

## Paul's Letter to the Romans:



THE PINNACLE OF  
CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

### Let All the Poisons That Lurk in the Mud, Hatch Out...Pt. 2, Those Nasty Gentiles Romans 1:21-32

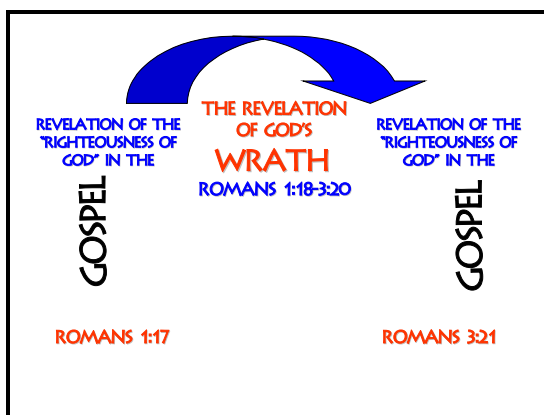
Last week, I made a reference to a wonderful, little phrase turned by Robert Graves in his novels **"I, Claudius"** and **"Claudius the God."** I described to you how Graves had his principal protagonist, the Emperor Claudius, hesitate for a moment as he began to write down the extraordinarily wicked and perverse history of his imperial family. He was reluctant to tell the whole truth about his family, not because he was feared repercussions, he was the emperor after all, but simply because his family's actions were so unimaginably vile and shameful. Then in a wonderful aside, Graves has Claudius determine to just go ahead and tell everything. When he does, he whispers to himself this wonderfully poetic line, **"Let all of the poisons that lurk in the mud, hatch out."**<sup>1</sup>

Now I know that Robert Graves places that scene in the book for its literary drama and effect. I certainly have no illusions about either its historical accuracy or the actual vileness of the historical character Claudius<sup>2</sup>. Still, I thought it was useful to show it to you, to use it to explain the nature of Paul's argument here in the section between 1:16-17 and 3:21. Because there is a sense in which Paul is doing exactly what Robert Graves had Claudius do for his readers. He is making

the case for how bad things really are. Of course, Paul's purpose is much more comprehensive. He is attempting to demonstrate the terrible state of the fallen Gentile world and he is doing that to explain the wonder, and I really do mean the wonder, of the fact that God has now indeed provided for us, as sinful men and women, a **"righteousness from God."**

You will recall, I hope, that Paul brought up the issue of that **"righteousness"** in Romans 1:16-17 and that that **"righteousness"** is really the theme or anchor of the whole of the epistle. You will also recall, I hope, that Paul here has temporarily laid aside any further discussion of that **"righteousness."** Instead, Paul has turned to a discussion of why that **"righteousness"** is necessary in the first place.<sup>3</sup> Paul will not return to the development of his theme of a **"righteousness from God"** until Romans 3:21.

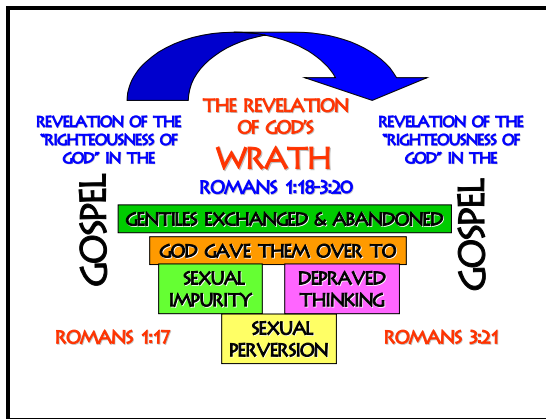
Another way to say the same thing is to say that Paul introduced the idea of the revelation of a **"righteousness from God"** in 1:16-17 and then quickly turned to the idea of the revelation of **"the wrath of God"** in 1:18-3:20.



Paul won't pick the topic of the **"revelation of the righteousness of God in the gospel"** until Romans 3:21. Meanwhile, in the intervening verses, he commits

himself relentlessly and logically to demonstrate the universal guilt of mankind. He strives to show that all men everywhere are fallen and fallen indeed.<sup>4</sup>

In the opening verses of this section, however, Paul is focuses exclusively on the unbelieving pagan, Gentile world. What he is going to demonstrate is that the moral putrescence that characterized the Gentile world was at the same time both an indication of their idolatrous rejection of God and of God's retributive judgment against them.<sup>5</sup>



What we will see this morning is a discussion of God's retributive judgment launched against the sin and idolatry of the Gentile world. We will see that judgment manifest itself under three judicial pronouncements: sexual impurity, sexual perversion and depraved thinking.

