

Divine Name itself (Mt 26:64=Mk 14:62). The Greek term translated “divine nature” (θεϊότης) is only found here (cp. θεότης, *theotes* “deity” in Col 2:9) and means “divinity.” It is a Hellenistic term found first in Wisdom 18:9 and denotes the divine nature and the properties attached to it. It is no wonder that Paul combines the concept of power and divine nature, for when one looks physically at the created world, one is almost always taken aback with the grandeur and innate power of the world. In fact, the idea that these invisible attributes are “clearly seen” may actually put an emphasis upon the physical act of “seeing” more than the sense of “see with the mind’s eye” as this passage is often interpreted. It is as man looks at the created world, seeing that it has been made by One greater, more powerful, indeed infinitely more powerful than himself, that he comes to realize the existence of the Creator. The only way that a person can deny what is evident is to lie both to himself and to others. Thus, Paul pointedly writes “so that they are without excuse.” No one will be able to stand before the bar of justice and claim that he or she was not made aware of God’s existence. No one will be able to charge God with injustice for meting out the just punishment upon those who have failed to submit to God and receive His Son as Savior. All will be without just excuse because all have been impacted by the created world in such a way as to verify beyond doubt the existence of God who is Creator.

To this may be added the obvious fact that evolution, regardless of its brand or color, is an attempt to diminish or do away with this cardinal reality. To find a way that the creation is, in fact, not a creation, but a tangled mass of probability and random events, is, in the end, a bold attempt to do away with the very witness that will stand at the judgment day against those who have rejected God and His Messiah. This is subtly evident in our day by the appearance of “Darwin” bumper stickers in protest of the so-called Christian *ichthus* (fish) symbols. Why would a symbol (whether valid or not) that purports to witness to Yeshua as Creator be countered by a “Darwin” icon? The answer is evident.

21-23 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Verses 21-23 sum up the response of sinful man to the self-revelation of God in the creation. Here Paul addresses the obvious question which his teaching has raised, namely, “if God has so clearly revealed Himself, why hasn’t mankind responded to Him in greater numbers?” Paul shows that rather than respond to God in faith, mankind in his sinfulness has rather rebelled against God, choosing to create his own gods or even put himself forward as a god. Paul is beginning His exposition of the wickedness of mankind’s heart, and his ultimate inability to respond to God on his own strength and wisdom.

We may note the characteristics of sinful man as listed by Paul here:

Mankind's Actions	Mankind's Inaction
Futile speculations Foolish heart darkened Professed wisdom Became fools Exchanged God's glory	Did not honor God Did not give thanks to God

Here we may ask the question of cause and effect. Note carefully how Paul puts mankind’s inaction first, and lists his sinful activities second. The principle seems obvious: failure to honor God and give Him thanks leads to all manner of self-centeredness, which finally leads to

idolatry. Note as well the principle that to honor God leads naturally to thanksgiving.

What is idolatry at its core? Idolatry is both the failure to give God the honor He deserves as well as giving the honor reserved only for God to another. At the heart of idolatry is the desire to control—to control one's destiny or the outcome of the events of life. All paganism is characterized by attempts to control the gods through ritual and ceremony, or through trickery. The statue which an idolator erects as a point of worship is nothing less than an attempt to bring the invisible god closer by means of the image and ritual connected to it. We ought to examine our worship and walk with God, that we not slip into religious forms of idolatry, thinking that through our practice of worship we can somehow guarantee the outcome of life's events.

Note well the progression: after failing to honor God by acknowledging Him as Creator, and thus failing likewise to thank Him for the creation, sinful man turns to "futile speculation." Being created with the need for God, mankind, after rejecting Him, creates his own god through "futile speculation." Paul no doubt refers to the various cosmogonies formulated by the ancient pagan civilizations in order to explain the existence of mankind and the world in which he lived. Once the creatorhood of God has been abandoned, the slide into full idolatry has begun. Intellectual pride takes over, and man exists, not as the image-bearer of his Creator, but as even lower than the animal life which God created for his use. He bows to the animals over which he was to rule.

There is a sense then, as v. 21 plainly indicates, that a great part of glorifying God is to give Him thanks as the source of all things which we need and enjoy in this life. The unthankful spirit of rebellion is at home with the deception of idolatry.

24-25 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 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.

This concept of God giving sinners over to their own desires has been bothersome for many as they read this passage. The word translated "gave them over" is παρέδωκεν, an aorist of the verb παραδίδωμι, *paradidomi* "to deliver," "hand over." The exact phrase ("God gave them over") is used two more times in this very section, in vv. 26 and 28, giving an undeniable emphasis upon this activity of God. How should we understand God's action in "giving them up?"

