

THE FINAL CORRUPTION OF MAN

ROMANS 1:28–32

INTRODUCTION

For a number of weeks now, we have **been studying the topic** of **the wrath of God**.

Paul focuses his attention on this as **the explanation for why** we need the **righteousness that God gives** through faith alone.

God's righteous **response of punishing sin** is **the bad news that explains the necessity** of the good news of the gospel.

So Paul's purpose is **not to paint a hopeless picture** as he describes **God's judicial abandonment** of man to his sin.

This detailed but devastating description of man's condition without Christ should make us as Christians all the more **enthusiastic for the gospel** as we respond to God's saving work by glorifying Him and giving Him thanks.

Nevertheless, Paul's teaching on the wrath of God does offer us **great insight** into **the perversity of the culture** that we live in.

As a consequence of man's wretched rebellion against God **and** God's wrathful response to man, humanity is **abandoned to a state of complete corruption**.

As we have learnt in our study of **the larger section**, man is corrupted in his **knowledge of God** and his **worship of God** as he **rejects God's message in creation** and **exchanges the worship** of the Creator for His creation.

As a result, God abandons man to the **corruption of human sexuality**, moving from **heterosexual immorality** to the greater depravity of **homosexual sin**.

Paul paints of picture of man caught in a **death spiral of sin** leading to judgement **which results in** further sin and consequent judgement.

Sin becomes the punishment of sin, resulting in the **complete corruption of man**.

This brings us to the **third demonstration** of the wrath of God which **results in the final corruption of man**.

As men and woman **give themselves over to idolatry**, God responds by giving them over to the **final corruption of their minds** so that they find themselves abandoned to **moral insanity**.

What began with man losing the ability to **think rightly about God**, according to **verse 21**, has come to a devastating finality as man loses the ability to **think rightly about good and evil**, according to **verse 28**.

The terrifying result is **the ruin of humanity** as man's sin escalates from **destroying the individual** to **destroying society**.

In other words, **man's hatred for God** spills over to become **hatred for one another** as a consequence of the **increasing depravity** that comes from being abandoned to sin.

As we will see through our study of Paul's **final comments** on the wrath of God, **the corruption of ideas** necessarily produce **the corruption of behaviours**.

The corruption of our **ideas about God** produce our **corrupted worship in idolatry**.

The corruption of our **ideas about morality** produce our **corrupted relationships with one another** which leaves us in the **chaos of sin** as we destroy ourselves and one another.

As **Francis Schaeffer** noted, "*Ideas have consequences in the way we live and act, both in our personal lives and in the culture as a whole.*"¹

That is precisely Paul's point as he elaborates on God giving mankind over to the **corruption of the mind and the conscience**.

The most devastating demonstration of God's wrath, then, is His judicial abandonment of man to the **moral insanity** of what Paul calls the "**unfit mind**."

¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1984), 30.

As we **look at the culture** in which we live, we can clearly see the **evidence of this moral insanity**, especially as it produces behaviours that are destructive to others.

Human society is destroyed through **corrupted ideas of right and wrong** that lead to people devouring one another like animals.

By way of introduction, then, what's consider **two examples of corrupted ideas** that **produce corrupted behaviours**.

That is, **two examples** of the **moral insanity of man** that is destroying human society.

The first example of moral insanity is **Marxism**.

While most people associate Marxism with the **political and economic theories** of Karl Marx that are foundational to both **socialism and communism**, it has become a far-reaching ideology **rooted in secular humanism**.²

In simpler terms, Marxism is both **anti-God and anti-human**.

Considering first the deaths caused by Marxist governments such as **Stalin's Russia** and **Mao's China**, some estimate that as many as **100 million people have died** in the 20th century as a result of either executions or starvation.³

² "Marxism represents the most consistent humanism developed this side of the Enlightenment and the French revolution." Andrew Kirk, "The Meaning of Man in the Debate between Christianity and Marxism," *Themelios* 1, no. 2 (1976): 43.

³ Cf. Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

However, many people overlook the **hateful, divisive, and ultimately destructive ideas directly linked** to Marxism.