But before we get there let me say this. I know I have spent a good deal of time emphasizing the structure of the passage here and I want to take just a moment and give two reasons why I have done that. The first reason I have done that is so you can retrace Paul's argument as your read through the book on your own. I think it is more important that you be able to see these things and reconstruct them for yourselves as you read through Paul's epistle to the Romans than it is

for you to remember any of my particular insights into what Paul is doing. Grasping the structure of the book will give you that and keep you on track. It will emblazon on your mind where you are in Paul's argument and why where you are matters. Another way to say that is that is more important for you to track Paul than it is for you to track Browning on Paul. Now, I am not trying to deprecate or minimize myself here. A good teacher fulfills exactly the same role as a pointer. It points and then disappears.

Now the second reason it is important to grasp the structure of the book is even simpler. It will keep you from focusing on one particular aspect of Paul's argument to the exclusion of his main point. Let me illustrate what I mean this way. Paul is going to say in our passage this morning that **"homosexuality and lesbianism"** are practical evidences of the idolatrous sinfulness of a culture and of God's retributive justice being poured out on a culture. In fact, he is going to say that that in such a matter-of-fact way that it is really...really quite startling. I would do you no small intellectual or spiritual disservice if I were to deny or even minimize the reality of the fact that that is what he says. He is not going to say that such cultures will be judged for homosexuality but that such cultures are, in fact, being judged currently in the act and by the act of homosexuality itself. Now because of that you might think I need to **"tee off"** on homosexuality here and spend our whole time doing an expose of the inherent sinfulness and immorality of this particularly, heartbreaking sin. You might even think that I ought to do a lengthy social commentary on the recent overturn of the Texas sodomy laws by the United States Supreme Court. But I am not going to do that. At least, I don't think I am going to do that and here's why. Paul's point was not trying to get the Romans to a place to where they would say, **"My God, aren't they sinners?"** Men and women both do that inherently without any

prodding from the outside. No, Paul's purpose was much more personal than that. What Paul wanted the Romans to hear him out and the turn to their mirrors and say, "**My God, aren't we sinners?**"

You see Paul's purpose was to expose the whole seething sinful, maggot-infested underbelly of the sin of the whole Gentile world. Homosexuality was certainly a part of that. But it was not the only part; it was not even the principal part. The principal sin of the Gentile world is that it was idolatrous.<sup>6</sup> The principal sin of your heart and mine is that it is idolatrous.<sup>7</sup> We are, in fact, idol factories. We want to run our lives the way we chose without any interference from God, the government or even our own consciences. We are fully modernized, fully automated, high-tech, clean burning, ecologically friendly idol factories, fully powered by the eternally sustainable force of our own original and actual sin. You don't even have to plug us in. You could drop us in the heart of the Amazon Rainforest and we could be up and running in a matter of seconds.<sup>8</sup>

You see that is Paul's major purpose and point here. He doesn't want us to consider the horror of the sinfulness of others. He wants us to consider, instead, the horror of our own sinfulness. And you know that is a hard thing to get across. **The human heart is almost impervious to self-accusation.** I think the best biblical illustration of that is the wonderful story of David the king and Nathan the prophet over in 2 Samuel. I know you all know the story so I won't ask you to turn there. Rather, I want you just to remember what happened. King David committed a whole array of terrible sins when he sinned with Bathsheba against the noble Uriah. Those sins included ingratitude, lust, adultery, lying and finally murder. But David hid the reality of those sins away in his heart, far from the sight of his adoring subjects. Then one day, Nathan the prophet came along

and told him an outrageously pitiful, made-up story about how one of his rich subjects stole a poor man's prized lamb and killed it and fed it to his company. David was outraged. He boiled over with righteous indignation. He wanted to get this poor man justice. He wanted to champion the poor and the helpless. It was so easy for him to visualize the prideful arrogance of the kind of man that would do such a thing. I can almost hear David shouting, **"Not while I'm king! Not while I'm king."** And then Nathan dropped the bombshell, **"King that man...that rich, arrogant, prideful, ravenous wolf of a man that you want to chasten...that man...that man is you."**

