

THE CORRUPTION OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

ROMANS 1:24–25

INTRODUCTION

As we have learnt over the last two Sundays, there are **two reasons for the wrath of God.**

God responds with **intense hatred for sin** to human rebellion because, **first, man rejects God.**

That is, man demonstrates his sinful rebellion by continually rejecting **God's message in creation.**

All people, at all times and all places, are aware of God through **human instinct, human conscience, and divine revelation** in creation.

However, man's knowledge of God has been **corrupted by sin** as he rebelliously suppresses the truth of God's eternal power and divine majesty.¹

The **second reason** for the wrath of God is that **man replaces God.**

¹ "Natural revelation exists, but its light is not fully appropriated because of human sin." S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "God Gave Them Up;" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (1972): 125, fn 4.
"People 'knew' God (i.e., they knew about him; cf. v. 20), but they refused to acknowledge him."
Douglas J. Moo, *Romans, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 61.

That is, man further demonstrates his sinful rebellion by **replacing his worship of the Creator God** with the **worship of creation in idolatry**.

Therefore, the **corruption of man's knowledge** of God leads invariably to the **corruption of man's worship** of God.

Because man both rejects the knowledge of God and replaces the worship of God with idolatry, **God responds with just punishment** in the form of **His righteous wrath**.

We also learnt last Sunday that the **corruption of the worship of God** follows those same steps of man's **rejection of God and replacement of God**.

However, the steps in the corruption worship also lead to the **devastating and inescapable consequence** of the **corruption of man himself**.

Because man rejects the truth and sound reasoning about God, he becomes **corrupted in his heart by sin** so that his **thoughts become futile**.

That is, **sin makes us stupid** so that we embrace the **insanity and irrationality of idolatry**.

When Paul wrote of the **corruption of man**, he described it as **the natural consequence** of the corruption of man's knowledge of God and worship of God.²

² "The passive voice-form indicates external causality, but the agent for this action is not identified." Stanley E. Porter and David I. Yoon, *Romans: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, ed. Lidija Novakovic, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023), 25.

However, as Paul transitions in his argument from dealing with **the 'WHY' of God's wrath to the 'HOW,'** we will learn that **God takes an active role** in giving man over to his sin which brings further corruption, especially the corruption of human sexuality.

As Paul explains, **God demonstrates His wrath** at this present time in the **active corruption of human sexuality.**

That is, **sin becomes its own punishment.**³

This is God's righteous response of wrath because of His intense hatred of sin.

Particularly, we understand from Paul's explanation that **God intensely hates the sin of idolatry.**

Based on what we learnt last week, **we can conclude** that God views idolatry as the **pinnacle of human rebellion.**

Therefore, **idolatry invites the wrath of God.**

That wrath is demonstrated, at least in part, in the **corruption of human sexuality.**

To say that differently, idolatry **invites the wrath of God** which, in turn, **brings the ruinous consequence of immorality.**

Thus, mankind is **plunged into all manner of sexual sin** and **its devastating consequences** because men and women **choose to worship creation** rather than the Creator.

³ "Sin is the punishment of sin." Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, New Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Louis Kregel, 1882), 61.

Now as we consider this, it is worth **contemplating the idolatry of creation** that is **evident in society and even in our own culture.**

Some may reject the idea that we worship creation because, particularly in Western society, **we have “advanced” beyond the primitive paganism** that we see in other cultures.

We might think ourselves superior because we don't worship cows like the Hindus, or nature like the Buddhists, but the reality is that **Western society practices the worship of creation** just as much today as it did when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans.

We find a clear example in the corrupted knowledge of God called **'naturalism,'** which in turn produces idolatry.

Naturalism is the **philosophical theory** that nature is all that exists.⁴

It goes hand-in-hand with Darwinian thought to produce the **corrupted worship of God** as man makes nature his idol.

As the **Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck** explains,

“If nature is viewed apart from God, then it becomes either nothing or a god.”⁵

⁴ C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 79.

⁵ Cited in Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker, *A Biblical Theology of Climate Change* (Cumming, GA: G3 Press, 2023), 35.

Cf. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation, vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

As **another author** argued, “*It is not merely that the world exists side by side with God: it has taken His place, and has itself become God.*”⁶

There are many examples of this **idolatry of creation or nature** in our culture, but as I mentioned last Sunday, it is strikingly evident in the **climate change cult**.

