

The Apostle Paul's been laying out before us the desperate condition of humanity – the default condition of all who've entered this world since the fall of Adam and Eve. That couple's rebellion against God has been repeated over and over again through the centuries, to this very day. Rebellion has become part of the fabric of who we are.

And while you probably know the good news that God has intervened to change us through the person and work of Jesus, Paul, *at this point* in his letter, is focused on establishing our *need* for such intervention. And one way he's doing that is by telling us how God *previously* intervened in our world – a way that expresses an aspect of God we tend to shun, but an aspect without which God wouldn't be God. I'm referring to His holiness – His righteousness – that expresses itself through things like wrath, judgment, and discipline.

[Turn to Romans 1]

In v.18 Paul told us that

Read v.18

*** ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,**

Paul went on to talk about the poor exchanges humanity made: in v.23 we **exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for idols**, in v.25 we **exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator**, and in vs.26,27, we **exchanged the natural function of males and females for that which is unnatural** by engaging in sex outside God's design (which is sex in the context of marriage between a male and female).

The sins of idolatry and sexual perversion stand out starkly against God's original design as revealed at Creation, which as we saw last week, was on Paul's mind when he wrote these verse.

Along with the fateful exchanges *we've* made, Paul speaks of *God's response* to our rejection and rebellion. The consequences of failing to honor God and give Him thanks – of worshiping anything other than God – of violating God's design and standards – include God *giving us over* to our pursuit of sin and its consequences as an expression of His judgment and discipline.

Paul points that out by using the phrase “**God gave them over**” three times:

Read v.24

*** ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...**

Read v.26

²⁶ For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions...

And as we come to v.28 this morning, we read that again:

Read v.28

²⁸ And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

We turn our attention to vs.28-32, as Paul points out some of the ways humanity's rejection of God manifests itself in daily living. It's a reminder of the depth and breadth of sin.

Read v.28

*** ²⁸ And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,**

Paul speaks of our rebellion against God in this way: *** they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer.** What's translated as **to acknowledge** is a 3 word phrase consisting of the words *to have/hold/consider + in + knowledge*. Our problem is a failure to consider what we've known about God – what God's revealed about Himself. We don't give God thought in the course of our living and decision making. We don't **acknowledge God any longer.** That's why Paul earlier wrote (v.21) that we failed to **honor Him as God or give thanks.**

So what did God do?

Read v.28b

*** ... God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,**

There's an effective play Paul uses here to drive home God's judgment. The adjective translated **depraved** and the verb translated **they did not see fit not see fit** share root word. We might say they *disapproved* acknowledging God, so God gave them over to an *unapproved* mind – they considered God *unacceptable* of being acknowledged, so God gave them over to an *unacceptable* mind. Because humanity has been

given over to a **depraved mind**, our thinking and moral decision making has been damaged.

And that leads to improper behavior, or as Paul says, **to doing those things which are not proper**. That terminology was also used by stoic philosophers of things that are morally wrong. Paul is saying humanity has become morally and ethically challenged. We need is a new mind – a change in thinking. And the good news is that Paul tells us later in his letter how that can come about.

To this point, Paul’s stressed wrong behavior expressed in idolatry and sexual perversion. But Paul wants to make sure we know that our **depraved minds** can lead us **to do many other things which are not proper**. There’s more to **ungodliness and unrighteousness** (cf. v.18) than bowing before statues and sexual sin.

Someone confronted with what Paul’s said up to this point might be skilled enough at denial and rationalization to manage to claim they were excluded from the people Paul’s talking about here. You might be able to rationalize that you’re exempt from the legitimate wrath of God because you yourself don’t have any physical idols in the likeness people or critters that you bow down before. And you might further rationalize that you’re exempt because you’re not involved in an illicit sexual relationship.

If at this point in listening to Paul you’re feeling comfortable that based on your own merit, you are a fine, upstanding citizen of God’s world, the sensation you’re about to feel just might be that of the rug of good standing beginning to be pulled out from underneath your feet. That’s because Paul is about to expand our vision of sinfulness, and the many ways in which it poisons our thinking and taints our relationships.

If I wanted to get everyone’s attention this morning, I could say something like... “I’d like anyone who meets any of the following criteria to listen carefully to the very important information I have to share. *Anyone* wearing *any* of the following colors: red, maroon, pink, purple, lavender, mauve, salmon, tangerine, orange, yellow, gold, green, forest green, lime green, mint green, brown, beige, tan, blue, navy blue, cobalt blue, light blue, aqua, turquoise, teal, black, grey, white, bright white, off white, or that yellowy kind of white formerly white tee shirts acquire

after failing to bleach them over the years – that kind of white. *Anyone* wearing *anything* with *any* of those colors, what I have to say next is of utmost importance to you.”

