles that apply across the board. This is mankind before God.

And the same principle applies to an unbeliever as to a believer at this level. And that is that the truth, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for deliverance. If you're an unbeliever, the truth of the gospel is the power of God to deliver us from the wrath of God, from the lake of fire, from the inevitable consequences of being a fallen creature in a fallen world and separated from God.

If we are a believer, the truth about God, the truth that's revealed in Scripture, is the power of God for deliverance out of this present evil age. Deliverance from our own sinful nature. Deliverance from whatever we need delivering from.

That same principle applies. And Paul doesn't break it down here. He doesn't say, well, there's

one kind of deliverance for unbelievers and another kind for believers.

He says, look, this truth that I am a minister of, that I'm an apostle for, it is the power of God. The word for power is *dunamis*. It's God's active power to accomplish something, to bring something about.

And specifically, that something is deliverance for everyone who is believing. And we saw last time that word is a present active participle. And it has emphasis on someone who is in a current status of belief.

Paul is not addressing eternal security in this verse. He's not saying, well, if you believed once and now you've stopped believing, are you still delivered from the lake of fire? But maybe you're not delivered from the present evil age. What he's concentrating on is that the truth that's contained in the Scriptures, the truth about God's person and God's plan, that's where God's power is for deliverance.

And that power to be delivered is accessed by being in a status of belief, by believing in a present tense kind of way. Everyone who is believing, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. And this is a reminder of the fact that God began to reveal this truth that delivers through Israel in the Old Testament.

It was the truth that was revealed in the nation of Israel, in the presence of God there, in God establishing His residence there, the Levitical worship system that portrayed in a graphic way the righteousness of God, the righteous standard of God for men. If you wanted to approach God and worship Him in those days, you came to Israel because that's where the truth was. That's where you could learn this truth that delivers.

And so it came to the Jew first. And even in the church age, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to an assembly of Jewish Christians. But it also came to the Greeks.

And that was the part of the mystery doctrine that had not been revealed in times past. And so we see that combination of previously revealed truth and then the new truth that comes as a part of the mystery. And it is revealed by faith for faith.

To an unbeliever, the gospel is revealed and you've got to accept it by faith. There's no concrete proof and there never will be. I seriously doubt that they'll ever bring down Noah's Ark from Mount Ararat so that people can decide, well, yes, there really is a Bible.

And even if they did and brought it down intact and there were still animal droppings and Noah's last will and testament in there, people would still say, well, it's just not true. You have to accept it by faith. And God has purposely not presented convincing evidence of his existence.

We can't look up in the sky and see a great glowing hole and there is God on his throne because God reveals his righteousness by faith for faith. The whole system of operation for salvation and

for life afterwards is faith. We should not expect to see the things that God has for us.

We shouldn't expect to see the way that God will deliver us or the path that we should take because the very principle by which we live is the principle of faith. Faith is believing what you can't see. The reason he introduces this becomes clear as we move on into verse 18.

He says, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Now, we've seen that he's made an issue of this truth. It's the gospel that saves.

It's the gospel where God's power is. And that gospel is a synonym for the truth. Whatever you want to call it.

Bible doctrine. The information that God has communicated in the scriptures under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, that is the gospel and that is the truth. And there's a balance here between verse 17 and verse 18.

What is revealed in verse 17? The righteousness of God. What's revealed? Very same word. It's the word from which we get apocalypse.

Apo means to have something come from, to come away from. And calypsus is to cover. So you remove the cover.

You remove the veil. That's why the book of Revelation is called the apocalypse because it's the revealing, the unveiling of what's going to happen in future times. In verse 17, the righteousness of God is revealed, is unveiled.

It's revealed in that truth when we accept it by faith. In verse 18, it's the wrath of God that is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness, it says in the New King James. But this word asebeia in Greek could be used in a wide variety of things.

This wasn't restricted to worship of the God of Israel at all. This would be a word in English, something like impiety or irreverence. You can be irreverent in the presence at a funeral.

You can be irreverent towards someone who has died. You can be impious in kind of a general way that doesn't specifically and personally involve God. And that's what this word has to do with.

It doesn't specifically reference God. It implies the sort of arrogance and flippant attitude that disregards things that deserve to be treated as important or that deserve to be treated with respect. It's irreverence.

