

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Lecture 4

Romans 1:18-32

© 2024 Craig Keener and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session number 4, Romans 1:18-32.

In Romans 1:17, God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel, in the good news for those who trust in Christ.

But God's righteousness can be revealed in other ways to those who reject the message of Christ. In fact, we read about God's righteousness being revealed in verse 17. In verse 18, it says that God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of humanity.

Well, how is humanity's unrighteousness expressed as opposed to God's righteousness? When he speaks of what they did, it's what they did by suppressing the truth by means of idolatry, which becomes clear in verse 23. He's going to address God's wrath against inexcusable idolatry. This idolatry is the opposite of believing in the truth of the gospel.

Some corrupt the truth, even the truth that they have in nature, he's going to go on to say. So, God's saving righteousness is revealed in the gospel for those who trust it, verses 16 and 17. God's wrath is revealed against those who suppress the truth by unrighteousness.

Speaking of the wrath is from heaven, it's kind of like a circumlocution, a euphemism. Jewish people spoke of heaven, they used that as a term for God. You can see it, I think, in Luke 15, around verse 20, sinned against heaven and against you.

Well, not against the clouds, but against God. What truth do they unrighteously suppress? Well, verse 25 tells us that it's the truth about God, and they suppress it ultimately, verses 19 through 23, by means of idolatry, despite the knowledge of God in creation. So, this is showing that they're not justified by ignorance.

They had enough knowledge available to them in creation that the world should have known better. In fact, some pagan intellectuals did figure out that creation testified to a supreme deity, but they didn't usually get rid of idols altogether. Some of them did, but still, they had a distorted and inadequate understanding of God.

The position of this material in the larger context of Romans is like this. The larger argument is that both Gentiles and Jews need the gospel. You're starting out with Gentiles.

Jewish people viewed idolatry, as we see in 1:23, and sexual vice, as we see in verses 24 and 25, and especially homosexual sexual behavior, verses 26 and 27, is characteristically Gentile sins. But Paul is going to quickly turn from these to more universal sins in verses 29 to 31, showing that the Jewish people who didn't commit normally these Gentile sins were condemned as well. And he's going to turn to that especially in 2:17 through 29, come back to it in 3:9 and 19 and 20, showing that all of us are under sin.

His strategy rhetorically resembles what you find in Amos chapters one and two, specifically Amos 1:3 through 2:8, where Amos cries out, judgment on Moab, judgment on Ammon, judgment on all these other pagans around us. And you can imagine Amos here is applauding. He says judgment on Judah, and you're wondering what's he doing, he's got a Judean accent or a Judahite accent.

And then finally he says, judgment on Israel, you alone have I chosen among all the families of the earth, therefore I will judge you for your iniquities. Probably the applause died down at that point. You have a similar strategy in the wisdom of Solomon, talking about the sins of the pagans and then focusing on the sins of God's own people.

And that's what he does here in this section of Romans. He's got subtle preparations, even in this earlier section, for that kind of conclusion, because he uses Old Testament language, like in 1:21, speaking of their idolatry and they're not giving thanks to God. He uses language from Psalm 94:11. Well, guess who that was about? In chapter 1 and verse 23, exchanging God's glory for idols.

Well, guess who that's about back in Psalm 106, verse 20, about Israel. You also can think of some similar language in Jeremiah chapter 2 and verse 11, and possibly from Deuteronomy 4:16-18. Again, language about Israel. Perhaps also the issue of moral hardening.

Romans 1:28, you can compare it with 11:7 and 25. And the handing over to their sins in 1:24 may evoke Psalm 81 and verse 12. In other words, these things he's about to say about Gentiles, he's using Old Testament language condemning Israel's sins.

So those who catch the illusions may already see where he's headed with this larger argument. Going back to verse 18, wrath from heaven. I mentioned it may be a circumlocution.

It also may allude to something partly future because, in chapter 2, verses 5 and 8, he's going to talk about the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Chapter 9 and verse 22, he's going to speak of vessels of mercy and vessels of

wrath, meaning what they're destined for. Vessels of wrath, he knows they're going to be destroyed, but let history play out because it needs to play out for the sake of the righteous.

But here he's speaking especially, although usually, he speaks of future wrath, speaking of wrath, especially in the present. And this is God expressing his wrath. That's why he is being revealed from heaven, especially through God handing over sinners to the consequences of their own sinfulness.

