

# **LIVING BY FAITH**

A COMMENTARY ON THE  
BOOK OF ROMANS

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by

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## FOREWORD

The wise man said, *“And furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh”* (Eccl 12:12). There are many books on many subjects, but religious books take up a special place in our world and in the eyes of God. When describing the state of the rich man who died in a wrong relationship with God (Lk. 16), we find these words attributed to Abraham: *“And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead”* (Lk. 16:31). God’s Word must be brought to the world as well as understood and applied. Comprehension of the Scriptures is so important Paul said, *“howbeit in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue”* (1 Cor 14:19).

God wants people to study and learn from His Word because it *“is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”* (Rom. 1:16). According to Eph. 6:17, God’s Word is the *“sword of the Spirit.”* Every Scripture is *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work”* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). John said the precious book we call the Bible was written so a person *“may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name”* (John 20:31). Commentaries on the Scriptures are helpful and even important, but they should never be regarded as being on the same level as the Word of God or the “final word.” Only the Scriptures *“cannot be broken”* (Jn. 10:35b).

Although the Scriptures are God’s power and complete us in every way, there are times when people would like help interpreting passages, defining key words and applying the Bible to everyday life. *“And the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some one shall guide me? And he besought Philip to come up and sit with him”* (Acts 8:29-31).

Since *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”* (Matt 4:4-5), this commentary and the ones to follow are designed to help readers better understand, submit to and *“contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints”* (Jude 3).

## INTRODUCTION

We live in a time of vast knowledge and a world full of technological advancements. Many tasks have been made easier for man, and one of these tasks is studying the Scriptures. Computer programs allow Bible students to do instant word searches in multiple translations, several Bible translations may be consulted at once, and the Internet offers a plethora of information about Bible books and characters.

While there is a lot of information available, there is not an abundance of good and affordable commentaries for Bible students. Thus, about twenty years ago I began to accumulate information that has resulted in my producing commentaries (Romans being the first) that are easy to understand, that are thorough and that bring out important highlights from the original language of the New Testament (Koine Greek). Unlike many other commentaries that offer information about dates, historical background, place and circumstance of writing, these commentaries go straight to the text. The introductory information used in other commentaries is widely available in many modern Bibles, the Internet, Bible dictionaries and handbooks, etc. When information such as the date of a book or place of writing relates to a specific text, these matters are addressed in the commentary.

It was never my intention to become a writer and especially not a commentator. Yet, such has become my apparent lot in life and I have been blessed with some truly outstanding helpers. *Kent* helped convert some old word processing files so some of the studying done in the earlier years could be included in the commentary series. Three editors (*Brian, Julie, and Rose Ann*) were superb in every way. *Kathryn* spent many hours on design work. A word of appreciation also goes to those who have been in my Bible classes. All the material in this book has been taken into Bible classes and actually taught. Thus, some of what follows is a reflection of class comments. Unlike many commentaries strictly based on research, this one has been “field tested.” My target readership is anyone who wants a thorough but simple to use commentary.

If you have suggestions or happen to find an error, please feel free to offer feedback by e-mail: [comment@abiblecommentary.com](mailto:comment@abiblecommentary.com). You may visit [www.abiblecommentary.com](http://www.abiblecommentary.com) for the status of future commentaries and to add your contact information to a discount list.

God bless,

Brad Price, December 16, 2005

## ROMANS

The author of this book was Paul (Rom. 1:1). Paul wanted to visit the Christians who lived in Rome because, in the first century, Rome was the center of the earth's power and government. Making a trip to Rome would have also given him a base of operations to take the gospel further west in the ancient world (15:24). Since Paul had previously been unable to come to Rome, he sent this letter (1:10-13).

This epistle (letter) was written from Corinth while Paul was on his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23f). His third journey took him to Ephesus for two years and three months (Acts 19:1, 8-9). He left Ephesus and entered into Macedonia (Acts 20:1). Then, he visited Greece (the same as Achaia, Acts 20:2). The city of Corinth was located in Achaia. Paul remained at Corinth for three months (Acts 20:3), and during this time he wrote this letter. We know this because of the information in Rom. 16:23. Gaius was Paul's host when this letter was written, and since Gaius lived in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14), this letter was written from Corinth. Since this letter was written for people in Rome someone had to take it to them. This messenger may have been Phoebe, a woman mentioned in Rom. 16:1. She lived in Cenchræa (a seaport of Corinth).

This letter, contrary to a common belief, was not written to the "Romans." One could have been a Roman but not a Christian. It was also possible to have been a Christian but not a Roman. There were even those who lived in Rome but were not of a Roman background. This letter was written to Christians who were living in Rome (1:6-7), and both Jews and Gentiles made up this church (Rom. 11:13; 17-32; 15:4f). These Christians lived in a wicked and violent culture.

At least three reasons may be given for the material in this epistle. First, God has always used a system of faith and not law to justify man (Rom. 3:20, 28). Second, this book refutes the idea that sin glorifies God. There were Christians who believed that if they continued to sin and God continued to forgive them, this "extra forgiveness" would further demonstrate God's greatness. Third, this book shows how God could send a savior to the Jewish people and yet allow the unbelieving Jews to be unblessed, condemned, and severed from the Messianic blessings (Rom. 11:22). Key words in this book include **law**, **righteousness**, **faith**, **sin**, **works**, **sanctification**, and **Israel** (Jew).

**1:1:** *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called (to be) an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,*

Paul was a spokesperson for God (Rom. 9:1; 1 Cor. 2:13). When he described himself to the Romans, he used the word "*servant*" (*doulos*). This word, which is often found in the New Testament, is equivalent to *slave*. It meant a person was owned by another. In the New Testament this term normally has a figurative sense that "covers three basic areas: (1) the Christian as a *doulos* of God; (2) the Christian as a *doulos* to other Christians; (3) Christ as the *doulos* of God" (CBL, GED, 2:175). The word *slave* would have been meaningful to these readers because the Roman Empire had an estimated 60 million slaves.

Paul knew he was owned by the Lord and said so in places like 7:22. He was a slave who was proud of his master (Gal. 1:1; Tit. 1:1), and he had bound himself to Christ both mentally and physically (Rom. 7:25; 2 Cor. 10:5). A passage in the Old Testament which may have influenced Paul's thinking is Ex. 21:2-6.

Barclay (Romans, p. 2) noted, "In the Old Testament it is the regular word which describes the great men of God. Moses was the servant, the slave, the *doulos* of the Lord (Joshua 1:2). Joshua himself was the *doulos* of God (Joshua 24:9). The proudest title of the prophets, the title which distinguishes them from other men, is that they are the servants and the slaves of God (Amos 3:7; Jeremiah 7:25). When Paul calls himself the slave of Jesus Christ he is doing nothing less than setting himself in the succession of the prophets. Their greatness and their glory lay in the fact that they were slaves of God, and so did Paul's. So, then, this phrase, *the slave of Jesus Christ*, describes at one and the same time the obligation of a great love and honor of a great office."

McGuiggan (Romans, p. 58) said Paul "wasn't a slave to booze, lust, money, sin, [work, recreation, education, drugs, sports, BP] or the Devil. He was a servant of the King of kings, Jesus Christ."

Willmington (p. 221) offered a similar thought. He noted how Paul was not “a servant of the U.N., or the W.C.C. or any other human organization, but of Christ!”

Paul told the Romans he had become an apostle through God’s “*calling*.” Paul’s calling came from God (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:1). God had “*separated*” him “*unto the gospel*.” This separation was a separation *to* something. It was unlike the separation practiced by the Pharisees. They sought to separate themselves *from* things (the title *Pharisee* meant “separated one”). The Pharisees refused to let the skirt of their robe brush against an ordinary man. They shuddered at the thought of God offering salvation to the Gentiles. To the Pharisees, Gentiles were fuel for the fires of hell (adopted from Barclay, Romans, page 3). The Jews also said, “the best of the serpents crush, the best of the Gentiles kill.”

At a former time Paul had embraced these very views. He had been a Pharisee and would have practiced separation. After his conversion to Christ, his outlook changed. He became an apostle to the Gentiles and dedicated his life to preaching and teaching the gospel. “Life to Paul was commitment (a servant), commission (an apostle), and consecration (called, separated)” (CBL, Romans, p. 19).

Paul had a main goal and he fervently pursued it. He was unlike the people who drift through life, doing a little of this and a little of that, unsure of what they ultimately want to achieve. There are Christians and non-Christians who come to the end of their lives but have no real accomplishments. This type of end is neither good nor desirable. We should have accomplishments, and among them should be a life that is filled with an eager and proud presentation of the gospel (verses 15-16).

Concerning the gospel, Cranfield (Romans, p. 3) said, “there is also an interesting pagan background to the New Testament use of this word *euangelion* [a word usually translated *gospel*, BP]. For the inhabitants of the Roman Empire, it had special associations with the Emperor-cult, the announcements of such events as the birth of an heir to the Emperor, his coming-of-age, and his ascension, being referred to as *euangelia*. There is thus in the Christian use of the word an implicit contrast between the evangel which may truly be called ‘God’s evangel’ and these other evangels which represent the pretentious claims of self-important men.”

