

**ROMANS: PART 4****TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES**

We stopped last week at Romans 1:23, so today we'll pick up our study in Romans 1:24. But let's get a running start by reviewing some of the verses just prior to verse 24, and we'll begin with verse 18, Romans 1:18-23 (NLT):

*18 But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves.*

*19 For the truth about God is known to them instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts.*

*20 From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God.*

*21 Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused.*

*22 Claiming to be wise, they became utter fools instead.*

*23 And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people, or birds and animals and snakes.*

Now let's begin our study today with

**Romans 1:24 and 25 (NAS):**

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

*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.*

People replaced God's truth with Satan's lie! What is Satan's lie? Worshiping the creature (Satan) and not the Creator (God); worshiping man instead of God; worshiping things instead of Christ. The truth believed and obeyed sets us free (John 8:31–32); the truth rejected and disobeyed makes us slaves.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 24 tells us that God gave them a free hand to pursue their lusts and to dishonor their bodies. The word "lust" means "a wrong desire." It's the mark of a person to crave what is wrong. They wanted their own way rather than to follow God's way, and God let them have their way as well as the consequences that would go with it. They perverted

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. 1997, c1992. Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament . Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill. Parentheses added.

God's intended use for the body. They desired fornication, sexual deviation, sexual perversion, and sexual promiscuity. I know many people who simply can't believe that a book written 2,000 years ago could apply to our modern culture today. Why not? People still behave in the same way today that they did then. The only difference today is that they drive instead of walk, fly instead of walk, and watch television instead of talk. The need to satisfy the lusts of their hearts remains exactly the same. And God still permits people the free will to make their own choices because without free will, without choices their can be no true love. Would your wife's love mean anything to you men if they were forced to love you? And would your husband's love mean anything to you women if they were forced to love you? God is not going to force anyone to love Him. He's going to allow each person to make the decision to love and obey Him or to reject Him and disobey Him. His promise is that love and obedience will result in peace, happiness, and eternal life in Heaven, and that disobedience will result in disappointment and separation from God throughout eternity in that other place nobody likes to mention. Our lives and our future lie in the decisions that we make.

What does the Bible say about decisions that lead to perverted behavior? Let's read what Paul had to say to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 (NAS):

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you **abstain from sexual immorality**;  
4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,  
5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;  
6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter **because the Lord is the avenger in all these things**, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.  
7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.*

Hugh Hefner, the pillar of moral purity who has given men fifty years of looking at naked women anytime they feel a lustful desire of the heart to do so, was quoted in *Eternity* magazine as saying, "Sex is a biological function like eating and drinking, so let's forget all the prudery about it and do whatever you feel like doing." The human race has an insatiable desire to fornicate in almost every perverted manner imaginable. They had the desire in the year 2000 B.C., they had it in the year A.D. 1, and they still have it in 2004. We have an entire world doing this. Our society today flaunts the body anywhere and everywhere, including churches. We exploit the body by the way we dress. The body is wrongly exploited through television, music, and movies. People are always talking about going to bed and there's fornicating going on all over the place. The implication is clearly to do whatever you feel like doing, whether you're 6 or 60 or 100. Humankind has turned the body into an instrument of lust and any such use of the body God gave us to perform good works dishonors the body. And all you have to do is to walk into any church on a Sunday morning to see how tolerant the Church itself has become of such behavior.

We saw in verse 25 that people had the truth about God written in their hearts. But they didn't want what their Creator knew was best for them. So they exchanged the true God for false gods, "*For they **exchanged the truth** of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.*" What's the lie referred to in verse 25? The lie is that God is not God, that God doesn't have to be honored and glorified. It's the same lie Satan's been pushing on humankind since the Garden of Eden. So people buy the lie and choose to worship idols and things they love rather than their Creator. People today worship cars, houses, clothes, their bodies, their children, the opposite sex, the same sex, success, money, and false gods in a religious environment. They have idols coming out of their ears and that's the reason God gives them up, leaving them to their own sinful willfulness.

