

Romans 1:19-32 by Wayne Barber

PREVIOUS

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Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " Jensen's Survey of the NT "				

Romans 1:19-32

Man's Desperation/God's Good News-2

Paul is showing you something in chapter 1, particularly in verses 16 and down. Before you can have a cure, you have to have a cause. If you go to the doctor feeling bad, the doctor will probably do a case history to look back into what other ailments you have had to see if they lend themselves to what is presently bothering you. Once he determines the problem, then he can come up with the cure.

The Apostle Paul does it a little backward. He gives the cure and then he shows the cause. Finally he shows the case study God has done and has against all men. In verses 16-17 we find the cure. What is the cure for the spiritual ills of society today? We know society is sick. Jesus said, "I did not come for those who did not need a physician," indicating that there is a sickness, a spiritual sickness in society. We know that it comes from Adam.

Romans 5:12-note says, "In that one man sinned, sin entered the world and death by sin." So we know the depravity of man, the sickness, the sin sickness that plagues our world. What is the cure? The cure is the good news of God. Remember, the word "gospel" means good news.

Now in chapters 1 and 2, you are talking about two different groups of people. It is very important that you see that. In chapter 1 you are dealing with the pagan nations of this world as evidenced by their conduct. Romans 1:32-note depicts a people who not only do things that are awful, but they approve of the people who do them. In Ro 2:1-note you find a different group of people. They judge the people who do these things. In other words, here are your pious people. In chapter 1 you have your pagans. In chapter 2 you have your pious.

Paul is saying, "Hey, you might be a religious Jew, but you need Jesus just as much as the pagan Gentiles. The pagan Gentile doesn't have the Law, but he has God's Law written on his heart. You have the Law but whether you are with the Law or without the Law, you both need Jesus Christ." In Ro 3:23-note he says, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It is a beautiful thing that Paul is doing here. Like a defense attorney, he is building the case that God has against all men.

It is important then, if chapter 1 is dealing with the Gentile nations, to remember where the Gentile nations came from. Where did the Gentile nations come from? Look back in Genesis 3. Man sinned. Once he sinned, it was down hill from that point on. Cain kills Abel and you go on. In Genesis 7 God wipes out humanity but he keeps one family alive—Noah and his family—and we see them in the ark. The ark, of course, is the picture of Christ. He is setting up His plan that He had before the foundation of this world that Jesus would come and die for all mankind.

In Ge 11:4, 5, 6 you find them at Babel in the land of Shinar. Shinar is another word for Babylon. Babel is another name of the city of Babylon. There they are, building the tower of Babel. Man and his pride saying we can reach up to God and we will make a name for ourselves. God looks down and says, "Not good." He destroys the tower, scatters the people and confuses their languages. And as far as I know in Scripture that is the beginning of the pagan Gentile nations right there. It is out of those pagan nations that He singles out Abram in Ge 12:1, 2, 3 and in Ge 15:18 God cuts a covenant with him. It is through Abram that you have Isaac and of course, Jacob. Jacob's name was changed to Israel. He had twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel.

So you have the Gentile nations, the pagan nations. All of them came out of the root of pride and rebellion and disrespect for God. There is your picture of the Gentile nations. Paul wants to explain to you in chapter 1 of Romans, that this is all the result of the depravity of man, the sin of Adam. We see the case God has against all man. That is what we are going to look at. Paul, as an attorney, is building the case that God has against all men, whether they are Gentile or Jew without Christ. His wrath is upon all of them.

First of all in Ro 1:19, 20-note, he describes the integrity of God. Now, as a good lawyer would do, he makes sure he defends the character and integrity of God. There may be a skeptic out there who says, "What kind of God would condemn a Gentile nation that doesn't even know about Him? I mean, what kind of God would condemn anybody if He didn't first of all let them know something about Himself?" How can they be condemned if they don't even know Him? The Apostle Paul nails that one to the wall and shows the integrity of our God. He has revealed Himself to all men born on this earth. Look at verse 19: "because that which is known about God is evident [the word "is" is in the present tense—it is constantly evident] within them; for God made it evident to them." God displayed it to them.