**1:2:** *which he promised afore through his prophets in the holy scriptures,*

The word “*which*” refers back to the gospel. God promised the gospel through the “*prophets*” and in the “*holy scriptures*.” Paul didn’t give any examples, but other New Testament passages like 1 Pet. 1:9-12 help explain the thought. At the end of 1 Peter 1:10, there is a reference to “*grace that was to come*.” The subject of *grace* is prominent in the preaching of the gospel. The information in 1 Pet. 1:11 proves the prophets had knowledge about Christ, the sufferings He would undergo, and the glories which would follow His death. All of these matters made the prophets very, very curious. One person with this information was Abraham (see Jn. 8:56 and Heb. 11:13).

The “*holy scriptures*” in Rom. 1:2 refer to the Old Testament. By appealing to the Old Testament, Paul showed the gospel was promised. There is a definite relationship between the gospel and the Old Testament. One of the places where this relationship is illustrated is Acts 8:30-35. Philip used Old Testament Scriptures to preach *Jesus* to the Ethiopian Eunuch. The book of Acts is filled with Old Testament references, and these continually show the relationship between the Old Testament and the gospel. Preachers used Old Testament references because they predicted the coming of the gospel. Even Jesus taught the gospel is tied to the Old Testament (Jn. 5:39; Lk. 24:25-27, 45-47). Old Testament texts which clearly predicted the gospel include Isa. 52:7; 53; 57:19; Zech. 13. Martin Luther said, “The words of the prophets are now set free....Now we can see and understand what was written, for we have an ‘entrance into the Old Testament.’”

Willmington (p. 222) observed how the Old Testament prophets speaking of the gospel completely refutes “the silly claims of the cults, all of which claim to have some new and exotic truth concerning the gospel. It is rightly observed that ‘if something is new, it’s probably not true, and if it’s true, then it is not new!’”

**1:3-4:** *concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared*

*(to be) the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; (even) Jesus Christ our Lord,*

The gospel predicted by the prophets and the Old Testament writings centered on “*His Son*.” In other words, the gospel (the good news) is about Christ. This is what we find in places like Acts 8:30-36. The Old Testament was used to teach people about Jesus. “There is no such thing as a ‘social gospel,’ or a ‘moral gospel.’ The founder and finisher of the gospel is Christ” (Willmington, p. 222).

The Old Testament promised that Jesus would be from David’s seed. The very first verse of the New Testament was written to prove Jesus came from David’s family. Matthew’s gospel begins with a lengthy genealogy, and this record shows the Lord was a descendent of David.

In Romans 1:3 Paul said Jesus had a dual nature. He was both man and God. The *humanity* of Christ is seen in the reference to David’s “*seed*.” This statement affirms Jesus was a man. Since Jesus was also *David’s Lord*, He was also *divine* (God). The Lord’s divinity and humanity were combined together in one body. Ralph Earle (p. 131) said, “Ask a conservative, ‘Was Jesus human or divine?’ and he will answer emphatically, ‘Divine!’ Ask a liberal the same question and he may reply, ‘Human.’ Both are right and both are wrong. For the correct answer is ‘Both.’”

While no person doubts Christ’s humanity, there are those who doubt His divinity (He was and is God). Paul said the resurrection is proof of the Lord’s deity. Jesus was “*declared*” (*horizo*) to be the Son of God. This means Jesus “*has been declared to be the powerful son of God*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 581). Thayer (p. 453) says this shows Jesus was “*openly appointed*” by the “*crowning event*.” These definitions are consistent with what Paul wrote—*by the resurrection from the dead*. The Lord’s return from the dead was designed to prove He has the nature of God (compare Jn. 1:1). The “*Spirit of Holiness*” (i.e. the Holy Spirit) promised Jesus would be resurrected from the dead. This happened. Basically Paul said the gospel is *from* God, *about* God, and leads men *to* God. This gospel was promised a long, long time ago.

**1:5-7:** *through whom we received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith among all the nations, for his name's sake; 6 among whom are ye also called (to be) Jesus Christ's: 7 To all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called (to be) saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

In the preceding verses Paul spoke of the gospel. Here, the subject changes to Jesus. Paul and others received “*grace*” and “*apostleship*.” This was a way of saying what Paul more fully stated in Eph. 1:3. Every spiritual blessing is in Christ. The grace and the positions enjoyed by the apostles were all a result of God’s spiritual blessings.

Paul’s usage of the word *grace* in this passage is somewhat uncertain. Galatians 2:9 seems to use the same word to describe Paul’s apostleship. Because of God’s grace Paul was an apostle. In 1 Cor. 3:10 and 1 Cor. 15:10, the word *grace* describes the Spirit’s power and inspiration. In this passage the Spirit’s power and inspiration are probably the correct explanation. More information on this term is found below.

The information in verse 5 is the key to getting spiritual blessings from God. Paul spoke of *faith*, and he linked it with *obedience*. God requires both of these things from mankind. Kittle (6:206) says Paul *coined* the combination of these two items. This source also says (6:205-206), “‘to believe’ is ‘to obey’” and “Paul in particular stresses the element of obedience in faith.” Paul spoke of being obedient in the first and last chapters of this book (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Other sections of this letter such as 15:18 and 6:17 also stress the obedient nature of faith. This *obedient faith* is to be “*among all the nations*.”

Paul’s mission was to aid people in *all the nations*. He taught people about Christianity and encouraged men and women to obey the truth (2 Cor. 5:11). This was necessary in the first century as well as now because those who do not obey the gospel will be lost (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Romans 1:6 tells us the Romans had been obedient to the faith. Their obedience had joined them to Jesus. They had become “*beloved of God*.” They were saints. Because of who these people were (Christians, people of God), Paul wished *grace* and *peace* upon them from *God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Before continuing to study more of the text, several important facts should be noted. Verse 6 states Paul's readers had been "*called of Jesus Christ.*" Verse 7 says these same people had been "*called to be saints.*" Today, it is not uncommon to find people who say God *called* them. The New Testament says God calls people through His word (the gospel, 2 Thess. 2:14). After the Word of God calls people, there is justification and glorification (Rom. 8:29-30) because those who were lost have obeyed the truth (Rom. 1:5; 2 Thess. 1:8-9).

The words *grace* and *peace* were typical greetings that describe "the source and the sum of all Christian blessings" (Expositor's Greek Testament, 2:587). The word *grace* was a common greeting for Greeks and would have made an impression with the non-Jews at Rome. The word *peace* was a Hebrew greeting. It would have been well received by Christians from a Jewish background. The words *grace* and *peace* also describe blessings from both the Father and Jesus. The Father and Son work together in giving blessings (Jn. 10:30).

The word "*saints*" in verse 7 shows that these saints were *alive* and not dead. Also, it is clear from verse 7 that the saints were Christians and *only* Christians. That is, they were not special characters who had been canonized (canonization is the process whereby dead people are declared saints). The Biblical definition for a saint and the definition used by others do not always match. The only difference between *saints* and *sinners* is that *saints* have embraced Jesus Christ as their saviour and have obeyed His will. W. E. Vine (1:328) rightly noted that the "word 'saint,' in reference to an individual believer, is not found in the New Testament."

The last point is Paul's thankfulness for "*all*" the Christians in Rome. This thought is repeated in verse 8. Paul considered every Christian to be important, and he wrote in such a way to include everyone. This is an excellent example for us to follow.

**1:8:** *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world.*

Since the formal part of Paul's introduction is over (verses 1-7), the emphasis now turns to building rapport with the Romans. Several of the thoughts expressed in this next section are appropriate for our day. For instance, Paul "*thanked*" (*eucharisteo*) God. The apostle believed in expressing appreciation to God, and his view of prayer was not limited to *please give me/please bless me*. This is a lesson we would do well to remember and teach our children. One of the ways and times to teach it is at mealtime. A second lesson comes from the fact that the verb *thank* is in the present tense. Paul continually gave thanks for these Christians. A third lesson is found in the fact that this verb is also used in verse 21, a passage that shows not everyone gives thanks to God. A fourth point is that when Paul thanked God, he went "*through*" Jesus Christ. Since Jesus is our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), it is right for our prayers to go through Him. This is why most public prayers contain the expression, "in Jesus' name." The *name* of Jesus (compare Acts 8:16; 19:5; 1 Cor. 1:13, 15) means by the Lord's "*command and authority*" or "*acting on his behalf*" (Thayer, p. 447). Jesus has instructed His people to ask "in His name" (Jn. 14:13, 14; 15:16; 16:23) because requests based upon His authority are powerful.

The word translated *give thanks* is used elsewhere in Paul's letters. He used this term when writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:4); the Ephesians (1:16); the Philippians (1:3); the Colossians (1:3); the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3); and Philemon (verse 4).

Another piece of information in verse 8 is the reputation of the Romans. Paul said other Christians knew about the Romans and the faith of these brethren was "*proclaimed throughout the whole world.*" When Paul described the faith of these Christians, he used the definite article ("*the*" faith). These Christians understood God's plan for the church, and they were practicing it (2 Tim. 1:13, ASV). This gave them a reputation. Today, virtually every congregation is still known for something. Congregations are known for being evangelistic, liberal, conservative, friendly, cold, dead, wasteful, stingy, or having a high turnover rate of members and preachers. The Romans were known for being on the right track. This is the kind of reputation every church should have.