What is the result of such behavior for such people? It is a compounding, escalating, snowballing sinfulness with all its associated heartache. That's God's wrath because He just backs away from such people, removes His hand of protection, and allows them to go it on their own. Do you know what effect that has on people? It degrades them, strips them of their dignity, and steals their peace. Their lives are filled with fear, torment, guilt, stress, anxiety, and self-doubt. Some people even kill themselves to find comfort from the torment. Sin destroys relationships, marriages, families, and morally corrupts nations. They buy big, expensive toys or go on extravagant vacations, or take alcohol and drugs to try and forget. But nothing works. There is no way out of such sinfulness by human endeavors. They are suffering the consequences of choosing to get along without God. And God lets them go in their despair until they call out to Him for help, at which time God will hear and respond. Listen to what the Bible says in Psalm 51:17 (NAS):

*The sacrifice you want is a broken spirit. A broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not despise.*

**Matthew 5:6 (NLT):**

*God blesses those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for they will receive it in full.*

**Psalm 119:71, 72 (NAS):**

*The suffering you sent was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your principles.  
72 Your law is more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver!*

God allows people to suffer so that they will see and recognize their need for Him. Otherwise they might never turn to Him.

As we continue in this chapter, we read in

**Romans 1:26, 27:**

*That is why God abandoned them to their **shameful desires**. Even the*

*women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other.*

*27 And the men, instead of having normal sexual relationships with women, burned with lust for each other. **Men did shameful things with other men** and, as a result, suffered within themselves the penalty they so richly deserved.*

In this verse we begin to see some specific details about how people dishonor their bodies. One way they dishonor their bodies is through the practice of homosexuality. The words in these verses clearly describe what God considers to be unnatural sexual relationships. We see here a statement about people doing things utterly opposite of the way God made them. Did you know that such behavior does not exist in the animal community? In all the studies that go on all over the world using animals for various reasons, there has never been a reported case of animal homosexuality. A better literal translation of verse 27 appears in the NAS translation where we read that they “burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts.” There is a level of lust among homosexuals that is not known among heterosexuals. There is a burning that far exceeds anything that could be considered natural. It’s not uncommon for the average homosexual male to have a hundred or more partners per year. It’s not uncommon for them to go to the hospital to have all sorts of articles extracted from within them. Sometimes doctors are called in to separate them, to take limbs out of one another.

Many prominent figures in our world who admit to being homosexuals are writing books and magazine articles about how wonderful their relationships are. Many political leaders today advocate gay rights. In fact Bill Clinton as president was a gay rights advocate. He even appointed a number of homosexuals to high government positions. It is now considered discriminatory to refuse a person a job because they’re a homosexual.

We not only allow it, but we appoint people to high positions that do it. Several years ago the Quaker church released a statement that homosexuality is no more abnormal than being left-handed. Many denominations have ordained practicing homosexuals to the ministry. Homosexual behavior is a sin according to the Bible and as it says in Romans 1:27 there are built-in consequences for such practices: “*They receive in their own bodies due penalty for their actions.*” I believe AIDS confirms the validity of this verse.

The former chief medical examiner of New York City, Milton Helpburn, wrote a book entitled, *Where Death Delights*, in which he said: “

*Having been responsible for 60,000 autopsies, it’s high time for those that deviate from the norms to understand the risk. I don’t know why but it seems that the violent explosions of jealousy among homosexuals far exceed those of the jealousy of a man for a woman and a woman for a man.”*

That would explain the meaning of Romans 1:27 which says that “*men burned in their desire for one another.*” Helpburn goes on:

*“The pent-up charges and energy of a homosexual relationship simply cannot be contained. When the explosive point is reached, the result is brutally violent. The normal pattern of these homosexual attacks can involve multiple stabbing and senseless beatings that obviously continue long after the victim is dead. When we see these brutal, multiple wound cases in a single victim, we just automatically assume that we’re dealing with a homosexual victim and homosexual attacker.”*