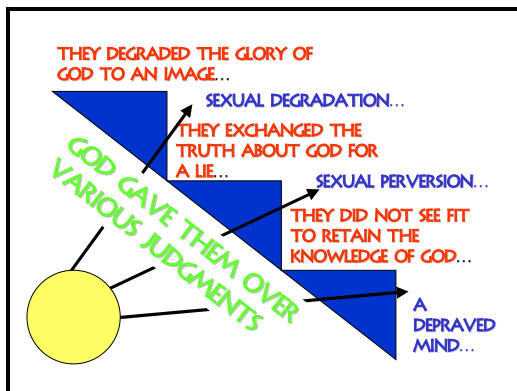
You see David did not need any help to see the sin of others. But, he needed someone desperately to help him make a steady, clear-eyed evaluation of his own sin.

And that, brothers and sisters, is what Paul is doing here this morning. He *is* going to bring up some reprehensibly sinful behavior. He *is* going to show us some things that are ugly. But he is not trying to illumine our hearts and minds to the sins of others. He is trying to illumine our hearts and minds to our own sin. If we let our blistered consciences crawl away thinking, **"Boy, I wish so and so could hear this? They really need to get a handle on just how truly sinful they are"** we will have examined Paul's words and missed the whole point of what Paul intended to accomplish. In the words of Isaiah, **"We will have heard without understanding."**<sup>9</sup> Do you see what I mean? You see we are so quick to divert the attention of the accusing finger of the law of God away from our own sinfulness to the sinfulness of others. We do that almost flawlessly and we do it almost instantly. We zero in quickly on the sins of others while we simultaneously ignore the reality of our sin that ought cut us like a knife.

Why do we do that? The answer to that is both easy and excruciating.

We do that because contemplating our own inherent sinfulness is not very conducive to self-worship. Focusing on our own inherent sinfulness would mean that we might be more apt to see the flaws and defects in that last idol we turned out. That is why, brothers and sisters, I want us to keep Paul's overall purpose in view here and that purpose is to demonstrate that the whole Gentile world is guilty before God and that that Gentile world includes both you and me and not just theoretically but actually, really and truly.

**Now, as to how Paul does that.** Most of the time, when we are following a trial on television or in the paper, we follow the testimony and the witnesses toward some anticipated conclusion. I am thinking of the recent "**man in the windshield murder case.**" We listened day after day to the pitifully cruel and heartless actions of the defendant and wondered, "**Will they let her off? Will they find her guilty? How will they respond to her pleas for mercy?**" It was only after the jury's decision finally came down that we even began to think to ask, "**How long will they give her?**"



Now, I bring that up because the structure of Paul's argument here is exactly opposite of that. Consider this for a moment. In verse 24, **Paul is going to**

**explain God's sentence** upon the Gentiles for degrading the glory of His image by exchanging it for one of men and animals.

In verse 26, **Paul is going to explain God's sentence** upon the Gentiles for exchanging the truth of God for a lie and for worshipping the creature more than the Creator.

Finally, in verse 28, Paul is going to **explain God's sentence** upon the Gentiles who determined that God was not the fit end of their thoughts. But Paul is not going to get to his conclusion about what all this guilty sentences and judgments mean until Romans 3:19. Did you realize that? Look at Romans 3:19.

**NIV Romans 3:19...**Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Instead of saying, **"Guilty, guilty, guilty and here's the punishment."** Paul turns it around and says, **"Here's God's punishment on them. And here it is on them, and here it is on them and finally yes because of the ever abiding presence of the judgment of God you can see the whole world is speechless and stands guilty before almighty God."**

Now, let's consider the three guilty pronouncements of God starting in Romans 1:21.