The climate change movement **based on pseudo-science** that is easily refuted by **rational thought and empirical evidence**.

For example, despite the alarm that CO₂ is destroying the ozone, it currently only **constitutes only 0.041%** of the atmosphere.

Additionally, the earth has **warmed by only about 0.8°C since 1880** and half of this warming occurred before there was any significant change in the CO₂.

Further, **CO₂ is ‘plant food’**, and planet Earth’s plants would benefit from more of it, not less.

Simply put, **there is no climate emergency**.

The climate change movement therefore **operates on the basis of pseudo-science**, but it also **operates as a pseudo-religion**.⁷

⁶ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, Sixth Edition (London; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 52.

⁷ For a scientific repudiation of the climate change ideology, see <https://creation.com/en-za/articles/climate-change>.

See also, Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker, *Just Thinking Podcast* (<https://creators.spotify.com/pod/show/podcast-just/episodes/EP--124--A-Biblical-Theology-of-Climate-Change-e26r2qt>), episode 124.

Therefore, the climate change movement is **rightly understood to be a modern day cult** with numerous and notable followers in our day.

A cult is primarily defined as a **system of religious worship, devotion, or belief**, often involving specific rituals and ceremonies.⁸

As authors **Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker** argue in their book, **A Biblical Theology of Climate Change**,

The climate change movement is, *“a pseudo-religion rooted in secularism, neo-paganism, and political manipulation. It masquerades as a scientific and moral cause, but its true goal is to overthrow biblical truth, distort the Christian's God-given role as steward of creation, and consolidate power in the hands of elites who thrive on fear and control.”*⁹

We can see **elements of pseudo-religion** in the **demands** that the climate change movement makes for **economic sacrifices** and **confession of sins** like carbon footprints.

It also offers an **idea of salvation** that is entirely dependent on the **naturalistic ideology** that denies God's sovereignty in sustaining the environment and instead elevates human intervention.

⁸ Douglas Mangum, *The Lexham Glossary of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), “Cult.”

“Inherent in cult worship is the elevation of some authority to or beyond an equality with the Biblical revelation.” Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 120–121.

⁹ Harrison and Walker, *Biblical Theology*, 35.

However, there are also **deeper elements of paganism** in casual references to **'Mother Nature'** and the underlying **worship of the Earth**, or **Gaia** as the ancient Greeks called it.

Gaianism is the clearest manifestation of neo-pagan ideology in the climate change cult.

As **Harrison and Walker** explain, "*At its core, Gaianism teaches that the earth is a living entity—often referred to as Gaia—and that humanity's primary moral obligation is to serve and protect this being.*"¹⁰

This is a clear example of man **replacing the worship of the Creator** with the worship of creation.

Furthermore, this idolatry **produces the immortality of anti-human policies** such as **population control, abortion, and euthanasia**—all promoted in the name of protecting the earth.

As we will see in our study today, though, Paul makes his argument about the wrath of God by **highlighting the particular immorality** of **sexual sin that follows man's idolatry**.

As **John Stott** very insightfully noted, "*A false image of God leads to a false understanding of sex.*"¹¹

This was true of the **ancient cults of Paul's day**.

¹⁰ Harrison and Walker, *Biblical Theology*, 74.

¹¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 76.

He wrote this letter of Romans **from the city of Corinth** where more than **a thousand cult prostitutes** served the pagan rituals of one large temple.

The nature cults of his day also linked their **sexual rituals with fertility** of people and the productivity of crops.

In their idolatry of creation, people **believed themselves to be masters of nature** who could use their rituals to control the environment and the fertility of people and their animals, along with the productivity of plants.¹²

However, even in our day we see the **undeniable link between** man's idolatry of creation and his corruption in sexual immorality.

Philosophical naturalism and Darwinian thought view man as nothing more than an animal, so people follow their lustful desires because their idolatry denies an **objective standard of morality or accountability to God**.

The neo-paganism of Earth worship, or Gaianism, **promotes birth-control and abortion** which have historically restrained the sexual passions of women who do not want to care for the children that their conduct produces.

Ultimately, as we learnt previously, **the heart of man's idolatry** is **the idolatry of self** as men and women worship the creature of self instead of God.

¹² Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 89.