There are certain things that are known about God. The little phrase, "that which is known" is the word *gnostos*. The word *gnostos* means that which can be comprehended. Whether you are lost or whether you are saved, God made certain things about Himself known.

Now it could be translated "knowable." I like that better. That which is knowable about God, He made it evident to them. You find someone in the darkest part of Africa, or you find someone in Siberia, or wherever you go, any person born on this earth has had the privilege of knowing something about God. All men can know it. God put two attributes of Himself on display for everyone; therefore, all men are without excuse. When they say, "But we didn't know there was a God," that is hogwash. The word of God says, "Yes, you did. But maybe you chose not to pursue that light you had of Him."

In Ro 1:20-note he says, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

There are two things that can be knowable by all men. One is His eternal power, the other is His divine nature. He has put it on display for all men to see and to understand. He has made it evident to all men on the face of this earth. What are we talking about? He says these things "have been clearly seen." Now wait a minute. If you find somebody in the darkest part of Africa and tell him that he has already seen evidence that God is real and alive and they have seen His power they would ask, "How?" They are "being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." Do you see that? His eternal power to create, to make, to bring into being has been put on display for all of mankind to view and to see.

If you find somebody who looks at a beautiful scene, a beautiful mountainside, a beautiful sunset, a beautiful sunrise and hear them say back to you, "Well, I just don't believe there is a God," they are being dishonest with themselves. You know, it is a fool who says there is no God, the scripture says. You see, anyone who is honest knows there has to be a Creator. You can argue about a lot of things, but you can't argue about the birth of a child. Anybody who has ever witnessed the birth of a child automatically knows there is a God. There is no other way. There is no other answer. There is nothing you can say.

I remember when my daughter Stephanie was born. I was very scared, but I want to tell you, I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience of watching that sweet little thing being born! I stood there and what I wanted to do more than anything else was worship, just worship because I saw what God can do.

Now find the atheists in this world and tell them, "You are not honest. You are lying through your teeth. You know that there has got to be a Creator. You've witnessed His eternal power that has been on this earth." That is what Paul says. He has put it on display. You don't have to have much of a brain to understand that there is a God. His omnipotent power has been put on display since the

very creation of this world. Scientists can come up with certain things, but they can't come up from nothing. They have to have something to work with. A farmer can plant a seed but he can't make the seed grow. These are the things that only God can do.

But not only have we witnessed His divine eternal power, but also His divine nature, the goodness of God. You say, "Now wait a minute, how can people witness the goodness of God?" Paul tells you right here in Ro 1:20-note: "His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made."

I want you to look over in Acts 14:17. It is a beautiful verse as Paul is preaching the good news to the people in Lystra over in Asia Minor. Acts 14:16 carries the whole thought. This is the beautiful picture of the goodness and the kindness of God: "And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, [speaking of God] in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." In other words, you didn't even know Him, but God was giving you rain. God was giving you food. This is the goodness of God. This is why you can find a culture that has never heard from someone's lips about Jesus Christ, but they know about God. You will find a kindness about them they have learned just from observing His creation. This is why you can find good people who are lost. The goodness of God and His divine power have been on display since the very creation of this world. These are knowable aspects of God and he says all men have observed them—all men. He has made them evident to all men.

Once Paul has identified the integrity of God, then secondly Paul shows the insolence of man. Do you know what the word "insolence" means? He is not willing to submit. He is only willing to be his own boss. He is arrogant. Man did not want what God had revealed. Ro 1:21, 22, 23-note read, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

Now let's look at those verses. In Ro 1:21-note "even though they knew God" is in the aorist active participle. That means at a time all men knew God. Here is the angle. They knew Him. Who are they? Well, it points back to the foundation of the nations. Over the generations they knew Him, but they are suppressing the truth about Him. Now we are in the 20th century to where no man seems to have a clue. That is the product of what man's irreverence has done in society.

