



Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

What does the Bible say about...

Sexuality

Romans 1:18-32; Luke 7:34

02/24/2019

Main Point

The grace of God cultivates a healthy distrust of our inner desires so that we might find true hope and peace in Christ.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you been surprised by how strongly people have reacted to Bruce Jenner's recent transformation to Caitlyn Jenner? Why or why not? What can we learn about the culture in which we live from these reactions?

If you were to grade the average Christian in America in terms of how well-equipped they are to answer questions about transgenderism, how would you grade them?

The recent transformation of gold medalist Bruce Jenner to “Caitlyn,” brought the subject of transgenderism to the forefront. Christians can no longer avoid this issue. It is going to come up in our churches, communities, and schools. Furthermore, it is not unlikely that we will encounter people in our churches who struggle to identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. As Christians, we must not shy away from addressing questions about gender. We must, as the apostle Paul charged the church at Ephesus, strive to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

While Scripture only identifies two genders, male and female (Gen. 1:27), we should not be surprised to learn that many people desire to be other than their birth sex. The presence of such desires, however, does not sanction them. “The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it” (Jer. 17:9). As Christians, we must help people see all human desire is broken. All people need God to help them cultivate a healthy distrust of their inner desires so that they might find true hope and peace in Christ rather than in their gender. Additionally, as we consider the issue of transgenderism, we must strive not only to understand God’s design, but also to demonstrate His sacrificial love for the Transgendered.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 1:18-32.

Before talking in depth about what the Bible has to say about the issue of transgenderism, it might be helpful to take some time to define the terms. The commentary section has definitions of commonly used terms when discussing transgenderism. Use discernment in considering whether defining the terms would be helpful for the group.

Who is God’s wrath revealed from heaven against (vv. 18-21)? Who does this include?

According to verses 21-22, what motivates people to reject God? According to Paul, what do all people know about God? Why are all people “without excuse” for their sin?

How has sin affected our thinking (v. 21)? When are we most tempted to trust our own thinking instead of God's revealed truth? Knowing this, how can begin to think rightly about God, the world, and ourselves (see Rom. 12:1-2)?

God is not neutral on sin. Nor is He more upset about one particular sin over and above another. His wrath is revealed against "all godlessness and unrighteousness of people" (v. 18). The transgendered person is no more or less guilty before God than the cisgendered (where individuals' experiences of their own gender agree with the sex they were assigned at birth). Both have "fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). As we think through the issues of transgenderism, we must remember that no person is more or less deserving of God's grace. We are all utterly and equally undeserving of God's grace. We are undeserving because we are all aware of God's eternal power and divine nature, as evidenced in creation, and yet we have willingly chose to worship creation rather than the creator. We exchanged "the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man." In other words, the sinful desire behind all our sin is idolatry. The desire to worship a god shaped in our own image. Though we know that God is king, we refuse to acknowledge Him as king. Instead we want to be in control. We want to determine what is right and true and good. Our rejection of God has deeply damaged the way we think such that we assume we are wise when in reality, we are fools (v. 21). This tells us that, if we want to think rightly about anything, including sex and gender, we need Christ to redeem us—we need to have our minds renewed by Christ so that our thoughts might be conformed to His will.

Look at verse 24, 26, and 28. According to these verses, should we trust our desires? Why or why not? How does Paul's teaching on our desires here compare with attitude of most people in our culture?

Read Romans 8:19-21. How is "creation . . . in bondage to corruption"? If this is the case, how can our desires be brought into conformity with God's?

Read Romans 8:6-11. Why is it important to remember that "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" as we interact with and minister to transgendered people? As followers of Christ, what hope do we have to offer both transgender and cisgender people whose desires are in "bondage to corruption"?