He uses this expression handing over in 1:24, 1:26, and 1:28, similar to what you have in Acts 7:42. We have in this passage a contrast between God's righteousness in the truth of the gospel and their unrighteousness in their suppressing the truth of God's character. It's very carefully constructed, the design of the text. And saving faith in verses 16 and 17 thus involves truth as opposed to falsehood.

Saving faith is not looking at the gospel as a guess or wishful thinking. It's embracing the genuine truth in contrast to the lies that seem progressively plausible to depraved humanity. We have plausibility structures.

We have frameworks of interpretation. When I was an atheist before my conversion, I thought that atheism was fairly plausible also because it was more respectable in the circles that I respected. And there were other possibilities that I entertained as plausible, some of which probably most atheists would think were quite strange.

But anyway, there were things I entertained as possibilities. Christianity, I gave it maybe a 2% chance of being correct because it seemed to me that 80% of the people in the U.S. at the time claimed to be Christian. And I couldn't tell by how they were living that it made a difference in their lives, partly because there was a mixing up real Christians with nominal Christians.

But I always said, you know, if I really believed this, if I really believed what Christians said, then I would give God everything I am and everything I have because God made me, God designed me for a purpose for himself. And I would have an eternal purpose and eternal meaning. Why? They don't live like this.

They clearly don't believe it. Why would I believe it? And eventually, I discovered that Christianity doesn't rise or fall on Christians. It rises or falls on Jesus Christ.

But we have certain plausibility structures, certain things that we assume to be true. And often they're culturally determined, these frameworks. God wants us to have the right framework, the framework that comes from the smartest one of all, the framework that God has given us, that God has revealed rather than simply adopting the frameworks of our culture.

People back then thought that idolatry made good sense. But in light of the gospel, it doesn't. In fact, Jewish people made fun of it because, you know, why would you worship something that you made as if it made you? Knowledge yields accountability and not only for examinations.

Knowledge yields accountability. Some philosophers said that true knowledge produces right living. Paul said that knowledge merely increases your moral responsibility if you aren't transformed.

That's why he says that they were without excuse, verse 20. And he also speaks of being without excuse in 2:1 and 2:15. Not that people do everything about God. They may have known only a little bit, but what knowledge they did have, they corrupted or rejected.

And so, Paul has been speaking of the good news. Now he speaks of the bad news of judgment outside the gospel. God has revealed enough for Gentiles to be lost.

They're without excuse, 1:20. People who know the Bible, however, and don't follow it are even more lost, are even more damned than those who have only nature and conscience, 2:14 through 18. So, woe to those who are nominal Christians and woe to those in particular who knew the truth and really knew the truth and walked away from it. Knowledge in nature.

God revealed the truth about God within people, 1:19, an internal knowledge based on being made in God's image. We see it in Genesis 1:26 and 27. More generally, God revealed his power and divinity as well as his benevolence in providing creation.

So those who fail to recognize his power and character, worshiping mere idols or human conceptions are without excuse in verse 20. Gentile intellectuals could have appreciated Paul's argument apart from Epicureans. Epicureans really didn't believe in design in nature or that they believed certain things in nature might be gods.

And that was the only way you could know them though. You couldn't know anything more about them. But most Greek and Roman intellectuals seem to have recognized divine design in nature.

That's actually not originally a Christian argument. That's an argument that came from ancient philosophers, people looking at creation and saying, well, the way this fits together is amazing. We might think of the ecosystem or something like that.

Many consider the alternatives absurd: the universe resulting from chance or from human activity. Various philosophers said that the supreme deity was present in and known by his works.

Now, sometimes they made that pantheistic, but sometimes they just said, you know, you can tell from the design of things that you could infer much about God's character from creation. His beneficence, for example, is that God must have cared for the creation or he wouldn't have made it. They weren't always correct in everything that they thought that nature taught them, at least according to the Bible, they weren't.

But they believed in one divine designer behind everything, including the other gods. For instance, Epictetus, was the stoic philosopher around the end of the first century. He argues for the necessity of a cause.

He argues from the structure of objects that they reflect the designer and not mere chance. Assuredly from the very structure of all made objects, we are accustomed to proving that the work is certainly the product of some maker, some designer, and has not been constructed at random. Anyone who observes the facts of nature, he says, yet denies the existence of a creator is stupid.

Human beings and especially their intellect, the most complex of all, particularly revealed the designer in ancient thought. Many others, including Cicero in the first century BC and Seneca in the first century AD said that humans, especially their intellect were inexplicable apart from design. Jewish thinkers in the Greek world had adapted such ideas toward pure monotheism for centuries before Paul, making his missionary job much easier.