Marxism is inextricably linked to popular ideas such as **Critical Theory, Intersectionality, and Critical Race Theory.**⁴

In fact, Karl Marx is generally acknowledged as the **fountainhead of critical social theory.**⁵

In other words, Marxism is the **ideology behind “wokeness.”**⁶

As theologian **Voddie Baucham** explains, Cultural Marxism replaces individual accountability with collective guilt, framing society as groups of oppressors versus oppressed, and promoting an anti-biblical worldview that undermines Christian notions of sin, justice, and redemption.⁷

In other words, **the ideas of Marxism** are behind the destruction of society through its promotion of sins such as **racism, envy, strife, feminism, and homosexuality.**

⁴ “Marxism includes several systems of thought or approaches to social criticism derived from their works.” P. R. Parushev, “Marxism and Christianity,” in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie et al. (London; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press; InterVarsity Press, 2016), 552.

⁵ Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, *Critical Dilemma: The Rise of Critical Theories and Social Justice Ideology—Implications for the Church and Society* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2023), 69.

⁶ Some academics and activists have used “woke” to describe a “critical consciousness to intersecting systems of oppression.” *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷ Cf. Voddie Baucham, “Cultural Marxism,” in *By What Standard? God’s World... God’s Rules*, ed. Jared Longshore (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2020), 17–29.

The ideas go further in the **anti-God and anti-human agenda** of Marxism as it **attacks the family** by severing parental authority with the **evil idea** that raising and educating of children is the responsibility of the state.⁸

This is **particularly disturbing** when we consider the ideas that a Marxist government wants to **indoctrinate children** with.⁹

The second example of moral insanity is **transgenderism**.

Transgenderism is the corrupted thinking that the **essence of maleness and femaleness** is not found in **one's sex**, but one's **gender identity**, which can be subjectively decided by the individual.¹⁰

Transgenderism rebels against the very **concept of divine design** in terms of **identity and appearance**—the very distinctions that God created.¹¹

⁸ David Q. Santos, "Postmillennial Thought and Marxism: Theology of False Optimism," ed. Christopher B. Cone, *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 15, no. 46 (2011): 24.

⁹ "One expression of Marxism today is the hateful indoctrination occurring in public education, which is primarily focused upon sins of the past, such as capitalist greed and what is called "systemic racism," and even to include gender roles and sexual oppression." Ron J. Bigalke, "What To Think Of Marxism," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 26, no. 73 (2022): 193.

¹⁰ "Chromosomes don't matter in determining what is truly male and female. DNA doesn't define us as either man or woman. Rather, being male, female, or any other gender expression is determined by looking within and accessing a kind of inner knowledge, a *gnosis*, that informs us of our gender identity." Hans Fiene, "A Lutheran View of Transgenderism," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 3, no. 2 (2021): 18–19.

¹¹ Cf. Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2019), 202.

In many ways, our culture's **acceptance of transgenderism** is the **latest stage in the sexual revolution** of the 1960s.¹²

The sinful practice of men and women **dressing, acting, and even mutilating their bodies** to **pretend to be** the opposite sex is based on **corrupted ideas**.

As **one author** explains, “*While sexual promiscuity reigned in the sexual revolution, academia initiated the foundational idea of modern transgenderism: that sex and gender are two different entities.*”¹³

The transgender movement is fuelled by **moral insanity** that, as **one book** put it, “*emphasised the instability of gender boundaries, rejected the ‘binary’ of male and female, and tried in various ways to live outside, or beyond, or across, gender categories.*”¹⁴

As a result, **society is destroying itself** as men and women no longer want to use the **appropriate bathrooms** and, worst of all, it **makes war against children** by mutilating their bodies with irreversible hormone treatments and surgeries.¹⁵

¹² J. Alan Branch, *Affirming God's Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴ Robert S. Smith, *The Body God Gives: A Biblical Response to Transgender Theory* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2025), 6–7.

¹⁵ Cf. Rosaria Butterfield, *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 218f.

In fact, **the death spiral of this insanity** continues as some now promote the **depraved ideas** of people who **no longer identify as human** but as various animals, with some even undergoing surgeries to resemble the same.¹⁶

These **two examples of moral insanity** clearly demonstrate **the final corruption of man** which results in the destruction not only of the individual, but of **society as a whole**.¹⁷

As **S. Lewis Johnson** insightfully commented—

*“Civilisation has... contracted a malignant and fatal cancer through its unbelief of the message of God in Christ. It is now hurrying on with increasing speed to final climactic destruction. Civilisations do not die because of violence, crime, immorality, and anarchy. These things are the evidences that death already is at work, a death brought on by disobedience to the revelation of God.”*¹⁸

So we see that **ideas have consequences** in the way we live and act, both in our personal lives and in the culture as a whole.