We live in a culture that has exchanged the truth about God for a lie (Rom. 1:25). This can be seen in the common cultural assumption that if someone desires to be a gender different than the sex they were given, then they should be. In other words, we live in a culture where desire is king. Three times in Romans 1, however, Paul reminds us that “God delivered” people over to their desires. In other words, because people wanted to reject God, He allowed them to continue deeply indulging their sinful desires. This further confirms what we have already seen—that we should not trust our desires, as they have been corrupted by sin. Therefore, all people, cisgender and transgender alike, need to recognize that we all suffer from disordered desires that need to be subdued by God’s grace. We must also realize that only God, by His grace, can subdue our sinful desires. Whether we desire to slander others, overeat, sleep with someone not our spouse, or to live as the opposite sex, we can have hope. Christ died on the cross to free us from our corrupt desires. Though dead because of sin, God brings all who trust in Christ to new life and “He who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through His Spirit” (Rom. 8:11).

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 7:34.

What was Jesus accused of in these verses? What does that tell us about the kind of relationship Jesus must have had with the social and moral outcasts of His day?

What might it look like for us to have a similar relationship with transgender people in our city or community?

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day accused Him of being a “glutton and a drunkard” because He made them uncomfortable by the way He sought out and dined with “tax collectors” and “sinners.” Challenge your group to think of concrete, tangible ways they might serve transgender people such that they, like Jesus, would be slandered by the hyper-religious for being “friends of sinners.”

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can you know whether your desires are in conformity to God's? What might it look like to daily "renew your mind" (Rom. 12:1-2)? See also Psalm 37:4.

How would you counsel someone who desires to live as the opposite gender than the one they were given? How would you counsel someone who claims that they cannot change their desire to be the opposite gender?

As more and more people embrace our culture's thinking on gender, we will inevitably see more people in and around our churches who struggle with gender identity. We must fight the temptation to shame these people and instead, strive to point them to Christ and demonstrate His love to them in tangible ways. For those that feel that they will never be able to live fully cisgender lives, we must remember that sin affects different people in different ways and that we will never truly be free from sin until Christ returns or calls us home (see Romans 5:12 and 8:18-25). We must strive to be patient with and continue to support and care for such people. Given that struggling with gender hinders them from getting married, it may also be helpful to remind them that singleness is not a curse but a gift as Paul told the church at Corinth, "I wish that all people were [single] just like me" (1 Cor. 7:7).

What are some tangible ways we could show Christlike love to transgender people in our city or community?

Pray

Pray that God would help your group members to submit their desires to Him. Pray also that your group would strive both to share, and to tangibly demonstrate, the love of Christ to transgender people.

Commentary

DEFINITIONS OF COMMONLY USED TERMS WHEN DISCUSSING TRANSGENDERISM

“Transgenderism” is an umbrella term for the state or condition of identifying or expressing a gender identity that does not match a person’s physical/genetic sex. Transgender is independent of sexual orientation, and those who self-identify as Transgender may consider themselves to be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, polysexual, or asexual. Approximately 700,000 individuals in the U.S. identify as Transgender.¹ The terms “Transgender,” “transsexual,” and “transvestite” are not synonymous. “Transsexual” is a narrower term used to refer to people who identify as the opposite of their birth sex, regardless of whether they have undergone or intend to undergo hormone replacement therapy and/or sex reassignment surgery. A “transvestite” is a person who cross-dresses, or dresses in clothes of the opposite sex, though they may not identify with, or want to be the opposite gender. All transsexuals are Transgender, but transvestites do not necessarily fall into either of the other categories.² The term “cisgender” is used to refer to individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity.

ROMANS 1:18-32

1:18. All people need the gospel because they are under God’s wrath, which stems from His holy revulsion to sin. Paul wrote this letter from the Greek city of Corinth—a city full of idolatry and immorality. Mankind originally knew God and fellowshiped with Him (Gen 3:8a). The history of the world and of the OT reveals a subsequent regression and loss of moral knowledge. Since the garden of Eden, people have been unrighteous, and they have suppressed the truth.

1:19. God as Creator has disclosed Himself in creation. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims the work of His hands” (Ps. 19:1). People also have an innate capacity for God as well as a moral conscience. God is at work to show Himself in the world, yet the world is in rebellion against Him.

