

Worthless!

Romans 1:28-32

Imagine with me if you would, a trash dumpster, like the one we have in our parking lot. But imagine all sorts of foul, rotting, garbage jam-packed into it, and overflowing – gross, smelly, and ugly.

That is what we have jammed into the last five verses of Romans 1!

It should come as no surprise to us that God is not absent from this picture, but is the one giving sinners over to their sin-filled lives.

We have seen that sin begins in the mind, in the thoughts, and this is no different. Men counted God unfit, not worthy, of their thoughts. In turn, God gave them over to a worthless or depraved mind or outlook. The same word is used in both instances: worthless.

God was worthless to them practically, and their minds were given over to worthless thoughts and ways. They did not approve of God, and God gave them up to what he did not approve.

God is again actively exercising His wrath by giving people over to what they already sinfully desire. The same word from 24 and 26 is used in 28, as a sinful mindset is the curse put upon them.

There is a further progression here from 18-27. Man was meant to be know God as a prophet, but instead, he suppresses this knowledge and is given over to foolish speculations – all in the name of wisdom!

Man was called to be a **priest** unto God and to serve him only; but instead he is given to glorifying and worshipping himself, and exchanging the incorruptible God for corrupt idols.

Now, as **king**, see how poorly man rules and controls himself. We have seen he cannot control himself sexually, but perverts that good gift. Now we find in him various ways of inhumanity – sins against his neighbor.

This is allegedly the longest list of man's moral failures in all the Bible. And yet it fits within only 5 fat verses!

Yet, dark as the picture is, it is not so black as pictures drawn by Greek and Latin authors of this time!

But this is not a message just about back then. This nature of man is not changed in 2000 years. Men are plunging over the Niagara Falls to the rocks below, and swept out to a sea of endless fire! This is as relevant as ever as eternity!

As you see the order in your outlines, we find that the unworthy soul, mouth, face, relationship, life and conscience begins with an unworthy or unfit mind in verse 28.

To acknowledge God is a strong and unusual phrase. It is something more, something stronger than merely knowing. This is rejecting the proper acquaintance we ought to have with God. So it is a practical consideration being rejected. These will not have God in all of their lives.

This implies that God should be in our outlook on life in a full and practical way. But this is precisely the kind of divine knowledge men hate. A god who is afar off and is not central to all life, that kind of god – which is no god – is the one men love.

And God is giving him over to this evil misuse of the mind. WE are to love the Lord our God with all of our minds, all of our thoughts. And if we do not, the Lord of infinite understanding stands at the door, and rightly judges unworthy those who say He is unworthy of such loving thought.

And is this not the case today?

Look at the views of secularism which banishes God from government, the workplace, the public square, and especially education. Your tax dollars hard at work! And then are we surprised when their lives produce what this text says? They do things improper, unfit for men made by God, morally improper acts!

Such minds have become untrustworthy guides in moral matters, and their lives prove the metal of their unworthy hearts.

Paul is not done with the insides, though, as he brings us to four big and general descriptions with what such hearts have in them, what is overflowing out of them – they are filled with all kinds of unrighteousness; evil; greed; and malice.

Being “filled” has two ideas about it:

First, the idea of a continual state of mind. It is not interrupted. These thoughts and views abide in them and define them.

Second, being filled with such, they are controlled by them in the seat of their hearts. To be filled means to be under the control of this evil heart. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he!

See that these are just headings; Paul is saying all manner, all kinds of these large, ugly things.

Unrighteousness means a lack of moral uprightness; of being principled, of conforming to what is right, that is, the law. In Romans 8, Paul insists that the mind of the flesh cannot submit to the law of God.

The second word is best translated evil, where some have wickedness. The OT word ‘ra-ah’ means twisted, or perverting what is right. Fallen men still have standards, but they are crooked standards. Like the thief who had his own ten commandments, like not stealing from poor people or not stealing on Sundays!

Greed is unlimited selfishness, controlled by an eye all for self, and yet is never satisfied. The objects of desire are numberless!