If you want to know what God intended, consider the following passage in Genesis 1:27,28:

*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

*28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.**”*

God made a man and a woman and placed them together because that was the only way it was meant to be. We should also go to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13:

*Do not practice homosexuality; it is a **detestable sin**.*

*The penalty for homosexual acts is death to both parties. **They have committed a detestable act and are guilty of a capital offense.***

But before someone jumps up and says how unfair this is let’s read 1 Corinthians 6:11:

*There was a time when **some of you were just like that**, but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God. **You have been made right with God** because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you.*

Isn’t that great? God saves people that are in situations like that. People involved with the practice of homosexuality are consumed by guilt, pain, physical disease, bodily wounds, and despair. The horrible results of the practice of homosexuality are its own condemnation. But God in His grace and mercy offers a way out for even the most perverted of behavior. God offers hope to **everyone** no matter how awful their sin might be.

One sure way to condemn a person for eternity is to tell them that their sin is OK. If you want to truly help someone, tell them what they’re doing is sinful. Because until they see it that way, they won’t turn to God for help. Practicing homosexuals are committing a sin against God and are thus alienated from Him. The only way they’ll ever be helped is to recognize what they’re doing is wrong and God wants to help them. Homosexual behavior is the result of a choice, not of genetic structure. It’s a choice a person makes

and it's a choice a person makes to keep on doing it. There's also the choice of seeking help and doing the right thing rather than the wrong thing. Is it right for an alcoholic to say, "I drink because of my genetic structure, so that's the way I am. They can say that if they want a miserable life and a premature death. Or they can go to Alcoholics Anonymous and seek the help that will allow them to stop destroying themselves. The homosexual is no different, except perhaps that they hold on more tightly to their denial. Paul's words to the Corinthians should provide encouragement for anyone who is struggling with temptation. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:13:

*But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it.*

There are some people who are more tempted toward adultery than others because of their backgrounds. In the same way, there are others that are more tempted toward stealing. There are some people, because of whatever circumstances, who are more tempted toward homosexuality than others. No matter what the temptation might be, we can all have victory through Christ. We can choose Him over sin, and we can call upon His cleansing blood when we do sin. We can wash that sin off just as we would dirt and move on without guilt. But for those who refuse this help, we see the inevitable outcome in the final verses of chapter one.

### **Romans 1:28:**

*When they refused to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their evil minds and let them do things that should never be done.*

Because people turned away from God, God let them go their own way. This is the basic problem with people. They don't want to know God. They don't want to trust God. They don't want to obey God. So, God just lets them go their own way. Listen to the words of Job in Job 21:13-15 (NRSV):

*They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to Sheol.  
14 They say to God, 'Leave us alone! We do not desire to know your ways.  
15 What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him?'*

People just don't want God; they want no part of the truth, because the truth would expose them for what they really are. Jeremiah wrote in Jeremiah 4:22 and 9:6:

*"My people are foolish and do not know me," says the Lord. "They are senseless children who have no understanding. They are clever enough at doing wrong, but they have no talent at all for doing right!"  
They pile lie upon lie and utterly refuse to come to me," says the Lord.*

That's what happens when people turn away from God. They will in one way or another develop a depraved and worthless mind. To what extent does humankind go? We're about to find out in Romans 1:29-32:

*Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, fighting, deception, malicious behavior (seeking revenge), and gossip.*

*30 They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They are forever inventing new ways of sinning and are disobedient to their parents.*

*31 They refuse to understand, break their promises, and are heartless and unforgiving.*

*32 **They are fully aware of God's death penalty for those who do these things, yet they go right ahead and do them anyway. And, worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.***

These are the traits that characterize human beings. Why are people like this? Because God has let them go. Now in verse 32 we see the low point of human behavior. To sin yourself is evil, but to delight in the perversion of others is even worse because you're not committing the evil act itself, yet you're still taking delight in it. People today do that all the time, don't they. They'll sit in front of a television or go to a theater and watch people sin, and they'll enjoy it. One major reason our society is in a state of decadence is that we enjoy "x" rated movies, soap operas, sitcoms, talk shows, and now reality TV.