The word translated "*whole*" (*holos*) sometimes describes the majority of something (see how this

same term is used in Acts 2:47; 11:28; 21:31). If this is not the sense of the word in Rom. 1:8, Paul may have intended the statement to be a hyperbole (an exaggeration for emphasis). A good parallel verse is Lk. 2:1b (the areas and parts of the world about which people knew and with which they were familiar).

The word translated “*proclaimed*” in the ASV is rendered “*spoken*” in the KJV. This term (*katangelo*) described an authoritative message which was proclaimed to people. This word is also used to describe the message of the resurrection (Acts 4:2), the word of God (Acts 13:5; 15:36), the way of salvation (Acts 16:17), the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14), and the death of Christ (Acts 17:3). Here the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:256) describes it as “the faith penetrating the world from the Roman church is now understood as gospel for all the world.”

**1:9-10:** *For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers 10 making request, if by any means now at length I may be prospered by the will of God to come unto you.*

Paul spent a lot of time praying for the Christians at Rome. Verse 9 helps explain what Paul meant in 1 Thess. 5:17. The expression “*how unceasingly*” comes from a single word (*adialeiptos*) which is used only four times in the New Testament (here, 1 Thess. 1:3; 2:13; 5:17). This term describes “an action continued over an indefinite period of time but probably not with such intensity that forbids a rest. It has connotations of mental alertness, consistency, and discipline” (CBL, GED, 1:79). Spicq (1:33) says it describes a precept that “should be linked to that of the Master when he bade his disciples to ‘pray under all circumstances and never give up.’” The term may be thought of as describing “a spiritual life dominated by the presence of God” and as a perpetual communion with God, after the fashion of a shoot vitally connected to the vine stock” (ibid). Paul spent a lot of time in prayer.

McGuiggan (p. 64) lists items which sometimes hinder him from praying like Paul. These include:

- The sneaking feeling prayer really doesn’t work.
- Personal guilt that makes us feel unworthy to pray.
- A schedule which is too full to make room for habitual prayer.
- Ignorance about how to pray which leads to boredom during times of prayer.
- Ignorance concerning the specific will of God so the believer is unable to intelligently pray for many things.
- Realizing God already knows about the request and He is about to again hear our prayer.

McGuiggan (same page) also lists things which help him pray like Paul prayed.

- The word *father*.
- The example of Jesus.
- Answered prayers.
- Good study habits.
- An honest attempt to live a life pleasing to God.
- Being around praying people.

One of the items about which Paul prayed was a visit to Rome. The word translated “*making request*” (*deomai*) meant to “ask, ask please, to beg.” This term “indicates an intensity of petition and an earnestness of Paul the beggar” (Owen, p. 3). Paul wanted to be “*prospered*” (*euodoo*). This is the word Paul used in 1 Cor. 16:2. Aside from Rom. 1:10 and 1 Cor. 16:2, this term is only found in 3 Jn. 2 (it occurs twice in this verse). Here, it means “whether I will finally *succeed*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:81). Paul had a burning desire to see the Christians in Rome. “While all men of that time aspired to see the fabled capital city of the world of that day, Paul did not measure his longing on the basis of the outward magnificence of the great city; he longed to meet with his fellow believers. Some were his kinsmen, some had been fellow workers, some were prisoners, but all were his Christian

brothers and sisters” (CBL, Romans, p. 23).

In spite of Paul’s intense desire, he left the matter up to God (verse 10, “*by the will of God*”). This is another lesson adults and young people need to hear regarding prayer. Our requests need to be stated in a way where we are always mindful of God’s will and what would be best. This is what Jesus did when He was in the garden. “To find the will of God is the greatest discovery. To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge. To do the will of God is the greatest achievement” (CBL, Romans, p. 23).

If we do pray for God’s will to be done, we must be prepared for the possibility that we may not like heaven’s plans. God’s will may be something we do not want to do. It is not necessary to always *like* God’s will but it is necessary to *do* His will.

If we have difficulty ascertaining God’s will, McGuiggan (Romans, p. 68) offers these pointers:

- Where God hasn’t made himself clear, He takes full responsibility.
- God is not like a train; He is able to run on more than one track.
- There are times when the subject is not good or bad, but better and best.
- If we are uncertain and the decision does not need to be made right away, wait for a while.
- Major in the will of God.

The other item which needs to be mentioned comes from verse 9. Paul said he served God in his “*spirit*” (heart). This corresponds with Jn. 4:24. Christians are to put their heart and soul into serving God. The word translated “*serve*” (*latreuo*) is used to describe the priestly service in Heb. 9:9; 10:2. It was also used by Paul to describe the service given by the Gentiles to idols (Rom. 1:25). Our Christian life, whether we are worshipping or not, should have spirit and zest. There needs to be interest, enthusiasm, and feeling in our Christian life. Christianity is not a heartless, cold, and unfeeling religion. Our service to God needs to come from the depth of our thoughts and convictions (Owen, p. 3).

W. E. Vine (1:328) noted the word *serve* “originally signified the work of a hired servant, as distinguished from the compulsory service of the slave, but in the course of time it largely lost that significance, and in its usage in Scripture the thought of adoration was added to that of free obedience.”

**1:11-12:** *For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; 12 that is, that I with you may be comforted in you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.*

One purpose for visiting the Roman brethren involved imparting a “*spiritual gift*.” It has been suggested that this is a reference to 1 Cor. 12:8-11, a passage where miraculous gifts are mentioned. For information on the miraculous gifts the first Christians had, see the commentary on 1 Cor. 12:4-11. These supernatural gifts confirmed the teaching and preaching were true and from God (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:2, 4). The apostles gave these abilities to other Christians (Acts 8:18). Since Paul was an apostle, it has been suggested he wanted to visit Rome so miraculous gifts could be given to the Romans.

Although this explanation is plausible, the context suggests a different interpretation. Verse 12 describes how Paul’s presence would have helped “*comfort*” the Christians at Rome. This term (*sumparakaleo*) is found only here in the New Testament. Since it “is in the passive voice, it could be translated ‘that I may receive comfort (or strength together with you)’” (CBL, GED, 6:162). May it never be said new or immature Christians have nothing to offer. They do. Another important term is found in verse 11 (“*established*”). This word (*sterizo*) is used in other passages to describe a general strengthening of congregations (see how it is used in Rom. 16:25; 1 Thess. 3:2; 2 Thess. 3:3). In light of this information, the *gift* (notice that this term is singular) may simply describe fellowship and friendship. If Paul came to Rome, he and the Roman Christians would have strengthened each other. Though this *gift* would not have been tangible, it certainly would have been beneficial. In some ways it would have been superior to any miraculous gift. Another point which argues against the giving of miraculous gifts is Rom. 12:6, a passage that describes prophets. This may indicate the Christians in Rome already had spiritual

gifts.

Paul was a spiritual giant, and the Christians at Rome were not. Though these Christians needed a lot of help, Paul believed he and the Roman Christians could assist each other. Paul expressed his desire to see these Christians with the word “*long*” (*epipothéo*). This word, which is in the present tense, shows Paul continually longed to see them. Paul had other *longings* (see how this same word is used in 2 Cor. 5:2; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 1:4). With the exception of 2 Cor. 5:2, each of these passages refers “to congregations and congregational leaders” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:33).

**1:13:** *And I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you (and was hindered hitherto), that I might have some fruit in you also, even as in the rest of the Gentiles.*

Here is another expression of Paul’s love for the believers at Rome. He had wanted to come to them several times (“*oftentimes I purposed to come unto you*”), but this had not been possible. Paul knew what it was like to make plans and then have the plans fail. Paul had been “*hindered*” from making his desired trip, but he did eventually get to Rome (this is made clear in the book of Acts). He did not want these Christians to be “*ignorant*” (*agnóeo*) about this matter. Paul often used this verb when he gave corrective instructions to congregations (see how it is used in 6:3; 7:1; 1 Cor. 10:1; 1 Thess. 4:13; etc.). “I want you to know” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:21) is the meaning in this verse.

One of Paul’s purposes for going to Rome is given at the end of verse 13. He wanted to have “*fruit*” among the Romans. This is not a reference to getting something to eat. The *fruit* Paul had in mind was souls—successful evangelism (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15). Paul previously had success among the Gentiles and he wanted to continue to reach those who were not Jewish. Rome would have been a fresh field for him. Paul was similar to those in our day who look forward to starting a new job or working in a new place.

**1:14-16:** *I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also that are in Rome. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

Several of the thoughts in verses 14-16 build upon each other. In verse 14 Paul said, “*I am a debtor.*” Since he was a debtor, what was he willing to do? Verse 15 says, “*preach the gospel.*” How was Paul going to preach the gospel? Verse 16 says “*without shame.*”

The word *debtor* (*opheiletés*) has three different senses in the New Testament. There is the literal sense of owing money to someone (Mt. 18:24). There is the sense of sin; we need forgiveness of our spiritual debts (Mt. 6:12). The third sense is here. Out of a sense of debt, people are bound to a task, idea, or person (this same sense is found in Rom. 8:12 and Gal. 5:3). Here, the word is in the present tense; Paul was continuously a debtor. He could not do enough to unbind himself from Jesus and his mission.