When people worship self, they **throw of all restraint in order to indulge every desire** of their sinful hearts, including their sexual passions.

So idolatry produces sexual immorality and this **corruption of human sexuality** is what Paul focuses on as **the first demonstration** of the wrath of God.

The corruption of human sexuality is **HOW God demonstrates** His righteous wrath in the present.

PROPOSITION

With that introduction, let's set our attention to the details of the text as we study **Romans 1:24–25**.

Here, **Paul explains the corruption of human sexuality as the result of two actions**:

1. **God's wrathful response** [to idolatry] (24)
2. **Man's wretched rebellion** [in idolatry] (25)

1. GOD'S WRATHFUL RESPONSE (24)

The corruption human sexuality is the **result of God's wrathful response to man's idolatry**, as Paul explains in **verse 24**—

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonoured among them.

As you can see, the verse begins with “**therefore**,” linking back to Paul's previous statements in **verses 22–23** about **man replacing the worship of God** with the idolatrous worship of both man and animals.

Clearly then, Paul is now describing **God's wrathful response**.

His words, “**God gave them over**,” describe the **present demonstration** of God's wrath.

This phrase becomes **the theme of this final section** of the chapter, being **repeated three times** in **verses 24, 26, and 28**.

Paul's use of the phrase “**gave them over**” has **roots in the Old Testament** where similar language is used to describe God's wrath in “handing over” Israel's enemies so that they **may be defeated in battle**.

The word that Paul chose carries a range of meaning, from **handing over or giving over to delivering, entrusting, or even abandoning**.

As one lexicon suggests, God “*abandoned them to impurity.*”¹³

Understandably, there has been **much debate** over what exactly Paul is referring to.

We can simplify all that the theologians have wrestled through down to two options—**a passive or an active work of God.**

First, many theologians have suggested that God giving man over, or abandoning man, **is a passive work.**

In this interpretation of Paul's words, **God withdraws His hand that restrains man from evil.**¹⁴

It is the **removal of God's restraint** that allows sinners to **reap the just fruits** of their rebellion.¹⁵

As **S. Lewis Johnson** explains, “*According to this view God passively permitted people to fall into the retributive consequences of their infidelity and apostasy.*”¹⁶

Another author put forward the idea that God's wrath, “*operates not by God's intervention but precisely by His not intervening, by letting men and women go their own way.*”¹⁷

¹³ BDAG, παραδίδωμι.

¹⁴ Cf. S. Lewis Johnson Jr., “God Gave Them Up;,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (1972): 127.

¹⁵ Cf. Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 80.

¹⁶ S. Lewis Johnson Jr., *Discovering Romans: Spiritual Revival for the Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 35.

¹⁷ J. A. Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 75.

One of the most **frequently cited explanations** is that God “ceased to hold the boat as it was dragged by the current of the river.”¹⁸

In support of this idea, many commentators cite the **apocryphal book**, the **Wisdom of Solomon** which states—
¹⁵ *In return for their foolish and wicked thoughts, which led them astray to worship irrational serpents and worthless animals, you sent upon them a multitude of irrational creatures to punish them,*
¹⁶ *so that they might learn that one is punished by the very things by which one sins.*¹⁹

However, though we can certainly affirm the principle that sin becomes its own punishment, Paul’s threefold repetition of the phrase, “**God gave them over**” is so emphatic that he must certainly be referring to a **deliberate, positive act of God**.²⁰

And so, **second**, other theologians view God giving man over, or abandoning man, **as an active work**.

Though some may blush at this idea of God’s wrathful punishment of sin, Paul’s language is clear and emphatic—**God is active in handing over** mankind to the lusts of their hearts.²¹

¹⁸ Frédéric Louis Godet, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. A. Cusin, ed. Talbot W. Chambers (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1881), 1:177.

¹⁹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Wis 11:15–16.

²⁰ Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 120.

²¹ Cf. Porter and Yoon, *Romans*, Baylor Handbook, 28.

Therefore, this expression, “**God gave them over**” describes a **judicial act, a “judicial abandonment.”**²²

God actively carries out His judgement by **sovereignly arranging** that man’s **idolatry will invariably lead to his immorality**, so that his sin is punished by further sin.

God actively demonstrates His wrath in arranging the **corruption of human sexuality**.