First, the repeated phrase would indicate that this was not a passive response of God to the sin of mankind, but an active one. God, in regard to the rebellious actions of sinful mankind, acted not in mercy and grace (in this instance) but in punishment and retribution by giving sinful mankind over to the very sin he desired, but the sin which would be his final demise.

But in understanding this as an action of God in permitting sinful mankind to go his own sinful way, we could run the risk of concluding that a sinner's approach to God is more or less in his own hands. That is to say, if these spoken of in our text (Gentiles most likely) were allowed to go their own way by the Almighty because they persisted in their sin, it might be easy to conclude that those who come to faith are those who, of their own accord, turn from their sinfulness to seek God. Yet such a conclusion will never stand in the face of Paul's dramatic statements of 3:10ff, that no one seeks after God and that everyone has turned aside and gone straying from God after one's own lusts. How then are we to understand the actions of God in the "giving them over" process?

We must see the actions of God as both just and merciful at the same time. God, in His justice, gives to the sinner what the sinner seeks: the ability to sin and to go further in sin. Yet in the justice of this (since sin carries with it its own temporal penalty) there is also mercy, for the penalty of sin which sin carries may turn the sinner from his ways and to the Lord. Cranfield writes:

It seems more consistent with what is said elsewhere in the epistle (e.g. in chapter 11) to understand the meaning to be that God allowed them to go their own way in order that they might at last learn from their consequent wretchedness to hate the futility of a life turned away from the truth of God. We suggest then that Paul's meaning is neither that these men fell out of the hands of God . . . nor that God washed His hands of them; but rather that this delivering them up was a deliberate act of judgment and mercy on the part of the God who smites in order to heal (Is 19:22), and that throughout the time of their God-forsakenness God is still concerned with them and dealing with them. (Romans, 1:121)

It should also be remarked that the same verb *paradidomi* ("to deliver") is used in 8:32 in reference to the Father "delivering up" the Son to the cross. Thus, the idea of "deliver" or "give over" does not necessarily contain within it the idea of "give up forever," "wash one's hands of it," etc. The fact that God gave up the Son to the cruelties of the cross certainly did not mean He had given Him up forever. Thus, in our present text the idea of "striking" in order to "heal" may be the better interpretation.

The result of God "giving them over" is that they, unfettered, give way to their base passions, and rather than carrying God's image as mankind, descend to the level of animals, dishonoring themselves and God with each other in unnatural sexual acts. Verse 25 describes that they "exchanged the truth of God for a lie," reiterating essentially what has already been stated in v. 23.

The Greek text includes the article before "lie:" "exchange the truth of God for *the* lie." Here, no doubt, idolatry is set as opposite to the worship of God. The truth of God is the reality of His person known through His self-revelation, that He and He alone is God and there is no other, that He alone created the world and all things, and that He alone is deserving of mankind's worship. "The lie," first announced by Satan in the garden, is nothing short of idolatry, i.e., that there are more gods than One, and that mankind can create gods or even make himself into a god equal to or greater than the Creator. This is "the lie" fashioned by the father-of-lies, the Evil one.

When confronted with the stark contrasts of the One true God and the lie of idolatry, Paul, in good Hebrew fashion, pronounces a *brachah*, a blessing upon the Name of God, as appropriate for anyone who has dedicated heart and soul to the singular worship of the One true God. It is almost as though Paul could not leave God's name and the mention of idolatry in the same sentence without sanctifying the Name (setting it apart) by means of a blessing. The Hebrew would be *בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד*, "blessed is Adonai forever and ever" or even *הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא*, "the Holy One, blessed be He," shortened in the Aramaic liturgy (such as the Kaddish) to *בְּרִיךְ הוּא*, "blessed be He."

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

We may infer from this and the entire context that God honors proper sexual relations, and such relations honor Him. I infer this from the fact that in changing the creative order in male/female relationships, the text plainly teaches that mankind dishonors God, and that He gives them over to "degrading" passions. Thus, when proper sexual relations occur between husband and wife, this must both honor God and be honored by God. So the writer to the Messianic Jews (Hebrews) states: "Let marriage *be held* in honor among all, and let the *marriage* bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." (Heb. 13:4)

The passions to which God permits sinful and rebellious man to go are labelled as "degrading." *ἀτιμία*, *atimia*, is simply the Greek word for "honor" with negating *alpha-privative*. There are passions which honor God and there are those which do not. Here, then, is an important truth, that when our passions align with God's creative purpose, they are honorable. But

when they do not, they are “dishonorable” or “degrading.” They not only dishonor God, but they also dishonor mankind who were created in His image.