**NIV Romans 1:21...** 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. <sup>22</sup>Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. <sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

The first thing I want you to notice is that the sin of the pagan Gentile world is first and foremost theological. Note the repetition of the terms that have to do



with the mind and with thinking...they knew God...their thinking became futile...their hearts were darkened...claiming to be wise they became fools. The Gentile world went from correct theology to bad theology. The world went from a right philosophy to a bad philosophy.<sup>10</sup> The world went from truth to non-truth. I think that ought to be a warning to us when we hold the importance of theology and theological truth so lightly. I particularly like what R.C. Sproul writes when he says:

The people Paul is describing here did not see any worthwhile purpose or value in pursuing the knowledge of God in any kind of depth. Nor did they even see the value of maintaining the knowledge they already had. The very word *theology* often is regarded as repugnant, and people glibly say, **"I'm not interested in theology. It's not practical."** By that, some may mean that they have an aversion to academic and scholarly research into the things of God. Certainly most people will never be academic theologians. But in its general use the word *theology* simply means **"the knowledge o God."** So how is it possible for a person to be a Christian and not have a passion for theology? Apart from merely knowing things about God, such as the creeds and the doctrines, I question how a real believer cannot passionately want to know God or have a real understanding of who He is.<sup>11</sup>

I think that is an extraordinary point and worthy to be accepted by every person here.

The second thing that I want you to notice is that bad theology leads to bad, ever degenerative behavior. Because the Gentiles began to think incorrectly about God, God gave them over to a scandalous lifestyle and to the pursuit of sinful desires. When men chose to degrade God's glory by exchanging it for mere images of God cast in the likeness of men and crawling animals, God gave them over to the degrading fulfillment of their passions. I think that ought to be a warning to us today. In fact, I want the judicial aspect of God's decree here to be

completely clear in your mind. They degraded God's glory so gave them over to degrade their bodies. Now the term used here for **"passion"** or strong desire here is in and of itself a neutral term. It is not necessarily wrong to be passionate. Sometimes **"passion"** can be a very good thing indeed. It is used in the New Testament to speak both of the **"desire"** of Satan...

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 8:44** You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

...and of the **"desire"** of Jesus...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 22:15** And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

Of course, the nature of the **"passion"** that Paul is describing here in Romans 1:24 is finally exposed simply because it culminates in sexual immorality. That leads me to my first conclusion and first application.

**"When a culture is consumed or preoccupied with the pursuit of sensuality and sexual passion, it is in the first phase of a long descent into the dark abyss of idolatry."** Can I say that again? **"When a culture is consumed or preoccupied with the pursuit of sensuality and sexual passion, it is in the first phase of a long descent into the dark abyss of idolatry."**

Brothers and sisters, I am not an alarmist, but I do not see how it is possible to understand the current state of immorality in our country as anything other than an expression of the permanent, abiding, presence of the wrath of almighty God. I have to tell you, I did not ever dream that I would ever see in my lifetime such a massive, overwhelming national preoccupation and passion to degrade the

nobility of women.<sup>12</sup> I was not raised to be naive and I have always at least some understanding of the inherent sinfulness of a man's heart. But if you would have told me thirty years ago that our country was going to decline to the place where women and girls were going to willing to endure such shabby and disrespectful treatment just to attract the presence of some hairy legged Neanderthal I would have laughed like an idiot. I mean the very idea that a woman of virtue might eve be willing to "shack up" with some man on a trail basis prior to marriage was just beyond the pale of possibility. If you would have told me that the women and girls of our time were going to view themselves with so little respect as to not only allow men to treat them like dirt but to that they themselves would come to the place to where they not only would endure but also expected social interactions and dating behaviors that held them up to disrespect and scorn I would have told you that you were out of your mind. If you would have told me thirty years ago that it was going to become commonplace for women to trade their reputations and self-respect for the paste pearls of some momentary encounter with fame and that otherwise attractive, intelligent young women were going to be willing to do all that on primetime television I would told you that you completely misunderstood the inner spiritual goodness of the American women. But boy has the woman in America ever come a long way baby.