That is why God's judicial abandonment of man to a **corrupted mind and corrupted conscience** results in the **final corruption of man**.

¹⁶ Cf. George C. Scipione, “Gender Blending and Confusion,” *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* 5, no. 2 (2018): 33.

¹⁷ “From God's perspective, the fact of maleness and femaleness bears implications beyond the home or gathered worshipping community. It also impacts daily life in society... This raises the likelihood that what makes transgenderism abominable is that it maligns humanity's ability to reflect, resemble, and represent God rightly in this world.” Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 445–446.

¹⁸ S. Lewis Johnson Jr., “God Gave Them Up;,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (1972): 130.

Sin is once again the punishment of sin as men and women destroy not only themselves, but one another through their **depraved ideas that produces depraved behaviours.**

The prophet Isaiah warned in **Isaiah 5:20–21**—

20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and understanding in their own sight!

This is exactly what we **see in our culture** as God abandons mankind to **self-destruction** through depraved ideas and depraved behaviours.

In the words of **one commentator**, “*Sin tumbles over sin with dizzying speed, and the human desire to rebel against God seems to be the only unifying principle of this otherwise chaotic activity.*”¹⁹

PROPOSITION

With that introduction, let's focus now on the details of **Romans 1:28–32**.

Here, as Paul **concludes his discussion** of the wrath of God, he describes the **final corruption of man** in **two features**:

1. The corruption of the mind (**28–31**)
2. The corruption of the conscience (**32**)

¹⁹ Frank Thielman, Romans, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 101.

1. THE CORRUPTION OF THE MIND (28–31)

The recurring theme of this section is found in the repeated phrase, “**God gave them over.**”

As we've established, Paul uses this phrase to refer to God's **judicial abandonment** of man to sin.

In the **first demonstration** of God's wrath, He abandons man to the **corruption of human sexuality.**

In the **second demonstration**, God abandons man to **further corruption in homosexuality.**

Finally now, in the **third demonstration** of the wrath of God, He abandons man to the **corruption of the mind**, which **results in the final corruption of man.**

The corruption of the mind is, then, **the first feature** of the final corruption of man, as we see in Paul's words of **verse 28**—

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind, to do those things which are not proper

The reason for God's wrathful response of abandoning man to a corrupted mind is **found in the clause**, “**And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God...**”

Paul has repeatedly emphasised that the reasons for men's **degenerating corruption in sin** are his **wretched rebellion in idolatry** and God's **wrathful response to idolatry.**

Here, however, Paul is doing **more than simply reminding** us of these two reasons again.

He gives what may be the **most shocking assessment** of human rebellion yet as he argues that **man considers God to be insignificant** to the point of **being irrelevant**.

This becomes clearer when we consider a **more literal translation** of Paul's words.

He wrote that men and women “did not see fit to have God **in knowledge/ recognition**.”²⁰

In other words, man did **not think it worthwhile** to **retain and respond** to the knowledge of God.

This takes us back to what Paul's earlier charge against mankind in **verses 19–20**.

All people are aware of God because of the **innate, or inherent, idea of God** that men and woman possess as those created in the image of God.

Furthermore, **all people are aware** of God because of God's **message in creation** whereby He reveals Himself to all people, at all times, and all places.²¹

²⁰ 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), 33.

²¹ “First, God made it crystal clear in (en) them before He visibly showed it to them. While the phrase to them captures the external evidence explained (with “For,” gar) in v 20 that God makes plain of Himself through natural revelation (i.e., creation), the phrase in them refers to the knowledge about God that all humans possess inherently.” René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked Power to Deliver* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century, 2005), 44.

Therefore, as Paul argued, **all are without excuse** for rejecting the knowledge of God.

Moreover, as he explained in **verse 21**, **man should respond** to the fundamental knowledge of God with the worship of God, **by glorifying and thanking Him**.

That **informs what we understand** Paul to be charging in **verse 28**.