It's impiety. It's not caring anything about the immaterial part of life, strictly living in the material world out to serve oneself, a Machiavellian approach. So it says the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against this impiety, this irreverence that doesn't even want to consider the invisible

world, much less God himself.

It's revealed against this impiety and it's revealed against unrighteousness. This is the word for righteousness, *dikaio*s, with the negative particle in front, the letter A. And it is the lack of righteousness of men. It's a quality that God possesses that we don't.

And the only way we acquire that genuine righteousness is from God. That righteousness is revealed in the truth of the gospel. We just saw that in verse 17.

And because we are unrighteous and because we're not concerned about it, that's when the wrath of God is revealed. We're unrighteous and we just don't care. We see this attitude today, don't we? We see people who embrace a lifestyle that is manifestly destructive, manifestly degrades other people, and manifests destruction and degeneration in lots of different ways.

And people don't have any sense of shame. They don't have any sense of wishing that things were different. They embrace it and they seem proud of it.

They'll paint it on a sign and march down streets in the capital of our country. And these people, it says in the last part of verse 18, suppress the truth in unrighteousness. This word for suppress is interesting because it's the word *echo*, which means to have or to hold, with a prefix on it that means alongside.

It's *kata*, *kateko*, to hold alongside, to hold out to the side. This is what Emmett Smith does when somebody is trying to tackle him. He sticks his arm out and he suppresses that tackler.

He makes them ineffective. He pushes them to the side and holds them out there so that it can't come in and be effective. That tells us something.

You can't hold something to the side. You can't suppress something unless it's present. You have to see it to actively suppress it.

And this is an active word. This is something that is an activity that keeps on going. This is a present active indicative.

They are suppressing the truth. It's an ongoing process. And what that tells us is the truth is there.

You can't suppress something that you don't perceive, that you don't realize is there. You have to see it and push it out of the way. Emmett doesn't stiff arm when he doesn't see it when the tackler comes up on his blind side.

And we're going to see in verse 19 that this truth of what may be known about God is manifest. It's there. And this is a critically important point because it affects the way we view the unbelieving world.

It affects our view of our own responsibility for evangelism and the way we evangelize. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all irreverence and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. And in the same way that in verse 17, faith builds on faith.

Faith comes from faith. We start with a little faith and it grows. And the more faith we have, the more opportunities for faith we have.

The same thing happens with unrighteousness. And these men are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. And it's their unrighteousness that is revealing the wrath of God.

So faith leads to more faith. Unrighteousness leads to more unrighteousness and more suppressing of the truth. And what it tells us is that there's no standing still.

There's no static grabbing of the mast and standing still until life is over and we go before the Lord. We're either making progress forward in the realm of faith or we're making progress backward in the realm of unrighteousness. And this is true of unbelievers and it's true of believers.

These are all general principles that apply to man before God. And as we pointed out before, isn't it interesting that the clear sharp distinction that we always make in our minds and in our Christian culture between believers and unbelievers and how seldom we see that distinction made in the pages of the New Testament. You don't see Paul very often when he's expressing these principles giving one set for unbelievers and another set for believers.

He says there's the life of faith and there's the life of unrighteousness. You're in one or the other. He isn't so concerned about, well, are you a believer or are you an unbeliever? Did you believe at one time and then you fell away and I wonder about your eternal security? Paul says, look, if you're living the life of faith, you don't have to worry about it.

And if you're living the life of unrighteousness, you have a lot to worry about. And what's the answer? Look at the truth that's been revealed and make it the object of faith. Whatever your status, that's the solution.

Because what may be known of God is manifest in them for God has shown it to them. Now this verse 19 talks about the fact that that which may be known about God, this is a noun that comes from the word gnosis, G-N-O-S-I-S, and it says that which may be known of God is revealed in them. This is the preposition en.

It's revealed in them. For God has shown it to them. And when you have one word here, like in the King James, it says, what may be known of God is manifest in them for God has shown it to them.

These are two forms of the same word, phanero'o. Phanero'o means to appear, to be evident, to

show up. This is the word that is used of Christ's appearing, when Christ appears.

And it uses *phanero'o*. So what may be known of God has appeared to them. And this is in the past.

