



Romans - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

Paul, writing to an audience that, in the main, he does not personally know, commences his letter in the general style of the day by introducing himself, but unlike his other letters, he does not name any others that are with him. This allows his readers to understand the Gospel he is proclaiming is from his own understanding and not that of others. He clearly identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, set apart to serve the Gentiles.

Paul soon departs from this accepted style to launch into aspects of the Gospel of Christ that is the driving force behind all that he does and is. The Gospel is centred on Jesus as the Christ, who was resurrected from the dead. Paul states that what he is writing is not new but the fulfilment of the OT scriptures. But Paul wants them to know that there is a clear departure from Judaism that the Gospel is for all, irrespective of race or social standing. The responses of those who hear the message are to turn to God through Christ in faithful obedience.

Paul then returns to the accepted style of letter writing by identifying the recipients as being the Christians living in the empire's capital city Rome. He then proclaims God's blessing upon them.

Paul gives thanks to God for the Romans and states how frequently they are in his prayers for he has heard nothing but good reports about their faithfulness and work. He then states that it has always been his desire to come to them but that either the work of the Spirit or Satan's opposition has prevented this. But he is coming to the end of his work in the east and intends going west, intending to establish Rome as the base for this new ministry.

Paul concludes the section by introducing the theme of God's righteousness, something he will come to again in greater detail later in the letter. But he starts a new section by looking at the wrath of God that is not an end-time judgement but a reality for those who choose to reject God and the Gospel of his Son.

Paul points out the general wickedness inherent in mankind, that was there from the beginning in original sin and has continued throughout history. Not just Israel, although Israel had the privilege of knowing God more intimately, but all of mankind knew of God and had an instinctive idea of what is right in God's economy. Even though they had this knowledge they turned away from God to establish themselves as god of their own lives and hence the mess that the world had found itself in.

Paul discusses homosexuality in detail, as it was rife in the Greco-Roman world, and something the Christians in Rome would have a natural abhorrence for as many of them had been attracted to Judaism because of their strict moral codes in the first place. Paul also lists a number of other sin categories and shows that God has given people over to their

desires as they would then reap the negative rewards of their sin for obedience by faith will lead to salvation but wilful disobedience of God will lead them to his wrath and to eternal damnation.

I Romans 1:1-17 - The Gospel as the revelation of the righteousness of God

The letter to the Romans falls into three self-evident sections of almost all communications: beginning (Romans 1:1-17), middle (Romans 1:18-15:13), and end (Romans 15:14-16:27).

In this first main section, Paul includes his opening salutation (vv.1-7), where Paul introduces himself with an unusual degree of elaboration and greets his readers in similar fashion, thanksgiving (vv.8-15), where Paul makes an opening statement of his hope to visit Rome, and his statement of the overall, if lengthy and detailed theme of Romans (vv.16-17).

I.a Romans 1:1-7 - Salutation: the Gospel concerning God's Son

This is the longest introduction of any of Paul's letters. Paul goes into more detail here because he had never been to Rome and he wanted to summarise his Gospel for the Roman readers. One remarkable feature of this section is that many of the themes mentioned here also conclude the letter in the final doxology (Romans 16:25-27). As will be discussed at the end of Chapter 16, that passage was added after Paul's time. These themes are:

1. Paul's apostolic authority;
2. the fulfilment of the OT Scriptures in the Gospel;
3. the Gospel that centres on Jesus Christ;
4. the obedience of faith;
5. the mission to the Gentiles; and
6. the glory of Jesus Christ and God the Father.

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God —

Romans 1:1

Paul is the name we have been accustomed to using instead of his Hebrew name Saul, which was used when we were first introduced to him in Acts 7:57. He started to use the Greek version of his name at the start of his works as an apostle to the Gentiles, a title that he then used in all communications. Unusually, he does not name any of his co-workers with him, probably because he is unknown to the Romans and wants to make it clear that the following Gospel proclamation is his own.

Servant. The Roman institution of being a bondservant or slave, Greek *doulos*, was different from the institution of slavery in North America and Europe during the 17th through the 19th Centuries. Slaves, bondservants and servants generally were permitted to work for pay and to save enough to buy their freedom. See the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, where the servants, again Greek *doulos*, were entrusted with immense amounts of money and responsibility by their owner. However, those not familiar with the OT and themselves free would struggle with the idea of willingly being a slave to anyone, including a god, as the thought was alien in Roman culture, where the hope for all slaves was their freedom. This designation indicates that Paul is a slave of Jesus Christ, placing him as his Lord, and thus giving him the same status as the God of Israel. At the same time the title recalls the honoured servants of God in the OT, such as Moses, Joshua, David, and the prophets, see Joshua 14:7, Joshua 24:29, 2 Kings 17:23, and Psalm 89:3 respectively. Paul does not put himself in honour with these men by perhaps announcing himself as a Roman citizen or as a Pharisaic Jew, but it is more of an

identification of his dedication to God. His pattern of argument in his servant-hood is clearly Isaiahic.

Apostle emphasises that Paul's authority is equal to that of the 12 apostles chosen by Christ. The apostles were specifically called by Christ, see Matthew 10:1-7, Acts 1:24-26, and Galatians 1:1, and had seen the risen Lord Jesus, refer to Acts 1:22, 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:7-9. They established and governed the whole church, under Jesus Christ, and they had authority to speak and write the words of God, equal in authority to the OT scriptures, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 14:37, 2 Corinthians 13:3, Galatians 1:8-9, 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and 4:15, 2 Peter 3:2 and 3:15-16.