Jewish intellectuals like Paul, however, believed that such reasonings simply confirmed what was already obvious in Genesis in a more general way. And this can challenge us today as well. I mean, today we shouldn't think of monotheism as one God or less.

And this is true regardless of one's views on evolution or microevolution or whatever. You can believe in that and say that it was designed as a mechanism if you believe that you have a superior outcome. The picture here depicts me as a lower, less evolved being and going up clear to a seminary president.

But in any case, it's not saying how you have to believe the universe was designed. Christians differ on that. Many people differ on that.

But the point is that we recognize that what we are today isn't simply a product of chance. There are actually a few people who even believe it's a product of chance, but God set up the chance in such a way that it was to arrive at us. In any case, there's an element of design somehow in getting to where we are.

For Paul, not all frameworks for interpreting the world around us are equally valid. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, Proverbs 1:7. So, fearing the Lord needs to be our starting premise. Knowledge handled negligently leads to folly.

You see that in Proverbs as well, but you also see it here in Romans 1. Humanity knew God. They had access to knowledge about God, but because they refused to glorify him in verse 1:21 and they exchanged his glory and image for that of mortal earthly creatures, 1:23, they corrupted the knowledge of God. They were God's image, Genesis 1:26 and 1:27. But by corrupting God's image and worshiping other than God, they gave up and lost his glory.

Chapter three in verse 23, for all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. God punished their failure to act according to the truth by delivering them over to moral insanity, 1:21 and 22, and professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Jewish people considered idolatry the climax of human evil.

And clearly, this is Paul's position. Even Greeks, whose deities looked human, disdained the Egyptian animal images that are also mentioned here. He mentions both animal images and human images here.

So, idolatry, and it goes on to sexual sin. Well, depending on what culture you live in, my observation is that most cultures today don't treat sexual sin nearly as seriously as Paul did. Paul talks about it a lot in his writings as a fundamental sin, because it's a corruption of who we are in God's image as male and female.

Sexual sin actually is something that corrupts our own bodies, the purpose for which they were designed. But sexual sin was pervasive in his day, no less than it is today. We learned from Paul about the deceptiveness of abused sexuality.

Humanity exchanged the truth about God for idolatry, 1:19 through 23, which he here calls a lie, the opposite of truth, in 1:25. The direct consequence of following a lie, God handed them over to defile their own body sexually, 1:24, including in same-sex intercourse that he says in verses 26 and 27 was against nature. For a Jew, what that meant was it was against the way God created things to be. It was against the creation that Paul has been talking about back in chapter one, verse 20, and so forth.

He appealed to the primeval era of creation, 1:20. God revealed his character then and made humanity in his image, Genesis 1:26 and 27. Yet here in Romans 1:23, they distorted God's image by worshiping other images. But not only do they distort God's image by idolatry, but it goes on to say that they distorted God's image in themselves.

Once they had perverted God's image directly, they distorted it also in themselves. God's image in Genesis 1:27 included the complementarity of male and female. They

were designed for one another, and especially it refers to their sexuality designed for procreation.

You can see that going on in Genesis 1:28 as to be fruitful and multiply. The distinctive terms that Paul uses here for male and female, are not his usual terms, but in verses 1:26 and 1:27, he uses the language for male and female that appear in Genesis 1:27 and 5:2 and in Mark 10:6, referring back to Genesis 1:27, where God made us in his image, male and female. Distortion of his image then, Paul says, led to same-sex intercourse that was against nature, against the way that God had created humans to function.

I'm going to talk a little bit about this pastorally later, but right now I'm just trying to explain the passage. And so, in verse 27, they received the penalty in themselves. Possibly as Jewett thinks, this refers to the physical consequences of their having intercourse in this manner.

But also, I think from the context, it refers to the further effacing of God's character and image in them. When you look at 1:19 and 1:24, you can contrast 8.23 on that point. Well, idolatry, is the progression from idolatry to immorality.

In Greek myths, the deities were immoral. They committed theft and murder. You can think of one of the early stories about Hermes, who was the messenger of the gods.

Well, shortly after he was born, he's kind of like a spoiled kid. He runs out and he steals some cattle, but he notices that somebody witnessed him doing that. So he says to him, don't tell anybody, please, that I stole these cattle.

And he offers him a reward if he doesn't tell anybody. Well, being a god, then he goes off and disguises himself, and comes back to the man to test him. And looking like someone else, he says to him, can you tell me who stole those cattle? And the man says, yeah, he went that way.

So, Hermes strikes him dead. They were guilty of theft and murder. They were guilty of adultery.