This is something that isn't future, it's past. It says it is manifest in them for God has shown it to them. We want to keep track of the sequence of events here, because that's going to be very important.

This is what may be known of God. And he's going to amplify that in verse 20. It says, for since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes, and in the New King James, that's in italics, the word attributes, because it's just a word that means the invisible things.

Ever since the creation of the world, the invisible things of him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. These things get separated further in the English than they are in the Greek. The invisible things are his eternal power and Godhead.

Have you ever thought about what God consciousness is? We've talked about people being positive at the point of God consciousness or responding at the point that they're conscious of God. This verse tells us what God consciousness actually is. What does it mean to be conscious of God? It means to be aware of his eternal power and his deity, literally.

His eternal power and deity. And it says that these things are clearly seen, being understood by creation. I was listening to Chuck Colson.

I take these little two-and-a-half-minute radio blurbs that Chuck Colson makes and put them in a digitized form so that they can be stored on a computer. So I get to hear these. I get to hear a whole month's worth in a single weekend.

I was doing some recently, and Chuck Colson was talking about this idea of the knowledge of God. And he gave the illustration of a young woman that he met on a recent trip to Russia. She had grown up in the Russian school system.

Her parents were atheists, quote-unquote. She had never heard the gospel, never been exposed to anything about the name of Christ. And throughout her upbringing in elementary school and junior high and so forth, there's a very consistent curriculum of godless view of the universe, a godless view of society and so forth.

And they go to great pains to attempt to demonstrate and prove that there is no God. And this young lady was talking to Chuck Colson, and she said, you know, when I became a young teenager, it just occurred to me as I looked around that there has to be a God. Look at the world.

Look at the order. Look at the way things are put together. And she saw these very things from

observation.

And then the second thing that convinced her is she said, there must be a God because they're trying so hard to tell me there's not one. You know, it's one of those me thinkest thou protested too much type of things. Why are they so intent on me not believing in God? He must be there or they wouldn't be so concerned about it.

And there are many illustrations. I think all of us have heard or read the biography of Helen Keller and at the point that the lady that was working with her was able to establish communication, and of course the lady was a believer and gave her the gospel and began to explain about God, Helen Keller, without any outside input whatsoever, already knew about God. And she told the lady, I knew there was a God, I just didn't know his name.

And so these things are evident. God has put that knowledge within us. And that's important because this chapter is going to go on to talk about cause and effect.

And it's diametrically opposed to what the world teaches and preaches. And in many cases it's opposed to what we see taught and preached in the believing world. Paul says that these things have been clearly seen, have been understood by that which is made, it's evident in creation.

Now, the existence of God, consciousness of God's deity and God's power are communicated to people just by their perception of the world. God reveals it. God reveals himself to people through creation, period.

And he says they are without excuse for that reason. But wait a minute, what about the believer swooping in and giving the facts of the gospel and naming the name of Jesus Christ and so forth? Aren't they responsible at the point that they hear the gospel? And isn't that the point at which they say yea or nay? That isn't what this verse says, is it? It says that God evangelizes. God makes himself known.

And these people suppress that truth in unrighteousness. When God reveals himself, he does it personally and he does it directly. He does it in them.

There is no intermediate agent. There's no human that has to be there to give the facts of the gospel. Now, this flies in the face of what a lot of denominations teach, that those who have never heard are not responsible, or that if you fail to communicate the gospel to someone, their blood will be on your hands.

It makes no sense. The responsibility for decision about God rests between that person and the Lord, because it's a one-on-one conversation. God reveals himself to that person, and that person either responds, like verse 17, in faith, and that first expression of faith is going to lead to more opportunities for faith, such as believing in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and being delivered, and learning the first things that are in Hebrews chapter 6, change of mind away from

dead works, and faith toward God for daily things, for living faith, and the other things that are a part of God's plan.

Rejection at that point, suppressing that truth, that truth is there. That's why it can be pushed away, because it's already revealed. And pushing it away leaves you with no excuse.

This word for excuse is kind of interesting, because it's the word from which we get apology, apologia. It means defense, or legal grounds upon which to make a case. This was a term that was used in legal cases.