Though Paul was a debtor to all people, he did not name the Jews because Rome was mainly composed of Gentiles. This culture was filled with “*Greeks*” and “*Barbarians.*” The *Greeks* (*hellen*) were from the Graeco-Roman culture. Paul used this word in verses 14, 16; 2:9, 10; 3:9; and 10:12. The word *Barbarians* (*barbaros*) distinguished the Greeks from the non-Greeks. In this book it is only found here. The first place it occurs in the New Testament is Acts 28:2. Paul also spoke of the “*wise*” (the intelligent and educated Gentiles) and the “*unwise*” (those who lacked a good education and perhaps intelligence). The word *unwise* (*anoetos*) is applied to both believers (Lk. 24:25) and unbelievers (Tit. 3:3). Paul even applied this term to the Galatians (Gal. 3:1, “*foolish*”). Here, it describes non-Christians. The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (1:105) describes the *unwise* as “uneducated.” The words *wise* and *unwise* are opposites.

The word *wise* (*sophos*) described those who were clever and skillful. *Wise* people excelled in human wisdom. This term occurs 19 times in the New Testament, and 10 of these places are found in 1 Cor. 1 and 1 Cor. 3. The book of Romans uses the word here, verse 22, and twice in chapter 16 (16:19, 27). In

the present verse as well as verse 22, the word describes “those who became guilty before other human beings in their own specialty, namely, ‘claiming to be wise,’ and yet failing to recognize the knowledge of God that is accessible in creation” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:261).

Paul was obligated to all people because he had been released from his sins (verse 5). Today, we have the same obligation. If we have found and obeyed the truth, we are under obligation to tell what we have discovered and done. We are debtors to all people and all nations (Mk. 16:15; Mt. 28:19).

Because we are debtors, we must be “*ready*” to teach. This is what Paul was prepared to do (verse 15). The word *ready* (*prothumos*) is used three times in the New Testament (here, Mt. 26:41; Mk. 14:38). These other instances refer to the times when the Lord’s disciples went to sleep, though they were asked to watch. Their spirit was *ready*, but their flesh was weak. The word *ready* may be thought of as “willing, eager, ready.” The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:156) describes it as Paul’s “eagerness/concern.”

Paul had taught the gospel in other places and he was now ready to come to Rome. When he came, he was going to preach. This preaching would be done without “*shame*.” The reason for his being unashamed of the gospel is given at the end of verse 16. The gospel is what brings people to salvation. Without it, no accountable person can or will be saved. Because of what it does, no one who is a Christian should ever be ashamed of it.

The “*salvation*” that comes through the gospel is in three different senses. There is the *past* sense (*I was saved*). There is the *present* sense (*I am being saved*). There is also the *future* sense (*I will be saved*).

In regard to being ashamed of the gospel, McGuiggan makes an excellent point (p. 72). He noted Paul “didn’t say he was not ‘afraid.’ He said he wasn’t ‘ashamed.’ There is a difference. Sometimes a snicker or a belly laugh is more successful than a whip or threats. Since the gospel is the only means of saving man, our attitude towards it must not be shame. It must be gratitude. We should be proud of the gospel. We should be thrilled that we have a book that tells us about where we can go, what must be done to get there, and how to live while upon the earth. Paul thought so much of the gospel there are times in the New Testament when we find him referring to it as his gospel.” In the first 16 verses of this epistle, Paul used the word *gospel* four times (verses 1, 9, 15-16). The word translated *not ashamed* (*epaischunomai*) occurs eleven times in the New Testament. Four of the occurrences are in Mk. 8:38 and Lk. 9:26 (each passage uses the word twice). This word is found several times in Second Timothy (2 Tim. 1:8, 12, 16). The Hebrew writer used it in Heb. 2:11; 11:16. It also occurs in Rom. 6:21. “The negative phrase, ‘I am not ashamed’, means positively, ‘I confess’” (Brown, 3:563).

Verses 16 and 17 provide us with an interesting perspective on the gospel. Paul tells us of its *origin* (it is from God, verse 16). He tells us about its *scope* (it is for everyone, verse 16). The *aim* of the gospel is given (it brings salvation and life, verses 16-17). The *demand* of the gospel is made known (people must believe it, verses 16-17). The *respectability* of God’s word is also given (it is nothing to be ashamed of, verse 16).

Willmington (p. 223) noted, “Paul preached at Jerusalem (the religious center of the world) and was **mobbed** (Acts 21:31; 22:22, 23). He preached at Athens (the intellectual center) and was **mocked** (Acts 17:32). He would later preach in Rome (the political center), where he would be **martyred** (II Tim. 4:6).”

Warren Wiersbe (Romans, p. 516) added, “Rome had known many great philosophers and philosophies; why pay any attention to a fable about a Jew who arose from the dead? (1 Cor. 1:18-25) Christians looked on each other as brothers and sisters, all one in Christ, which went against the grain of Roman pride and dignity. To think of a little Jewish tentmaker, going to Rome to preach such a message, is almost humorous.”

Lanier (Romans notes, p. 3) lists the effects of the gospel. He says the gospel saves us from the *power* of sin (Col. 1:13), the *pollution* of sin (1 Jn. 1:7), the *practice* of sin (1 Cor. 6:9-11), the *penalty* of sin (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 21:8), and the *presence* of sin (Gal. 1:4; Rev. 22:1-5, 15).

Many underestimate or understate the power of the gospel. Even though the word of God is the Spirit’s sword (Eph. 6:17) to convict and reprove men (Jn. 16:8), a lot of people believe something besides the gospel is needed or available. There are those who desire special insight from the Holy Spirit, a message from God, a sign, or something else. People have tried to replace the gospel with dramatic presentations, a

message of compromise, and “feel good pep talks.” The Bible says the gospel is God’s power to salvation (verse 16). If we refuse to accept this power, we have rejected God and God’s method to save us.

The other point about the gospel (the “good news”) is that it was first given to the Jews. The Jews were first exposed to the gospel because they were God’s chosen people (Rom. 11:1). Because of who they were, the Jews were entitled to hear the good news first, and they were entitled to become the first members of the New Testament church. The rejection of the Jews was widespread but certainly not total (Acts 2:36-41).

Paul also made it clear that the Jews were the custodians of God’s revelation (Rom. 3:2). They had been entrusted with Scripture. Furthermore, the Jews had the bloodline which brought Christ into the world (Rom. 9:5). There were multiple reasons for first presenting the gospel to the Jews. However, these reasons are no longer binding and the Jews no longer occupy a special place in the eyes of God (Gal. 3:28; Rom. 2:28-29).

Since the gospel was taken to the Jews and they rejected it, there is no longer any obligation to teach them first. We do not want to exclude Jewish people from hearing the gospel, but we are not required to go to them before anyone else.

In describing the presentation of the gospel Paul said the people who *believed* it would be saved. The word *belief* in this passage is a synecdoche; it stands for obedience to the gospel.

**1:17:** *For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith.*

The theme of Romans is pretty well described in the first part of verse 17. This epistle reveals the righteousness of God. Paul shows (1) How God can save man and still be righteous; (2) Why men are going to be condemned and God will be just; and (3) Why the Jews were justly cut off from being God’s chosen people. “The word ‘righteousness’ is used in one way or another over sixty times in this letter (righteous, just, and justified)” (Warren Wiersbe, Romans, p. 517).

Since understanding the righteousness of God is not the “milk of the word,” Romans is not one of the easier New Testament books. However, this does not mean we should neglect it. There are a number of passages that challenge those who study this book, and one of these passages is Rom. 1:17.

To appreciate and comprehend this passage, Bruce (p. 73) contends that readers must understand the Old Testament background for the word *righteousness*. On page 73 of his commentary he said, “The ideas of right and wrong among the Hebrews are forensic ideas; that is, the Hebrew always thinks of the right and the wrong as if they were to be settled before a judge. Righteousness is to the Hebrew not so much a moral quality as a legal status. The word ‘righteous’ (*saddiq*) means simply ‘in the right’, and the word ‘wicked’ (*rasha*), means ‘in the wrong’. ‘I have sinned this time’, says Pharaoh, ‘Jehovah is in the right (A.V. righteous), and I and my people are in the wrong (A.V. wicked)’, Exod. ix.27. Jehovah is always in the right, for He is not only sovereign but self-consistent. He is the fountain of righteousness...the consistent will of Jehovah is the law of Israel.”

Bruce further stated (p. 74): “When, therefore, the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel, it is revealed in a two fold manner. The gospel tells us first how men and women, sinners as they are, can come to be ‘in the right’ with God and second how God’s personal righteousness is vindicated in the very act of declaring sinful men and women ‘righteous.’ This second aspect of the matter is not dealt with immediately, but the former is expanded sufficiently to show that the principle on which God brings people into the right with himself is the principle of faith, and from this statement Old Testament authority is adduced in the words of Habakkuk 2:4b, ‘the righteous shall live by his faith’. Habakkuk 2:4b may be called the ‘text’ of this Epistle; what follows is in large measure an exposition of the prophet’s words.”

McGuiggan (Romans, pp. 24-25) said, “Law is thus not simply a demand that God makes on His people: it is the way in which He administers His universe. He can be relied on to act according to law. This becomes especially interesting when we consider the matter of how God will acquit the guilty. This acquittal cannot be done at the expense of God’s Holiness or Law. If God justifies men, it must be a

‘righteous justifying’; it must honor the law of God. We are never to think of the transaction at Calvary as a ruse of God to get around the holy demands of the law!”