Paul was not called an apostle but was called to be an apostle when Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road, which is initially recorded in Acts Chapter 9, repeated in Acts Chapters 22 and 26, and further discussed in 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8-9, and Galatians 1:13-17. The unusual timing of his call led Paul to conclude that no more apostles would be chosen after him: <<and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born>> (1 Corinthians 15:8). Paul's language is similar to that found in Isaiah 49:1-8 (LXX), and is very much in line in stating that his mission is to the Gentiles but encompassed the Diaspora Jews living in those regions.

The scripture: <<You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own>> (Leviticus 20:26), called Israel to be set apart from all the nations, but Paul was called to be set apart for the nations. As a Pharisee, Paul had separated himself to study the law; as an apostle he was separated by his calling by the whole Council of God: <<But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased>> (Galatians 1:15), and: <<While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off>> (Acts 13:2-3), for the study and proclamation of the Gospel, with God as its author, extraction of it divine and heavenly.

Gospel, Greek euangelion, means good news. This included not just a call to initial saving faith but Paul's entire message about Jesus Christ and how Christ's saving activity transforms all of life and all of history. Indeed, Paul himself is defined in the Gospel, as his whole life revolved around its proclamation, living by it and fulfilling his call.

² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,

Romans 1:2-3

The Gospel he promised shows that this was long awaited and now the apostles and disciples had some really 'good news' that had to be shared. Paul does not use the term in relation to his preaching but more that it was now the dominant and determinative focus of his whole life. The Gospel is not novel but from antiquity, for the whole of OT scripture announces it, describes it, and ushers in: <<the Sun of Righteousness>> (Malachi 4:2).

Through his prophets shows God's personal involvement in the prophetic hope given to the world via the Israelite nation. Paul deliberately avoids using the common term 'the law and the prophets', which he will use in Romans 3:21, as he wants to fully discuss the role and misunderstandings of the law during his later arguments.

This is the only occurrence of the phrase the Holy Scriptures in the NT. It refers to an established body of writings, already recognised as scripture and sacred, that is, as having the status of divinely authorised statements or indeed of divine oracles in writing. There were many other documents in popular existence that were well received and useful but which were not recognised as having this status.

Regarding his son. The Gospel has but one subject, its divine author, God's only Son, Christ Jesus, our Lord. Paul's very description of him shows that he had such great pleasure just writing or speaking the Name.

He can claim:

1. **Human origin through the line of David (Luke 1:27), as was his supposed father Joseph (Luke 2:4).** David is mentioned so openly and early because of the promise made of Messiah concerning the extension of the Davidic kingship: <<When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son>> (2 Samuel 7:12-14), <<I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father>> (Psalm 2:7), <<The Lord swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: "One of your own descendants I will place on your throne>> (Psalm 132:11), and: <<He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end>> (Luke 1:32-33).
2. **Divine nature declared to be the Son of God (v.4) by eternal generation, i.e. according to the Spirit of holiness (v.4):** <<For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit>> (1 Peter 3:18), and: <<For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you>> (2 Corinthians 13:4).
3. **Fruit.** <<Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ>> (Ephesians 3:8). **The proof being his resurrection from death, i.e. the sign of Jonah:** <<He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" >> (Matthew 12:38-40).

Jesus fulfilled the OT prophecy that a descendant of David would rule forever, and hence he is the Messiah; see 2 Samuel 7:12-16, Psalms 89 and 132, Isaiah 11:1-5, Jeremiah 23:5-6, and Ezekiel 34:23-24. The eternal Son of God assumed humanity to become the messianic King.

⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 1:4

Through the Spirit of holiness. Christ's great power is always connected to the holiness of the Holy Spirit as he works in the new covenant age.

Jesus was declared by God the Father to be the Son of God with power when he was raised from the dead: <<He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay>> (Matthew 28:6), and installed at God's right hand as the messianic King. As the eternal Son of God, he has reigned forever with the Father and the Holy Spirit. But this verse refers to Jesus as the God-man reigning in messianic power. Son of God was a Jewish title for the Messiah, and this reign began, i.e. was declared or initiated, at a certain point in salvation history, with Jesus resurrection from the dead through the Holy Spirit. This further declaration by Paul clearly takes Jesus beyond that of being a purely Jewish Messiah and that Jesus is in fact the saviour of all mankind, an elevation not in personal status but in his perceived unique Sonship. It is important that this was declared with power as Paul does not want it to seem

that Jesus was in some way elevated to a new level which, in reality, he had always had from eternity.

Among Cæsar's official titles is the designation 'son of god!' In addition, his official birthday is pronounced as 'good news' around the whole empire. But there is only one Son of God and the truly Good News is all about him, and stretches far wider than even the Roman Empire did.

It is interesting to note that the NIV uses the phrase resurrection from the dead whereas Jewish assertion through the Jerusalem church and that of many commentators is that a better translation is 'of the dead', for Jesus is seen as just one of many that will be raised; an assertion that was held in the Pharisaic traditions of Judaism.

Jesus Christ our Lord places Jesus on a par with God the Father as the authority for Paul's mission and for the calling on all our lives.

⁵ Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

Romans 1:5

The plural used is we received grace and apostleship shows that Paul does not try to place himself as the sole apostle called to serve the Gentiles. Of course, any such claim would have carried no weight in a church that he had not planted. However, Paul had made no attempt to introduce others into his discourse up until this point and certainly does not name anyone as he does in other letters.

Among all the Gentiles is the way that Paul now refers to his calling rather than an apostle of God that may imply too great an emphasis on the Jewish God. But all the Gentiles also showed that God was for all the nations and that Gentiles as well as Jews were called to obedience through faith. It was just to be expressed in a different way than it had been instructed to the Jews through their laws and covenant promises.

Paul's mission is to all people groups. His goal is to bring the obedience that comes from faith: <<but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him>> (Romans 16:26).