You had the prosecutor, and then the defense guy would stand up and make his apologia, his apology for his client. Well, the existence of God, his eternal power, and his deity have been manifested, and you have no apology, you have no defense, if you don't accept it. That's what this verse says.

That's a basis for condemnation right there. God has revealed truth, and it was not made the object of faith, and you have no excuse. You can't say, well, no believer ever came to me and told me about Christ.

If I had only had a Bible, if I had only had an appearance from an angel, if I had some stronger evidence that God was there, there is no stronger evidence than God's personal communication of himself. And to say that someone has an excuse, or has a claim, has some sort of defense before God in not being saved, is to say that God did an insufficient job of revealing himself. That we could have revealed God better than God can reveal himself.

If I had been there, and if I had given the gospel, that would have been a stronger argument than God's revelation of himself. That's what we tend to say. And we tend to insert ourselves into the evangelizing process, and saying, without us, it won't happen.

But that's not what this verse says. God reveals himself. He puts the knowledge of himself in the heart of every man, his eternal power and Godhead, and they are without excuse.

Why? Look at verse 21. Because although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God. This goes back to that impiety, that irreverence up in verse 18.

This is an attitude of heart that says, I am more concerned with my agenda than with any other agenda. I don't care if it's God's, I don't care if it's society's, I don't care if it's my family's, or my employer's, or the military service, or anything else. I have my own agenda, and it supersedes every other thing in life.

It's an irreverent lack of acknowledgement of anything more important in life. Although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God. Neither were thankful.

And this is something that's a part of condemnation, and it's also a part of acceptance. When we

accept the truth of God, one of the natural responses is thankfulness, gratitude. A part of faith is thanksgiving.

Because when we look at the truth of what God has done for us, and saving us, and it's real to us, it is impossible not to be thankful, and not to be grateful. And that's why we have so many encouragements in Scripture to thankfulness. Everything in prayer with thanksgiving.

Let your requests be made known to God. Why is that? Because thanksgiving is a fruit of faith. Thanksgiving accompanies faith.

Anywhere you find faith, you'll find thanksgiving. And if we're praying in faith, we'll be praying in thanksgiving. Because we have something to claim.

We have something to stand on as we come before God. We have an apology. We have a promise or a principle to claim from God, and we're thankful for that.

We're thankful that we have the avenue of approach to God, to even ask for these things. And faith and thanksgiving go hand in hand. If we find ourselves not feeling gratitude, and not waking up from time to time with just a great welling up of thanksgiving in our souls toward God, that's a good time to start checking and see if we're really trusting God.

Because if we're trusting Him, thanksgiving will accompany it. The flip side of the coin is, lacking faith, rejecting the truth, dismissing the truth as unimportant, we won't be thankful. Why should we be? We don't consider it to be important.

You see this on birthdays and Christmas with little children who get new socks or something under the tree, and they open them up. They attach no importance to the gift, and they certainly don't attach any importance to looking for whoever gave it and saying, oh, thank you very much for the clothes. And it's the same thing.

If you suppress the truth and you dismiss it and relegate it to an unimportant position, there's no thanksgiving involved. So these two things go hand in hand. And that's why they don't glorify God as God, and they are not thankful, but instead they became futile in their thoughts or in their imaginations.

This is the thought processes of the mind, the word here is the dialogismos. We get our word dialogue from this. The Greeks used the word dialogue to talk about your thought processes.

It's like there's a conversation going on in your mind. Have you ever argued with yourself over something or listened to yourself talk in your mind, carry on a little dialogue up there? Well, the Greeks sort of viewed the thinking process as a dialogue. And in their dialogues, they become empty or futile.

And you may have run across this Greek word before. Mataiotes is a noun that means

emptiness, vanity, a vacuum, as it were. This is a verb form of that word, and it's a passive.

And it's very interesting to track the passive voice that comes up as a result of this decision. There's an active decision to hold aside the truth. And as a result of that active decision, things start happening to you.

A lot of people feel victimized in this world, don't they? Why did this happen to me? Why did I not get a break? Why did I get the short end of the stick? Why did I not have the opportunity? Why was I mistreated? Why did I not get what that guy got? Kind of a thing. Well, this is the reason. Suppressing, holding aside the truth and unrighteousness, you're going to start to see all these passive voices come up.