As **Charles Hodge** writes, “*He withdraws from the wicked the restraints of His providence and grace, and gives them over to the dominion of sin.... What happens as consequences does not come by chance, but as designed; and the sequence is secured by His control.*”²³

This idea of **God’s judicial abandonment** is found in the Old Testament as we see in **Psalm 81:12**—

So I released them over to the stubbornness of their heart, that they would walk in their own devices.

The same doctrine is referred to by Stephen in his speech to the Jewish leaders in **Acts 7:42**—

But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven...

So God gives sinners over to the **terrible cycle of ever-increasing sin**.

²² Johnson, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129, 127–128.

²³ Hodge, *Romans*, 61.

Returning to the **analogy of a boat in a river**, **Doug Moo** comments, “[God] does not simply let go of the boat; rather, he confirms its disastrous course downstream.”²⁴

In other words, God responds to the human decision to turn from Him to idolatry by **actively ensuring** that people will experience the miserable consequences of their actions.

However, we should be careful that we do not **misunderstand Paul** to be saying that God is responsible for man’s sin.

As we read in **James 1:13**—

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

God does not entice anyone or compel anyone to sin.

People do just what they desire to do.²⁵

Rather, Paul clarifies in **Ephesians 4:19** that—

They, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

So it is **man who abandons himself** to the lusts of his heart, and God who ensures the just punishment of man by judicially **abandoning him to his own depravity.**

²⁴ Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 61.

²⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 102.

As **John Murray** wrote, “God’s displeasure is expressed in His abandonment of [people] to more intensified and aggravated cultivation of the lusts of their own hearts with the result that they reap for themselves a correspondingly greater toll of retributive vengeance.”²⁶

So then, **this is what Paul means** when he says, “**God gave them over...**”

Now, if you look at **verse 24** again you’ll see that he **elaborates with three details** of God’s wrathful response:

- a. Provocation of God’s wrath
- b. Purpose of God’s wrath
- c. Product of God’s wrath

a. Provocation of God’s wrath

Paul describes the **circumstances** by which **God is provoked** by man’s sinfulness to His wrathful response—

God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts...

Man’s lustful desires are the **moral condition** in which they were found when God gave them over in wrath.²⁷

The word translated as “**lusts**” can also be translated as **desires, longings, or cravings**.²⁸

²⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 44–45.

²⁷ Murray, *Romans*, 43.

²⁸ BDAG, ἐπιθυμία.

In this context it is clear that Paul is using the term **negatively to describe sinful passions**.

One author describes this lust of man as, “*The passionate desire for forbidden pleasure.*”²⁹

It describes the life of those who **acknowledge no higher authority** than their **own sinful desires**.³⁰

These are the desires of mankind that lead men and women to **indulge every kind of sexual sin**, as Paul stated in **Ephesians 4:19**, as we read earlier—

They, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

Later in that epistle, Paul refers to the **shameless sins of unbelievers**, as he writes in **Ephesians 5:12**—

It is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.

It is man's lustful desires, **his passions for sexual sin especially**, that Paul is focussing on in **Romans 1:24** as the **provocation of God's wrath**.

The location of these lusts, in the heart of man, is not Paul being **needlessly repetitive**, since that is where all of man's desires reside.

²⁹ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 34.

³⁰ Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, 122.

Rather, Paul is **linking this statement back** to what he said earlier in **verse 21**.

There, Paul describes **the corruption of man** as the darkening of his heart, and the **effects of sin on his ability to think reasonably or rationally**.

As man abandons the worship of God, **his thoughts and desires become corrupted** so that we long for those things that are **contrary to God's design** and, thereby, those things that **bring us harm** as we pursue the **“fleeting pleasures of sin,”** as **Hebrews 11:25** describes them.

In the words of **John Stott** that we quoted earlier, *“A false image of God leads to a false understanding of sex.”*

Therefore, **as we abandon God's design for sex** in marriage between a husband and wife, **we long (lust) for rebellious and self-destructive expressions** of our sexuality.

b. Purpose of God's wrath

The second detail that we find in **verse 24** is the purpose of God's wrath—

God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...

God abandons man **in order that he might be punished** for his sin by the **terrible cycle of ever-increasing sin**, and specifically, the impurity of sexual sin.