Obedience is required, but it is an obedience that flows from saving faith and is always connected to ongoing faith. Although Paul can speak of people's initial response as obeying the Gospel: <<But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" >> (Romans 10:16), it is unlikely that obedience that comes from faith here refers only to initial saving faith, because the purpose of Paul's apostleship was not merely to bring people to conversion but also to bring about transformed lives that were consistently obedient to God.

Paul's ultimate goal in preaching to the Gentiles is for his name's sake, that is, that Jesus Christ will be glorified. Name here means reputation or honour, and for the Gentiles to fulfil God's covenant purpose in the obedience of faith would only serve to enhance God's name and public image, whereas Jewish failure to fulfil the covenant, through pride and disobedience, had reduced God's reputation in the nations. The church must be careful that it does not fall into the same trap as the eyes of the world and, perhaps more importantly, the local community, are on the church.

⁶ And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:6

You also are among those who are called shows the Romans that they were not alone in coming to faith. It also indicates that they were in the main Gentiles.

The Messiah had been promised to the nations: <<Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession>> (Psalm 2:8), and: <<he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth">> (Isaiah 49:6). Those in Rome, as elsewhere, were the promised fruit given by God to belong to Jesus Christ. Note that they were not called by Christ but to him by God, as God the Father offers the invitations. This would distinguish Christianity from Roman cults that depended on named sponsors as links to their Gods.

⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:7

To all in Rome marks the transition of the letter back to the normal accepted format of the time after Paul's diversion into his expression of the Gospel that would allow the readers to find common ground with Paul on which to hold discussions when he arrived.

Rome was built on seven hills and many of the wealthy lived on those hills including the palaces of various Cæsars. But the poor, including many of the Christians, lived near to the city centre, in very overcrowded conditions that were prone to serious flooding from the River Tiber. Also see the extensive comments made on Acts 28:16 concerning the city of Rome and its history.

Loved by God and called. God shows his love by effectually calling his people to himself. Saints refers to all Christians; all believers stand before God as his holy ones.

Saints should not be confused with what we might consider 'saintly people'. Rather, it is a name given to those called to be servants of God. It is great to be called to be saints but rather daunting that on the day of judgement to be found wanting. We are to abide in him and do his will to ensure the name of saint is given appropriately.

Grace means God's unmerited favour, that is, the things we receive that we don't deserve. Compare this to mercy, where it is when God does not apply the punishment that we do deserve.

Peace is not just the absence of conflict but echoes the OT concept of shalom, Hebrew for so much more than peace, where a person's life with God and with everything else is in ordered harmony, both physically and spiritually, and 'all is well' in our walk with God. We cannot know this same peace apart from God.

Peace, Hebrew shalom, was the benediction given by the priests in the OT era and grace was added, although it has always existed, as they sought peace with God, peace in their own conscience, peace with all whom they meet. All these are found only in grace, and that grace is of God. It comes from God as the Father, who gives all good things, through the mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only means of receiving grace and peace in our lives.

From God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul separates the two here probably in line with David's understanding: <<The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet">> (Psalm 110:1), i.e. that after his resurrection and ascension, Jesus was exalted to the highest place of honour in the universe.

In summary, in this short opening address Paul reveals something of himself and his supreme passion, as well as some strong hints about what is to follow - a life characterised in terms of service and apostleship; an apostleship defined and determined by the Gospel it proclaimed; a gospel whose outline in its focus on Jesus Christ and fulfilment of Jewish expectations was not in dispute but whose interpretation in reference to the Gentiles was more controversial; an interpretation holding together Jewish heritage and Gentile outreach already beginning to emerge as a strong theme of the letter itself.

I.b Romans 1:8-17 - Paul's longing to visit Rome

Paul expresses his desire to come to Rome. Paul had desired to visit Rome for many years because he had a special call as the apostle to the Gentiles: <<I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry>> (Romans 11:13), to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples. Paul explains why he is so eager to preach the Gospel everywhere: the Gospel is the saving power of God, in which the righteousness of God is revealed.

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

Romans 1:8

I thank my God. Paul typically follows the greeting in his letters with a thanksgiving; see also 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, Philippians 1:1-8, Colossians 1:1-8, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:3, and Philemon 4. He is thankful not for any personal benefit but because he sees here the fulfilment of his goal in life, which was for the kingdom of God to advance all over the world. Paul likely means that the Gospel is no longer confined to the Jews but has also spread to the Gentiles in the Greco-Roman world. It is not unexpected that reports of the Roman churches are spreading, not necessarily because of their prominence but more their position at the centre of the Empire, where many of the communications emanate on all matters.

Through Jesus Christ acknowledges Paul understanding of Christ's intermediary role in relation to the Father.

Paul started by giving thanks to God for the Romans, which is always the right way to start. We bless people not just by praying for them but by praising God for them and for his gift of them to his Son: <<All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away>> (John 6:37), and: <<My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand>> (John 10:29), Paul included many whom he had never met but feels it sufficient to know they have been accepted by Christ. He would thank God again when he first met some of them on his journey to Rome: <<The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they travelled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged>> (Acts 28:15).

⁹ God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you

Romans 1:9

God, whom I serve continues Paul's thrust established at the beginning of the letter. It adds strength to his ambition to see those in Rome.

(God) is my witness. Paul appeals to God to hold him accountable if he is saying anything false.

¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

Romans 1:10

Paul expresses in his prayers that he might visit the Romans. The petition in this verse clarifies the request in v.9. This prayer through to comments in v.13 shows that perhaps Paul was being criticised for his failure to visit Rome before now and that he was perhaps vulnerable and sensitive to such criticism in the way he defends his failure to do so before.