Here's one. They become empty in the thinking of their mind. There's emptiness.

It's a vacuum into which other things are going to be pulled. And it says their foolish hearts were darkened. This is another passive voice.

They didn't darken their heart actively. They didn't say, You know, I think I'd just like to have darkness and gloom and misery in my heart. I'm going to pursue it.

I'm going to bring it on myself. But by making this decision, that's what's going to happen. Where does depression come from? Where does a constant state of dissatisfaction with life come from? It's pushing aside the truth in unrighteousness.

And it says they're senseless. This doesn't so much mean foolish in the sense of being a fool. It means senseless.

It means unable to perceive. It's like when you cut a nerve. I had a Jeep wreck once, wrecked my dad's Jeep, and my leg got tangled up in the clutch pedal and it cut a nerve.

And so there's a senseless part of the top of my foot. I can poke it and I don't feel anything. It's unable to perceive.

It's unable to respond. It doesn't have any sensation. That's what this word means in terms of the heart.

How would you like to have a heart that is impervious to sensation, that doesn't respond, that doesn't react, that doesn't enjoy life, that doesn't have capacity to appreciate things? Pushing aside the truth, whether we're an unbeliever or a believer, these things happen. It's a result. And we're in the passive mode.

These things happen to us. And a lot of people scratch their heads and say, Why am I miserable? Why don't I enjoy life? Why does everything turn to ashes in my mouth? And they don't connect that this is an effect that came from a cause. They made an active decision and these are the

results.

They become empty in the thought patterns and their senseless hearts were darkened. In verse 22, professing or claiming to be wise, this word wise is *sophos*, *sophia*, wisdom, claiming to be wise, they became fools. And the word for fools is the word from which we get moron.

This is a verb form and it's another passive. It's interesting because in Greek, a passive voice of a verb almost always has a theta in it. And as you go down through here, there are so many thetas on the last part of this page in the Greek text because all of these verbs are passive.

This is what's happening to this person. And they claim to be wise, but they become or became actually, literally, morons. *Amoranteson* is the actual form here.

And in verse 23, it goes on to say, they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man. This word for change, we've talked in the past about the word in Greek when you talk about something other. You say this other thing and there are two words.

There's *heteros*, which means another of the same kind, and there's *allos*, which means another of a different kind. This is a unique word because it's a verb that is sort of based on that word other. It has the force of a verb, but it's basically the word *allos*.

They got something other of a different kind. The glory of God that was there and they had it, they've traded it in. They wanted something of a different kind, and so now they get the glory of an image.

And it says the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man or birds, four-footed animals, and creeping things. And Paul presents this in a way so that we should find it ludicrous. Here is the glory of eternal almighty God in his eternal power and his deity manifested, and we take that and swap it for a fake of a creature that's corruptible.

It's not even the real creature. We don't exchange it for an animal. We exchange it for the image of an animal, a copy of an animal.

It's the farthest reaches of the spectrum to go from the glory of the incorruptible God to an image made like a corruptible animal, a bird, or a creeping thing. And we could spend some time and go into some of the idols that prevailed at this time and the various animals that were a part of them, Medusa with the snake head, a lot of Greek mythology had their deities such as Zeus turning into a swan and traveling around. And, of course, in more ancient times a lot of the gods, Dagon, the fish god, and the gods of Egypt that you see painted on the tomb walls with heads like birds and feathers, and people worshipped these things.

And Paul is pointing out how senseless it is. It's the product of a senseless heart. What sort of sense does it make to believe that an image made to look like a beast that dies has the same power as the incorruptible God who has eternal life and is capable of giving eternal life? It's the

most ludicrous decision we could possibly make.

But not only do unbelievers make that decision when they reject God's self-communication, but we make that mistake when we don't claim the truth that has been revealed to us as believers. Because God continues to reveal His glory to us. He continues to reveal His righteousness in the Gospel, which is the power of God for our deliverance on a day-to-day basis.

And if we look to anything else, if we look to a man-made solution, if we look to a technique, if we look to some other system that prevails in our culture or in our life, we're doing this same thing. We're exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for something that's a product of man and is doomed to perish. And it just makes no sense.

So in verse 24, Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness. And there are so many interweavings of threads here because there are people that have a problem with God responding to man. And yet, that's exactly what Paul paints here.