Of course, related to that, I have to admit that I did not ever think I would ever see such a complete lack of embarrassment associated with such an overwhelming downturn in our culture in terms of just plain old-fashioned prurient obsession. **Our culture is sexually obsessed and we are unashamed. No our culture is sexually obsessed and we are proud that it is obsessed.**

You can see our culture's preoccupation with all things erotic on billboards and in magazines. You can hear it on shock radio and you can see it on almost every channel on television ranging all the way from that vile human toad, Howard Stern, to late night sports shows that are for some reason hell bent on jazzing up game scores by discussing them in a perverse, sexually explicit manner that twenty years ago would have landed someone in an insane asylum. God help you young couples if you don't have the courage to regulate what you watch. God help you if your consciences are already so seared that you can't help but occasionally reach over and turn that stinking television off if for no other reason than that you are embarrassed for your participation in such things. God help you young couples that don't have the courage to eventually say, **"You know that is just about enough of that."**

In the same way, God help you men, if you do not manage what comes into your house via the Internet. And if you caught up in the evil clutches of pornography, may God give you the strength to go home and unplug your computer or even better to just jerk the altar of idolatry that it has become off your desk and throw it out into the street. I cannot tell you over the last three years how many men, women and boys I have met with that have fallen prey to the alluring siren song of pornography. I cannot tell you how many countless hurts and wounded hearts that I have already had to deal with because of pornography. I absolutely shudder to think about what kind of lovers the men and boys that are schooled in the hellish pursuit of pornography will turn out to be ten years from now or how many generations will wind up populating hell because some gutless fool somewhere did not have the courage to say, **"No, that's it. I will not go that far."**

In the same way, God help you women if you don't put your foot down on the intrusion of the vile and degrading presence of pornography in your home and God help you men if you don't have a woman who will fight you with the last ounce of her strength to insist that you do right.

God help you young mothers raising little boys and girls in our culture if you are using MTV or just television in general to nurture and baby-sit your kids. The perversity that is there is history making. You would be so much better off to give your children something safe to play with, something like a cobra or a black mamba or a vile of Ebola virus. At least those things can only kill them. They can't warp their minds and snuff out the few remaining embers of the glory of God's image in their precious little bodies. Oh, I beg you parents, tell them no. Better to have them hate you for a few years than for them to think the perverse is normal the rest of their days.

Now if I have not made you the least bit nervous, let me read for you the implicit warning of Karl Barth and remember as I do that Barth is no fundamentalist. Many today consider him to have been a theological liberal. Still listen to his insight regarding the judgment God has cast upon mankind.

When men want to achieve a life without God, God avenges them by giving them what they seek. When God has been deprived of His glory, men are also deprived of theirs. Desecrated within in their souls, they also *become* desecrated in their bodies...the creatureliness of their lives now becomes dishonor; and lust—and sexuality—become...the primary motive of their whole desire and striving...They now bear the whole *shame* of the whole world and because of their separation from God they must continue *to do so over and over*. They wanted to experience the god of this world and they have gotten all that they desired...*and the result is that for them...everything in life has been reduced to libido; life has become totally erotic.*<sup>13</sup>

Now that is the assessment of a theological liberal. Sounds like a fundamentalist today doesn't it. But that tells I think just how far our culture has declined in the last forty years. But of course, that is just the first step downward in the decline of the Gentiles. It is just the first of God's retributive judgments against man as a result of man having exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

The continued downward turn of mankind reveals a second pronouncement of judgment by God. Let's look at verse 25 and thank goodness all I have to do here is just read the text. The pronouncement is clear enough in itself.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:25**...They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-- who is forever praised. Amen.<sup>26</sup> Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.<sup>27</sup> 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.

My observation and application is a simple one:

**"When a culture is consumed or preoccupied over a long period of time with the pursuit of sensuality and sexual passion it cannot help but enter into the second phase of a long descent into the dark abyss of idolatry. That second phase is perversion."** Can I say that again? **"When a culture is consumed or preoccupied over a long period of time with the pursuit of sensuality and sexual passion it cannot help but enter into the second phase of a long descent into the dark abyss of idolatry. That second phase is perversion."**

Now there are some things that find difficult to discuss. I am, in the end, just a simple Texas boy raised by simple Texan parents, and it just grieves me to even

have to admit that things are true. But there is one thing here that I think is clear. The slippery slide into the life of perversion is made of steps, or levels at the beginning. No man wakes up one day and just decides out of the blue that he is going to be perverse. He gets there by inches, by increments. No man wakes up out of the blue and thinks, **“Today I am going to become a pederast.”** No he gets there by inches. Once a man has entered into the life of perversion, he finds it takes a bit more excitement, a bit more titillation each day to reach the same sense of euphoria.<sup>14</sup> A man’s inhibitions are slowly laid aside as he moves downward, ever downward in the pursuit of one more **“rush”** one more **“fix.”** When we dishonor God, God gives us over to sexual lusts. When we practice those sexual lusts over a period of time, we start to slide downward into perversity. Our lusts are no longer sated by the mundane; our passions are no longer soothed by the same lust-worship. We need more; we need worse.