Simply put, man refuses the **practical, experiential knowledge** of God that would have been involved in **glorifying and thanking God**.²²

This indictment of the rebellion of man is **made worse** when we consider that man did not “**see fit**” to possess this knowledge of God.

The Greek term for “**see fit**” means to **put to the test, or examine**.²³

In other words, man put the knowledge of God to the test and decided that, **after experiencing it**, it was **not worthy or acceptable**.

Man does not reject **merely the theoretical idea of God**, but rejects the **experiential knowledge of Him**.

²² 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), 128.

²³ BDAG, δοκιμάζω.

It is as if they tried it and then rejected it as unsuitable or unsatisfactory—what a blasphemous assessment of God!

The further implication is that man's ignorance of God is **not due to a lack of opportunity** to know Him, but to his deliberate refusal.²⁴

So then, this is certainly **the most serious charge** that Paul has made against mankind—it demonstrates the **depths of sinful rebellion** to which men and women will go in their rejection of God.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that **God responds** with the **most serious demonstration of His wrath** to the most serious demonstration of man's rebellion.

As Paul says in **verse 28**, **“God gave them over to an unfit mind...”**

That is, God justly handed people over to a worthless way of thinking because of their decision to consider God worthless.

The Greek word for **“unfit”** refers to something that **does not stand the test** and so is **useless, disqualified, worthless, corrupted**.²⁵

²⁴ Cf. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 93–94.

²⁵ BDAG, ἀδόκιμος. See also, Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), and Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies, 2010).

Therefore, Paul is teaching that God abandons man to **a mind which is reprobate** and **unable to fulfil its natural functions** as designed by God.

It **confuses right and wrong** and **fails to distinguish** what is pleasing to God from what is displeasing to Him.²⁶

We should understand this to be an **escalation from the previous consequence** described in **verse 21** that man became **futile in his thinking about God**.

As **James Montgomery Boice** notes, this is “*a mind not merely foolish or in error, but totally depraved. It is a mind so depraved that it begins to think that what is bad is actually good and that what is good is actually bad.*”²⁷

Therefore, man is given over in the just punishment of God’s wrath to a **disposition, or inclination**, that is **vile and detestable**.²⁸

While men and women **may still have an intellect** that can function, **the moral capacity of their minds** is **completely corrupted** so that they are fundamentally unable to think and decide correctly about God and His will.²⁹

²⁶ W. E. Vine, *Romans & 1 Corinthians: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary* (Nashville, TN; Bath, England: Kingsley Books, 2022), 35.

²⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: Justification by Faith*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 182.

²⁸ William G. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary upon the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879), 30.

²⁹ Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 128.

The Legacy Standard Bible does a good job of representing the **wordplay** that Paul uses to underscore this terrible reality:

Just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind...

To say that another way, just as they did not “**approve**” of the knowledge of God, **God in turn gave them** over to an “**unapproved**” mind.³⁰

Since man considered God as worthy of rejection, or reprobate, **God judged man in response** with a mind that is **worthy of rejection, or reprobate.**³¹

From Paul’s explanation, we see that there are **two results** of this judicial abandonment to a corrupted mind.

Man is abandoned to **depraved ideas and depraved behaviours.**

a. Depraved ideas

Though Paul does not state this first result explicitly, it is a **logical implication** of having an unfit mind.

The reprobate mind **will produce** reprobate ideas.

The depraved mind **will produce** depraved ideas.

³⁰ Porter and Yoon, *Romans*, 33.

³¹ Cf. Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, New Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Louis Kregel, 1882), 64.

As **Doug Moo** explains, “Turning away from true knowledge of God means cutting ourselves off from any ultimately accurate understanding of this world and our place within it.”³²

That is why **our culture embraces** the **moral insanity** of corrupted ideas like **Marxism** and **transgenderism**.

God punishes man for sin by handing him over to his sin, and as a result **the mind of man is so debilitated and corrupted** that it becomes completely useless in moral decisions.

But as we have established, **ideas have consequences** in the way we live and act.

Therefore, the depraved ideas **produce depraved behaviours**.

b. Depraved behaviours

Paul explicitly refers to **this result** at the end of **verse 28** when he says,

God gave them over to an unfit mind, to do those things which are not proper

That is, refusing to acknowledge God **leads to pursuing and practising sin**.