Men make a decision about God, and then God has an attitude toward them. When we suppress the truth in unrighteousness, God has a response. He gives them over to uncleanness.

In the desires, it says less here, but this can be a healthy or an unhealthy desire. But to be given over to the desires of your heart, to be controlled by your passions, in other words. You can have healthy passions in life or unhealthy passions, but it's never healthy to be controlled by your passions, to be ruled by your passions, and to be a slave to them so that you can't escape.

I think I've mentioned this before, but I think one of the most haunting images in my memory as an English tutor to teach English to some of the sailors that needed to get GEDs and so forth on the ship, and he was a homosexual. And he may have asked for this duty because it's not uncommon to find homosexuals in the enlisted ranks of the Navy especially. But this man would lurk around the showers and around the areas where people were dressing and so forth.

And if you went in to take a shower, even in the dead middle of the night, his stateroom was right next to the showers, and so when you turned the shower on, you could count on it. Within a couple of minutes, he would have some excuse for coming into the shower area. And of course in the Navy, there's no privacy to speak of, but I remember coming out of the shower one night very late after I had gotten off watch, and this man was in there, and he was looking at me.

And it was the most pitiful look that I've ever seen in a person's face because he was in the grip of this desire that had consumed him, and he looked so miserable and yet so hungry all at the same time. He knew what he was doing was despicable, but he was a slave to it. He had no power to escape it.

And that's what happens to people who suppress the truth that God reveals. Notice that this happens after that truth has been presented and rejected. A lot of people would like us to believe

that it's our depravity that keeps us from responding to God, but it's just the reverse.

It's our failure to respond to God that puts us in the grip of depravity. There is deliverance from depravity through faith in what God reveals. And it's when we reject that truth that we're given over, and that's a result, not a cause, of rejecting God.

And this is what Paul talks about. He says, therefore, and this is a result in verse 24, because these people have been flippant in their disregard of God and what He has done, because they disregard His self-manifestation, He gives them over to uncleanness. They've exchanged His glory.

They had His glory in their hands and they traded it away for something in this world. And we think of idols, we think of things made in the image of birds and lizards and so forth, but we can do this same thing today. We can exchange the glory of God for something in the human realm, something in the material realm that seems secure because we can see it.

People invest their money in stocks or bonds or mutual funds or something that they estimate is secure and is safe and is something that they can count on. And when you look at the great flow of history and the unexpected things, you look at the crash of 29 and so forth, those things are very insecure compared to God immortal who never changes, who is all-powerful and who has revealed that to us. And we trade that away and we'd rather put our faith in the banking system or the government or our employer or some other human thing that we can see and we think it's secure because we can see it.

Because we do this, because these categories of people have done this, God gave them up to uncleanness in the lust of their hearts, the desires of their hearts to dishonor their bodies among themselves who exchanged the truth of God for the lie. And notice, it's so important and it's so overlooked in this chapter that the truth was there and it got traded away. It wasn't the grip of depravity so that no one could see the truth.

It wasn't that because of depravity it was impossible to turn to God or impossible to understand the gospel or impossible to believe that He was there. That transaction takes place first and when it's rejected and suppressed then that person has made an exchange. They've taken the truth that God granted them in grace and traded it away.

Exchanged the truth of God for the lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator. This is the contrast between the material and the immaterial. The things that are what God has created and God Himself.

And Paul takes this opportunity to give a little doxology here. The creator who is blessed forever. Amen.

And the reason God is blessed forever is that He exists forever. His deity and His power are

eternal as we saw in verse 20. For this reason, it says in verse 26, God gave them up.

Now we've seen this pattern established here, haven't we? It says, Because of what they have done, God gave them up to uncleanness. Because of what they have done, in verse 26, God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

Now how the churches that cater to people who engage in these practices get around these verses, actually I do know, but it's very flimsy. It's very weak. This is a direct reference to the immorality that manifests itself in homosexuality, in abnormal behavior.

In fact, the word for abnormal is here in verse 27, Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use, leaving that which is normal, that which is proper of the woman, burned in their desire for one another, men with men, committing what is shameful and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error, which is due. And the misery that accompanies this lifestyle is well known to anyone who has been close to it. They may put up a brave front and they may say, we're just like other people, we love just like other people love, we can have two men and we can raise children or we can have two women and we can raise children and it's just a normal, healthy, bright, sunshiny household and everything is fine.