1:20-21. Mankind’s problem isn’t that he doesn’t know the truth. The history of the human race discloses a determined effort to oppose the will of God. People are without excuse for their idolatry and practical atheism. Because of human willfulness, people’s knowledge of God became clouded and their thinking became darkened. Without contact with God, the center of man loses contact with reality, misses the purpose of his existence and becomes ungrateful. People are supposed to glorify Him as God, but instead find all sorts of created objects to worship. Part of the wrath of God is revealed in humanity’s loss of intelligent thinking.

1:23. Many people think that the history of religion developed along an evolutionary model. In this view, humanity originally held animistic beliefs and then progressed to polytheism, to tribal deities, and then to a single creator God. From there we

progressed to a vague philosophical monotheism in the Enlightenment, and finally we are now embracing atheism in the age of science. But this is not true to the early history of religion. Instead of starting in polytheism, the Bible says humanity started with knowledge of the one true God and then declined into polytheism as humans were separated from God and fractured from one another. Paul warns that loss of knowledge of the true God resulted in the worship of images resembling mortal man. Even in the modern age we have seen dictators worshiped as god, and the Bible says this sin will be repeated climactically in the end times (see 2 Thes. 2:3-12; Rev. 13:1-18).

1:24-25. Because they rejected the truths of God revealed in creation, God punished the Greco-Roman world by delivering them to the cravings of their hearts. A similar scenario played out in the life of King Ahab of Israel, who continually rebelled against God (1 Kings 16:29-33). As a judgment, God permitted a lying prophetic spirit to deceive Ahab to his doom (1 Kings 22:22-23). The ancients were enmeshed in polytheistic idolatry, and in their devotions to their false gods they practiced all sorts of immorality. The loss of the knowledge of God in the mind and heart leads to an exchange of truth for a lie. Something created is served and worshiped rather than the Creator, and judgment is the result (Ps. 81:12; Acts 7:42).

1:26-27. Lesbians and homosexuals often argue that this verse only prohibits sexual abuse of children, or else they say that natural sexual relations are not violated when men and women who are born with a tendency for homosexual desires (as they claim) practice homosexuality. But Paul clearly says lesbianism is unnatural, and the Bible elsewhere strictly prohibits all homosexuality (see Lev. 18:22). The Creator intended male and female to be joined in marriage (Gen. 2:24). As an example of the sort of sexual perversion Paul would have been aware of in his day, the emperor Nero castrated a boy named Sporus and married him. Such degrading passions result in appropriate penalty.

1:28-32. Finally, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind. Knowledge is retained in the mind, and sinful humankind has decided it is not worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. This must refer to thoughts about God, the function of the conscience, the mental evaluations that even a pagan goes through about who and where God is and how one may know Him. When people do not pursue these God-given internal and external evidences (see Eccl. 3:11; Acts 17:23-31), they gradually develop minds characterized continually by depravity—as in the days of Noah (Gen. 6:5). It is characteristic of a depraved mind to reverse the importance of everything, including evil and its origin.

Paul, writing to those who undoubtedly knew of his past as a persecutor of Christian believers, concludes with what must have been a difficult thing to write. He points out that those who act with depraved indifference are worthy of death—and know they deserve to die (Rom. 6:23). Yet they continue. And not only do they continue in the same acts, but also approve of those who practice them (1:32). Paul concludes this section with a point to which he adds a counterpoint beginning with 2:1. Those who sin and approve others who do are obviously guilty and deserving of the wrath of God.

The New American Commentary: Romans

1:18 In v. 17 Paul wrote that in the gospel “a righteousness of God” is being revealed. Then he added that from heaven the “wrath of God” is being revealed. There is an essential relationship between God’s righteousness and his wrath. If God

responded to wickedness with no more than a benign tolerance, his righteousness could be called into question. That which is right necessarily stands over against and defines by contrast that which is wrong. We recognize that divine wrath is not the same as human wrath, which normally is self-centered, vindictive, and intent on harming another. God's wrath is his divine displeasure with sin. We call it "wrath" because it shares certain basic characteristics of human wrath. But because it is God's wrath it can have none of the sinful qualities of its analogical counterpart. Berkeley calls it God's "indignation" (MLB) while the NEB chooses the expression "divine retribution."