That’s what Paul does with the 21 sins in the list beginning in v.29. His long (but not exhaustive) list of sins, should lead us to realize he’s talking about each and every one of us. And if we have any doubts that we’re included in this list, what he’ll say next week aims to remove any such doubts.

It’s not wrong to see this list as describing the behavior of humanity in general and the depths to which we have fallen. After all, these expressions of sin are common, and easy to spot in others. But in the course of reading through this list, we might want to take a glance within, because the sins we see in others may’ve also taken root in our own lives, Perhaps to those around us, *we* are the “others”.

So, how else does a depraved minds express itself?

Read vs.29-31

* ²⁹ **being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips,³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;**

Such “vice lists” are not only common in Scripture, but in non-biblical writings as well. Paul doesn’t appear to be following a particular order, although the first couple of term are rather broad and encompass many of the terms that follow. And there’s certainly some overlap in terms. And if there are any sections to the list, they’re distinguished by the introductory phrases **being filled with**, **full of**, and **they are** (supplied by translators to introduce section beginning with some plural nouns). But the divisions are stylistic, not driven by content.

What has “humanity” (you know, “those people”) been given over to? He prefaces the first few terms by describing us as **being filled with** something. The perfect tense suggests it’s the current, ongoing state of humanity (apart from divine intervention). And the word **all** [πάσῃ, adj. *πᾶς*, *all, every*] probably not only goes with the word that follow it, but perhaps the first 4 in the

lis ...and perhaps in thought, it could carry over to all the words, with **all** being used in the sense of *all kinds of*.

What are we given over to? What are we filled with?

* We're filled with all **unrighteousness**.

This general term speaks of our behavior as opposed to the righteous character of and justice of God. God is the standard of rightness, and we fall short in so many ways.

* We're filled with **wickedness**.

Another term that's rather general and inclusive. While being described as "wicket" in South Boston may be a good thing (like being "wicket good" or "wicket smot"), being wicked *anything* is not good in the eyes of God.

There's no shortage of new reports testifying to humanity's **unrighteousness** and **wickedness**, whether Isis using children as suicide bombers, or a serial killer who also keeps women chained around the neck, holed up in a storage container.

* We are filled with **greed**.

Greed – an insatiable appetite for more – more money, more things, more of just about anything. And we don't just see it on Wall Street, but on Main Street...perhaps even on *your* street. We were designed to find our contentment in God and serving Him, but by rejecting and rebelling against Him we seek to fill that void with something else, anything else, and lots of it. But it can't make up for what we lose when we turn from God.

* We're filled with **evil**.

Another general term, it covers all kinds of malicious behavior, from bullying to rioting, from defacing property to doing genuine physical, emotional, or psychological harm to another person. The possibilities are only limited by the imagination of the perpetrator.

* We are **full of envy**.

It often partners with greed. While greed desires more, envy desires harm to those who have the "more" that we want. Our world is filled with people who despise and plot to harm those who have what they do not. In their effort to gain votes, it's a sin that politicians feed when they talk about harshly about those who have what others do not.

* We are full of **murder**.

Whether globally, or locally, we see too many examples of how cheaply we estimate the value of human life, whether the life of the pre-born or the life of the elderly, whether the life of someone who has what we want or the life of someone who opposes what we believe. And Satan was the first murderer in that in tempting Eve he provoked the sentence of death upon humanity. And many followed in his footsteps, beginning with Cain who slew his brother Abel, down the latest murder that we'll hear about the next time with check our newsfeed.

* We are full of **strife**.

Like Satan who created strife/discord between God and man, and man and man, that tradition continues today. Some people do it without even giving it much thought because they have many of the other traits in this list, while others do it with calculated intent, seeking some kind of gain at the expense of peace and harmony.

We are full of **deceit**.

Far too many people are not just prone to telling white lies, but are known to have, not just an aversion to the truth, but a devotion of deception. Do you follow politics?

* We're full of **malice**.

It speaks of a craftiness meant to harm others. It was evident in Satan in harming Adam and Eve, evident in demons who harm those they possess, and evident in people you know, who instead of trying to bring help and healing, seek only to inflict harm on others.

* We are **gossips**.

More literally it means *whisperers*, referring to those who often, under the guise of good intentions, seek only to harm others by spreading confidential information. They *talk about* those they should be *talking to*.

* We are **slanderers**.