There's a species of ants found in parts of Africa that leave the shelter of their underground tunnels to go out on work details. The queen remains in the tunnel network. If the queen is killed while they're away they become frantic rushing around aimlessly. It appears they're connected to the queen by some radar-like device. When she dies, all of their orientation stops, confusion follows, and ends in death.

There can't be a better illustration of humankind. People are naturally connected to God as we've read earlier. When they're cut off from God they become disoriented and confused, which inevitably leads to death. Romans 1:20 told us that people are without excuse. That's bad news for the proud and arrogant, very bad news. There is a positive side to this, however, and that is the good news. The apostle Paul said that "Jesus Christ has come to save sinners." God can save anyone no matter how bad the sin according to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NLT):

*Don't you know that those who do wrong will have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, who are idol worshipers, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, 10 thieves, greedy people, drunkards, abusers, and swindlers—none of these will have a share in the Kingdom of God.*

*11 There was a time when some of you were just like that, but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God. **You***

*have been made right with God because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you.*

If you haven't yet accepted Jesus as your Savior, I hope you'll allow Him to save you before the consequence of sin is irreversible.

Let's turn now to chapter 2 of the book of Romans.

## **ROMANS CHAPTER 2**

In verses 1-16 of this chapter we learn on what basis God judges people. We've just learned in Romans 1:18-32 that God's wrath is revealed in judgment against a sinful world that has rejected His provision. But there is a question here that we've not yet dealt with. **What about the good people** who aren't murderers, liars, thieves, and homosexuals? What happens to the people who live generally good and moral lives?

There are people in the world who live morally acceptable lives. They may even claim to be members of a Christian church. But because they do not truly believe in Jesus, they make every attempt to uphold an external moral value system to prove to others how good they are. But in reality their hearts are filled with sin although they are quite skillful in hiding that sin from others by the masks that they wear. To other people they appear to be fine, decent, upstanding citizens, but inwardly **their true motives are not what they appear to be on the surface**. In chapter 2 Paul sets out to expose such people who in his day were the scribes and Pharisees. Such a sense of moral purity gave them a false sense of security, and it does the same to people who think that way today.

The whole basis of the Christian Gospel can only be understood by people who recognize that they are guilty before God, whether they consider themselves immoral, as were the people described in chapter 1, or moral as the people in chapter 2 thought themselves to be. In Paul's time the Jews considered themselves to be the people of God. Today it is the Church going people who consider themselves to be the people of God. The Jews in Paul's day would have readily agreed with his evaluation of the unbelieving world, just as those who call themselves Christians would today. The truth is that all people of all time are the people of God, but that's the subject for another study. But the Jews then and the Christians now seem to think that they're exempt from any judgment because of their connection with Israel or the Church. Big mistake!

Although we will be describing the nation of Israel for the most part, because that's who Paul was writing about then, it applies equally to the Church today. The first thing we will address is that they believed in a **salvation by works**, what is often called **legalism**. They believed that by obeying certain rules, participating in certain rituals, being circumcised, and attending services regularly, provided them an automatic membership in the Kingdom of God and that they were home free. Thus there would be no consequences for personal sin because they were under this umbrella of protection.