Although the wrath of God is primarily eschatological, it is at the same time a present reality. The use of the present tense (apokalyptetai, "is being revealed") indicates something that is taking place in the present. Furthermore, vv. 24–32 describe divine wrath as currently operative in the lives of the ungodly. That God's wrath is present does not mean that it will not also be eschatological. God's present wrath anticipates his final withdrawal from those who do not respond to his love.

The wrath of God is being revealed against every sort of "godlessness and wickedness." C. Hodge takes these two terms to mean impiety toward God and unjustness toward humanity. Lack of respect for God leads to a lack of justice for people. History demonstrates that nations that forsake God lose their concern for the rights of the individual. To forsake God is to forsake his creatures. As a national policy, atheism grinds its people under the collective heel of "what's best for society."

The people of whom Paul spoke were those who by their wicked and sinful lives "suppress the truth." Truth cannot be changed, but it can be held down or stifled. Wickedness "denies ... truth its full scope" (Knox). We will learn in the verses that follow that God has revealed to all humans something of his eternal power and nature. Yet people refuse to believe, and as a result their understanding is darkened. To turn willfully against God is to move from light into darkness. The blindness that follows is self-imposed.

1:19–20 Verses 19 and 20 tell why the wrath of God is being revealed. God, in his creation, has provided sufficient evidence of himself to hold accountable all who reject that revelation. What can be known of God is perfectly clear. God himself made it plain. Theologians call this natural revelation (as distinguished from special revelation). Attempts by the medieval church to prove the existence of God on the basis of creation are commonly held to fall short of their goal. There is no doubt, however, that creation is the work of a Creator. To demand some sort of absolute proof of God's existence is simply an indication of the recalcitrant nature of fallen humanity.

Verse 20 explains that certain invisible attributes of God have been clearly perceived since the world began, specifically, his "eternal power and divine nature."⁸ They are understood from what has been made. The NEB says they are "visible ... to the eye of reason."⁹ God has revealed himself in nature in such a way as to hold all people responsible. They are "without excuse." Seeing the beauty and complexity of creation carries with it the responsibility of acknowledging the Creator both as powerful and as living above the natural order. Disbelief requires an act of rebellion against common sense. It displays fallen humanity's fatal bias against God. Although the created order cannot force a person to believe, it does leave the recipient responsible for not believing.

The text says that people are without a defense for their unwillingness to believe. The Greek word translated "without excuse" (anapologtous) suggests that from a legal standpoint people had been stripped of any defense. The age-old question about

the salvation of the “heathen” is clearly answered in this verse. Nature holds people responsible to believe in a God of eternal power. The question of what may or may not constitute the minimum requirements for salvation is not dealt with here. To rebel against God’s self-revelation in nature is to incur the results of that rebellion. Things visible call for a power that is invisible. The idea that matter has always existed is an impossible premise for the logical mind. The view that behind the visible world there must exist an invisible Being is far more reasonable. So those who do not believe are without excuse.

1:21–23 We can reasonably expect that knowing God should lead to honoring him as God and giving thanks. But by nature people neither give him glory for who he is nor give him thanks for what he has done. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of sun and rain benefitting both the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt 5:45; cf. Acts 14:17). God gives to all the basic requirements for life irrespective of their relationship to him. The proper response should be gratitude. But people choose to ignore God and come up with their own version of reality. By rejecting the knowledge of the true God, religion is born. F. J. Leenhardt calls it “the triumph of gods over God.” That line of foolish speculation leads to futility. Paul said that “their misguided minds are plunged into darkness.”¹³ To turn from the light of revelation is to head into darkness. Sin inevitably results in a darkening of some aspect of human existence. In a moral universe it is impossible to turn from the truth of God and not suffer the consequences. Ignorance is the result of a choice. People who do not “know” God are those who have made that choice. Understanding God requires a moral decision, not additional information.

In rejecting the knowledge of God available in creation, people claimed to be wiser than God (v. 22). Self-deification lies at the heart of human rebellion. But although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. One cannot turn from knowledge with impunity. The rejection of truth marks the rebel as a fool. There are two contrasts here—light and darkness, wisdom and foolishness.