The Greek word for “**impurity**” refers to the **state of moral impurity**, especially in relationship to sexual sin and can be translated as, **‘impurity, immorality, filthiness.’**³¹

It can be used **literally** of something that is **filthy or dirty**, such as **refuse or decomposing bodies** in graves.³²

Figuratively, it refers to a **state of moral corruption or depravity**.³³

As Paul **emphasises with his grammar**, this is God’s intended purpose that His wrath would lead to man’s punishment by his own depravity, especially in the corruption of human sexuality.

As man abandons God, God abandons man.

As God abandons man, man abandons God’s plan for sex.

The link between the rejection of God for the worship of creation and man’s depraved indulgence of every sexual sin is **evident in society**.

The founder of a pornographic empire is reported to have said, “*Sex is a biological function like eating and drinking. So let’s forget all the prudery about it and do whatever we feel like doing.*”³⁴

³¹ Louw & Nida, ἀκαθαρσία.

³² BDAG, ἀκαθαρσία.

³³ Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), ἀκαθαρσία.

³⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Romans*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 103.

This echoes the saying that was common in the **perverse culture of Corinth**, as we read in **1 Corinthians 6:13**,
“**Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food...**”

The idolatry of naturalism produce lifestyles of sexual impurity, immorality, and filth, which is precisely **God's purpose in His wrath**.

The most profound example of this is seen in the so-called **'sexual revolution' of the 1960's**.

In 1960, the birth control pill was made commercially available, which **decoupled sex from pregnancy**, enabling more sexual freedom and shifting attitudes toward premarital sex.

This combined with the **'women's liberation' agenda of feminism**, which demanded sexual autonomy and equality for women, and the **'free love' ethos of the hippie movement** produced a **corruption of the culture's attitudes and values towards sex**.

As the culture rejected the knowledge and worship of the Creator for the worship of creation, **God's judgment become apparent** in the **quickly devolving levels of sexual immorality** that became culturally acceptable.

In our present day, this is further illustrated by the **pervasive use of pornography**.

Just one website alone reports the upload of **6 million** pornographic videos annually, and **42 billion** visits per year, which equates to **115 million** visits.

While people believe that their lustful desires will **bring them freedom** in the sexual immorality they indulge, it proves to be **a horrible freedom and the means of their own destruction** as God punishes their sin with sin.

c. Product of God's wrath

The third detail that Paul provides us with is the product of God's wrath—

God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, **so that their bodies would be dishonoured among them.**

In devastating irony, the consequence of man refusing to honour God in worship leads to **man himself being dishonoured.**

The miserable consequence of the corruption human sexuality is that men and women are **devalued as mere objects of another's sexual satisfaction.**

Instead of God's good design for sex in marriage wherein a husband and wife **love and honour each other** in their intimacy, the corruption of human sexuality results in **men and women dishonouring each other.**

The bodies of men and women are dishonoured and abused.

As we can now see clearly, the sin of idolatry leads to man's **deviation from God's good design** for sexual relationships, **with ruinous results.**

The more man honours himself, the more he becomes dishonoured.

As **John MacArthur** insightfully comments—

“Because humanism rejects God, it has no basis for man’s dignity. And therefore in the name of humanism, humanity is dehumanised. While lamenting man’s inhumanity to man, fallen men refuse to recognise that in rejecting God they reject the only source and measure of man’s dignity.”³⁵

As Solomon writes in **Ecclesiastes 9:3 (NASB95)**—

The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives.

Simply put, sexual sin **dishonours and degrades people’s humanity**, whereas sex in marriage, as God intended, **gives humanity honour and nobility**.

Tragically, when man rejects God, **God responds in righteous wrath** that **produces the degradation and misery** that follow the corruption of human sexuality.

Despite this, we must remember **the greater context** of Paul's letter.

God’s judicial abandonment of men and women to their sin is **not an eternal abandonment**.

The good news of the gospel is that God provides an opportunity for our salvation through justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

Even in wrath, though, **God’s purposes of mercy** shine through for those He has chosen to save.

³⁵ MacArthur, *Romans*, 102.

God abandoned them to their sins **in order that they would learn from their wretchedness and misery** to hate the futility of a life turned away from the truth of God.