Actually, Hermes' wife, Aphrodite, was always messing around with Ares, the war god. You have Zeus raping girls and Hera avenging. She can't do anything to Zeus.

So, what does she do? She punishes the girls who weren't really at fault. They were innocent. And Zeus is also raping boys like Ganymede.

On some other occasions, Zeus is having an affair with a woman and just openly says, you know, he's Zeus. So, Hera gets her revenge and maneuvers it so that Zeus, unfortunately, has to burn her alive, and incinerate her. The story of Semele.

Well, some Greek philosophers, were kind of embarrassed by these myths. And so, they said, well, these weren't really gods raping women. These were virtues mating with other kinds of virtues.

But Jewish apologists connected such myths with the Greek male lifestyles that seemed to be endorsed by such myths. And Jewish apologists often ridiculed these myths. And we see that also sometimes in Scripture.

About homosexual activity in antiquity. It was common. It spread especially from the Greeks, but it was common also among Romans in this period.

Usually, it was bisexual among Greeks rather than exclusively homosexual. Most who quartered or molested boys planned to eventually marry women and have children of their own. It was reported among Gauls and Persians, especially with eunuchs and others.

But the dominant cultural influence for it in the Mediterranean world was Greek. It pervaded Greek society and was even attributed to deities. I mentioned Zeus raping Ganymede.

And there was Greek influence even in Rome, especially in the early period the influence was Greek. But homosexual behavior was attested in Rome from an early period. The Greek influence just multiplied it, especially for aristocrats who appreciated Greek culture in more ways as time went on.

And Romans often denounced it as due to Greek influence and denounced other things as due to Greek influence, softness, luxury, and so on. But for Romans, the main problem with it was the problem of status. A real man shouldn't assume a feminine position of being underneath during sexual intercourse.

And so, for Romans, a person of rank could do it with the slave, but they couldn't do it with somebody of their own social class. That was actually stuprem. That was actually considered illegal.

Paul writes in Greek to the majority Greek speakers in Rome, and they would be aware of these practices. There were places in Rome where people could actually find homosexual prostitutes as well as heterosexual prostitutes in places in Rome. Paul's view might appeal to some traditional Roman values, but not everybody, at least not everybody who wasn't converted to Jewish or Christian beliefs on this.

But Paul's view was ultimately grounded in Jewish and Old Testament beliefs that had also been adopted by Gentile converts to Judaism or to the Christian message. Now, in Greek culture, there were some sociological reasons that made this particularly appealing. Sexual outlets with males among Greeks.

Unwanted babies were abandoned on trash heaps. Probably female babies were abandoned more often than male babies. Some people have protested this, have said that's not very likely.

We've got like one letter from antiquity where a man writes a nice letter home to his wife. He says, I'm not there right now, but I hear you're pregnant. If it's a boy, keep it.

If it's a girl, throw it out. But people say, well, that's just one letter. But it's not just one letter.

They say, well, if girl babies had been thrown out more, then the Greek population would have declined over time. Well, actually ancient historians tell us that the Greek population did decline over time. The most serious evidence though, is in papyri from Egypt, even though we know that Egyptians didn't approve of this.

And Egyptians and Jews were the ones who didn't throw out babies. Egyptians would often pick them up off the trash heaps. They could raise them as their children, but because Rome actually gave tax penalties for doing that, sometimes they got, well, often they get raised as slaves.

So, babies were often thrown out in trash heaps, but the papyri, the business documents, we have some census records. And we have from some places in particular, some of the Greek gnomes or Greek villages or town centers of agricultural areas in Egypt, we have very stark differences in the male and female population with so many more males than females, like two-thirds male, two males to every female and so on, that it suggests, well, what accounts for this? Probably that girl babies were being thrown out. They did have abortion back then, but they didn't have a way of knowing whether the baby was a girl or a boy in the womb.

So, this would be the throwing out of babies afterward. Well, female babies were abandoned more often. When they were abandoned, babies could be left in the trash heaps to be eaten by vultures or dogs.

So, if you think you have difficulty evangelizing your society, or if you think your society is very immoral, keep in mind the society that Paul was seeking to evangelize was also quite immoral. And God was with him in evangelizing the society. And as a result, the throwing out of girl babies actually, you know, as Christianity spread in

later centuries, that and a lot of other horrendous things were suppressed, although later Christians had their problems too, but not this one.

So, the throwing out of babies, often they would be picked up off the trash heaps. Instead of being eaten by vultures or dogs, they would be raised, but most often as slaves. Some from Asia Minor were exported to Rome, the babies to be raised as slaves.