People participated in an unfortunate exchange. Their “wisdom” led them to barter the majesty of the immortal God for “images made to look like mortal man” (v. 23). In fact, they even exchanged the glory of God for images of birds, beasts, and creatures that crawl along the ground.¹⁷ This threefold classification (cf. Gen 1:20–25) as well as terms such as “image” (Gen 1:26) suggest strongly that Paul was describing the wickedness of humans in terms of the Genesis account of the fall of Adam and Eve. The worship of gods in the form of animals was common in the pagan world. In the ancient Near East people worshiped such animals as bulls, jackals, hawks, and serpents.¹⁹ Paul’s denunciation brings to mind Ps 106:20 (“They exchanged their glory for an image of a bull”), which alludes to the Israelites’ worship of the golden calf at Sinai (Exod 32).

Although God is “immortal” (aphtharton), humans are only “mortal” (phtharton). To exchange the one who exists outside of creation, not subject to its inevitable demise, for that which at the very moment is caught in the process of decay indicates the abysmal ignorance of fallen humans. In Deut 4:16–18 God prohibited the Israelites from making images shaped like a man, any animal on earth, or any creature that moved along the ground. Paul used these same categories to describe the flight of sinners away from the knowledge of God. This decline from idols shaped like humans, to images of beasts, and even to creeping things shows that a debased mind gravitates to the lowest possible level.

1:24–25 People cannot turn their backs on God with impunity. They exchanged the majesty of God for images made by their own hands, so God “gave them over ... to sexual impurity.” The verb has a certain judicial quality. The NIVSB note on 1:24 says,

"God allowed sin to run its course as an act of judgment." God's wrath mentioned in Romans 1 is not an active outpouring of divine displeasure but the removal of restraint that allows sinners to reap the just fruits of their rebellion. F. Godet writes that God "ceased to hold the boat as it was dragged by the current of the river." The TCNT says that God has "abandoned them to impurity." Moral degradation is a consequence of God's wrath, not the reason for it. Sin inevitably creates its own penalty. "One is punished by the very things by which he sins" (Wis 11:16). Through the psalmist God declared, "My people would not listen to me ... so I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own desires" (Ps 81:11-12). Divine judgment is God permitting people to go their own way.

The text speaks of "the sinful desires of their hearts." Although the Greek word translated "desires" (epithumiais) may be taken in a good sense (as in Phil 1:23; 1 Thess 2:17), it normally is used of desires that are evil. Scripture is clear that the human heart is fatally inclined toward evil. What the "sexual impurity" consists of is clearly delineated in the verses that follow. It is described as "degrading ... their bodies with one another." By practicing the abnormal vices listed in vv. 26-27, men and women actually degrade their own bodies. Our physical bodies were meant for better and more noble purposes. Sin is a virus that invades the human soul and takes its toll throughout a person's entire being. The Greek infinitive translated "degrading" (atimazesthai) is present tense, suggesting the continuing practice of dishonoring the body.

In v. 23 pagans are said to have bartered away the glory of God. Now v. 25 says they have bartered away the truth of God. The truth Paul spoke of is God's self-revelation through creation. And what did the pagans get in exchange? Hardly a bargain! In exchange for the glory of God they acquired idols. They traded the truth of God for "a lie." Calling attention to the definite article, Morris writes that Paul was "not thinking of idolatry as no more than one falsehood among many. It is the lie." To turn from God is to head straight for theological and moral bankruptcy. The lie they bargained for led them to worship and serve²⁶ that which is made instead of the Maker.

God created humans for fellowship. To deny that intended purpose is to enter the darkness of paganism. Moral direction is lost. The rebel worships himself in the form of idolatrous images. Either the Lord is God or people assume that role. The first option brings spiritual wholeness; the latter, a hopeless and fraudulent self-deification. It is the Creator, not that which he creates, who is "forever praised." Both the RSV and the NEB see v. 25 as providing the reason for v. 24. God gave them over because they exchanged the truth for a lie. But the relative pronoun with which the sentence begins is qualitative. Verse 25 describes what people of that sort do.