They did not honor Him. The word "honor" means to glorify Him. They didn't give Him a proper estimate. Glorify means not just to be in awe of, but also to give Him the proper estimate. In other words, to recognize Him for who He is. Man does not want to obey anybody. That is because of the depravity of Adam. We don't want to be under anybody's submission. That is the flesh that every man has. So man chose not to honor Him and glorify Him. As a result it tells us in Ro 1:21-note, "they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened." They became futile. The word "futile" means empty or unable in their speculations, in their reasoning. They were unable to think straight. They were illogical. They couldn't think about how God was, who He is and what He is doing. They have no concept.

Doesn't it sort of amuse you to watch the world try to solve the problems of the world? They don't know how to think. They haven't got a clue that God is the answer. Why? Because they are the product of generations of suppressing the truth. It goes on and says, "and their foolish heart was darkened." What do you think the word "heart" means? You can think of my emotions. That is where my heart would be. My thoughts, my attitudes, everything comes out of the heart. Now what happened to it? Instead of it having any light in it, darkness just poured in on all those areas of a person's life. That is why he is darkened emotionally. Then his attitudes have been darkened and his will has been darkened. The light of God has been taken out. Why? Because man said, "I will not glorify you. I don't want you, God. I am irreverent and I am going to live like I want to live."

Well, then Paul gives the illustration of how foolish they became. Ro 1:22-note says they were "Professing to be wise." Their wisdom was in contrast of God's wisdom. Can you imagine? People standing up and saying, "God, I know more than you do." That is exactly what people do today. You may not want to listen to God's Word. You are going to do it your way. Whether anybody likes it or not, you profess yourself to be wise. That is the flesh and that is what man did. "Professing to be wise, they became fools." That is the word we get the word moron from. They profess themselves to be wise and as a result, they became fools.

Look at what they did in Ro 1:23-note: "and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." In other words, he pictures the idols. They don't want to worship God. They don't want to bow down to God. They would rather worship a tree or a bird or a stone. You know why? Because they can control and make every one of those things. Idolatry is nothing more than what man makes with his hands. A man who won't submit to God, a man who won't submit to God's Word is a person who has created for himself his own idols. He will worship, but he won't worship God. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools.

In the verses that follow, Ro 1:24-32-note, there is a picture of God's divine abandonment. In other words, God says, "If that is what you want, if that is what you really want, then I am going to give it to you." Judgment is not God doing what you think He is doing.

Judgment is God giving man what man wants. That is what judgment is. "You want immorality? I will stuff it down your throat. You want this? I will give it to you. Have at it. You won't glorify Me. You won't bow before Me. You will not submit to My Word. Okay, I will give you what you say you want because I am a righteous God and you have a choice to make." As a result, you see the degrading passions and the depravity of man's mind. Man insolently said, "I don't want you. I will do it my way." Over generations they have suppressed the truth about God, taken Him out of our education system, taken Him out of everything you can think of, and tried to explain Him away as never before. As a result, you see humanity in the state that it is in today. Don't blame God for the evil in this world. God has revealed Himself to all men.

Don't think God is mean. God is God, and He has integrity. He has been displaying Himself for generations, but man has been throwing it right back in His face. As a result there are two things that come out. One is the impurity of their degrading passions and the other is the appalling nature of their depraved mind. I want you to see this in Ro 1:24-note. "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." "Amen" means "let it be so." He is blessed forever.

Ro 1:26-note goes on, "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned their natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own person the due penalty of their error."

Now, if you can't see what he is talking about, you are blind. He is talking about the sin of homosexuality! That came as a result of man's insolence towards God, his irreverence, his ungodliness. He would not turn to Him, so God turned him over to his own passions. They were perverted in the process and it ended up the worst, most heinous of all immorality.

Do you think that is all the immorality that they were turned over to? No. But Paul picks the two worst things. First of all, their women burned for one another rather than for men. Someone has said that when the women of society turn to that sin, that is the symptom of the fall of that society because women are always the last ones to turn away from the natural function that God has given them. Why didn't he mention adultery? That was all included. Do you know why he mentioned homosexuality? Again, it is the most heinous, it is the most compelling, and it is the most obsessive.