Often related to the previous sin, it involves speaking against others with a view toward harming them, even destroying them. It happens without regard for the truth. And it's as at home in our neighborhoods and places of work as it is on the campaign trail. And no matter where it's practiced, it does damage to *both* the intended victim *and* the perpetrator.

* We are **haters of God**.

Although the word can possibly mean *hated/forsaken by God*, in the spirit of the list which

speaks of things *we* do, it likely refers to those who *hate God*. That's the opposite of what *we were designed* to do – the opposite of what *we should* be doing. We should love God. We should desire to worship, honor, and serve Him. And the hatred of God manifests itself in many ways, including the other sins on this list.

The next 3 sins are closely related, different expression of pride:

* We are **insolent**.

This speaks of pride as reflected in actions, particularly in aggressive and violent actions.

* We are **arrogant**.

This speaks of pride in terms of our thinking and estimation of ourselves. We are haughty, thinking more highly of ourselves than is warranted.

* We are **boastful**.

This speaks of pride in terms of our words – in boasting and bragging.

Pride – what earlier believers saw as the first and primary of *the seven deadly sins* – what Scripture portrays as the prelude to humiliation and defeat – is what many exemplify, and it's evident in their defiance and selfishness. It's the opposite of Jesus, as wonderful portrayed in Philippians 2:

Read Philippians 2:2-11

*** ⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

* We are **inventors of evil**.

Just when you think we couldn't come up with more ways to hurt people – just when you think we can't get any worse – we still invent new ways to express and promote evil. We come up with new variations on that old theme.

* We are **disobedient to parents**.

Those who disobey divine authority usually have no qualms about disobeying parental authority, with the result that the family, the bedrock of society, crumbles, and society with it.

The next four words are positive words with a prefix that negates them:

* We are **without understanding**.

Because we've rejected God, the source of wisdom and knowledge – God who holds is the key to the life and world that He created – we are, **without understanding**.

* We are **untrustworthy**.

We who are untrustworthy and unfaithful when it comes to God, become untrustworthy and unfaithful in our relationships. Politicians make promises they never intend to keep – companies makes guarantees they never intend to keep – nations make treaties they never intend to keep.

* We are **unloving**.

The particular word for love used here commonly speaks of *natural affection*, such as that which we are expected to have for family and friends. But as never ending reports of abandonment, abuse and murder within families indicates, natural affection has become seemingly unnatural – and scarce.

* We are **unmerciful**.

Always looking for mercy for ourselves, we can be stingy in extending it to others. Instead of seeking to alleviate suffering, many seek to increase it. Mercy can be as hard to find as high ranking government officials in North Korea who die of natural causes.

And then Paul adds:

Read v.32a

*** ³² and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death,**

I think Paul has in mind all the sins he's been talking about to this point when he refers to "**such things**" that are practiced, idolatry, sexual perversion, or the things on the list we just looked at. Paul says all who do such have an awareness that they are **worthy of death** – worthy of divine judgment. That comes from our conscience (as distorted as it may be) and from man's laws passed on through generations (as distorted as those laws may be). As depraved as we may be, there's still an awareness that divine judgment

looms – and vehement denials of such judgment don't deny our sense of it, they're just further evidence that it exists.

Then Paul adds:

Read v.32b

* ³² **...they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.**

Even though there's an awareness of sin and judgment that awaits those immersed in the practice of such things...**they not only do the same** – they not only keep it up – **but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.**

Things that should cause us to hang our heads in shame, are things for which we march with pride. Things for which we should humbly bow before God in confession, with rise to our feet with microphone in hand to boldly promote. Things we should retreat from, we double down on. And by doing so, we succeed in lessening the stigma of sin, making it easier for others to go down the same dead end path.

If any New England Patriot players are tempted to look at the NFL standings and think that they are sitting pretty and on their way to the Super Bowl, I can't imagine that feeling lasting too long. My guess is that after every game, the moment they set foot in the film room, Coach Bill Belichick and his staff have a way of reminding them that they've yet to arrive – that they've not yet reached football nirvana – that they've all made mistakes – and that that standard for paly is not a relative one, but an absolute one.

Your first impression of the reading through that list may be think you're not so bad – actually pretty good – and that Paul's not describing you. But I'd suggest you do the equivalent of going into the film room with Coach Belichick and letting Him give you an objective evaluation of just how well you are doing. The equivalent of doing that is to get alone, *pray through* and *meditate on* that list, and ask God evaluate how you are doing, and for the Holy Spirit to make it clear, and for Him to empower you to make the necessary improvements.

As Paul will continue to make clear, we are still among the needy.