The phrase, “**things which are not proper**” was an expression that **emphasised failure to fulfil one’s obligations**.³³

³² Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 62.

³³ Thielman, *Romans*, 111.

“**Things which ARE proper**” refers to behaviour that is appropriate given **the nature of man** as God’s creature and **his responsibility** toward his Creator.³⁴

As we can see clearly from **the list of sins** that follow in **verses 29–31**, the depraved behaviour that flows from depraved ideas of right and wrong is **destructive to society and not just the individual**.

Men and women **tear each other apart** as their corrupted minds **corrupt their relationships** with one another.

As **one author** put it, “*The wrath of God is revealed as God hands people over to the social chaos of a world populated with people like themselves.*”³⁵

That is, those who refuse to acknowledge God **lose not only their godliness**, but their **essential humanity** too.³⁶

In other words, the depraved mind leads not just to the sexual immorality described in **verses 24–27**, but to a **whole variety of antisocial practices**, which ought not to be done.

³⁴ Cf. Vine, *Romans & 1 Corinthians*, 35–36.

³⁵ Thielman, *Romans*, 112.

³⁶ Cf. 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), 39.

Therefore, the depraved behaviour to which God hands men and women over **leads to the breakdown of human community**, as **moral standards disappear and society disintegrates**.³⁷

Paul **pictures this vividly** in the so-called '**vice list**' of **verses 29–31**—

²⁹ **having been filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,**

³⁰ **slanderers, haters of God, violent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,**

³¹ **without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful**

Here Paul gives us a **catalogue of 21 sins** which are not meant to be exhaustive, but represent the **virtually endless number of depraved behaviours** of the natural man.

Paul was more concerned about communicating the truth that those who reject God give themselves over to **all manner of depraved behaviours**, rather than detailing precisely what those behaviours are.

We see that as Paul **modifies the first four terms** with the word “**all**,” as in “**all manner of**” or “**every kind of**.”³⁸

These are **broad, all-encompassing categories** of sin.

³⁷ Cf. 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), 78.

³⁸ Louw & Nida, 58.28, πᾶς.

We should take note that Paul **does not think** of people as being **half-hearted about their sin**—they are were completely given over to it and **embrace it wholeheartedly**.

Though many of the terms are **self-explanatory**, it's worth briefly considering them **one by one**.³⁹

1. Unrighteousness—Paul used this same term earlier in **verse 18**, first in combination with the term “**ungodliness**,” and then as a **shorthand summary** to refer to both.

It refers to behaviour that that **violates standards of right conduct**, or to an activity which is unjust.

Unrighteousness is a **violation of God's law** and His created order.⁴⁰

As **one scholar** defines it, unrighteousness “*is a condition of not being right with God, judged by the standard of His holiness, or with man, judged by the standard of what man knows to be right, through his conscience.*”⁴¹

In simpler terms, unrighteousness is **selfishness, enthroned against all rights of others**.⁴²

³⁹ “As is typical of such lists, this one exhibits no rigid logical arrangement, since rhetorical concerns play a role in the ordering of the list. Nor is it possible to give each term in the list a meaning distinct from every other term—some are virtually synonymous, and a considerable degree of overlap in meaning occurs.” Moo, *Romans*, 128–129.

The majority of references in the following list are taken from Barclay, *Romans*, 39–47.

⁴⁰ TDNT, ἀδικία.

⁴¹ Vine, *Romans & 1 Corinthians*, 27.

⁴² William R. Newell, *Romans Verse-by-Verse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), 25.

As **one commentator** put it, “People like that have erected an altar to self in the centre of things so that they worship themselves to the exclusion of God and of everyone else.”

In many ways, this term “**unrighteousness**” is the **general heading** under which the **other 20 sins fall**.

It is the **comprehensive term** that summarises all the depraved behaviours to which man is abandoned.

2. Wickedness—This term refers to moral depravity in general, and the sinfulness by which people deliberately do evil.

It refers to man’s **desire to do harm**.

It is the **active, deliberate decision** to inflict injury.

3. Greed—This refers to the **excessive desire** to get more and more.

“It is **selfishness unlimited**.”⁴³

As God abandons the human race to final corruption, “**greed**” **reflects the power of sin** in the ravaging of human relationships.⁴⁴

4. Evil—This is the most general word for badness.

⁴³ Morris, *Romans*, 96.