Paul was constantly in prayer for them and so many others. For example: <<And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints>> (Ephesians 6:18), and: <<pray continually>> (1 Thessalonians 5:17), but he found time for so much more. In his prayer for all the saints he ensures he made specific mention of the Romans. It is not that God needs reminding or doesn't know what each person and church needs, but it is for us to be reminded in our prayer to God of what is important. We need also to remember that God is witness to our private prayers and thoughts: <<But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you>> (Matthew 6:6). It is a good idea for those called to visit and especially teach in other churches that they are unfamiliar with, to pray before they travel that they might be accepted with the spirit that is intended.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – ¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Romans 1:11-12

Impart some spiritual gift shows how aware Paul is of the success he has enjoyed with the Gentiles through the power of the Holy Spirit working through him and he envisages this will continue in Rome. However, Paul did not wish to imply that the church was deficient in anyway and needed his teaching to rectify things.

Mutually encouraged. Paul desires as an apostle to encourage the Christians in Rome, but it is also noteworthy that their faith serves to inspire and strengthen him as well. This verse, sandwiched between the comments of v.11 and v.13, also shows sensitivity to the apostolic rules of not encroaching on another apostle's work. It is a comment to serve the church then and now in the fact that we need each other due to the way the Holy Spirit distributes his various gifts.

¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

Romans 1:13

Paul's ministry is like bringing ripened crops as a gift to God. Paul neither planted nor watered the churches in Rome: <<I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow>> (1 Corinthians 3:6), but its increased maturity and obedience would be a harvest nonetheless.

Paul serves God in his spirit. A true servant does, for God is Spirit: <<God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth>> (John 4:24), but it is according to the will of God: <<Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that" >> (James 4:15).

I planned many times to come to you. Paul had stated before his desire to visit Rome: <<After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also" >> (Acts 19:21), and will express it again in this letter: <<I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full

measure of the blessing of Christ>> (Romans 15:29), not for the sake of seeing this great city but to acquaint himself with the church, whom he doesn't know, to impart some spiritual input to believers and to bear fruit among them, both in terms of those who already believe, by helping to increase their faith, and to bring in new converts. But as much as Paul had desired to go to Rome, he was about God's business and the first, in fact, the only call on his life was to complete the work.

¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

Romans 1:14

Paul was under obligation imposed by Jesus Christ, who ordained Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles.

Greeks refers to those who spoke Greek and adopted Greek culture in the Greco-Roman world.

Non-Greeks or barbarians, Greek barbaroi, designates those who are outside of Greek culture, who did not speak the Greek language. See comments made on Acts 28:2. Paul is not using the language to discriminate between the people who make up the church nor does he wish to label them in any way. He just wants to show that, irrespective of our status in the world, the Gospel is for us.

The world was divided between those who were Romans and those who were not. In earlier history, there was a time, culturally at least, when the world was spilt into Greeks and Barbarians, used here by Paul (perhaps tongue in cheek), and for the Hebrews there was Jew and Gentile, sometimes called Greeks. What Paul is clearly demonstrating is that the Gospel of Christ, though rooted in the OT scriptures, was intended for everyone without any divisional lines.

¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

Romans 1:15

Why would Paul preach the Gospel to people who were already Christians? For Paul the Gospel is not just a call to initial saving faith but also a call to continue in a daily walk of faith: <<We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life>> (Romans 6:4), <<in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit>> (Romans 8:4), <<Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!>> (2 Corinthians 5:17), and: <<For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love>> (Galatians 5:6).

Paul had a special gift of adapting his style to his recipients. We can see this by comparing the great detail Paul will use throughout Romans with the words he spoke to pagans at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17), and Gentile philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), and yet he does so as a debtor to each, giving to each what they require to hear to aid understanding of the Gospel he proclaimed.

¹⁶ I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Romans 1:16

Because of their lack of size, fame, or honour in the Roman corridors of power and influence, Christians might be tempted to be ashamed of the Christian message. But Paul says it is nothing to be ashamed of, for it is in fact a message coming with the power of God that brings people

to salvation. Public proclamation of the Gospel in Rome was a hard task and always met with strong opposition and not just from the Jews or special interest groups such as the silver smiths in Ephesus, but from ordinary citizens as well. But Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel, neither should any of us be. Just as he would never be ashamed to proclaim Jesus to be his Lord and Saviour, nor is Paul a cause of shame to either.

In Paul's day, Cæsar ruled the Roman world and for Christians to proclaim the Gospel was to challenge Cæsar's authority by saying that Jesus ruled the world. It would be safer to keep quiet but Paul was called to proclaim it to the Gentiles; he was not ashamed of doing so. We too, in a world where Christians are disdained and sneered at must be willing to speak up no matter how difficult that may be: <<I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame>> (Psalm 119:46), and: <<that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth>> (Philippians 2:10).

Revelation of the Gospel, is the revelation of God's strong arm: <<Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?>> (Isaiah 53:1), the spiritual power that enabled Christ and his followers to heal diseases.

The power of God. Whenever Paul, or anyone else with the commission to proclaim the Gospel, announces that Jesus died and rose to life, and continues to live, then God's power is released and something happens to renew the belief of the new life that started with Jesus' death. People's lives are changed as a result of God's power, resulting in salvation.

The statement: for the salvation of everyone who believes, refers namely to all who not only come to a decision of faith, but whose whole life is characterised as a trustful acceptance of and commitment to the Gospel, which is God's power to salvation.

Salvation is a present reality as well as a future hope. Although there will come a time when God removes all corruption from the world and sets things back to how they were intended to be with a new world and those who chose Jesus clothed in new, resurrection bodies, there is a much more immediate meaning to salvation and that is the cleansing of us in life from the burden of sin and the effects it has in our own lives and on others.

First for the Jew indicates the priority of the Jews in salvation history and their election as God's people. The role of the Jews is a major issue in Romans, as seen especially in the discussion in Romans Chapters 9-11. Although God treats all men with equality, the Gospel was offered to the Jews first: <<He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel">> (Matthew 15:24), as did the apostles: <<When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways>> (Acts 3:26), but when they rejected it, they turned to the Gentiles: <<Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles">> (Acts 13:46). However, it doesn't matter how good the medicine is, it cannot heal if the patient won't take it.

¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Romans 1:17

Several translations give a slightly different slant on this verse than the NIV. The ESV reads: <<For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith">>. From the righteous faith of God to the fallible and often weak faith of man; faith to faith, faith is all in all, faith to start our journey in Christ, faith to continue on it, and faith to the very end. Faith to faith: <<We live by faith, not by sight>> (2 Corinthians 5:7).

A righteousness from God. This is a crucial phrase that has been the subject of intense debate. It most likely denotes right standing before God, i.e. a legal reality that is given to people by God. A similar expression in Greek clearly has this meaning: <<and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith>> (Philippians 3:9). Romans 10:5 <<Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them”>> is parallel to Philippians 3:9, and bears the same meaning. It is likely that the phrase bears this meaning as well as in Romans 3:21-22 <<But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference>>, and: <<God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God>> (2 Corinthians 5:21). However, the expression in Greek, dikaiosynē theou, the righteousness of God, likely also carries an additional, fuller meaning, which refers directly to God’s right moral character, particularly manifested in his holiness and justice, and in the way that his method of saving sinners through Christ’s death meets the just demand of his holy nature. Although today’s Western world often regards using words that carry a double sense as confusing and ambiguous, in NT times such wording was commonly used to add weight and enrichment. For example: <<But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself>> (John 12:32), where lifted up refers to Christ being exalted by being crucified.

Right and justify have a similar root in the original and again is not as powerful and as clear in English. When we read any of these words in scripture we need to hold words like righteousness and justice all together in our minds in order to have a true understanding of Paul’s writing, especially in passages here in vv.14-17.

Will live by faith is taken from Habakkuk 2:4, which is also quoted in Galatians 3:11 <<Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith”>>, and: <<But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him>> (Hebrews 10:38). The life of faith is all-encompassing: it is by faith that one initially receives the gift of salvation, i.e. eternal life, but it is also by faith that one lives each day. This quote from Habakkuk is probably meant to be understood with a richness of meaning, which can embrace within it the fuller understanding of the Gospel for which Paul stands, in its continuity with the revelation to Israel. Paul uses words for believe and faith that are basically the same and much more powerful than those in English. For in our language they can bring in an element of doubt but in God’s language there is none, and we must learn to believe and have faith that is without any hint of doubt whatsoever.

From first to last. Paul does not see the Gospel as something which merely begins someone on the way to salvation, but as something which embraces the totality of the process toward and into salvation. The Gospel is not merely the initial proclamation of Christ which wins converts, but is the whole Christian message and claim, in terms of the rest of the letter, not just Chapters 1-5, or 1-8, or even 1-11, but the whole letter.

Our equality is that we are both at a loss without a saviour and yet both equally welcomed to that same saviour: <<Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all>> (Colossians 3:11). He is a light unto the Gentiles: <<I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth>> (Isaiah 49:6b), as well as the glory of his people Israel: <<a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel>> (Luke 2:32), a stumbling block for proud and arrogant Jews, and Gentiles alike who choose to reject him: <<but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles>> (1 Corinthians 1:23). And the time of accepting him was fixed: <<Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy>> (Daniel 9:24).

Salvation, i.e. the right to stand in the very presence of God, can only be achieved by faith or works. Paul will now spend some considerable time looking at the works of the Gentile world and the works of the law of the Jews, showing the failings of both and concluding that salvation is by faith alone (and grace!).

First we must see the righteousness of God condemning, and then that same righteousness justifying, making us appear worthy of acceptance or revealing the wrath of God. The light of nature and the light of the law reveal the wrath of God from sin to sin. Thank God that the Gospel reveals the justifying righteousness of God from faith to faith.

The sinful nature of man can be described in the categories ungodliness and unrighteousness. Those who reject God and his laws do so in ungodliness. Those who believe life is achieved through human endeavour, knowing good from evil, and knowing of the existence of God, do so through unrighteousness. Holding fast to that which is good in faith and love is the root of the Gospel, holding it fast in unrighteousness, in the captivity of the soul, is the root of sin.

II Romans 1:18-3:20 - God's righteousness in His wrath against sinners

This next main section shows that God's wrath is being righteously revealed against all people, both Gentiles and Jews, since all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).

II.a Romans 1:18-32 - God's wrath against mankind

God's wrath is righteously revealed because people suppress the truth about the one true God and turn to idolatry (vv.18-23). The consequence of idolatry is the moral disintegration of human society (vv.24-32).

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

Romans 1:18

The wrath of God refers to his personal anger against sin. God's anger is not selfish or arbitrary, but represents his holy and loving response to human wickedness. Some have understood God's wrath in impersonal cause-effect terms, but that would be a deistic worldview rather than a biblical one. It is abruptly introduced by Paul and would not have been an immediately familiar concept to many of Paul's readers, although both Jew and Gentile would have been familiar with the idea of divine indignation, of judicial anger against evil. This wrath, Paul affirms, was already being revealed in the Jewish and Gentile response to the Gospel, so the divine anger can be readily recognised in what was already actually taking place.

Against all indicates that we all have an individual as well as corporate responsibility for our response to the Gospel. It is particularly aimed at those who deliberately suppress the truth, the truth of God in relation to man, the truth of man in relation to God and the truth of man in relation to man. Such suppression of the truth in any of these aspects is classed as wickedness by God, and those people will feel the force of the wrath of God, not as an end time judgement, but in the immediacy of their actions.

It is possible for rational people to think that one idea is the right thing and its opposite is wrong, and be completely wrong in their thinking or deduction. It is not that moral standards are relative to cultural thinking, but more a case that we can deceive ourselves where personal interests and desires are concerned.

¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his

eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Romans 1:19-20

Known about God. The general charge of human wickedness is now made more precise by defining or justifying it in terms of the knowledge of God. This takes up an idea that was well-known to them at the time that God is knowable, which is in keeping with Stoic philosophy, and popular in Rome at the time. Although many of the philosophers of Rome, Athens and other seats of learning often viewed the God of the Hebrews as a hidden, unknowable God to those outside of Israel: <<Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Saviour of Israel>> (Isaiah 45:15).

The root cause of humanity's problem at this time was they had turned away from God in their corruption and no longer gave him the glory for what was happening throughout his creation; but all was not lost and they had not passed beyond redemption.

God's wrath is expressed for good reason since his power and divine nature are clearly revealed through the world he has made, and yet he is rejected by all people. These verses show that salvation does not come through general revelation, i.e. what is known about God through the natural world, since Paul emphasises the universality of sin and concludes that: <<no one seeks for God>> (Romans 3:11).

What has been made. The entire natural world, i.e. creation, bears witness to God through its beauty, complexity, design, and usefulness.

Without excuse. No one should complain that God has left insufficient evidence of his existence and character; the fault is with those who reject the evidence, for man is recognised as a responsible agent in the face of this revelation, so that his failure to respond appropriately is not simply a lack of perception, a defect in spiritual capacity, but a moral failure, a culpable act. The Gentile unbelievers, though not having the scriptures, or the covenant promises, would still be aware of God and being made in his image, as he is not without witness in the world: <<He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the Lord>> (Psalm 147:20), and: <<Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy>> (Acts 14:17).

That which may be known implies there are a lot of aspects of God that remain unknown, nor do we need to know. God has become known to mankind, e.g. through the philosophies of Pythagoras, Plato and the Stoics, which point toward the existence of a supreme being. There is a great deal of evidence for the science of God outside of the realm of believers.

God may be apprehended but he is not comprehended. By searching we find him but we cannot find out about him: <<Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens – what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave – what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea>> (Job 11:7-9). Finite understanding can never perfectly understand an infinite being. It is only that which is revealed that can be known. That which is not should remain secret: <<The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law>> (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Aspects of God that are invisible, e.g. the Godhead, can be seen through their product. He works in secret: <<But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him>> (Job 23:8-9), <<My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in

the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth>> (Psalm 139:15), and: <<As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things>> (Ecclesiastes 11:5); yet shows his creations in natural light. You could never come to the knowledge of the Godhead through natural light, although some claim it is evident in the writings of Plato, but you can come to sufficient knowledge to know right from wrong and not to fall into idolatry. This was the belief held in unrighteousness.

Even those who have the idea that creation came about by natural causes see, through clear evidence of design, in science and nature, for the need of some first cause and intelligent agent: <<The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands>> (Psalm 19:1), <<Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing>> (Isaiah 40:26), and: <<The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands>> (Acts 17:24).

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Romans 1:21

The root sin is the failure to value God above all things, so that he is not honoured and praised as he should be. Human beings are foolish, not in the sense that they are intellectually deficient but in their rejection of God's lordship over their lives. They knew God not in a saving sense, but they knew of his existence and his attributes. God had revealed himself through his creation. By withholding the appropriate recognition of God they became less, not more, able to function as rational beings; failure to recognise his own creatureliness brought with it a decreasing ability to function as a human being.

The corruption started, not with evil deeds as we might suppose, but with suppression of the truth about God and who he is. Human intellect on its own cannot always tell us which way to go, indeed it is often a waste of a God-given gift, for along with twisted thinking goes a darkened heart.

²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

Romans 1:22

People actually claimed they were being wise in turning their back on God, that it was an act of sophistication and sign of high intelligence to declare their independence from God. The consequence was they became less and not more capable of running their own affairs and lives.

Even brilliant people who do not honour God miss the whole purpose of life and therefore became fools. See Proverbs 1:7, 1:22, 10:1, 12:15, 14:7, 17:25 and 20:3.

In Paul's time, the pagans worshipped the sun and moon, the learned Egyptians the ox and the onion, the wise Greeks diseases and human passions, and the mighty Romans, the wisest of them all, seemed accepting of all ideas and passions. And Paul made little progress with the Athenian philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:18-32). But it seems those of us who are simpler folk seem more able to grasp the enormity and reality of the Gospel and its implications, not just for our own lives, but for the eternal destinies of everyone.

²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Romans 1:23

Exchanged the(ir) glory is taken from Psalm 106:20 <<They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass>>. This verse points out the utter folly of man, whose desire to be the god of his own life, has turned away from his creator, and crafted images, because they preferred the darkness of their flickering minds to the brightness that God shines into our lives, for the latter shows up our imperfections and weaknesses that we don't want to see, not understanding that, if we turn to God and become dependent on him, our imperfections are removed in his sight.

Idolatry is the fundamental sin. In addition to the images housed in great temples, Roman families commonly kept representations of individual house gods in their homes, with examples found at Pompeii being particularly striking. Mediterranean and Near Eastern pagan religion worshiped idols in the form of beasts, and in the likeness of mixed beast/human deities, such as the ancient gods of Egypt. Modern idols don't look like ancient ones; images served today are often mental rather than metal. But people still devote their lives to, and trust in, many things other than God.

The first sign of moral decay is the failure to worship God and turn to idols which are actually reflections of ourselves and therefore subject to corruption and decay as we are. Not only that but we are prepared to worship sub-human species and inanimate objects as well! We may laugh at the ancients for worshipping the carved images they had made themselves, thinking they were Gods. Demetrius in Ephesus complains that Paul claims: <<man-made gods are no gods at all>> (Acts 19:6), a statement in itself that should have made Demetrius think; but we too worship such things as money, sex and power, and many other such things. The twisted thinking, darkened heart and failure to worship God are like a disease spreading through the body of mankind, at first unnoticed until the patient becomes really ill, by which time it has turned to ungodliness and injustice, two terms that mean human beings are going wrong and the primary reason why there is so much crime: rape, murder, torture, economic oppression, sickness, injustice and a lack of understanding as to why God doesn't intervene to put things right.