God smites, or strikes, those He chooses to save with what **Isaiah 19:22** calls “**smiting but healing; so they will return to Yahweh, and He will be moved by their entreaty and will heal them.**”

And so, as **one commentator** put it, “*throughout the time of their God-forsakenness God is still concerned with them and dealing with them.*”³⁶

So then, in **verse 24** Paul explains **the corruption of human sexuality** in terms of **the action of God's wrathful response.**

The three additional details elaborated on this point, and prepare us now to consider the **second action** that explains the corruption of human sexuality.

³⁶ Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, 121.

2. MAN'S WRETCHED REBELLION (25)

The corruption human sexuality is the result of man's wretched rebellion in man's idolatry, as Paul explains in **verse 25**—

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.

Here again Paul refers to the “**exchange**” of man's worship of God for his corrupted worship of idols.

Paul is, therefore, **referring back again** to **verses 22–23**.

What is important to note, then, is **the sequence of events** as Paul describes them.

Chronologically, man's wretched rebellion in idolatry **comes first and is then followed by** God's wrathful response which produces the corruption of human sexuality.

So Paul has been **consistent and clear**—the corruption of man's worship invites the response of God's wrath.

God's wrath is a response to human corruption, not the other way around.

However, as we have established, God's wrath is demonstrated by judicially abandoning man to his own sin.

Therefore, **the corruption of human sexuality** is **caused by both God's wrathful response and man's wretched rebellion.**

But Paul is consistent and clear that **the first cause lies in men's rebellion** in idolatry which then invites God's wrath.

Now, as you look at **verse 25**, you see that Paul **restates his assertion of man's idolatry** in **verse 23** with different terms
They exchanged the truth of God for a lie...

Here, the “**truth of God**” can be **understood in various ways**, but it seems best to understand it as a **shorthand summary of all that Paul has referred to** previously about the knowledge of God.

In that sense, Paul intends to remind us of **both God's existence and His revelation in nature.**³⁷

“**The truth of God**” must refer to His existence because that is **fundamental reality.**

It also refers to **God's message in creation** by which man **'knew' God, or knew about Him,** yet refused to acknowledge Him by responding to His revelation with worship.³⁸

Man rejects the knowledge and worship of God and replaces it with the idolatry of false 'gods.'

³⁷ Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, 123.

³⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 61.

The corruption of man's mind, his continuous denial of the truth of God which damages his ability to think rationally and reasonably about God, is emphasised again as Paul refers to **the futility of idolatry** as “**a lie.**”

Most English translations do not bring out the fact that Paul **used a definite article** here so that it is more literally, “**THE lie.**”

That is, Paul is not thinking of idolatry as **no more than one false idea among many**—**it is THE lie**, THE great falsehood that man embraces in his wretched rebellion against God.

The stupidity of sin is **epitomised** in man's worship of creation instead of the Creator.

It is the perfect example of the corruption of man's thoughts about God, and it brings with it **devastating consequences** by inviting the wrath of God that abandons man to his depravity.

As **one author** wrote, “*To exchange the worship of God for the lie is the final disaster.*”³⁹

Paul further explains this wretched rebellion of man with a parallel phrase—

they... worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator....

By combining “**worshipped and served,**” Paul Paul is emphasising that mankind **worships idols in the fullest sense.**

³⁹ Morris, *Romans*, 90.

We see a similar idea in **Deuteronomy 4:19** where Moses warns against making a graven image, or idol,—

lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them....

As we consider the details, the **first term**, “**worship**,” is more **general and refers to showing reverential awe**.

The **second term**, “**service**,” is more **specific and refers to offering religious service** as an act of worship.⁴⁰

To put that simply, “**worship**” can be used to express the feeling, and “**service**” the outward service.⁴¹

So then, as we said, Paul is describing mankind’s **wholehearted and enthusiastic worship of idols**.

However, there is an **additional emphasis** the Paul adds in the **grammar** with which he writes that is not apparent in our English translations.

Paul uses the **passive voice of the verb** “**worshipped**” which **indicates an indirect causality**.⁴²

What that means, then, **is not only** that man worshipped idols, but that **“they worshipped” or “they accepted worship.”**

⁴⁰ John D Harvey, *Romans*, ed. Andreas J Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (B&H, 2017), 44.
See also, Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, 124.

⁴¹ Cf. Hodge, *Romans*, 62.

⁴² Porter and Yoon, *Romans*, Baylor Handbook, 29.

In other words, men and women become the **object of their own idolatrous worship**.