The end of this verse contains an expression that troubles interpreters. This expression is “*from faith unto faith*.” Different explanations have been proposed to explain what this means. I understand it to describe what has already been stated. This epistle sets forth a clear contrast between faith and works, and this verse makes a point about the contrast. If we desire to be righteous (just) before God, we must do it by *faith*. This means *faith* is the starting point to becoming righteous and *faith* is the ending point. Works can never justify us. Similar expressions are found in Ps. 84:7; 2 Cor. 3:18; and Jn. 1:16.

This *faith* is not mere belief. It involves all the things listed in the introductory notes. One of these items is obedience (verse 5). If we are living this kind of life, we will be among the righteous for the righteous *live by faith*. This quotation is from Habakkuk 2:4. Other places where it is found are Heb. 10:38 and Gal. 3:11.

**1:18:** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hinder the truth in unrighteousness;*

This verse brings readers to the *meat* of Romans. Verse 18 is a topic sentence for this entire section (Bible Knowledge, p. 442). In dealing with sin, especially among the Gentiles, Paul referred to the “*wrath*” (*orge*) of God. He said this wrath “*is revealed*” (*apokalupto*). These two words are from a present tense verb. This verb is used in both verses 17 and 18, and in each verse it is in the present tense. This information shows that God’s *righteousness* and *wrath* have been revealed in the past and are still being felt (compare Eph. 2:3). The word *wrath* (*orge*) is also found in Jn. 3:36, a passage which may help explain the information in verse 18 (“He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him”).

Part of God’s wrath has been directed against the Gentiles. When the Gentiles were without the Mosaic Law, they were still guilty of sin (2:12). In fact, Paul argues in the following verses that these people had some knowledge of God but they chose to neglect this knowledge and even *exchange* it for something else. Those who live under the New Testament but reject Jesus and the gospel system are also under God’s wrath. The information in verses 17-18 affirms God is still active in our world.

At a time in the past, perhaps prior to the New Testament, Gentiles were so wicked they “*hindered the truth*.” The KJV uses the word “*hold*” (*katecho*; this word is in the present tense). The thought seems to be that the Gentiles held down, hindered, thwarted, and suppressed the truth. Spicq (2:288) defines *hold* (*katecho*) as “the chains of unrighteousness.” The *truth* was designed to regulate man’s duty to God and his fellowman. However, the Gentiles did not want to follow this truth, so they suppressed their knowledge of God. This suppression brought punishment. Some of the world’s greatest events such as the flood can be related to a rejection and/or the suppression of God and His word. When Paul was writing this letter, people still were trying to bottle up the true knowledge of God (compare Acts 19:23-41). The word translated *hold* in the KJV has a positive sense in other places (be sure to see how it is used in Lk. 8:15; 1 Thes. 5:21; Heb. 3:14; 10:23). It is not enough to *hold* to a belief. It must be the right belief.

The other sins listed in verse 18 are “*ungodliness*” and *unrighteousness*.” *Ungodliness* (*asebeia*) suggests irreligion, impiety, and a lack of reverence for God. The CBL (Romans, p. 27) says it “means ungodlike. It connotes licentious living, but it also includes respected people who are ungodlike in heart and life. The basic idea is irreverence, disregard for God’s law and disregard for God’s person.” This word described a “disregard of the existence of God, a refusal to retain Him in knowledge; that habit of mind leads to open rebellion” (Vine, 1:331). Trench’s definition (p. 242) is “positive and active irreligion, and this contemplated as a deliberate withholding from God of his dues of prayer and of service, a standing, so to speak, in battle array against him.” Baker’s Dictionary of Theology (p. 536) says this term is “not merely another evil in a catalog of sins but is the root out of which other sins grow.”

The word *unrighteousness* (*adikia*) denoted a lack of justice and a lack of right behavior in dealing with one’s fellowman. It is the opposite of righteousness. According to Vine (2:331), this word described “a condition of not being right, or straight, with God, judged by the standard of His holiness, or with man,

judged by the standard of what man knows to be right, through his conscience.” This term is again used in 1:29 and is more fully defined there (it is also found in 2:8; 3:5; 6:13; and 9:14). For now we may say it described “an absence of a right attitude inwardly and right conduct outwardly” (CBL, Romans, p. 27). In considering these terms, it must be remembered that God’s wrath has always been *legal* instead of *emotional* (Whiteside, Romans, p. 21). Only after people violated God’s laws has punishment been forthcoming.

One of the items which made the gospel so attractive was the need for it. When men were under God’s judgment and facing punishment, the gospel looked very appealing since it is man’s only escape (1:16).

**1:19-20:** *because that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, (even) his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse:*

These two verses teach that information about God was and is available. This information (which the previous verse says the Gentiles had access to) is *natural* revelation. There are two kinds of revelation from God. There is *supernatural* revelation; this information comes directly from God. This type of revelation allowed the prophets to preach and allowed the Bible writers to produce Scripture. The second type of revelation is *natural* revelation. This is the type of disclosure we can see—the earth, sun, moon, stars, etc. The existence of design in the world (natural revelation) informs us there is a designer, but we do not know the specifics about Him (how powerful He is, who He is, His interest in us, etc.). This information can only be acquired by supernatural revelation. Anyone who has never seen a Bible or heard about the true God only has *natural* revelation.

Paul stated that natural revelation is, in some respects, sufficient. By looking at the world (and or the universe), people should conclude that everything has been designed and there is a supreme being. This is how God has been “*manifest*” to people in the past and how He is still “*manifest*” in our time.

Because the creation exhibits so much evidence for God’s existence, the Bible says people are “*without excuse*” (*anapologetos*). This word is used only here and 2:1. The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (1:87) says it means people are “unable to present anything in their defense.” On the Day of Judgment no one will be able to say, “God, I didn’t know about you. I never thought I would be accountable to anyone. I was unaware of any higher power.” God created things in such a way where people are able to conclude that a supreme being exists and that all should seek Him (Acts 17:24-26). There is no excuse for atheism.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> verse Paul also stated the “*invisible things*” of God are “*clearly seen.*” This expression is also easily understood. When we look at our planet, we find it has man’s best interest at heart. There are different climates, so man can choose a setting which pleases him. There is plenty of sunshine and rain. A variety of crops can be grown. There is a wide variety of soil, sometimes even in the same area. Everything we see indicates the Creator is good. Man is able to conclude certain things about God’s character based upon the creation. The thought is further stressed by the word “*perceived*” (“*being understood,*” KJV). This term (*kathorao*) is found only here in the New Testament. It means “since the beginning of creation one can grasp ‘[God’s] invisible nature in his works and *have them before one’s own eyes*’” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:226). Because of the creation, people should be assured about God’s “*everlasting power*” (His omnipotence) and His “*divinity.*” The word *divinity* (*theiotes*) is found only here in the New Testament. Outside the Scriptures it “was used of deities, such as Artemis (Diana) of Ephesus, and of persons who were considered near-gods, such as princes and Roman emperors” (CBL, GED, 3:9). Here, the word “refers to the properties and attributes of deity” (ibid). The word translated “*made*” (*poiema*) is used twice in the New Testament (here and Eph. 2:10). It shows God has been involved in two kinds of creative works—man’s environment and man’s redemption. God’s *handiwork* is displayed in both the physical and spiritual realms. “Creation exists as an invitation to dialogue with God. Certain things may be **clearly seen**, but only if we are willing to see” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:51).

**1:21:** *because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened.*

Paul again made it plain that in the past people knew about God. The kind of knowledge Paul had in mind, in my judgment, is both natural and supernatural. When the world was young the human race had an excellent opportunity to access both types of knowledge. Though this information was available, numerous people did not want it. Even though people in the past “knew” God, they chose to not follow Him. God was not “glorified,” and He was “not thanked” (*eucharisteo*). This word was often used by Bible characters to express thankfulness (Mt. 15:36; 26:26; Jn. 11:41; Rom. 1:8; Col. 1:3). Anyone who wants to be a true servant of God must glorify and thank God.

The Gentiles turned their backs to God and became “vain in their reasonings.” The word *vain* (*mataioo*) is found only here, and it means *worthless, purposeless*. The thoughts of the people were foolish or empty. The term is in contrast to the word *thankful* and to the revelation God gave (verse 19). The hearts of these people became “senseless” and “darkened.” On the word *senseless* (*asunetos*), see verse 31 (“without understanding”). Here the word *darkened* (*skotizomai*) means “the mental and spiritual incapacity of perverse people to understand divine truth” (CBL, GED, 6:74-75). This term has this same meaning in 11:10 and Eph. 4:18.

**1:22-23:** *Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.*

The people described by Paul thought abandoning God was a good idea. Paul, however, contended that the “wisdom” of this decision was actually “foolishness.” The apostle’s condemnation was very strong. The expression “they became fools” (*moraino*) literally meant *they became stupid*. Jesus used this same word to describe worthless salt (it loses its *savour*, Mt. 5:13). Though the people Paul described claimed to be intelligent, their boasting was nothing but hot air. These Gentiles demonstrated their stupidity by worshipping people, animals, and idols.