We are living in a day when they are trying to make homosexuals in America a minority group. That is directly an affront to everything God stands for and has said in His Word. Homosexuality is the most heinous of all the immoral sins and it is the direct result of a person who has been irreverent and has caused himself to become wise and has chosen not to glorify God in his life.

Now you say, "Wait a minute. Hold it. Hold it. There are churches in the inner cities of many cities that have homosexuals as ministers and they love God." No they don't! Loving God is not what you say to Him. Loving God is not going to church. Loving God is falling down on your knees before God and abandoning yourself to whatever His will says. Then that changes you from within and you become a person who can perform the way God wants you to perform. That is loving God. Does God love homosexuals? You had better believe it. "For God so loved the world [of everything you can think of including homosexuals] that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever [including homosexuals] believeth in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life."

Are we saying that God doesn't love them? No. But what we are trying to say is that lifestyle is the result of a reprobate mind that God gave people over to because they would not reverence Him and would not submit to Him. Thank God for the people who are working with the homosexual community. Thank God for the homosexuals who have been changed by the grace of God and the good news of Christ. Thank God for their testimonies around this world. But the sin of homosexuality is exactly what it is, it is a sin. We cannot make these people a minority group and give them rights as if they are dignified in any way. Their lifestyle has automatically denounced us doing that.

The last thing Paul shows you is the depraved mind from which all these passions come. In doing so he shows you the rest of the picture. Where does this come from? It must come from minds that are reprobate. Look at the scripture. In verse 28: "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness [wrong conduct], wickedness [*poneria*—the kind of wickedness that always injures somebody else], greed [*pleonexia*—I want what you have and I am going to take it], evil [*kakia*—the inherent evil that man has apart from Christ. He cannot do anything but sin]...." Do we understand that? Maybe you don't understand, but all sinners can do is sin. If they are sinning, that is all they know. They can't do anything else. Sinners sin.

We are the exception, not them. If you see a sinner living righteously back up and check this thing out. All they know how to do is sin. That is *kakia*. They are inherently evil. That is all they can do. Now we live in the 20th century where they have polished it up and refined it where you don't see it all the time anymore. Culturally they can get away with it—even at church. But all they can do is sin.

Then the verse goes on, "full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant

[pushing yourself up above everybody else], boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving,..." Do you know what that word "unloving" is? It is *astorgos*. What does that mean? It comes from *stergo*, which is something God gives to people even if they are not saved. It is a family love. That is the love a mama has for her little baby. They don't have to be saved to have it. Yet a woman can abort a baby and think of it as nothing more than a piece of trash. *Astorgos*, unloving. Where does it come from? Reprobate minds. Where does that come from? People who will not bow and glorify and acknowledge God. He gave them over and that is the result.

He goes on, "...unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them." Wow! We could have taken a little more time to really nail some of these sins. But I think they are pretty self-explanatory. What kind of person does these things? They are either lost or they are living after the flesh. They are not obeying God, that is for sure. They approve. They not only do it, they approve it. How can you and I approve of people who do such things?

Somebody gave me a note that I thought was really good. It says that one of the ways we can approve is by sitting in front of it for hours watching it on television, laughing with them when they are doing the very things that He says are the most terrible things that come from reprobate minds. We can approve of it by sitting and watching it, giving our time to it, letting our minds be subjected to it. It is amazing.

You might say, "I just personally thought the world is a better place than what you have just presented it." Well, I didn't present it. That is what God says. You will have to argue with Him. That is what it says. That is why the world is in the mess that it is in. Go to some of the countries that are having famine. Why is that happening? If you will go back to the roots of that particular nation, you will find that they rejected God and threw Him out of their vocabulary. It is the same thing that is happening in our country today.

We live in a society that for generations has suppressed the truth with their unrighteousness. Now they have been turned over to a reprobate mind and depraved character and passions. No wonder we are in the mess that we are in. Thank God for the good news! Amen! Thank God.