⁴⁴ Cf. TDNT, πλεονεξία.

“It describes someone who is lacking in any of the qualities that make people good.”

“**Evil**” describes a person whose life is **always inclined towards the worst things**.

“It is the degeneracy out of which all sins grow and in which all sins flourish.”

5. Envy—This is human **resentment** towards the success or possessions of another.

“It is the most warped and twisted of human emotions.”

6. Murder—the term refers specifically to the **unlawful killing** of a human being by another.

As Jesus teaches in **Matthew 5:21–22**, though, God considers the **anger and hatred of man's heart** to be similar to murder.

7. Strife—Strife describes **bitter conflict** between people.

It comes from a heart of jealousy and is demonstrated in **conflict that ultimately destroys** relationships.

8. Deceit—The practice of those who **lie, manipulate, and deceive**.

It describes people who stoop to **devious and underhanded methods** to get their own way.

9. Malice—This is a character trait of those who feel the **need to see others suffer**.

It refers to an evil disposition and being **mean-spirited**.

It is “*conscious and intentional wickedness.*”⁴⁵

10. They are gossips—“**Gossips**” and “**slanderers**” both referred to people who **attack others with their words**.

This first term refers to the person who **whispers malicious stories** in the listener’s ear.

Quietly the gossip takes another to one side and whispers a **character-destroying story**.

11. Slanderers—The slanderer, by contrast, is willing to make his accusations and tell his tales openly.

While the gossip whispers, the **slanderer shouts** his attack on another’s character.

In the end though, the result is the same.

12. Haters of God—This describes people who hate God because they **know that they are defying Him**.

As **one commentator** stated, “*God is the barrier between them and their pleasures; He is the chain which keeps them from doing exactly as they like.*”

If they could, these people would **gladly eliminate God** in order to live their lives as they please.

⁴⁵ Morris, *Romans*, 97.

They long for the **freedom to indulge** every sinful desire.

13. Violent—This is the sinful delight in **inflicting mental and physical pain** on others.

14. Arrogant—The term refers to the person who is prideful and filled with a **sense of their own importance**.

It refers to “*a certain contempt for everyone except oneself.*”

15. Boastful—This person is **self-exulting and self-absorbed**.

In their **conceit**, they believe all their achievements are their own doing so that they are worthy of being praised.

16. Inventors of evil—With this phrase, Paul describes the people who are not content with the **usual, ordinary ways** of sinning.

As **one author** puts it, “*They seek out new, obscure and subtle vices because they have grown bored and seek a new thrill in some new sin.*”

17. Disobedient to parents—This refers to people who **reject the authority** of their parents and **fail to honour** their father and mother.

It represents a particularly depraved behaviour because once the bonds of the family are loosened, full-scale degeneracy is certain to follow.

18. Without understanding—The term refers to one who is **senseless and foolish**.

Such people are the ones who **cannot learn the lesson of experience**, who do not use the intellect God has given them to gain understanding.

19. Untrustworthy—This describes someone who **breaks a covenant or commitment**.

They do not keep their promises or agreements and so lose the trust of those they deal with.

20. Unloving—This word referred to the one **lacking an affection for others**, especially the **natural affection** between family members.

It describes those who consider children to be a **misfortune or a burden**.

The term also referred to the common practice in the Graeco-Roman world of Paul's day of **abandoning unwanted babies to die**, and even to the act of **infant murder**.

There was never a night when there were not thirty or forty abandoned children left to die in the Roman forum.

It is impossible not to **draw the connection** to the **unspeakable evil of abortion** in our day as millions of unborn children are slaughtered in the womb.

21. Unmerciful—This describes the **absolute lack of compassion** for another person, even to the point of regarding human life as cheap.

Zooming out from the details of Paul's list, he paints a **devastating picture of human depravity** as sin comes to destroying not only the individual, but society as a whole.

So we can see the **tragic outcome** of God judicially abandoning man to a corrupted mind which results, **firstly**, in **depraved ideas** and, **secondly**, **depraved behaviours**.

To say that differently, the corruption of the mind leads to a **moral insanity** that cannot distinguish right from wrong, and therefore society destroys itself as people behave in the most depraved ways towards one another.