The worship offered by the Gentiles was depraved. Humanity, at least for a time, said to the true God, “We are not going to worship you. We want to worship something that is false.” Verse 23 describes what these people turned to: *corruptible man, birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things*. This list actually describes four stages (it descends from man to snakes—the lowest level). The word translated “creeping things” (*herpeton*) may refer “to the serpent worship which was part of many pagan cults prior to and during New Testament times” (CBL, GED, 2:599). Even the Israelites burnt incense to the brazen serpent of Moses (2 Kgs. 18:4), until Hezekiah destroyed it. The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:55) defines it as a “reptile” and “a designation of an unclean animal.” The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:53) offers this quote from Chester Quimby: “They got God down on two legs, then down on all fours, then down on the belly!” They considered this to be *wise*.

The “glory of God” was traded for what had been created by God. The “incorruptible” God was exchanged for His corruptible creation. Deity was exchanged for humanity (under the Old Testament this was strictly forbidden, Ex. 20:4). The people described in this chapter were perverse. For information on the word *incorruptible* (*aphthartos*), see the other places in the New Testament where it is found (1 Cor. 9:25; 15:52; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:4, 23; 3:4). This word always has the sense of “that which constantly endures, that which is no longer subject to corruption, that which is immortal and imperishable” (CBL, GED, 1:501).

Vine (p. 333) rightly said, “Man is essentially constituted to be a worshipper. If he abandons the worship of God, some other object will be found to take the place of the Creator.” Willmington (p. 224) noted, “The Greeks worshipped the human body, as does Hollywood today.” Birds were worshipped by the Assyrians; the Assyrians “bowed down to birds” and the Egyptians “looked to cows and crocodiles” (*ibid*, pp. 224-225). The pagans worshipped snakes (same source, p. 225). Willmington concluded his comments by saying, “The Bible teaches *devolution*, not *evolution*.”

In the Old Testament there are references to the pagan god Molech. This idol was a deity that required human sacrifices. Worshippers brought their babies to Molech and burned them as a sacrifice (Lev. 18:21; 20:1-5). The servants of Molech, like the people Paul described, traded a God of love for a god (note the small “g”) who wanted child sacrifices. Other perversions are found in Rom. 1:24-27.

Before studying the following verses, an observation is in order. Men in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are still trading in God for other things. The trades may not seem as bad as what is described in Rom. 1, but exchanging God for anything is still unacceptable. Most can name someone who traded in God for success, an education, athletic ability, wealth, or health. The message of Rom. 1 is that those who trade God in for anything are stupid and reckless.

**1:24:** *Wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts unto uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves:*

One of the key expressions in this paragraph is found in this verse—*the lusts (epithumia) of their hearts*. These people desperately wanted to do what was evil and perverse, and God allowed them to carry out their desires. The word “*lust*” expresses “a particularly strong desire” (Brown, 1:457) because it chokes the word (Mk. 4:19) and breaks marriages (Mt. 5:28). Brown also (same page) noted that Paul used this word to describe the “sin which rules man.” This word describes the desire that “urges man to activity.” In other places this word is associated with sexual sin as well as materialism (see how it is used in Gal. 5:16; 1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Tim. 2:22).

The people in Rom. 1 were so intent on being wicked God “*gave them up*” (*paradidomi*). This term means God “*abandoned them to impurity*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 615). The thought is further explained with the word “*uncleanness*” (*akatharsia*). Here, this word has a “moral sense” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 28). The word describes “moral impurity which excludes man from fellowship with God” (Kittle, 3:428). It is the opposite of holiness and is often associated with sexual sin (see Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5). Additional information about this word is in the commentary on Gal. 5:19. Because of the Gentiles’ *uncleanness* and lustful hearts, God turned His back on them. For additional references on the seriousness of sexual sin, see 1 Cor. 6:18 and 1 Thess. 4:6. The word “*dishonored*” (*atimazo*) was often associated with physical abuse (Mk. 12:4; Acts 5:41). Here, it means “*their bodies might be degraded*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 120).

**1:25:** *for that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.*

Not only did ancient people reject God, they actually engaged in an “*exchange*” (*metallasso*). This word occurs only here and Rom. 1:26. The pagans “turned aside and distanced themselves from the true knowledge of God and traded him for the lie of idols” and sexual sin (Spicq, 2:470). The people described by Paul served creatures made by the Creator rather than honor the Creator who made the creatures. The one who is “*blessed forever*” and the only one who can offer salvation was rejected. This rejection had consequences. Paul again stated that God turned His back on these people, and this rejection took away all hope. The Gentiles were on their own, and they were lost. This type of situation can still exist if people do what is listed in verses 26-27.

The word translated “*worshipped*” (*sebazomai*) is only found here. It is defined as “the rebellious elevation of the creature to the place of reverence that belongs solely to the Creator. This is not simply a pious reverence but an act (or acts) of worship” (CBL, GED, 6:34).

**1:26-27:** *For this cause God gave them up unto vile passions: for their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature: 27 and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working unseemliness, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was due.*

At the beginning of verse 26 Paul spoke of “*vile passions*.” These words describe sexual activity. The adjective *vile* (*atimia*) shows that not all sexual activity and passion have God’s approval. While the word Paul used can mean something as insignificant as social embarrassment (1 Cor. 11:14), in this passage it means “sinful men disgraced their bodies by succumbing to disgraceful passions” (CBL, GED, 1:483). Gingrich and Danker (p. 120) define it as “*shameful passions*.” The word translated *passions* (*pathos*) is plural in the Greek text. This term is only found here, Col. 3:5; and 1 Thess. 4:5. In each of these places the word describes sexual passion that has a distinct sense of perverse eroticism. Thayer (p. 472) defines it as “depraved passion” and “vile passions.” Gingrich and Danker (p. 603) say “disgraceful passions.”

According to verse 26 one *vile passion* is lesbianism (“*for their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature*”). There were women who had a sexual relationship with other women. This practice was common among the Gentiles, and it still exists. The word “*changed*” (*metallasso*) is more fully defined in the commentary on verse 25. This word described a substitution (Spicq, 2:470). Here, it makes a connection between “moral deviation” and the *replacement* of God (ibid).

The CBL (Romans, p. 33) noted, “Women should be the bulwark (safeguard, BP) of society. When they yield to sinful desires, the home and the nation are doomed. Lost men and women plunged deeper and deeper into the cesspool of shameful iniquity and did so unashamedly. The apostle here uses *theleiai* for ‘women’ rather than the usual *gune* and *arsen* for ‘men’ rather than the usual *aner*. A literal translation would be ‘females’ and ‘males.’ This usage emphasizes the physical obsession with sex, de-emphasizing the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of a right relationship in marriage according to God’s plan.”

At the present time, it is not uncommon to find people who argue that as long as two women or two men enjoy same sex relations, both are in love, no one gets hurt, and if “safe sex” is practiced, anything is acceptable. This is not the Biblical view of sex. Scripture says some sexual activity is *vile passion*, and Rom. 1 says homosexuality and lesbianism are two examples of this. However, these two examples are not the only vile passions. What other *vile passions* can be listed?

Some sexual acts are wrong because God has established a pattern for human sexuality. This pattern consists of two people—a man and a woman—and these two people are to be married (Heb. 13:4; 1 Thess. 4:3-7). When this plan is altered, God’s plan is perverted and the result is sin. When women engage in sexual activity with other women, Rom. 1 affirms this is “*against nature*.” This expression may be related to the word *exchanged* in verse 25. Women who have sexual contact with other women change God’s pattern for sexuality. This is especially clear from the Greek text. The word rendered “*natural*” (*phusikos*) is found only three times in the New Testament (verse 26, verse 27, and 2 Pet. 2:12). This word described that which is “inborn” or “native” to human beings. Gingrich and Danker (p. 869) define it as “*natural, in accordance with nature*.” This word shows that it “is unnatural—contrary to the basic inborn nature of man—for men and women to engage in homosexual practices” (CBL, GED, 6:466). “Thus, the view that understands homosexuality as the product of prebirth hormonal influences is clearly contrary to Scripture” (ibid). “Every sexual transgression is also a transgression against the natural order” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:444).

If this way of life is contrary to nature, why is it practiced? This choice is sometimes made because people want to be different and want to experiment. Willmington (p. 225) relates an interesting story. “An European applying for American citizenship, when asked why he desired to enter this country, is reported to have said: ‘Because of homosexuality.’ When asked to explain, he continued, ‘In my country homosexuality was recently declared not to be illegal. Then the church said it was not even immoral. I want to move before they make it compulsory!’” Plato “believed that homosexuality was unnatural since animals do not engage in it” (CBL, GED, 6:468-469).

In the past and even now it has been proposed that sexual activity is really for men and women have no true sexual needs. Romans 1:26 shows that women do have a need for sexual fulfillment. Both sexes have needs, but this does not mean the needs are exactly identical. There are known sexual differences between men and women.

When Paul described lesbians (verse 26), he only mentioned the sin. When Paul described men and homosexuality (verse 27), he said they “*burned in their lust*” towards each other. The men are described

as having intense sexual interest. In commenting on verse 27 Vincent said, “The terms are terrible in their intensity. Lit., *burned out*. The preposition indicates the *rage* of lust” (p. 20). Robertson (4:331) said this is an “old verb, to burn out, to set on fire, to inflame with anger or lust. Here only in the NT.”

By inspiration Paul said the sexual urge in people, especially men, is very strong. There can be exceptions, but this is generally true. This urge may be demonstrated in a variety of ways. Magazine sales illustrate the male interest in sexuality. The pornography industry is primarily directed towards men. Those in the clothing business understand the sexual interest described by Paul. Women’s lingerie is sold by the truckload. Even Jesus commented on men and how easily they can be tempted to lust (Matt. 5:28).