It's just a difference in gender of one of the parents is wrong. And anyone, any homosexual knows it's wrong. Anyone who has been close to homosexuals knows that that is wrong.

The depravity that goes with that immorality manifests itself in inability to overcome passions, inability to overcome desires. And there are a lot of very ugly accompanying symptoms to this lifestyle that they're very careful to hide and to suppress when they make their case before the unsuspecting public. The people that are part of that community, it's very interesting to talk to people who have come out of this community by the grace of God and are believers and who will talk about what a fallacy that is to try to present this lifestyle as a reasonable alternative.

It's not. It is characterized by depravity. It is characterized by degradation because it hinges on satisfaction of an urge, satisfaction of a passion that rules that person and in any area of life that quickly is insufficient.

You have to have more. It's like a drug addiction. You can't just get a little bit and go the rest of your life with that little bit.

Pretty soon that little bit is not enough and it takes a little bit more and a little bit more. The people that are in the grip of these passions have all kinds of problems that are wrestled with in private and are hidden from the public eye. And so as citizens of our country, among other things, we should not let them get away with the fallacy that it's a reasonable alternative and that there's just a difference in gender.

It goes far deeper than that. These are vile passions. Women exchange their natural use for what is against nature.

The men leave the natural use of the woman, burn in their lust for one another. Men with men committing what is shameful and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error, which is due. And a lot of people have said, well, you know, this is AIDS and so forth.

This penalty is primarily the deep abiding darkness and senselessness of the soul. What kind of life is it to live in darkness, to live in senselessness where there's no real joy, there's no real peace, there's no real satisfaction in anything in life? Life is nothing but a dark experience from the time you get up until the time you go to sleep. And it's a penalty that happens not only to homosexuals but to all those who suppress the truth and unrighteousness.

And it says in verse 28, and Paul is just beating on this point, isn't he? Don't we see this happening over and over again where he's saying, here's the cause and here's the effect. It happens again in verse 28. Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind.

This verse 28, again, I wish we all knew Greek because it's such an interesting interplay of words that Paul uses here to tie these concepts together. In verse 28 he says, just as they did not consider God to have Him in their epinosus, they didn't want to have a full knowledge of God. They didn't want to pursue an experiential knowledge of God, a knowledge that goes beyond gnosis and into above knowledge, epinosus.

They didn't consider Him worthy of it. The word there is dokimazo, to test something, to consider it, to weigh its value. They look at God and they evaluate Him as not worthy of having a deeper knowledge of.

And so, because they do this, God gives them over to a mind that is adokimazo, that is not approved. They don't approve God and seek Him, so He gives them over to a disapproved mind. It's literally what it says.

They don't approve God in their mind, so He gives them over to that disapproved and disapproving mind. A is the negative particle, A and then dokimon, a disapproved mind. And to do those things which are not fitting, are not normal, are not ordinary.

So it says that God gave them over to a debased mind and to do those things which are not fitting, God gives them over. In other words, God has opened the opportunity to escape from this and when people reject that, the opportunity withdraws. God gives them over.

God says if that's what you choose, it's your choice. And God respects the decision-making ability that He has given each human being. That's the reason He gave it to us.

He doesn't override it. He doesn't countermand it. We have been given authority to decide our own fate.

And God, in a sense, respects the decision that we make. And if we reject Him, He lets us have what we have chosen. And that's what this means.

To give over. This is the word for give with a prefix para, which means alongside. To give.

You've chosen that thing, I'll let you be alongside that thing. You go stay with that thing. And that's what He does.

And so, these people in verse 29 are filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God. Notice now, this is a complex, a cluster, if you will, of attitude sins. And this is the point that we were just making.

If someone chooses a lifestyle, if someone establishes a pattern of suppressing the truth, pushing the truth away, and choosing something else, this is what is going to fill that empty heart and that senseless mind. And it's not like you can pick one of these and not get the other. They're a package deal.

They all accompany one another in the same way that righteousness accompanies faith and unrighteousness accompanies a lack of faith. And when there's a lack of faith, because of rejection of the truth, unrighteousness is the result. It's as inevitable as the immutable character of God Himself.