To put that simply then, **the first feature** of the **final corruption of man** is **the corruption of the mind**.

However, there is still **a second feature** of man's corruption that Paul describes next.

2. THE CORRUPTION OF THE CONSCIENCE (32)

The final corruption of man is completed by **the corruption of the conscience** as God abandons him to **moral decay**.

Paul describes this **second feature** of the final corruption of man in **verse 32**—

and although they know the righteous requirement 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.

Paul's final statement on the wrath of God **outlines the very depths of depravity** to which man is given over.

Paul states that “**they know the righteous requirement of God**,” which indicates that the judicial abandonment of God **does not destroy man's capacity to choose** or his **responsibility** in choosing sin over God.

As **Charles Hodge** eloquently describes, “*They are given up to work iniquity, and yet know that they deserve death for what they do. The stream which carries them away is not without, but within. It is their own corrupt nature. It is themselves.*”⁴⁶

Though Paul **does not use the word**, he's clearly referring to **the conscience**.

⁴⁶ Hodge, *Romans*, 66.

He refers to this shortly after in **Romans 2:15**—

They demonstrate the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.

The conscience is man's **innate ability to distinguish right from wrong**.⁴⁷

As **Andy Naselli** defines it, “*The conscience is your consciousness of what you believe is right and wrong.*”⁴⁸

Elsewhere, in **Titus 1:15**, Paul also refers to the corruption of men and woman **in both mind and conscience**, there by demonstrating the **close link between the two**.

As he writes, “**To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.**”

So then, we should understand that **the mind of man informs the conscience of man**, so that the corruption of one **invariably leads** to the corruption of the other.

In other words, the conscience is like an **instrument** and the mind is the measure by which it is **calibrated**.

⁴⁷ Cf. John F. MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience: Drawing the Line in a No-Fault, Guilt-Free World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 36.

⁴⁸ Andrew David Naselli and J. D. Crowley, *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 42.

If man is **given over to a reprobate mind** so that he can no longer accurately judge between right and wrong, then **certainly his self-assessment, or conscience**, will be reprobate too.⁴⁹

Here in **verse 32**, Paul argues that man's conscience is **corrupted but not destroyed** because he retains the **understanding that God will punish** their sin.

As he explains, men and women know **“that those who practice such things are worthy of death.”**

While this **ought to restrain** man's depraved behaviour, he **nevertheless continues in his sinful rebelling** as he demonstrates his **final** corruption.

In other words, people have such an intense hatred of God that they are willing to risk future judgment in order to carry out their evil desires.⁵⁰

The corruption of man's conscience is **evidenced in two ways—first**, in his **practising of sin** and, **second**, in his **praising of sin**.

a. Practicing sin

Paul continues to explain that even with the knowledge that **sin brings death**, man **continues unrestrained in his sin**, as he writes, **“they not only do the same...”**

⁴⁹ Cf. Gary T. Meadors, “Conscience,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 113.

⁵⁰ 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), 109.

In other words, every sin is a **wilful act of rebellion**, a **conscious act of treason** against God.

Every time we sin, we challenge God's right to reign over His creation and we defy His right to impose obligations on us as His creatures.⁵¹

The natural man's conscience is **meant to keep him from sin**, but its **corruption is plainly evidenced** as he rejects its warnings and chooses to **continue practising sin**.

b. Praising sin

As Paul continues, he argues that the **most damning evidence of human depravity** and the corruption of man's conscience is **the praising of sin**.

That's what he means when he concludes **verse 32**—
they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

As **John MacArthur** remarks, "*Today the world praises deviancy. They profess the nobility of degrading and destructive lifestyles. And they demand you do the same.*"⁵²

We can see this plainly in the **corruption of our culture** then not only embraces the most depraved ideas and behaviours, but goes further by **celebrating them** and demanding that we join in the celebrations.

⁵¹ Cf. R. C. Sproul, *Romans*, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 55.

⁵² John MacArthur, *The War on Children: Providing Refuge for Your Children in a Hostile World* (Los Angeles: The John MacArthur Publishing Group, 2024), 152.

That is because, **if people can entice others to join** them in their sin, they can **get rid of the social taboos** rather than repent of their sin.