In Paul's arguments, he first shows man's folly in being disobedient, just as Adam was for original sin. He then uses the analogy in Psalm 106, which points to Israel's apostasy in the Sinai desert with the building of the Golden Calf. These two illustrations show that the typical Jewish polemic against idolatry is Israel itself, and shows just how quickly those blessed by God can fall. The point would not be lost of Paul's readers, first the Jew then the Gentile!

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Romans 1:24

Three times Paul says God gave them over (v.24, v.26 and v.28). In every instance the giving up to sin is a result of idolatry, the refusal to make God the centre 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 every good thing.

The real result is it stirs up God's wrath. But he doesn't lash out in righteous indignation. In fact, it is quite the opposite as he shows patience, tolerance, grace and mercy, even towards the worst of us.

It should also be noted that God gave them over to their desires; he did not give them their desires! Their quest for sexual freedom not only robbed them of their moral purity it also cost them their liberty, making them slaves to sin, with all the pain and suffering that will bring upon them for all eternity unless they turn again to God in true repentance.

²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.

Romans 1:25

Exchanged the truth of God for a lie. Paul implies that all other religions are based on false ideas about the one true God; they are not just different paths to one God, as some claim. It was easy for Adam to accept a lie from Satan: <<you will be like God, knowing good and evil>> (Genesis 3:5b), which did not lead man into being god but into a dependence on much baser things rather than a dependence on and trust in God. Who would think to choose as one's master a flawed, created thing rather than the glorious Creator? But that is exactly what we did. As it did dishonour to his glory so it did misrepresent his being.

Served created things. Such is the folly of man to believe that God, or indeed any fictitious god, could exist inside something that man has made! The only natural conclusion is that they want to be god of their own lives: <<They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass>> (Psalm 106:20), and: <<Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols>> (Jeremiah 2:11). The sin is having other deities. Placing them above God is just an aggravation of the sin. But God will be glorified for all eternity, simply for who he is.

God's greatest honour to man was to make him in God's own image; the greatest dishonour man has done to God is to make him in man's own image!

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Romans 1:26-27

Before considering the detail of these verses and the issues of homosexuality in particular, it is worth considering a few things. It is known that homosexuality was contrary to God's law; it was found to be disgusting in the eyes of the Jews in general and was illegal, punishable by death, in their country. Under Roman law, and indeed within customary Roman cultural practice, homosexuality was not just accepted, it was often actively encouraged. Plato writes of the deep-seated love that can exist between two men and Nero himself was known to engage in homosexual acts as well as some bizarre heterosexual activities.

However, Paul does not include this information in his letter either to express his own disgust at this behaviour, or that of other Jews. He knows that many of the readers of his letters would feel this way too, as they had been attracted to Judaism initially because of the strong moral codes their religion insisted upon. Neither is Paul using this as an opportunity to have a swipe at current Roman practice, or the emperor himself. His main thrust is to show that God created a specific world order. The bible tells us: <<Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it">> (Genesis 1:26-28a), and: <<For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh>> (Genesis 2:24). God created mankind to be stewards over the rest of his creation and he created man and woman to be partners, quite distinct but equal partners, in populating and stewarding his creation.

Just as Adam listened to the cunning serpent, disobeyed God and brought sin and thus God's wrath upon creation, by breaking up God's created partnership for stewarding the earth, we are exacerbating our original sin. Therefore, we should not be disgusted at homosexual practice, we should be disgusted with all unrepented and thus unforgiven sin, especially our own.

God gave them over. This is the second of three such references. It should not be considered that this offence is more serious than the first, but that God takes them all so seriously Paul has to mention it three times. God's judgements on the nations are not temporal as the most powerful ones are often the most idolatrous, and so it was with Rome in Paul's day. Spiritual judgements are to be feared the most, for they are eternal. 'Giving them over' is the withdrawal of grace and leaving men to follow their own heart's desire, which usually leads to the greater sin, but God is not the author of sin, that is man allowing Satan to rule. For God is pure, holy and just. Here they are shown to be worse than: <<A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish>> (Psalm 49:20), as God holds us in honour yet we dishonour him, and thus we dishonour ourselves. When we worship God, truly worship him, the God in whose image we are made, then we reflect that image more brightly and become more fully and truly human. When we choose sin and idolatry our humanness dissolves bit by bit.

Not only homosexual acts but all such lusts or desires are said to be shameful before God. Just as idolatry is unnatural, contrary to what God intended when he made human beings, so too homosexuality is unnatural, i.e. contrary to nature in that it does not represent what God intended when he made men and women with physical bodies that have a natural way of interacting with each other and natural desires for each other. Paul follows the OT and Jewish tradition in seeing all homosexual relations as sinful. The creation account in Genesis Chapters 1-2 reveals the divine paradigm for human beings, indicating that God's will is for man and woman to be joined in marriage. Although homosexual practice was widespread and generally accepted in 1st Century Rome, Paul makes the assumption that his readers would be as opposed to this as the Jews were, as it was their moral code and monotheism that had attracted most of the converts to Judaism before they became Christians, a route that many of the early converts had taken.

Unnatural sexual practices include homosexuality, paedophilia, and bestiality. However, it is the act not the individual that God abhors, just as he does all sexual immorality, and indeed all sin. David wrote: <<what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour>> (Psalm 8:4-5), probably in despair. What a vile creature when left to his own devices. Man was made a little lower than the angels yet has the capability to make himself a lot lower than the demons. Even Satan must shudder at times, even if it is with delight!