In the church today many people believe that if a child is baptized as an infant, the child is guaranteed a place in God's kingdom. They believe the same thing about the sacrament of confirmation. Actually there are people like this all around us today. They've been baptized and they keep the rules. They go to church and behave outwardly in a moral way. They're self-righteous, try to do what looks right, and just don't think they're going to be judged. Have you ever heard anyone say, "*God wouldn't do that to me, I'm a good person.*" These moral, self-righteous people are by far the hardest people to reach with the truth. In chapter 2, Paul points out with great force and clarity that the ethical, moral person is going to find himself/herself in the same Hell as the person who loves to sin if they keep believing what they believe. Basically Paul is saying that **outward religion alone is of no help whatsoever to anyone**. If one's belief isn't internalized it's simply not true faith. So let's begin with Romans 2:1 (NLT):

*You may be saying, "What terrible people you have been talking about!" But you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you do these very same things.*

So both of these groups, the unreligious and the religious, are equally guilty. They've both been given the truth and both ignore it. The religious group proves that they know the truth about God because they're judging the unreligious group. Isn't that just like human nature? How many people live less than moral lives but are the first to criticize others because of their behavior. I believe it's called **gossip** and **slander and hypocrisy**. We'll see later that we should evaluate the behavior of others, being ready to dialogue about what is right before God, but we are not to criticize. We are to stop criticizing, finding fault, and being self-righteous. We are to stop playing God. Stop attacking peoples' motives when you have no way of knowing their hearts. Jesus taught the people in Matthew 7:2:

*For others will treat you as you treat them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged.*

In the next few verses of Matthew 7, Jesus tells people that before they try to get the splinter out of another person's eye, they should take the 2 x 4 out of their own eye. He was telling the Jewish people that they were doing the same things as those they were condemning. Their reaction was that they didn't do such things. They were moral men. But Jesus knew better. He had said that He came to fulfill the Law, and this is what He said to these Jews in Matthew 5:21, 22:

*"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.'  
22 But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment!  
If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.*

This verse is saying that they have been taught that they should not kill. Their response of course was, “*We don’t commit murder. So you see, we’re keeping the Law.*” Then Jesus tells them that they may not kill outwardly but they kill in their hearts. They restrain themselves from actually committing the murder because they are seeking so hard to be self-righteous. They want everybody to look up to them and respect them, but in their hearts they are murderers. This folks, is false religion. It can’t restrain sin in the heart, it can only hide it with a mask of self-righteousness. Jesus said the same thing to them about anger, sex, divorce, honesty, and vengeance in Matthew 5:23-39. Self-righteous people make two big mistakes. First, they misunderstand God’s Law, which also encompasses a person’s heart and mind. Secondly, they misunderstand the extent of their sin.

In the end God will judge us all by the condition of our heart. We’ll all be judged for what’s on the inside not by what we pretend on the outside.

### **ROMANS 2:2, 3:**

*And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things.*

*3 Do you think that God will judge and condemn others for doing them and not judge you when you do them, too?*

Another problem with the self-righteous person and the moralist is that they think they’re okay because they’re judging themselves by themselves, which is the ultimate in self-deception. Let’s get some further insight into this over in Hebrews 4:11-13:

*For anyone who disobeys God, as the people of Israel did, will fall.*

*12 For the word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are.*

*13 Nothing in all creation can hide from him. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes. This is the God to whom we must explain all that we have done.*

Every act and every thought has been recorded on “instant replay.” There’s nowhere for us to hide. How can we escape this inevitable judgment? We find the answer if we continue reading in Hebrews 4:14-16:

*That is why we have a great High Priest who has gone to heaven, Jesus the Son of God. Let us cling to him and never stop trusting him.*

*15 This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin.*

*16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.*

If we know we're exposed to God on this giant screen, then we should run to the one we know can mediate between us and God, and that is Jesus. Jesus has already paid the penalty. He's already received the judgment of God. When you receive Christ as your Savior, He takes the judgment instead of you. And what do we mean when we say, "receive Christ as your Savior?" Simply that you believe in your heart that Jesus Christ is God Himself in human form. Believe that Christ died to take the penalty of your sin and that He came alive again and now lives in Heaven. Accept Him as your Savior for sin and put Him in charge of your life. Next week we'll look at the impartiality of God. We are all equal before Him no matter who we are. He gave each one of us special gifts to use in His service. It doesn't matter if you're rich or powerful or good looking or intelligent. The meek and humble who serve faithfully will receive the rewards.