I know that you know that is true. God grant us as a culture the ability to stop and come to our senses.

Finally let’s take a minute to look at the third downturn and third pronouncement of judgment against the Gentiles. This is really interesting in the Greek New Testament. There it says something like, “They did not see fit to retain the knowledge of God...therefore God gave them over to (I know in your Bibles it says a depraved mind but in Greek there is wonderful word-play that goes back to the word **“see fit”** so that a better translation is) an **“unfit mind”** where depravity is the norm, the way of life.<sup>15</sup> Look at verse 28.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:28**...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. <sup>29</sup> 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, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil<sup>16</sup>...

My goodness is that a perfect description of our culture today. We are the most creative, the most inventive, wicked generation in the history of the world. We stand out if in no other aspect than this that we are especially able to dream up new and sinful behavior better than all those that have gone before.

...they disobey their parents;

Now notice Paul's conclusion here. He says that disobedience to parents is not the start of perversion but rather it is the end of perversion. Parents and children both...if that doesn't terrify I don't know that you can even be terrified.

...<sup>31</sup> they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. <sup>32</sup> 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.

They not only want to practice perversion, they want others to join them.

Here's my conclusion.

**"When a culture is consumed or preoccupied over a long period of time with the pursuit of perversion it cannot help but buckle under the weight of its own sin and be driven to edge of insanity, despair and self destruction."<sup>17</sup>**

Let me show what I mean. The following quotes are excerpts taken from a tragic 38-page suicide letter that a good friend of mine, who just happened to be a detective, gave me a few years back. My friend found the letter when he was called in to investigate the man's death. The man who wrote the letter was in his



late thirties. His name was Harvey and these are really not much more than just some random musings. Listen to some of the things he wrote:

When I had definitely decided to kill myself, I quit my job. I wasn't going to do anything on my remaining days that wasn't pleasurable or comfortable to me and going to a job everyday that was tedious, stressful, unrewarding and thankless was sheer drudgery...just for the sake of drudgery.

He goes on to say...

As it turns out, I've lived longer than I intended to and my money ran out a little over a month ago and I've been forced to exist on the \$1000 my mother loaned me some time ago for a down payment on a car.

Do you see what he is saying? You can here the way he viewed his mother. He essentially stole the money she gave him to buy a car and lived off it not really thinking of how she worked for her money or the devastating hurt he was about to cause.

I'm a thirty nine year old man, completely and utterly heterosexual, who has never been married, although admittedly, I have never wanted to be! However, I've never even known a girl who wanted or loved me enough to want to live with me. If only I had, I might be alive today.

I just think that part is so pitiful. Then he talks about a girl he met at work and then he says...

Soon after her departure, I began frequenting a topless called "Baby Doll." It's a very classy, respectable club, located on highway 157 just off highway 183 in Hurst...

Then he spends page after page talking about all of the girls he met there and the wonderful relationships he had with them and how every single one lied to him and cheated him trying in the end only get at his money. Then he says this:

During the month of August, I've spent most of my time watching televised tennis matches and preseason football games as well as other programs of interest to me. I have watched videotapes and listened to my music on the best stereo system I have ever had...I have also eaten all my favorite foods. During this final week I decided I was going to enjoy foods I'd never tried before. I've had filet mignon steak, veal cutlets, Brie and Camembert chesses. I have also enjoyed Canadian bacon pizza, and turkey breast and Swiss cheese sandwiches on rye. I've enjoyed a very impulsive and self-indulgent week.

The he says this...which is, I think, just extraordinary:

I know I am taking the easy way out. I'll probably only have an instant of pain and then my life will be over, no more pain or suffering. Dying will be easy; it is the living that's tough.

Oh, that what he said had been true for him. Oh that the death he endured would have led to sleep, dark and peaceful. But that is not where it led, brothers and sister. All his conclusions were wrong. His mind was no longer fit. He was no longer thinking in terms of rational, intelligent thought.