Verses 26 and 27 describe the whole nature of homosexual activity in clear and forthright terms. Note carefully how much emphasis is put upon the “natural” order of things (φυσικός, *phusikos*, “natural,” “belonging to nature”). The foundation for Paul’s argument is the creative order, for in the creative order Paul, like all the biblical writers, finds a Divine order which signals the Divine intention of His creation. God created the world in such a way so as to reveal Himself, and thus every part of the creation has Divine purpose. As such, to tamper with the creation, to turn it on its head, to exchange the creative order for the chaos of sinful man, is to deny the Creator and His designs.

Thus, the sin of homosexuality is first and foremost a direct sin against God, and only secondarily a sin against mankind. This is, of course, true of all sins, but it may be said particularly of the sin of homosexuality. In no other dimension of human relations has God so clearly revealed His love for us than in the male/female relationship properly held within the covenant of marriage. Here, in marriage, the many-yet-one mystery of God (“Let us make man in our image,” Gen 1:18) is seen: “therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife, and the two shall become one” Gen 2:24. It is in the physical union of man and wife that the mysterious multiplicity yet infinite unity of the Godhead is experienced by the image-bearers, for man and woman who are different and therefore individual, become one. And this unity is further physically portrayed in the children the union produces.

Perhaps, then, homosexuality as no other sin hits at the heart of the very revelation of God, and seeks to eradicate the image of the Creator stamped upon the beings of His pleasure. Yet in the midst of the disgust which the Apostle portrays over such sin, we may once again infer that even as homosexuality destroys the divine picture of unity, so marriage as defined by the Creator extols and magnifies the truth of the One God whose unity is perfect and eternal, who nonetheless exists in three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

27 receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

This may parallel v. 18 and the wrath of God being revealed (though refer to the notes on v. 18 for my own understanding of the wrath of God being revealed in the history of the cross), though it seems most likely that the punishment they receive is the sexual perversion itself, attended with all of its lack of satisfaction and its unquenchable thirst for more.

The Greek and Roman cultures were well known for their tolerance and even glorification of all sorts of sexual perversion. It was common among Semitic cultures as well, though to the Jews it was a grave abomination (Gen 19:1-28; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Deut 23:17f; 1Ki 14:24; 2Ki 23:7; Is 1:9; 3:9; Lam 4:6). Paul speaks of it elsewhere in 1Cor 6:9; 1Ti 1:10 and Peter also in 2Pt 2:6ff. Cf. also Jude 7. One should also not overlook Mt 10:14f; 11:23f.

Surely in our times the same outlook is increasingly gaining a foothold among the majority of our society, and hastens toward being fully ripe for God’s wrath.

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

This clearly parallels what Paul has already written in verses 22 and 25, bringing the reader to a summary before making additional statements. The Greek term translated “acknowledge” is ἐπίγνωσις, *epignosis*, a compound word made up of the preposition ἐπὶ, “upon,” “over,” “on the basis of” and γνῶσις, *gnosis*, one of the common nouns meaning “knowledge,” and related to the verb ἐπιγινώσκω, *epiginosko*, “to know.” While often the term is simply synonymous with the common “to know,” the additional preposition may indicate knowledge that

has been accumulated, i.e., facts upon facts. In classical Greek the term is only used of moral or ethical knowledge (i.e., knowledge learned through repeated circumstances of life). Paul may have chosen to use the word here to emphasize that those who refuse to bow before God have refused to accept multiple revelations of His being and character. They fail to accept fact upon fact that otherwise would render them believers. The literal translation of the Greek would be, "And just as they did not see fit to have God in knowledge. . . ." In other words, they refuse to accept what they know to be true.

God gave them over to a depraved mind The verse begins with the Greek word καθώς, *kathos*, "just as," "in like manner," so we must understand that God's actions in giving them over is in direct response and character to their own actions. I might say it this way: even as they refused to acknowledge God, so in like manner God refused to acknowledge them. Thus, to "give them over" (cf. vv. 24, 26) is to allow them to go in their own selfish and deluded direction—to be consumed with their false outlook.