The male slaves were used for labor. The female slaves were used as prostitutes. Often, they would serve as barmaids in taverns, and then they would be forced to serve as prostitutes in the inns that often went with the taverns.

So Greek men, because of the shortage of women, we also see this in terms of the age of marriage. Greek men often married around the age of 30 and were often marrying wives who were 12 years younger than they were. And they could be even younger than that, but on average about 12 years younger than they were.

They often treated their wives as children. And before marriage, before the male population thinned out enough when the males were around 30, they had other sexual outlets. They could have sex with slaves if they were of a class that could afford slaves.

They could have sex with prostitutes. There were the ordinary prostitutes who were slave prostitutes who you'd pay a fee for, or there were the high-class prostitutes, the heteroi, where you'd pay a big fee for them. They often dressed in purple, and they were, in traditional Athenian culture, they were often the freest of the women in public, and the highest status of women in traditional Athens, classical Athens in earlier times.

But they could have sex with slaves, with prostitutes, or most affordably with each other. And often this took the form of pederasty with boys and also with early adolescents. Greeks openly admired young men's beauty, and it was believed to decline with puberty and facial hair, in other words, as they became less looking like women.

So, some slaveholders sought to forestall their boys becoming masculine by having the hairs plucked out, or worse, by turning the boys into eunuchs, so they wouldn't fully develop sexually as men. Some retained the objects of homosexual affection through their teens. So, it wasn't just boys.

It was also after they had achieved puberty and become men. Some young men, like Alcibiades, Alcibiades, were considered handsome much later and were reputed to be having sexual relations much later. Homosexual relations did occur between fully

mature men, but by far the predominant form of homosexual interest remained that of men towards prepubescent and adolescent males.

It was an unequal status of partners compared to gender disparity. The dominant partner would be on top in their acts of intercourse. Propriety and pederasty.

Men courted boys with gifts and interest. Many Greeks found that entertaining. Some fathers didn't want it, whether with their daughters or with their sons, but some people found it, and many people found it entertaining.

Only excesses like blatant seduction or rape were viewed as exploitive and punishable, but milder acts of seduction were considered to be acceptable often. Such outrage, when outrage existed, regarded only free boys. Even aristocratic Romans now exploited slaves, including slave boys as well as slave girls, at banquets.

And they often preferred that such boys remain what they called effeminate. This was mocked for those who were free, who were considered effeminate, but not for slaves who had been made effeminate, or they wanted them to be effeminate for certain reasons. Eunuchs and others with what was considered impaired masculinity were mocked.

Even though eunuchs could hold high positions, especially in some foreign courts, they tended to be mocked in the Mediterranean world. Male prostitutes, pimps could exploit slaves for this role without any public protest. The voluntary involvement of free young men invited disrespect.

So, a lot of these were slaves who were being used in this way. Teachers, conquerors, and emperors were all reputed to sexually exploit boys as well as, when available, young women. There were some Gentiles who criticized homosexual behavior or some parts of it.

Some criticized it just from personal preference. They said, well, I don't think that's good. But some Romans considered homosexual behavior especially, well, primarily for what they considered the feminine partner, the lower status partner, considered it unmanly or un-Roman.

This was normally just for the person in the feminine position, what they considered the feminine position. Many Roman philosophers associated the pursuit of boys with excesses like gluttony and drunkenness. Not that it was wrong in itself, but the pursuit of pleasure led it in a wrong way.

But there were some who also criticized it as being against nature, using the same kind of language Paul uses here. Usually, there was cultural acceptance of this. For

most people, it was personal preference or they recognized that it was a Roman practice.

Some even defended it as preferable to heterosexual affection, which they said was driven by animal passion rather than philosophic appreciation. The idea that only heterosexual intercourse could be driven by animal passion, however, was not appreciated by everyone. Anal intercourse was common.

Thus, men sometimes, having learned it with other males, used it with women, perhaps prostitutes, but it's attested in some pornographic vase paintings. Again, by the way, sexual behavior was so common beyond marriage in Greek and Roman culture that you find pornography openly. I mean, you have the prostitutes in a particular inn.

From Pompeii, we can see that there were pictures of them on the walls of Pompeii. Talk about sexual exploitation gives you different prices for each according to how beautiful they were according to the standards of the culture. You have acts of intercourse on vase paintings, both heterosexual and homosexual.