His mind is depraved mind and he views everything through the lens of his own body's glands rather than through a mind and a heart filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as it is revealed in the face of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, that brings me back to the point Paul is making. The reason we need the revelation of the righteousness of God in the gospel is because we are lost, helplessly, hopelessly lost and that is true not just of you but of everyone you know. But you know what, our God loved us enough to reveal Himself in perfect matchless mercy and pity in the gospel. Over the next few weeks we will talk about the reality of what a wonder of wonders that truly is.

Let's pray.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Graves, *Claudius the God* (New York: Vintage Books, 1935; reprinted 1962), 523.

<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, "Sexual Gratification in I Thessalonians 4:1-8" *Trinity Journal* 20:2 (Fall 1999): 225. "Homosexual excess is a subplot of the lives of several of the Caesars Suetonius writes about from Julius onward and including Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero, the last-named of whom had a slave castrated and dressed him like a woman so he could stage a marriage with him. Claudius stands out as an exception, about whom Suetonius writes, "Boys and men left him cold."

<sup>3</sup> Ronald E. Mana, "False and True Worship in Romans 1:18-25." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (January 2000): 26. "Paul described the sinful condition of humans in all its darkness. He did this so that by contrast the light of the gospel (in 3:21-5:21) might shine all the more brightly."

<sup>4</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans (NIC)* 2 vols. in one (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968; reprint 1980), 34. "The design of the apostle in establishing this thesis appears plainly from 3:20 when he says that from works of law no flesh will be justified in God's sight. In other words the design is to show that the salvation provided in the gospel is the need of all and that the power of God is operative unto salvation only through the revelation of the righteousness of God appropriated by faith."

<sup>5</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News For the World*, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 67-8. "It is this plain and unpopular principle which lies behind Romans 1:18 — 3:20. Before Paul can show that salvation is equally available to Jews and Gentiles (which he says it is in 1:16), he must prove that they are equally in need of it. So his purpose in this passage is to draw up the indictment that all, Jews and Greeks alike, are under the power of sin', so that the whole world may be exposed to Gods judgment'. He does more than bring an accusation; he marshals the evidence against us, in order to prove our guilt and secure our conviction. All men and women (Jesus being the solitary exception) are sinful, guilty and without excuse before God. Already they are under his wrath. Already they stand condemned. It is a theme of great solemnity. It is also the necessarily dark background against which the gospel shines brightly, and an indispensable foundation for world evangelization."

<sup>6</sup> C.K. Barrett, *Romans: The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 37. "Their idolatrous minds and practices are themselves a punishment from God."

<sup>7</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Tyndale Press, 1963), 82. "Instead of appreciating the glory of the Creator by contemplating the universe which He created, they gave to created things that glory which belonged to God alone. Idolatry is the source of immorality. So the author of Wisdom had already said, 'For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life' (Wisdom xiv. 12)."

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion Vol. 1*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 108. "From this we may gather that man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols." 1.11.8.

<sup>9</sup> NIV **Isaiah 6:9** He said, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'"

<sup>10</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans Volume 1: Man's Ruin 1:1-32 and God's Wrath 2:1-3:20* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1952 and 1953; reprint 1994), 249. "What fools not to comprehend that Plato and Aristotle are but the rubbish of Adam, and that Athens is but the degeneration of the Garden of Eden."

<sup>11</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Before the Face of God: A Daily Guide for Living from the Book of Romans Book 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 34-5.

<sup>12</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988; reprint, 1994), 92. Although this discussion by Morris is not under the verse in question but later, it is quite germane to the whole issue of the importance of the integrity of women. "He uses the adjectives "female" and "male" rather than the nouns "women" and "men", possibly because he is concentrating on sexual differentiation Hendriksen points out that "A person's sexual orientation, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is not the point at issue What matters is what a person does with his sexuality!" He goes on to remind us that "According to the plain teaching of Scripture sexual intercourse was intended for a husband and his wife, for no one else. Paul mentions the degradation of women before he deals with that of men. Hodge (See, Charles Hodge, *Romans* from the Crossway Classic Series edited by Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1993), 40.) thinks the reason for this is that "they are always the last to be affected in the decay of morals, and their corruption is therefore proof that all virtue is lost.'"