The last word is malice and touches on the bad-natured bent of the fallen heart. This is full of spite and hatred toward others. Men always think the best of themselves and very near the worst of others.

These all show the desperate case of our hearts. Were God to lift his restraint upon them, what a flood of evil would fill our world! And in some cases, they truly are!

This leads then – as if this were not enough – to a second specific filling now of five related items in verse 29: full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice.

The last word is the same root as the end of the previous 4.

But the thing to note is that these all are tied up with envy with the first word, “envy”. Envy leads to murder, as in the case of Jesus’ death; envy brings forth strife, warfare – as in James 4, envy leads to deceit, lies, deception – lying is the necessary tool to cover up a coveting heart. Of interest, this word was used to describe the craftiness of Greeks sneaking in by the Trojan Horse! And the last

word is the meanness that grips many souls – the toxic and poisonous heart in sin, where the venom of a cobra’s heart is found!

Envy is such a bizarre evil. It cannot be happy for one’s neighbor, but is only happy when they are unhappy! This is inhumanity on display in the worthless mind!

And this cannot stay inside, but must exit from the mouth.

This is not the best verse division as gossips belong with slanderers – both describing the tongue, what James calls a world set on fire. The Phillips translation is vivid: 'whisperers-behind-doors' and 'stabbers-in-the-back'! Wow!

You can see how the evil within is being acted upon verbally – first in the dark and then from behind.

Words are powerful, and we murder one another with our tongues.

I wish it stopped there but it doesn’t.

The next four belong together as parts of pride, and the greatest pride being against God Himself.

In Athens this phrase was used for defiance; such impudence toward the gods was not tolerable in the Greek mind. To be a God-hater is to be a God-murderer – wishing that there were no God! The modern “God is Dead” movement has fathered a secularism which wishes there were no God.

And what then comes in the wake of such heavenward pride? Every form of arrogance toward our fellow man – even deeming certain parts of the human race as non-human!

John Gerstner said: "Man as sinner hates God, hates man, and hates himself. He would kill God if he could. He does kill his fellow man when he can. And he commits spiritual suicide every day of his life."

Insolence, arrogance and boasting are three aspects of the same thing – Trench has them as proud in activities, proud in thought and attitude, and proud in words and speech. They are all relational – puffing up one's self over others, demeaning others, being a full of boasting.

Cranfield summarizes them as being confident in one's own superior power, wealth, social position, physical strength, intelligence – any ability by which one's fellow man is treated with contempt!

But as bad as this attitude is, it doesn't end there. The next two should be joined together: inventors of evil and disobedient to parents, (1:30)

Inventors of evil things shows the restlessness of sinners, desiring some novel sin or evil. **Proverbs 4:16** says: "For they cannot sleep unless they do evil; and they are robbed of sleep unless they make *someone* stumble."

Disobedient to parents is a symptom of deep, moral and social disorder. In Roman times even, by both Jews and Greeks, disobeying one's parents was deemed 'profoundly dangerous'.

You can see how the two are linked as forms of sinning against conformity and authority. These inventors and disobedient are people nearly always transgressing the rule of their father and mother, while giving their hearts to whatever turns them on.

Think here of the 60's hippies and what they thought in contrast to the young people of the 1950's!

Well, we wish it didn't go farther in this passage, but it does:

From these unworthy faces of pride and disobedience, we come to verse 31: “without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;”

English versions try to capture the fact that each of these words begin with the same letter in the Greek.

The New Jerusalem Bible has it: without brains, honor, love or pity

These ingredients are crucial for civilization. To be without understanding is the same word to be foolish back in 21. They are senseless because the conscience is strangled and they act morally poor.

This can be found in many areas, but is especially evident in the political arena. When politicians cannot define the word “is” suddenly? Our previous President admitted to lying to our nation – that he always favored homosexual marriage, but he could not speak his mind because he could not get elected. Why was that not on the front of every newspaper?