According to a work that's attributed to Demosthenes, it may not have actually been authored by Demosthenes, but he said, you know, we have regular prostitutes for our daily needs. We have high-class prostitutes for our special needs. And we have wives for the purpose of bearing these legitimate children.

Jewish rejection of homosexual behavior. In ancient Jewish sources, they unanimously reject homosexual behavior. Some diaspora Jews consider it to be against nature to use that same language that Paul uses here.

You find that in Philo a couple of times. You find that in Josephus, both of them writing in the first century. You find it in the Jewish, probably Jewish work, Pseudo-Facilities.

You find it in what may be a later work. There's some debate on the date, but the Testament of Naphtali. It was believed to be among Sodom's sins, although the Old Testament, you know, it's homosexual gang rape.

And it would have been heterosexual gang rape if they'd gotten their first choice. Also, well, no, actually, in that case, it would have been homosexual gang rape in any case. But I was thinking of Judges chapter 19 instead of Genesis 19.

Also in Ezekiel, it's not just the hospitality, it's not just gang rape. It's also the sins of Sodom including neglect of the poor and so on. But it does appear in Genesis that the homosexual character of it was also a consideration of its sinfulness.

Jewish people associated that with Sodom and they associated homosexual behavior, especially with Gentiles. Jewish sources report Jewish adulterers, johns, and murderers, but barely ever Jewish homosexual practice, which is an obvious contrast with ancient Greek culture and may suggest that socialization has something to do with sexual development. Not that it never happened.

Presumably, it must have happened sometimes, but we have no record of it or almost no record of it in Jewish sources, which may suggest that there was a cultural disposition that made it more acceptable among Greeks before Christianization than it was in Jewish culture. Now, culture and Paul's view. Paul uses the language against nature.

Like Stoics, he appealed to the natural order and sometimes Roman Stoics also applied this to homosexual behavior. Other Jewish writers also use this appeal on this subject. It's against nature.

Well, they weren't thinking in terms of modern genetics, but they were thinking in terms of where male and female organs were designed to fit. And Paul's language recalls the male and female of creation, as the context about creation also suggests. So what Paul is appealing to is the way God designed us to be.

But Paul is also preaching to the choir here, because remember, he's speaking of completely Gentile sins or things that were considered completely Gentile sins. By the time he's done, he's going to have condemned a much wider range of sins. Some use ancient culture to limit Paul's arguments here.

One of the arguments that they use is that Paul was addressing only pederasty. That is the best argument, I think, for limiting what Paul was addressing here. Certainly, pederasty was the most common form of Greek homosexual intercourse, but it wasn't exclusively pederastic.

And in verse 26, he seems to speak of lesbian relations, which also was not exclusively pederastic in any case. So probably Paul's argument isn't meant to address just that, especially given his specific language. Some say, well, it's only when it's linked with idolatry.

Well, in the Greek world, as opposed to what some people have said about Canaanite culture or other cultures, I'm not sure how true that is what they've said about, but in the Greek world, there was no direct link between idolatry and homosexual behavior. Paul makes a theological link, but this isn't just a cultural issue. At least one scholar has made an argument for an echo of the Enoch myth, but this is just one sin.

There were many sins in the Enoch story and Paul's appealing to a different model of the fall here than Enoch. Again, he's appealing back to creation. Well, how do we interpret Paul? That's a big issue on this.

Was there gay marriage in his day? That wasn't even an issue that he could have addressed. Nero, besides having intercourse with his older boyfriend, Tigellinus, and besides being married to Poppea Sabina and having Actaea, I believe it is, who was a slave girl that he had sex with, had a marriage to Sporus. But you couldn't be married to more than one person and nobody really took that as seriously a marriage.

It's something that people made fun of him for in the Roman world. That's the closest thing we've got that I found to it in antiquity. Jewish people talked about a culture they considered very wicked.

They said, yeah, men married men. It's in a later rabbinic source. But we don't have any direct views that gay marriage really existed in this period and was understood as marriage by people other than maybe Nero.

Sporus was a slave, I think. So, marriage was viewed as unions designed especially to produce legitimate heirs. Was Paul only against pederasty? The dominant practice wasn't the only practice.

The word pederast was widely available. If that's all he meant, he could have used that term. He specifies lesbian as well as male homosexual behavior and Paul explicitly targets the same-sex element of the behavior.

At the same time, we shouldn't exaggerate Paul's point. He uses idolatry and homosexual behavior because they were considered prototypical Gentile sins. It's a setup to address everybody's sins in verses 28 to 32.