1:26-27 Again it is stated that "God gave them over" (cf. v. 24). God's anger against sin leads him to withdraw from the sinner who willfully continues in wickedness. The penalty for sin is sin itself with all its inevitable consequences. Because people failed to glorify God and give him thanks, God gave them over "to sexual impurity" (v. 24). Because they exchanged the glory of God for a lie, he gave them over to the "passions that bring dishonor" (v. 26).

Romans 1:26-27 contains the clearest teaching in the New Testament on homosexuality. In this section Paul described the practice as "shameful," "unnatural," "indecent," and as a "perversion." By contrast, the Greco-Roman society of Paul's day tolerated homosexuality with considerable ease. Among some advocates it was viewed as superior to heterosexuality. Barclay notes that "fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors were homosexuals."³¹

In Jewish culture, however, it was regarded as an abomination. Barrett comments that “no feature of pagan society filled the Jew with greater loathing than the toleration, or rather admiration, of homosexual practices.” The Old Testament specifically prohibits homosexuality. Leviticus 18:22 says, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” The penalty for both participants was death (Lev 20:13). In 1 Cor 6:9–10 Paul specifically said that “homosexual offenders” will not “inherit the kingdom of God.” Against this background it is difficult to understand why some contemporary teachers—even some who claim to be biblical—make allowance for a practice clearly condemned in both the Old and the New Testaments.³⁵ Achtemeier writes that the kind of life Paul described in vv. 26–27 “cannot be understood as an alternative life-style, somehow acceptable to God” but rather as “a sign of one of the forms God’s wrath takes when he allows us free reign to continue in our abuse of creation and in our abuse of one another as creatures.”

Several specifics in this section call for attention. The NIV and several other translations say that “even their women” are caught up in the unnatural practice of lesbianism. Even they have turned from natural to unnatural sexual practices. God did not intend women to “have sex” with other women. It is the shameful result of willful moral disobedience. Stuhlmacher calls lesbian love “a sinful reversal of Gen. 1:27f.” Men, as well, have abandoned natural relations with women and are “inflamed with lust for one another.”³⁸ The sexual drive itself is wholesome and good. It is God’s way of providing both pleasure and progeny. When directed toward a person of the same sex, it abandons its God-given purpose and becomes a degrading passion.

When men commit “indecent acts with other men,” they receive back “the due penalty for their perversion” (Rom 1:27). Once again we see the necessary relationship between sin and its consequences. To put it in terms of Newton’s third law of motion, every sin calls for an “equal and opposite” response. The “inevitable recompense” for homosexuality is to receive back the regular consequence of that practice. Since we live in a moral universe, moral failure must of necessity carry a penalty. Homosexuality, as a perversion of God’s intended relationship between man and woman, carries its own destructive penalty.

1:28–32 For the third time in five verses Paul wrote that when people disregard God’s revelation in nature, he gives them over to the normal consequences that follow. Here in v. 28 he is said to give them over to “a depraved mind” (cf. vv. 24 and 26). Truth rejected leaves its mark. One’s ability to think clearly about moral issues is undermined. Turning from the light of revelation disqualifies a person to think correctly about the issues of life. God’s will and his ways with humans are crucial factors in understanding the moral world in which we live. Secular education, which rules out the hand of God in history, is seriously flawed because it attempts to understand the whole without acknowledging the most significant part.

God gave these people over to a reprobate mind, since they came to the conclusion that God was not necessary as one of life’s basic presuppositions. As a result they “do what ought not to be done.” This expression refers not only to the debased sexual activity outlined in vv. 24–28 but also to the twenty-one negative qualities (cf. vv. 29–32) of those abandoned to their own sinful natures. This list of sins was undoubtedly part of Paul’s rhetorical arsenal to be used in pressing home the need for righteousness on the part of the Gentile sinner. A common practice in antiquity was to assemble catalogs of vices.

