

The rejection of God – society's drift into ever-increasing depravity

• Five stages, continued...

3. A wild and unrestrained lifestyle

4. A movement from natural sin to unnatural sin

5. 'The fullness of sin' – a depraved mind

(i) Four general terms

(ii) Four more specific terms

(iii) Slander – secret and open

When a society does not know God it decays into corruption and vileness. The process is slow. If it were more sudden, perhaps it would be more obvious. But the frightening thing about social decay is that it moves so slowly that the generations that are passing by scarcely notice it. As people get older they are conscious that the days of their youth were somehow cleaner than their own time but one generation inherits the sins of a previous generation and then adds its own sins so that society gets worse than ever. God's anger against sin shows itself in letting the sinner do what he wants. Society drifts into ever-increasing depravity.

In Romans 1:21b–32 there are five stages in God's wrath as it works out in any given culture. First is the darkening of the mind, then false religion. **Next comes a wild and unrestrained lifestyle.** Paul says: ²⁴*Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, for the degrading of their bodies with one another.* ²⁵*They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised. Amen.* Then as human sin gets worse **a movement takes place from natural sin to unnatural sin.** The kind of sins Paul mentions in verses 24 and 25 are natural sins. But then God hands them over to yet a further stage in the downward slide. The fourth stage is **a further development into unnatural sin:** ²⁶*Because of this God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.* ²⁷*In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lusts for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

How far can sin go? The next stage is what verse 28 calls a 'depraved mind' and what verse 29 calls 'being filled' with all manner of sins. We may call it **'the fullness of sin'**. ²⁸*And since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.* ²⁹*They have become filled with every kind of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, rivalry, deceit and spite. They are gossips,* ³⁰*slanderers, God haters, insolent, arrogant, boastful inventors of evil, disobedient to parents;* ³¹*they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.*

First of all Paul uses four general terms: **unrighteousness**, a character which violates God's order; **evil**, a general word; **covetousness**, greed about possessions and money; **malice**, nastiness towards other people. (The Greek word for sexual immorality, found in inferior Greek manuscripts, is included in the 'King James' translation and one of its updatings, but in my opinion it is a mistake to follow late manuscripts.)

A second group is rather more specific: envy, wanting what another person has, murder, animosity towards others, rivalry, the desire to outclass others, deceit, treachery, lack of straightforwardness, evasiveness, spite, hoping evil and doing evil towards others.

Then a third group begins: whisperers, the habit of secretly and quietly spreading around slander. Then there is the open slanderer, then the way the profligates of the ancient world hated God. Their attitudes were thoroughly religious but they showed hatred towards

the one and only God who revealed himself in Israel and in Jesus. Next is mentioned their insolence. The word means a derisive, cynical, scornful treatment of others that stems from the enjoyment of being contemptuous of others. Arrogant refers to the person's proud, self-centred opinion of himself. Boastful focuses more on talk and upon bragging exaggerations. Last in this little section is the way the profligate of the ancient world exercised his ingenuity in finding new ways to sin; they were inventors of evil.

(iv) *Five negatives*

A fourth group of characteristics mentioned by Paul consists of five negatives: disobedient to parents, senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. It may be asked, is the human race really as bad as this? Yes. True, there are differences between people, and God's mercy and the influence of Christian tradition can hold down sins so that life is pleasant even in the worst of societies. But these restraints are just that – restraints. They are superficial.

(v) *Delighting in sin*

One might think it is not possible to get much lower than the process Paul has described so far in Romans 1:19–31. Almost the last phase is to delight in sin! ³²*Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practise them.*

Thank God – there is a solution

Thank God, Romans does not end with Romans 1:32. Although every mouth is stopped and the whole world is guilty before God, there is a righteousness that comes from God. It is free. It comes by simply trusting in Jesus. It involves being clothed with the righteousness of Jesus, and being transferred into his kingdom. Then one begins to live not under condemnation, not under sin, not under anyone's law, but under the grace of God. We learn to give ourselves to God in body and to be transformed in the renewing of our minds, and to work out the way of the **Holy Spirit** in every area of life. These men and women in Rome had been vile in sin. But all who give in to what they know in their hearts to be true and find God by putting their trust in Jesus will discover the truth of Paul's promise. He will be to them the power of God unto salvation.

• *It comes by simply trusting in Jesus*

• *And the help of the Holy Spirit*



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