Hence to help all people to recognize that all of us are sinners, 3:23. All of us have offended God's standard of righteousness and holiness. All of us need the good news that Paul is proclaiming. Many of Paul's members had this background.

Paul's members of the congregations that he started would have this background, certainly in Corinth. That would be the case. Paul was pastorally sensitive.

He was addressing the behavior, not classes of people. He's not providing pastoral counsel here for people who are struggling with temptation and is not certainly granting license to abuse those who practice homosexual behavior. We need to keep these things in mind because some people have used his teaching in ways that he didn't design his teaching to be used in.

Years ago, before this became a political issue that was debated back and forth in society and in most of the churches, apart from the Metropolitan Community Church at that time, I think they were the only ones who were saying that homosexual sexual intercourse is acceptable for Christians. At that time, when I was a pastor and this wasn't a big divisive issue in society, or our society, I had a couple of men in my congregation who were, in terms of their sphere of temptation, it was homosexual. My sphere of temptation was heterosexual.

They had temptation. I had temptation. But as far as I know, they were celibate.

We're not supposed to condemn people on the basis of their temptation. Otherwise, we would find ourselves condemning Jesus, who was tempted in all points like we, and yet without sin. Scripture says he was tempted.

We are tempted. We can't look down on somebody else because they're tempted. In fact, if they're tempted and they resist the temptation, we ought to respect them for that.

Now, there have also been other circumstances. These men were godly members of my congregation. But in another congregation where I was not the pastor, but the person came to me and confessed that he was struggling with temptation, and he wasn't doing so well with his.

He was going out weekly and having unprotected homosexual intercourse with other gay men, and he knew he was HIV positive. So basically, he was very likely infecting these other men so that they would die. That was obviously a much more serious problem.

So, there are different kinds of issues that we have to look at. But remember that what Paul is doing here is giving a set up, and he condemns all sin. The one time when we actually came close to practicing church discipline when I was a pastor was through the sin of slander.

If we want to discipline homosexual behavior, and we don't do it with heterosexual sex outside of marriage, then we're not being consistent. We're being hypocritical. We need to be consistent in our standards of holiness.

And I think that in Christ's love, wherever we are, our goal is to bring people to maturity in Christ. And we need to be sensitive to where people are at and to nurture them and to help them. And again, if this is just somebody's sphere of temptation, we have a lot of people with the heterosexual sphere of temptation, too, who don't always do too well.

And we need to be consistent across the board. Chapter 1 and verse 22. Paul has talked about idolatry.

He's talked about sexual immorality. He says in chapter 1 and verse 22, where they reject the truth about God, while they were asserting themselves to be wise, they became fools. And this leads us to what we see elsewhere in this chapter where the madness of sin becomes its own punishment.

Philosophers contrasted reason and the passions. Paul says people traded the truth about God, which would be reasonable. They traded it for falsehood in 1:25.

So, God handed them over to irrational desires; what philosophers would consider irrational passion. You know, passion has its value.

We wouldn't procreate without passion. Without desires, we probably would starve to death. We would dehydrate before that.

There are certain bodily functions that drive us, but it's not appropriate for those to rule us. We need to use our reason and follow God's truth. We can control our passions.

If it weren't possible at all to control our passions, we have a whole lot of people raping a whole lot of people, more than we already have. So, we are able to control our passions and we are expected by God to control our passions when it comes to things that God says are sinful. And some people, by the way, going back to what I just talked about before moving on with this, sometimes we've talked about this in class.

It's not an issue I like to talk about, but it's here in the text. So, when I talk about Romans, we deal with it. And it's also an issue, it's painful for me to talk about it some because I know how it hurts some people whom I care about very much.

But in one class, somebody was saying, well, it's not fair. You know, if your temptation is heterosexual, at least you can get married. Whereupon some of the people in the class said, that's not true, because they were older and they had been unable to get married, partly because they were waiting for a Christian spouse.

And in their particular ethnic church community, the women outnumbered the men two to one. And so many of them stayed single all their lives. And some others just didn't have to do with waiting for a Christian spouse.

They just didn't find a spouse. Whatever our situation is, some people actually have harder temptations to deal with than others. And we need to sympathize with that and we need to support them.

But ultimately, whatever our temptation is, it's like Revelation, the seven churches, all of them except Pergamum and Thyatira had different tests that they had to overcome, but all are called to overcome. And we could talk about the things we've had to overcome in our lives sometimes, but this is a really hard case and we need to be sympathetic. But in any case, the madness of sin is its own punishment.