So as we consider the **culture in which we live**, we not only find the **moral insanity of ideas like Marxism and transgenderism**, along with the depraved behaviours they produce, but we see the **open celebration of all this depravity** as if it was virtuous.

To justify one's own sin is wicked enough, but to **approve and encourage others** to sin is **immeasurably worse**.⁵³

This is man's final corruption, when men and women are so **callous** that they rejoice in the **moral ruin of others and take pleasure in their sinfulness**.⁵⁴

This is what leads to the **destruction of society**, when the depravity of sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, and all the behaviours listed by Paul **are celebrated by the culture**.

This is the darkest stroke of the whole picture Paul has painted as he leaves us to stare in horror at the destructive forces of depraved ideas and behaviours, without conscience to restrain it.

Evil is celebrated as if it were good, which is the cause of utter social corruption.⁵⁵

⁵³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Romans*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 109.

⁵⁴ Cf. Vine, *Romans & 1 Corinthians*, 38.

⁵⁵ Cf. E. F. Scott, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (London: SCM Press, 1947), 32.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, Paul's description of the **final corruption of man** is a terrifying reminder that **sin is the punishment of sin**.

God's judicial abandonment of man to a **corrupted mind and a corrupted conscience** demonstrates that **moral depravity is the result of the judgment of God**.⁵⁶

Ideas have consequences, so when people embrace depraved ideas they will also embrace depraved behaviours, ultimately coming to **celebrate the very sins** which destroy both individuals and societies.

What a terrifying picture of the wrath of God!

It reminds us that we are in the **midst of a war for the truth**.

We are in an ideological war, and as **MacArthur** adds, *"our duty as Christians is to expose lies with the truth, answer evil ideas with righteous ones, and overthrow wicked false opinions with a biblical worldview."*⁵⁷

However, this war will not be won **even by the clearest and cleverest arguments** because man is corrupted in his mind.

⁵⁶ Cf. S. Lewis Johnson Jr., *Discovering Romans: Spiritual Revival for the Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 36.

⁵⁷ MacArthur, *War on Children*, 17.

It is only through the **saving power of God in the gospel** that men and women “**receive the love of the truth so as to be saved,**” as Paul puts it in **2 Thessalonians 2:12**.

Therefore, we should boldly and unashamedly proclaim the gospel as “**the word of truth**” (**Colossians 1:5**).

The disastrous effects of the final corruption of man **can only be undone through Christ** as those united to Him are, according to **Romans 12:2**, transformed by the renewing of their minds.

Therefore, let us **boldly and unashamedly proclaim** the gospel in order that God would **rescue His chosen people** from the corruption by which they would otherwise be destroyed.

BENEDICTION

*Now may God be your exceeding joy,
Christ your unfailing hope,
and the Spirit your unfailing comforter,
in all your worship and work and troubles
until Jesus comes.
Amen.⁵⁸*

⁵⁸ Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 41.

1:28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God,
 b God gave them over

c to an unfit mind,

d to do those things which are not proper,

1:29 having been filled with all

[1] unrighteousness,

[2] wickedness,

[3] greed,

[4] evil;

[5] envy,

[6] murder,

[7] strife,

[8] deceit,

[9] malice;

[10] gossips,

[11] slanderers,

[12] haters of God,

[13] violent,

[14] arrogant,

[15] boastful,

[16] inventors of evil,

[17] disobedient to parents,

[18] without understanding,

[19] untrustworthy,

[20] unloving,

[21] unmerciful;

1:32 and although they know the righteous requirement of God,

b they not only do that those who practice such things are worthy of death,

c do the same,

d but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

1:30

b

c

d

e

f

g

1:31

b

c

d

1:32

b

c

d

Reason for 28b

Continues theme of 24, 26

Purpose of 28b

Result of 28b

Explains/ expands 28b–d

Concessive of 32c

Content of 32a

Restates 28d

Expands 32c



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Sermon Notes

Introduction

As Paul concludes his discussion of the wrath of God, he describes the final corruption of man in two features:

1. The corruption of the mind (28–31)
2. The corruption of the conscience (32)

1. The corruption of the mind (28–31)

- a. Depraved ideas (28)

- b. Depraved behaviours (29–31)

2. The corruption of the conscience (32)

- a. Practicing sin

- b. Praising sin

Conclusion