Paul’s list seems to divide somewhat naturally into three parts. The first four vices are abstract nouns in the dative singular. They are all quite general. The next five are in the genitive singular and relate to envy and its consequences. The final twelve are in the accusative plural and include a variety of sins that pagan society would condemn as dangerous to the social fabric.

Each term is worthy of serious study, but for that the reader will want to consult Greek lexicons, New Testament word study books, and more technical commentaries. Here we will simply list the words and comment briefly on certain ones.

Paul first described the Gentile sinner as being “full” of a number of sinful characteristics. “Wickedness” is the lack of moral uprightness. “Greed” is the insatiable desire to have more,⁴⁴ normally to the disadvantage of others. Morris comments that “envy reminds us that evildoers are not just one happy band of brothers.” A number of commentators have taken “malice” in the rather specific sense used by Aristotle: “the tendency to put the worst construction upon everything.”⁴⁶ But Paul probably would have used it in the broader sense of malignity. Goodspeed calls it “ill-nature.” Grundmann says it is “conscious and intentional wickedness.”⁴⁷

Then Paul continued by listing twelve additional character flaws of the unregenerate person. Phillips translates “slanderers” as “stabbers-in-the-back.” “God-haters” may be either those who hate God or those who are “loathed by God” (Moffatt), although most scholars prefer the former. Rienecker notes that the Greek word translated “insolent” “contains a mixture of cruelty and pride.”⁴⁸ “Arrogant” people are those who in their self-sufficiency elevate themselves over all others. They are “boastful.” Natural humans are said to “invent ways of doing evil” (they are “ingenious in evil,” Goodspeed). To be “senseless” means to be “devoid of conscience” (Moffatt). The Greek term translated “faithless” designates those who are false to their word.⁵⁰ The “heartless” are those devoid of “natural affection” (AV).

A more depressing catalog of vices would be difficult to find. Yet who can deny that turning from God leads inexorably down the trail into moral darkness? Although people know well that those who do such things deserve the penalty of death, they not only continue to do them but also applaud others who follow the same course of action. Willful rejection of divine revelation hardens the heart to the point where the rebel takes delight in the sinfulness of others. At this point wickedness has sunk to its lowest level.⁵²

Was Paul a bit too severe in his opposition. Were all nonbelievers in his day that vile? What about contemporary America? Don't we all know people who although they are not believers are at the same time kind and thoughtful? The answer to the latter question is yes. Consider, however, that they are the benefactors of a civilization shaped to a great extent by its Judeo-Christian heritage. Remember also that Paul was establishing the important point that outside of Christ there is a critical need for righteousness. He would not say that everyone to whom he was writing was equally sinful or that everyone was guilty of every sin listed. Using a rhetorical method well known to ancient orators, he was pressing home the crucial point that all outside of Christ are in need of salvation.

Robert H. Mounce, Romans, vol. 27, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 76–86.

Parables and comparisons provided the central content of Jesus' teaching style. He tried to bring every teaching down to an everyday level that people could understand. He wanted to be sure the religious leaders did not miss his point. They were spoiled kids playing a game. One group of kids gave signals for another group to act out the appropriate response. They played the flute for the wedding dance, but the second group did not dance. They sang a funeral song, but the others refused to cry. No matter which way the game turned— celebration or mourning—the children sat idly by, refusing to participate.

The Pharisees saw the rigid Nazirite lifestyle of John and said it came from demons. Jesus came joining in all the celebrations, and they labeled him a glutton and a drunkard who ran with the wrong crowd. Tax collectors, of course, represented the Roman government in taking away the resources of the people of Israel. "Sinners" represented those Israelites who ignored the Pharisees and scribes and lived life apart from their rigid interpretation of the law. John prepared the way through repentance, so the people would be ready to stand in the presence of the holy Messiah. Jesus brought the kingdom of God, and this was reason for constant celebration. The Pharisees did not see God working in either case and so rejected both. They would not prepare for or participate in God's kingdom. They were too busy being religious.

1

<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/census-lgbt-demographics-studies/how-many-people-are-lesbian-gay-bisexual/>

2 <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-transgenderism>