As we noted in our study of **verse 23**, the corruption of man's worship is **ultimately motivated by man's worship of self**.

Here we see that idea again as Paul says that we exchange the truth of God and **instead received worship**.

That is, we do not properly give worship to God but idolatrously receive it among ourselves and in our own hearts.

Therefore, we can conclude that **of all the creation that man worships, the chief of his idols is himself** as man exchanges the worship of God for the worship of man.

The link between this idolatry and the **consequence of our corrupted sexuality** is **clear in two ways**:

First, as men and woman idolise each other, **their sexual sin is an expression of their corrupted worship**.

For example, men do not merely lust after women in sexual passion, **but idolise the female body**.

Women do not merely long for the attention and affection that sex offers them, **but idolise intimacy from men**.

That is why **pornography**, for example, is such a pervasive problem our culture—**it is not merely a lust problem, it is worship problem**.

Men and women **worship each other** as idols in their sexual immorality.

Second, the idolisation of man is **ultimately an idolisation of self**.

As Paul states it, people don't only offer worship to people, but men and women receive worship—**we become the objects of our own idolatry**.

The culture's obsession with **self-esteem, self-worth, self-love** perfectly illustrates this **corruption of worship**.

Whatever the object is, man rejects the worship of the true God for a lie, and in **wretched rebellion** makes an idol of creation.

At this point, we must remember the same point that we did earlier.

Though Paul has described man as **totally corrupted because of sin**, he is nevertheless **not hopelessly corrupted**.

God is able to save men and woman from their wretched rebellion through **the power of the gospel**.

In **1 Thessalonians 1:9**, Paul describe God's power to save as the report spread of the Thessalonians' conversion.

As he writes, they “**turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God...**”

Turn to **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** for another illustration of God's power to save His chosen people from **sin and the corruption it brings**—

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,

10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Turning back to **Romans 1:25**, we see that Paul ends the verse with **a word of praise**—

... the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

As **one author** said, "*Paul could not resist adding that refreshing thought in the sea of filth he was describing.*"⁴³

As Paul thinks of God, he expresses his own **redeemed worship for the Creator** which serves as a **profound contrast to the wickedness of idolatry**.

So then, in **verse 25** Paul explains the **corruption of human sexuality** as a **result of man's wretched rebellion** in idolatry.

⁴³ MacArthur, *Romans*, 104.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, the corruption of human sexuality is **evident in society** and the culture that we live in.

From what we've learnt today, **we can explain that corruption** as the **result of man's wretched rebellion** against God in the idolatry of creation.

The corruption man's worship **then invites the wrath of God** by which He **judicially abandons man to his sin**, especially to his corruption in sexual sin.

Therefore, we can **also explain the corruption of human sexuality** as a **result of God's wrathful response** to man's idolatry.

In the midst of such a culture, we should be like Paul when he declared in **Romans 1:16** that he was **not ashamed of the gospel**.

The good news of God's salvation in Christ is the **only reason** that men and women are not hopelessly lost in their corruption.

The solution to the wrath of God, then, is **the righteousness that God offers** through faith in Christ.

Furthermore, men and women **cannot escape their corruption in sexual sin** without turning from their idols to worship and serve the living God through the good news of the gospel.

BENEDICTION

*Now the Savior, who died and rose and who reigns,
grant you joy in the midst of labour,
peace in the midst of troubles,
hope in the midst of despair,
and faithfulness in the midst of temptation.
Amen.⁴⁴*

⁴⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 23.

1:24

Therefore **God gave them over**

↑ in the lusts of their hearts
↓ to impurity,

so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

1:25

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 .

Possibilities:

- a. Purpose
- b. Result
- c. Epexegetical

Grk. omits "for" and has relative pronoun "who" describing humanity under wrath.

Inference of 18–23

Location/ sphere of 24a

Result of 24a

Restates 24c

Reason for 24

Restatement of 25a (parataxis)

Describes 25c

Sermon Notes

Introduction

Paul explains the corruption of human sexuality as the result of two actions:

1. God's wrathful response [to idolatry] (24)
2. Man's wretched rebellion [in idolatry] (25)

1. God's wrathful response (24)

Three details of God's wrathful response:

- a. Provocation of God's wrath
- b. Purpose of God's wrath
- c. Product of God's wrath

2. Man's wretched rebellion (25)

Conclusion