People traded the truth about God for falsehood, so God handed them over to irrational desires. The philosophers would call this moral insanity. Paul speaks of the passions in 1:24, which includes heterosexual intercourse, and in verses 26 and 27, they corrupted God's image into idols.

And finally, they corrupted God's image in themselves by becoming so enslaved to the passions that they couldn't overcome them, which philosophers considered having unfit minds. So, in verse 28, he says, ultimately, people didn't evaluate it as right to hold on to the right knowledge about God. And there's a play on words here.

In Greek, they didn't judge it right to have the right knowledge about God. So God gave them over to minds that failed his evaluation. They didn't judge it right.

And so, God gave them over to an *adokimas* mind, *adokiman*, if I'm using the accusative. But anyway, minds that failed his evaluation. Although they knew some behavior was worthy of death, he says in verse 32, at the end of this section, he says, they did it anyway.

That is, they had completely abandoned true reason. And that's what sin does to us. It messes up our heads because we just give way to the passions.

We don't use our reason in the way God intended it to be used, informed by his truth of revelation. So, verses 28 through 32, deal with various vices. After he summarized these things that were considered exclusively Gentile sins, he goes on and addresses sins that weren't exclusively Gentile sins, that characterized pretty much everybody.

God gave them over, verses 24, 26, and 28. And then verse 28, their minds became corrupted. You also see that in verses 21 and 22.

It's probably what you also see in chapter eight, verses five through eight, when Paul speaks of the perspective or the way of thinking of the flesh, the mind of the flesh, where we have nothing higher, no divine revelation from the spirit informing us or leading us in the right way, where he says, they didn't approve God in their knowledge, it's from *Dokimazo*, approve God in their knowledge. So, God gave them over to unapproved *Dokimazo* minds to do unfitting things. Distorting the truth about God's character leads to distorting God's image in us.

And ultimately it leads to every kind of vice. The vice lists. Paul lists unfitting things produced by a depraved or corrupted mind.

Vice lists were common among ancient moralists. Sometimes they were arranged with repetitions to rhetorically drive home the point. Paul's list is longer than average, though it's by no means the longest.

You have vice lists in the Old Testament, you have them, especially in Greek literature. Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher, has one that's over a hundred items long. So, Paul's is longer than average, but by no means the longest.

But he has rhetorical repetition and variation that help drive home the point, and help arouse emotion. Chapter one, verse 29, humanity was filled with four basic evils. Then he goes on further in verse 29, they were full of five sins.

And then we have a summary of eight kinds of sinners in verses 29 and 30. And in verse 31, they have a deficiency in four positive traits. The language approve, they refuse to approve of God in their thinking, verse 28.

But now in verse 32, they approve others who share their own behavior. The function of the vice list. Humanity rightly faces death.

He says in verse 1:32, well, that's what we're going to see in 5:12 through 21. Adam introduced death to humanity. 6.23, the payment, the wages of sin is death.

In chapter eight in verse six, the mind of the flesh is death. But he says, but they knew better. They were morally responsible.

1:19 and 20 also in 2:14 and 15, where people have enough of the law written in their hearts, enough knowledge of the truth to know better for at least some of the things that they do, to have a conscience that has at least some truth in it. But God's righteous standard or requirement, Jewish people said, oh, these, these idolaters, these people who practice sexual immorality, God's going to wipe them out. God's going to destroy them.

Paul says, God's righteous standard, God's dikaioma, his righteous requirement demands capital punishment for all of us. All of us are sinners. The other things were set up.

These are Jewish as well as Gentile sins. Envy, strife, gossip, slander, arrogance, disobedience to parents, and so on. I've committed most of those and some of them I've committed quite often.

This is, here's one that's most relevant for Paul's further argument in Romans because he's often going to condemn boasting as being utterly inappropriate in the sight of God. Chapter 2, verse 17, and verse 23, 327, speaks of those who are boasters. Both Jews and Gentiles stand under sin.

He does this and makes this argument inductively here because, you know, all of us have sinned somewhere along this list, and then he's going to do it deductively in 3.9 through 19 with scripture. This is a setup for chapter 2. Judgment on Ammon, judgment on Moab. Yes, yes.

Judgment on all those pagans and judgment on you, oh Israel. And so, when we look at this, it's not so we can look at somebody else's sin and say, oh, you are really messed up. It's meant to say all of us are equally in need of God.

And therefore, all of us must come to God on the same terms. And as Paul will argue, that is through his perfect gift to us, his free gift to us, free to us, but he paid for it by the death of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session number 4, Romans 1:18-32.