Because when you're apart from God, by definition, you're apart from God's righteousness. Because God is righteousness. That's what He's revealing about Himself.

And if we reject that righteousness, there is nothing left in the universe but unrighteousness. And it's not like you can mix the two together and say, well, I'm a homosexual, but I'm a Christian. Or, I'm a greedy, backstabbing, materialistic American, but I'm a Christian.

They just don't mix. It's either pursuit of righteousness or it is entrapment in unrighteousness. Now, we've talked in our introduction to Romans and we've talked in our study of Samuel about the idea that we have a mixture in our life.

Sometimes there are areas in our life that are doing well and there's other areas where we're not doing so well and that we can't paint with a broad brush ourselves or another believer or denomination or whatever. But one of the things that can happen is as we tolerate unrighteousness in one area, if a denomination tolerates unrighteousness in one area, such as being tolerant of homosexuals or being tolerant of those who pursue some other form of this unrighteousness, it is going to spread and it is going to eat away at the good things that are left. If

you study the letters to the Christians in Revelation chapter 2 and 3, you see this.

God says, you're doing well because you have put away some of the unrighteousness that's in your church. And on others, he says, you have not. You tolerate the Nicolaitans.

You tolerate these things. And the reason they come under condemnation is by tolerating those things, it is only going to get worse. So there's not a happy balance of righteousness and unrighteousness.

If there's unrighteousness in some area of a church or a denomination or an organization or an individual life, it has to be addressed and dealt with pretty soon or it's going to start wiping out what the good things that started out being there. Because it is part of a pattern and there is a consistency in the choices we make. We are either characterized by positive decisions toward God and the truth about God or we will be characterized by negative decisions.

And this is what results in being filled with. That's where we get this concept. Verse 29, it says, they are filled with these things.

It may start out in one small area of life, but if it's not contained and if it's not dealt with, it's going to spread until it fills. All of these types of unrighteousness. And of course, we could do a detailed study on each one of these, but look at the point that he makes down here after he talks about the proud and the boasters and the inventors of evil things and those who are disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful.

This is sort of the reverse Fruit of the Spirit here, isn't it? It's all of those mental attitudes that characterize someone who's not living the life of faith, who's not accepting the truth and being changed by it. Then in verse 32, he says, knowing the righteous judgment of God that those who practice such things are deserving of death. Isn't that interesting? These people, when God appeared to them and God revealed His eternal deity and power, part of that revelation is the knowledge that rejection of this leads to death because this is the same group we've been talking about all the way from verse 18 forward.

They are without excuse. What may be known of God is manifest to them because God has revealed it and they know the righteous judgment of God. Where does that come from? That's a part of God's deity, isn't it? It's a part of His eternal power.

He is the God of the universe. He makes the rules. He says what's right and what's wrong.

And a part of that eternal power and deity is the fact that He is righteous and that He will judge unrighteousness and that the penalty for unrighteousness is death. The righteous judgment of God, those who practice such things are deserving of death. They not only do the same but they also approve of those who practice them.

And we see this when people start banding together and approving each other and giving each

other legitimacy. And we've seen this just in the last few years especially in our own country where things that were formerly shocking to the population now show up in our TV sitcoms. And we have homosexual characters in comedies on TV and they're accepted and they're treated as normal.

And we have people who engage in all sorts of illicit behavior and immorality who live together without benefit of marriage, who are immoral in their dealings with other people, who are dishonest, who are in the grip of various forms of passion. And our society gives them approval. We don't want to be thought of as disapproving or bigoted or narrow-minded.

Everyone says, well, live and let live and everybody has the decision to make. But this is the basis of condemnation, isn't it? It says in verse 32 that part of the bad description of these people is that they approve of people who practice these things. And what this tells us is there is a category of things that we are not to approve, that we are not to tolerate, that we are not to permit in our immediate vicinity.

There's a certain category of things that are part of a pattern of rejection of the truth that we are also to reject and to stay away from because tolerating these things allows them to spread. Well, let's take our break now and when we come back we're going to draw a couple of conclusions from this and we'll actually get a little bit of a start into Chapter 2. But let's take a break at this point.