The "depraved mind" is ἀδόκιμον νοῦν (*adokimon noun*) in the Greek. Ἀδόκιμος (*adokimos*) is used elsewhere in the Apostolic Writings in 1Cor 9:27; 2Cor 13:5, 6, 7; 2Ti 3:8; Tit 1:16; Heb 6:8 and properly means "failing the test," "disqualified," "unsatisfactory," "useless," "disreputable," "reprobate." Thus, its use here is to emphasize that the mind to which these are given over is a mind entirely debilitated and corrupted so as to be a completely untrustworthy guide in moral decisions, as the concluding phrase indicates, "to do those things which are not proper." "Proper," therefore, is clearly defined by Paul as that which agrees with God and His revelation. He alone is the standard of right and wrong.

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

Here we have one of Paul's lists of sins, a list comprised of 21 items in the Greek. Many have suggested various groupings, but none are obvious. It may be that Paul, in typical Hebrew style, arranges the words in a chiastic arrangement, something like the following:

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

If Paul had some arrangement like this in mind, then the triad “gossips, slanderers, haters of God” stands at the middle of the chiasm and thus the place of emphasis. From a Hebrew perspective, those who regularly engage in *leshon hara*, (evil speech) are those who show their contempt for God. We may note in parallel to this thought the words of James: “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well” (James 3:2).

- unrighteousness*: opposite of Hebrew צְדָקָה, *tzedakah*, which would involve acts of mercy (thus the final word in the list is “unmerciful”)
- wickedness*: all forms of evil
- greed*: selfish getting without consideration of others (“evil eye”)
- evil*: Greek κακία, *kakia*, a general word for bad actions
- envy*: perhaps the primary source of all sin; ultimately, the desire to be God
- murder*: the physical side of envy; taking a life
- strife*: the opposite of שְׁלוֹמִים, *shalom*, peace. One who causes division among people
- deceit*: lying, appearing to be other than one truly is
- malice*: κακονηθείας, which means “spite” or ill-feelings against another individual
- gossips*: a person who destroys another person with לשון הרע *leshon hara*’ evil speech
- slanderers*: literally to speak evil. This may go beyond gossip to even fabricating evil tales about another person in order to destroy them.
- insolent*: only here and in 1Ti 1:13. Treating someone else as though they were well beneath oneself; attempting to take the place of God.
- arrogant*: self-centered, attempting to impress others by status in life, etc.
- boastful*: arrogance particularly seen in one’s speech
- inventors of evil*: mankind has the unique ability to take the God-given gift of creativity and turn it to find new ways to sin, particularly in hurting one’s fellowman.
- disobedient to parents*: the breakdown of authority in the home is the first step to denying the authority of God.
- without understanding*: blinded to the truth; cp. the concept of “fool” in Proverbs
- untrustworthy*: someone who deals treacherously (cf. Lxx Jer 3:7, 8, 10, 11). The Greek term (ἀσυνθέτος, *asunthetos*, literally means “covenant breaker”).
- unloving*: the Greek word is ἀστόργη, *astorge*, alpha-privative with στόργη, *storge*, which means the love shown particularly between family members, thus KJV “without natural affection.” Some point to the hideous practice in the Greco-Roman world of drowning unwanted babies and other forms of infanticide.
- unmerciful*: without the ability to show mercy, i.e., to grant kindness to someone who might otherwise deserve punishment.

If the chiastic arrangement was in Paul’s mind as I have suggested, then we have a reason for his imbedding the triad in the heart of the chiasm, summed by “haters of God.” In other words, if such an arrangement were in the mind of the Apostle, then he wanted us to know that hatred for God, displayed most egregiously by slander and gossip against one’s fellowman, is the fountainhead of all these sordid evils, or the final expression of them. Mankind’s inability to bow before God and accept His rule issues in the growth of sin and the eventual demise of mankind’s ability to portray the image of God in which he was created.

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.

As far as Paul is concerned, the “ordinance of God” which calls for capital punishment for those who fall to the depths of murder and sexual perversion, revealed specifically in the Torah, is likewise embedded in the creative order. Those who rebel against God in these ways know that the final punishment of such rebellion is their ultimate demise.

Thus, since Paul has already shown that the revelation of God is to be found in the creation itself, and even more surely in created man himself, those who rebel against God and make unrighteousness their lifestyle are fully aware that their actions will draw the death penalty. But what is fascinating about this verse is that those who give “hearty agreement” to such sinful activity are considered by Paul as perhaps more guilty even than those who commit the acts. Cranfield writes:

But there is also the fact that those who condone and applaud the vicious actions of others are actually making a deliberate contribution to the setting up of a public opinion favorable to vice, and so to the corruption of an indefinite number of other people. So, for example, to excuse or gloss over the use of discrimination and oppression, while not being involved in them directly, is to help to cloak monstrous evil with an appearance of respectability and so to contribute most effectively to its firmer entrenchment. (*Romans*, 1.135)