<sup>13</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwin C. Hoskyns, from the 6<sup>th</sup> ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 51. See also Barth, 53. And see D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 1, The Gospel of God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 392-3. "The world as it is today is the greatest proof possible 'of the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men that hold (down) the truth in unrighteousness'. Our world today, with its baffling moral problems, with its incredible moral muddle, with all the loudness and the ugliness and the foulness on the increase, is just an absolute proof of what the Apostle says here. It is God's wrath against sin; you cannot explain it in any other way. There is no other explanation. We have been taught that education and culture and moral lectures and moral societies are going to make man moral. But they are not doing it and they cannot do it. No, no! this is a part of the 'wrath of God against sin'. So the modern world itself proves that the doctrine, which it hates above every doctrine, the doctrine of the wrath of God is actually a fact; and when the wrath of God manifests itself in this way, and when God withdraws His restraining grace and abandons man to himself, the result is what you see. My other comment is this. Hell is just what is described here exaggerated and going onto all eternity. That is hell! Hell is a condition in which life is lived away from God and all the restraints of God's holiness. All that is described in this passage, exaggerated still more and going on endlessly! In other words, hell is people living to all eternity the kind of life they are living now, only much worse! That is hell. Can you imagine anything worse? It is men and women without any control at all, finally abandoned by God." And finally see, S. Lewis Johnson, "God Gave Them Up: A Study in Divine Retribution," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (April 1972): 131. It is doubtful that there is a doctrine in the Bible easier to prove than that of

eternal punishment, a fact that reminds one of an incident involving Henry Ward Beecher and William G. T. Shedd, both eminent leaders of their day. The *North American Review* engaged the two men for articles on the subject of eternal punishment, knowing the views of the two men. Beecher had once commented, "I believe that punishment exists, both here and hereafter; but it will not continue after it ceases to do good. With a God who could give pain for pain's sake, this world would go out like a candle." Shedd was asked to write an article supporting the doctrine, and Beecher was asked to answer it. When the proof sheets of Shedd's article were sent to Beecher he telegraphed from Denver to the magazine's editors, "Cancel engagement. Shedd is too much for me. I half believe in eternal punishment now myself. Get somebody else." The reply was never written by anyone. Shedd remained unanswered.<sup>29</sup> There is no answer, biblically, logically, or philosophically to the doctrine of eternal punishment.

<sup>14</sup> Frances A. Schaeffer, *The Finished Work of Christ: The Truth of Romans 1-8* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1998), 43. Schaffer is very good here. "With a realism we see throughout the Bible, Paul addresses the issue of male homosexuality. Religious people don't always like to deal with the reality of such things, but the Bible never covers up reality. It deals with humanity just as it is. Paul speaks of the "recompense, the automatic result, of such a way of living. If you minister among people such as this—homosexuals, or women who have made their womanhood a commodity—you will see people who have become absolutely miserable after an initially deceptive attraction. While giving satisfaction on some level of relationship, homosexuality is a total denial of the real world. It creates no continuity and contradicts the identity of the person as a child of a father and a mother. Sad lives end with a handful of ashes strewn to the wind."

<sup>15</sup> Barrett, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Archibald Thomas Robertson, "The Epistle to the Romans" in *Word Pictures In the New Testament Volume 6: Epistles of Paul* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 320. "Robertson cites Tacitus's Annals IV.2 in reference to Sejanus as one who was able to...facinorum omnium repertor... invent of all kinds of evil."

<sup>17</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1991), 41. Compare this wonderful view of what it Hughes says the world would be like if men honored God, "Therefore God *gave them over* in their hearts to self-control and purity, that their bodies might be honored among them. For they kept and cherished the truth of God and worshiped and served the Creator, who is blessed forever, rather than the creature. Amen.

For this reason God *gave them over* to pure and wholesome lives, lived with carefree ease even in the most intimate relations so that all received in their own persons the due reward of their fidelity.

And just as they saw fit to acknowledge God in all things, *God gave them over* to a sound mind, to do those things which are proper, being filled with all righteousness, goodness, generosity, kindness; full of selflessness, life, healing, openness, kindness; they are gentle in speech, always building others up, lovers of God, respectful, humble, self-effacing, inventors of good, obedient to parents, understanding, trustworthy, loving, merciful; and as they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are possessors of life, they do the same, and give hearty approval to those who do likewise."