Joseph Dillow, a commentator on the Song of Solomon, made an interesting observation about a passage from the Song of Solomon (4:10). The latter part of this verse says, “*And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.*” According to Dillow, “This apparently refers to a flimsy, scant, and perfumed negligee she is wearing while they are enjoying their love together. It must be sheer; he can see her breasts through it (4:5) and her ‘mountain of myrrh’ (4:6). This attire provided Solomon with ample access to her feminine charms. Shulamith knew how to dress for bed!”

Researchers have found a scientific basis for a man’s strong interest in sexual fulfillment. Each drop of seminal fluid contains as many as 300 million sperm. If this is unreleased in men accustomed to sexual activity, it is like a pressure that steadily builds.

An examination of verses 26-27 shows that women were not the only ones engaging in unlawful sex acts. Men were just as guilty. Verse 27 states that men left the “*natural use of women.*” Men also wanted to try something different, and they turned to each other (for information about the word *natural* see the comments on verse 26). There was homosexuality in the first century, and this practice still exists. Our nation struggles with homosexuality in the military, prisons, and in the workplace. Supporters of this way of life are often adamant in their belief. One author said, “We shall sodomize your sons, emblems of your feeble masculinity, of your shallow dreams and vulgarities. We shall seduce them in your schools, in your dormitories, in your gymnasiums, in your locker rooms, in your sports arenas, in your seminaries, in your youth groups, in your movie theater bathrooms, in your army bunkhouses, in your truck stops, in your all-male clubs, in your house of Congress, wherever men are with men together. Your sons shall become our minions to do our bidding. They will be recast in our image; they will come to crave and adore us” (Grant, p. 39). The basis for this type of thinking is found in the word “*burned*” (*ekkaio*). This word is used only here. In Classical Greek it meant to set something on fire, or burn something up. Here it refers to homosexual lust. The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (1:410) defines it as “be inflamed.” This source further says these men “*were consumed with passion for one another*” (1:410).

Another key term, though it is only found here, is “*lust*” (*orexis*). The CBL (GED, 4:381) has a long but interesting entry on this word: “Paul used *orexis* in Romans 1:27 to attack the sexual ‘desire, lust’ of a certain group of people. He did not attack the desires that arise in the course of normal marital sexual relations. Instead, Paul spoke out against the perverted and unnatural sexual *orexei*, ‘lust,’ of men towards men, i.e., homosexuality. The context shows that three times Paul asserted, ‘God gave them up’ (verses 24,26,28). Paul interpreted the moral decadence of those who go against the created order of sexual relation between men and women as changing the ‘truth of God into a lie,’ and worshipping ‘the creature more than the Creator’ (verse 25). Just as they did not ‘like to retain God in their knowledge,’ God then abandoned them (punitively, not merely permissively) to their own ‘reprobate’ minds (verse 28). Paul also noted that these condemnable sins are not simply a thoughtless yielding to temptation, but instead are indulged in deliberately. In fact they are encouraged in others even while ‘knowing the judgment of God’ (verse 32) is inevitable.”

When Paul described homosexuality (verse 27), he also used word “*unseemliness*” (*aschomosune*). This word is only found here and Rev. 16:15, though the verb form of this term is found in 1 Cor. 13:5 (this verse should be read). The noun form of this word in Rom. 1:27, combined with the verb form of the term in 1 Cor. 13:5, proves that those who are involved with the *unseemly* acts of homosexuality do *not* have love (1 Cor. 13:5). These verses indicate the driving force behind homosexuality is sheer lust.

Members of the homosexual community often argue the condemnation of homosexuality does not apply because Paul spoke to heterosexuals. That is, the people described by Paul were not naturally

inclined to participate in same sex relationships. If heterosexuals engage in same sex behavior, this is wrong because it is not natural for them. Those who are “born gay” have no choice about their sexual orientation, so this way of life is acceptable to God. As long as a person has never had heterosexual feelings or desires, homosexuality is acceptable. These assertions are easily refuted by the text. Paul said men ***burned in their lust one towards another***. This description does not describe heterosexual feelings. These people had a “natural” desire for a same sex partner, and they fulfilled their desires.

When people want to engage in sin, some type of justification will be offered. Even though this is what has happened with this passage, Christians must still teach the truth about sexual sin. We must state that certain acts are wrong and warn people that God condemns certain activities. For information on the word translated “*working*” (*katergazomai*), see the commentary on Phil. 2:12. A comparison of Phil. 2:12 and Rom. 1:27 shows that while some are involved in acts that are depraved, others are *working out* their salvation.

The final point to be made comes from the end of verse 27. Those who have been involved with homosexuality have received the “*recompense of their error*.” The word *recompense* (*antimisthia*) is found only here and 2 Cor. 6:13. Here, it means “receiving the due *penalty*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:110). This word seems to emphasize “the reciprocal nature of the transaction” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 75). For those who are involved with same sex relationships, they will receive a reward (payment) consistent with their actions, though God did not specify how this is done.

**1:28:** *And even as they refused to have God in (their) knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting;*

The preceding material shows there are acts, especially in the area of sexuality, which are *not “fitting”* (*katheko*). This word is only found here and Acts 22:22. Here, it describes “the lowest state of fallen man” (CBL, GED, 3:201). It means the people “were doing what is against the most basic duties and responsibilities of mankind” (ibid). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:222) defines it as “what is *not permitted/not fitting* before God.” Why did the people behave in this way? Part of the reason is that what is forbidden is often desirable (think of Adam and Eve). People often want what they cannot have or are told to leave alone.

In the past Gentiles decided to pursue the forbidden and *refused* to have God as part of their lives. The word “*refused*” (*dokimazo*) expressed the idea of testing. The Gentiles tested God and determined that they disapproved of Him. They checked out God and decided to reject Him and His plan. According to Paul God allowed the Gentiles to reject Him. God left these people to themselves, and they began to pay the price for life without God. The word translated “*knowledge*” (*epignosis*) meant *full knowledge*.

**1:29-31:** *being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful:*

Verse 29 has a vivid expression—*filled with unrighteousness*. After God was rejected men’s minds had new space for wicked ideas and practices. It didn’t take long for the Gentiles to fill up their lives and minds with sin. They became involved with many evils, twenty-three of which are specified by the following words. A short definition will be offered for each of these sins plus a point or two of application. The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:55-56) attempts to categorize these sins. It says the first four (excluding fornication) “refer to injustices with respect to the well-being and properties of others.” The next five “are injustices in which we harm the person of our neighbor.” The next six are “dispositions of the mind centering in pride.” The final seven “relate to the destruction of all natural sentiments and affections.” Concerning the expression “*being filled*,” this same source (8:56) says: “literally ‘*stuffed*.’”

**Unrighteousness** (*adikia*) – *Unrighteousness of heart and life* (Thayer, p. 12). The word translated

*unrighteousness* is a comprehensive term that includes all the following sins. It is the “genus that spawns all the other sins that follow. These are sins of thought, word, and deed. They are both against one’s self and against one’s neighbor. Some sins are inward, others are outward” (Complete Biblical Library, Romans, p. 35).

**Fornication** (*porneia*) – *Illicit sexual intercourse in general* (Thayer, p. 532). Richardson says the term is “sexual intercourse outside of marriage or even sensuality in general” (p. 16). This word is lacking in the best manuscripts but the Beacon Bible Commentary (8:56) suggests “This presents no problem since the subject has been exhausted in the preceding section.”

**Wickedness** (*poneria*) – *Malice* (Thayer, p. 530). *Wickedness, baseness, maliciousness, sinfulness* (Gingrich and Danker, p. 690). This word describes the desire to harm someone. “It is the active, deliberate will to corrupt and to inflict injury” (Barclay, Romans, p. 27). The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:56) defines it as “*active mischief*.”

**Covetousness** (*pleonexia*) – *Greedy desire to have more, covetousness, avarice* (Thayer, p. 516). This spirit pursues “its own interests with complete disregard for the rights of others, and even for the considerations of common humanity” (Barclay, Romans, p. 27). The book of “Ephesians shows that *pleonexia* (covetousness, BP) is not restricted to monetary ‘greed’; it also suggests an ‘insatiable’ appetite for other things (Ephesians 4:19 suggests a more sexual understanding)” (CBL, GED, 5:207). “‘Covetousness’ was regarded by Jews as an extremely heinous sin, a characteristic of pagans who were separated from God. Paul accented this same view in Colossians. Because *pleonexia* is an outcome of pure selfishness, it also leads easily to dishonesty and deceit. The man ruled by *pleonexia* considers his fellowman to exist solely for his own profit. The heart that is covetous lives for the present moment. The Christian, in contrast, lives for the future” (ibid).

**Maliciousness** (*kakia*) – *Malignity, malice, ill-will, desire to injure* (Thayer, p. 320). This term describes “a man who is destitute of every quality which would make him good” (Barclay, Romans, p. 27). This word “typifies the wide range of wicked behaviors that oppose godly living and righteousness” (CBL, GED, 3:218).