We can note with interest that this is one aspect of the Jewish law that Paul accepted had been brought forward into the new covenant. We should also note that it is the homosexual act here that God vehemently opposes and not those who practice it. They should be shown every kindness and be encouraged to turn away from their sin just as all others engaged in sexual immorality should, including those who so frequently indulge in sex outside of marriage or those that commit wilful adultery. To claim that God is OK with us performing any of these acts of wilful disobedience is simply self-deception; a dangerous game to play.

Inflamed or consumed gives a strong image of a powerful but destructive inward desire. The sin in view is not pederasty, homosexual conduct of men with boys, but men engaging in sin with other men. There is no justification here for the view that Paul condemns only abusive homosexual relationships.

Due penalty could refer to the sin of homosexuality itself as the penalty for idolatry. Or, the 'and' in and receiving may indicate some additional negative consequences received in

themselves, that is, some form of spiritual, emotional, or physical blight. The due penalty refers to a penalty that is appropriate to the wrong committed. Even those who have come into the light allow it to fade and even ask God to go: <<Yet they say to God, 'Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways>> (Job 21:14), because his memory thwarts and contradicts their natural desires.

²⁸ Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;³¹ they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Romans 1:28-31

This is the third and final time Paul writes that God gave them over to a depraved mind. This does not indicate a downward spiral and that each activity was worse than the previous but that all of them, and many more sinful activities that Paul could have gone on to list, are treated with equal disdain by God. The need to use it three times has a sombre and sobering effect.

Human sin is not confined to sexual sins, and Paul now lists a whole catalogue of the evils common among human beings as a result of turning from God.

One comforting thought of this list of wickedness is that life is no worse today than it was then. We have always had this capacity for wickedness; it is just that modern communication lets us hear about it more often. What is perhaps more worrying is that there is no dividing line in society that says: 'these are the good people and these are evil' for our sinful nature makes us all capable of doing any or all of the things Paul lists and more. It is only the grace of God that keeps us the right side of the line; not the grace of God in believers, for we are all made in God's image and there are many people who have not accepted Jesus as their saviour, who still live within the moral code of God's righteousness that is in our DNA. Sadly, not all who profess to know God walk on the same side of the line as these unbelievers; it is the way life can become for anyone who does not truly place Christ as Lord over all aspects of their lives, nothing else could protect us from becoming one of these people that Paul refers to.

The believer should not be depressed at the disorder of society and the evidence of man's degradation; it actually constitutes evidence of God's overall control. Man is still the creature whom God made, and even if he refuses to recognise God, his essentially creaturely instincts and their outworkings nevertheless bears witness to the Creator his conscious mind denies. In short, human fallenness is an ellipse caught by the twin foci of man's freely chosen wilfulness and God's ordering of his creation. And thus it becomes clearer that God's wrath is indeed the converse of his righteousness, since both express and bring to effect the world as God intends it to be: righteousness through faithful dependence on the Creator leads to salvation; wrath through self-deceitful pride and self-indulgent desire leads to self-destruction.

Gnosis (the knowledge of spiritual mysteries) and epignosis (having full knowledge of God) apply. They have the knowledge of God but do not acknowledge him. This is not just a pagan issue, but is seen in the church today, often with the excuse 'Times have changed; society is more accepting of these things'. Thankfully, God has not changed, nor will he - ever! <<With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed – an accursed brood!>> (2 Peter 2:14), and: <<Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more>> (Ephesians 4:19). Pharaoh had hardened his heart, then

God hardened Pharaoh's heart. This is wilful hard-heartedness, punished with judicial hard-heartedness. We reap what we sow.

And here, in Rome, we find the seat of sin: <<my name is Legion; for we are many>> (Mark 5:9b), thus the need for the Gospel to be brought to them. It was not just Rome though, for in reality, the whole world had, and still has, the need for reformation.

³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Romans 1:32

People do not generally sin in innocent ignorance, for they know God's righteous decree, at least in an instinctive way, that their evil deserves condemnation. Indeed, the evil goes further when people approve of and applaud others for their sin, probably because having others join in their sin makes them feel better about the evil course they have chosen.

There are two groups of sinners:

1. Sinners who break commandments 1-4 are essentially God-haters, but some are overtly so. They are avowed enemies of God: <<In one month I got rid of the three shepherds. The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them>> (Zechariah 11:8). They are lord of their own lives.
2. Sinners who break commandments 5-10 are unrighteous: <<Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins>> (James 4:17). Sin for the love of sin is to join willingly the confederacy for the Devil's kingdom and his interest.

Paul concludes this section by showing that it is not just the Jews but all of mankind who instinctively know right from wrong, as the Stoics of Paul's day would have confirmed. Therefore, the defiance shown against what they know is wilful and the punishment they receive for whatever acts they then chose to commit, or indeed encourage others to commit, is fully merited.

In society there are those who think that God, if he exists at all, has written a load of rules and then loves to punish anyone who breaks them. The Roman Emperor Caligula had a reputation for being such a person. Apparently, he would have new laws published in small writing and pinned high up on walls so people could hardly see them, let alone read them, and then he took great delight in punishing those who broke such laws.

But God is not a man that he should have a warped mind. He has built into creation itself a set of rules and guidelines that allow people to live fruitful, fulfilled lives and he provides a mechanism for allowing people to come back on track if they wander away from a life that is not righteous and God-pleasing. He has made the world in such a way that kindness, gentleness, generosity, humility and love in its many forms, is life giving; while evil in its many forms is deadly, not just to the body but to the human soul as well. This is the result when we choose to be so arrogant and so determined to separate ourselves from the love of God that 'he gives us up' to our own folly.

Putting this all together, could the Gentile world ever be justified before God by its works?