The word “untrustworthy” means not keeping covenant; to be faithless when it is convenient, and break their word, their promise, their oath.

See how this touches on the high divorce rates today! Marriage vows are freely broken when convenient, to the tune of 50% of marriages are broken in this country.

Then, unloving or without natural affection. This is being heartless. We can see striking proof of this worthless attitude in ancient times in the practice of exposing unwanted infants, and in our modern day with the sin of murder in ABORTION.

Lastly, unmerciful, being ruthless in the sense of always asserting one's self regardless of the rights of others, without pity. Again, this quality was the toast of Rome as thousands packed the coliseum to witness the gladiator's gruesome bloodlust. And do we not have some pretty brutal forms of entertainment? If we do not witness actual death in our stadiums, we witness 100s and 1000s of violent deaths in the theater, on tv and computer screens pumped right into our homes even!

And still it doesn't end with these four – there is this last item Paul places on the top in 32 with which we close.

This verse has two parts – their knowledge of God's coming judgment against such sin and evils; and the non-effect this has not only on their own conduct but on their encouraging others in sin and evil.

The world in that day believed a coming judgment in the world to come, and that evil would not forever escape. Many moral stories were built around this conviction.

So this worthy of death is speaking about the final judgment – as in Rom. 2:5. If this were speaking of capital punishment, we cannot see how gossip, for instance, would be punishable in such a way.

So the picture is against this backdrop of knowing there is a day of judgment. But not only do they not repent or seek to amend their ways, and continue in their sin, they delight in others doing the same!

They know perdition is coming but they sin anyway; they laugh about hell, sing about it, mock at it, but know deep down what is coming.

But here they are applauding and encouraging evil in others – which can be worse than doing so ourselves.

On the one hand, it is a great inhumanity – another form of hating your neighbor – to consent and comply in his sins.

On the other, it seeks to make for a public condoning of evil.

One says: "This is really the darkest stroke in the whole picture. Not only were all those vices practiced but the public conscience was dead and evil could exhibit itself as if it were good. This is the final and deadliest phase of utter social corruption."

I heard a prominent politician backing the legalizing of marijuana a few years ago, but out of the other side of his mouth, he said he is not personally going to use this drug, nor would he permit his children to do so! He even went so far as to say his own wife might not vote for him.

Think of that – he is fine with your children being tempted to this evil; to be made more available to them, and now condoned by the civil authorities of the land. Isn't that in some ways worse? You know it is wrong; you see the damage it can do; you may even see it as sin and to be judged in the end – but you are for it!

Why would anybody seek to legislate contrary to their conscience? So they are willing to sell your children and their futures to get elected and gain taxes on the souls of our people!

Let us close with these words here – “knowing the ordinance of God – those practicing such evil are worthy of hell.”

But it doesn't change them. The law cannot convert; the poverty of life which comes with such sins cannot convert; a conviction that we should be better people, that we wish we didn't live this way – that doesn't change anyone. As they say, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Even the doctrine of hell, says Murray, does not create any hatred of sin or desire to repent of sin; it is not enough to shake men loose of their evil minds or ways.

One time Jonathan Edwards, the great preacher in America in the 1700's, and a man who often preached on judgment and hell. He was like the opposite of Joel Osteen! He was criticized for preaching too strongly on hell in the Bible.

You know how he replied? He answered: well, people still don't turn from their sins, so it must not be strong enough!

Let us take heed, and see in all these sins of men, the crying need of the only answer for sin – the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, shed for us on the cross of Calvary. Flee to him from the wrath to come!

- a. Worthless Minds And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind,
- b. Worthless Hearts ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice;
- c. Worthless Mouths *they are* gossips, ³⁰ slanderers,
- d. Reprobate Faces haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil [see it in their eyes], disobedient to parents,
- e. Worthless Relationally [following disobedience to parents] ³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;
- f. Worthless Lives to do those things which are not proper,
- g. Worthless Conscience ³² and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.