**Envy** (*phthonos*) – This describes *sadness occasioned by the thought of another’s good* (Spicq, 3:435). This sin “looks at a fine person, and is not so much moved to aspire to that fineness, as to resent that the other person is fine. It is the most warped and twisted of human emotions” (Barclay, Romans, p. 28). This sin prompted the chief priests to deliver Jesus to Pilate (Mk. 15:10). For additional information about this sin, see the commentary on Gal. 5:21 and Phil. 1:15.

**Murder** (*phonos*) – *Murder or killed* (Gingrich and Danker, p. 864). “We may never have struck a man in our lives, but who can say he never wanted to strike anyone?” (Barclay, Romans, p. 28). It is of no surprise that envy and murder are listed next to each other. Cain envied his brother and killed him (Gen. 4:1-11).

**Strife** (*eris*) – *Contention, strife, wrangling* (Thayer, p. 249). Though the KJV translates this with the word *debate*, the word “really means ‘strife’” (Earle, p. 140). This sin follows *hatred* in Gal. 5:20 and is connected to it. When anyone harbors the emotion of hate, there will be contention.

**Deceit** (*dolos*) – *Deceit, cunning, treachery* (Gingrich and Danker, p. 203). This describes “the man who has a tortuous and a twisted mind, the man who cannot act in a straightforward way, the man who stoops to devious and underhanded methods to get his own way, the man who never does anything except with some kind of ulterior motive. It describes the crafty cunning of the plotting intriguer who is found in every community and every society” (Barclay, Romans, pp. 28-29). This word is applied to the people

who plotted against Jesus (Mt. 26:4).

**Malignity** (*kakoetheia*) – The tendency to put the worst construction upon everything (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 351). “It is terrifying to think how many reputations have been murdered in gossip over the teacups, when people maliciously put the wrong interpretation upon a completely innocent action” (Barclay, Romans, p. 29). This word is found only here in the New Testament.

**Whisperers** (*psithuristes*) – To whisper or speak into one’s ear. A whispering that is actually secret slander (adopted from Thayer, p. 676). Those guilty of this sin “will take a man apart into a corner and whisper a character-destroying story” (Barclay, Romans, p. 29). “The verb is used here only in the New Testament, and the corresponding noun ‘whisperers’ in 2 Corinthians 12:20 only. The evil is that of secretly conveying information, whether true or false, detrimental to the character or welfare of others” (Vine, 1:335).

**Backbiters** (*katalalos*) – *Defamer, evil speaker* (Thayer, p. 332). This sin “describes the man who trumpets his slanders abroad. He openly makes his accusations and tells his tales” (Barclay, Romans, p. 29). “The word, here only in the New Testament, does not necessarily involve the absence of the person attacked” (Vine, 1:336).

**Hateful to God** (*theostuges*) – *Hateful to God, exceptionally impious and wicked* (Thayer, p. 288). Anyone guilty of this sin sees God as “the barrier between him and his pleasure. God is the chain which keeps him from doing exactly as he likes. He would gladly eliminate God if he could, for to him a godless world would be a world where he would have, not liberty, but license” (Barclay, Romans, p. 30). This word occurs only here in the New Testament.

**Insolent** (*hubristes*) – *An insolent man, one who, uplifted with pride, either heaps insulting language upon others or does them some shameful act of wrong* (Thayer, pp. 633-634). Barclay says this term “describes the spirit of the man who is so proud that he defies God.” Also, “It is the sadism which finds delight in hurting others simply for the sake of hurting them” (Romans, p. 30). This is “self-centered and violent cruelty” which has no regard for others (CBL, GED, 6:334). This term is rendered “*despiteful*” in the KJV. The only other place in the New Testament where this term is found is 1 Tim. 1:13 (“*injurious*”).

**Haughty** (*huperephanos*) – *With an overweening estimate of one’s means or merits, despising others or even treating them with contempt, haughty* (Thayer, p. 641). This type of person “never looks at people on the street unless it pleases him to do so. He invites a man to a meal and then does not appear himself, but sends his servant to attend to his guest. His whole life is surrounded with an atmosphere of contempt and he delights to make others feel small” (Barclay, Romans, p. 31). In the KJV this term is translated “*proud*.” The word is found only here, Lk. 1:51; 2 Tim. 3:2; Jas. 4:6 and 1 Pet. 5:5.

**Boastful** (*alazon*) – *An empty pretender, a boaster* (Thayer, p. 25). A man guilty of this sin “boasts of trade deals which exist only in his imagination, of connections with influential people which do not exist at all, of gifts to charities and public services which he never gave or rendered. He says about the house he lives in it is really too small for him, and that he must buy a bigger one. The braggart is out to impress others—and the world is still full of such people” (Barclay, Romans, p. 31). In this passage, Paul described the past. In 2 Tim. 3:2, the only other place where this term occurs in the New Testament, he used it to describe the future.

**Inventors of evil things** (*epheuretes*) – *An inventor, contriver* (Thayer, p. 265). “The phrase describes the man who, so to speak, is not content with the usual, ordinary ways of sinning, but who seeks out new and recondite vices because he has grown tired and blasé, and seeks some new thrill in some new sin”

(Barclay, Romans, p. 31). This term occurs only here in the New Testament.

**Disobedient to parents** (*apeithes*) – A refusal to submit to parental authority. “Paul saw those who are ‘disobedient to parents’ as typical of the wickedness of mankind” (CBL, GED, 1:332). Lenski (Romans, p. 122) observed, “Godless parents raise godless children and thus get to taste the bitter fruits of their own sowing in their own offspring.” For additional information about parents, children, and what obedience means, see the commentary on Eph. 6:1.

**Without understanding** (*asunetos*) – *Unintelligent, without understanding* (Thayer, p. 82). “The word describes the man who is a fool, the man who cannot learn the lesson of experience, the man who is guilty of incredible folly, the man who will not use the mind and brain that God has given to him” (Barclay, Romans, p. 32). This word is also used in verse 21 (“senseless”).

**Covenant-breakers** (*asunthetos*) – *Covenant breaking; faithless* (Thayer, p. 82). “In the great days of Rome Roman honesty was a wonderful thing. A man’s word was as good as his bond” (Barclay, Romans, p. 32). “To fully understand the seriousness of faithlessness, one need only examine the company with which it is placed (slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, boastful, disobedient, senseless, heartless, ruthless, filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity)” (CBL, GED, 1:476). This word occurs only here in the New Testament. The RSV translates it “faithless.” The NASB renders it “untrustworthy.” In light of the other sins Paul listed, this word may have a special emphasis on the marriage bond.

**Without proper affection** (*astorgos*) – *Unloving* (Gingrich and Danker, p. 118). “The natural bonds of human affection had been destroyed” (Barclay, Romans, pp. 32-33). This word “describes an unloving, uncaring attitude toward those who are the very nearest, such as one’s immediate family. Even the sinner can usually exhibit love for those who are closest to him” (CBL, GED, 1:473). This term described “the destruction of all feelings of natural tenderness, as is seen by the mother who exposes or kills her child, a father who abandons his family, or children who neglect their aged parents” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:57-58). “Even brutes show such love” (Lenski on Romans, p. 122).

**Implacable** (*aspondos*) – This word is in the KJV. It occurs only here and 2 Tim. 3:3. Thayer (p. 81) says it described those who “cannot be persuaded to enter into a covenant.” The word may be likened to someone who will not cease hostilities or accept reconciliation. Such a person is usually unwilling to forgive.

**Unmerciful** (*aneleemon*) – *Without pity*. This “is the lowest rung in the downward ladder of Rom. 1:29-32 and so the completest negation of the knowledge of God” (Brown, Dictionary of New Testament Theology, 2:597). This sin marks an “extreme departure from the knowledge of God” (CBL, GED, 1:258). This term occurs only here in the New Testament.

**1:32:** *who, knowing the ordinance of God, that they that practise such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also consent with them that practise them.*

The Gentiles knew about God (compare verse 28), and they knew that anyone doing what they did surely deserved “death” (the second death, Rev. 21:8). The Living Bible offers a clear picture of Paul’s point (“They were fully aware of God’s death penalty for these crimes”). These people knew what was wrong, they knew the penalty, but they didn’t care. They willfully chose sin and sin in its worst form. It also appears they encouraged others to join them, so Rom. 1 describes a very low point in human history.

Cranfield (p. 38) said, “The sentence implies that approving of others’ doing evil deeds is even more depraved than doing them. This has often been judged - and still is judged by some commentators - to be untrue. But a good many have argued - surely rightly - that it is indeed true that the man who applauds

and encourages those who practice something shameful, though not himself practicing it, is not only as depraved as those who practice it, but very often, if not always, actually more depraved than they. For those who applaud and encourage the vicious actions of others make a deliberate contribution to the establishment of a public opinion favorable to vice and thereby promote the corruption of an unnumbered multitude; and they will not usually have been under any such powerful and violent pressure as those who commit the actions will quite often have been.” The word translated “*consent*” (*suneudokeo*) is rendered “*have pleasure*” in the KJV. This term is used elsewhere, and one of these other passages is Acts 8:1 (“*consenting*”). Here, it means “approve, applaud” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:305).

**Lessons from Lanier (p. 7):**

- The most degraded of men are not completely destitute of the knowledge of God.
- A knowledge of God’s law does not of itself keep people from sin.
- The knowledge of God’s disapproval of a judgment against sin does not create a hatred for sin among man.
- Only a love for God and a desire to be like Him will cause sinners to turn to God.