

Chapter Seventeen
Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans
God's Third Response to Lost Mankind's Denial of His Existence

“²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; ²⁹ Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, ³⁰ Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: ³² Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Romans 1:28-32).

Egypt's Sun *god* Ra was believed to be the *Father* of all *gods*. Ra was Egypt's primary *god*. In God's plagues upon Egypt, He used darkness to show Pharaoh the reality of his unbelief in the true God. Even though Pharaoh believed in Ra and sacrificed to Ra, it was still considered unbelief by God.

The Egyptians (like most pagan nations of ancient times) believed in Henotheism. This simply means that some *gods* were considered more powerful than other *gods*. If a nation was victorious over another nation in war, the victorious nation's *god* was superior to the other nation's *god*. The victorious nation would then add the weaker *god* to their pantheon of *gods*. In doing so, the more nations they conquered, the more *gods* they collected and the more powerful they became. Each of the ten plagues was against one of the false *gods* of Egypt. The 9th plague was against the Sun *god* Ra.

Spiritually blind people are almost completely ignorant of Who God is or what He is like. Spiritually blind people do not know they live in the darkness of their own ignorance. They have never known anything but that darkness. In fact, they think living in that darkness is normal. In order to turn them from the darkness, God must bring a depth of spiritual darkness upon them so severe it can be felt.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness *which* may be felt” (Exodus 10:21).

“¹⁰ Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, *being* bound in affliction and iron; ¹¹ Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: ¹² Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and *there was* none to help. ¹³ Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saved them out of their distresses. ¹⁴ He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. ¹⁵ Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! ¹⁶ For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder” (Psalm 107:10-16).

Romans 1:28-32 is the last area in this digression towards reprobation. God wants to turn those who reject His truths and His existence from their chosen pathway of sin. In this last digression, this person's life is filled with the consequences of living their lives in selfish and carnal pursuits for fulfillment. God loves all men too much to allow them to continue on such a pathway without doing what is necessary to help them see the hopelessness of it all. The only way to do that is to allow the misery of their choices to become the reality of their existence. Therefore, He foretells what will “come to pass” from these choices of the free will “before they spring forth.”

“⁵ Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: ⁶ I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; ⁷ To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, *and* them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. ⁸ I *am* the LORD: that *is* my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. ⁹ Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them” (Isaiah 42:5-9).

Those who deny God's existence are given over to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:28-32).

This refers to the person who has gotten so far away from truth and his conscience that he tries to mentally erase the very idea of God from his *psyche*.

“Reprobate” is from the Greek word *adokimos* (ad-ok'-ee-mos) meaning that which does not prove itself for its intended purposes. I think the best English word reflecting the idea behind “reprobate” from the context of Romans 1:28 is the word *unconscionable*. *Unconscionable* means not guided or restrained by conscience, therefore excessive or immoderate in practices.

The word “mind” is translated from the Greek word *nous* (nooce) referring to the mind and its ability to perceive and understand in order to make the correct judgments. All five gates of his body (sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell) are perverted in their ability to make right judgments. All five gates of his soul (*psyche*: imagination, reason, memory, conscience and affections) are perverted in their ability to make the right judgments. When the will (the mind) acts upon the everyday judgment calls necessary for an ordered life, the person with a “reprobate mind” will almost always make a choice that takes him deeper and deeper into the darkness of this world. Once God gives him over to this reprobation of his mind, his judgments in everyday life will result in the things listed in Romans 1:29-31.

When God says “they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,” He is referring to that realm of education the secular world calls *knowledge*. The word “retain” is from the Greek word *echo* (ekh'-o) meaning here to hold as a possession of the mind. In other words, they totally reject the truth of God's existence and wipe even the possibility of His existence from their minds. As a result, they totally reject any truth which is proposed to originate with God.

Since imprinting the absolutes of God's truth on the psyche is the only way a functioning conscience can make correct judgments, this person is “given over” to a life without a conscience. This depraved reasoning (“reprobate mind”) will lead this person “to do those things which are not convenient” (Romans 1:28). The word “convenient” is from the Greek word *kathoko* (kath-ay'-ko) referring to practices which are unfitting and inappropriate.

According to Romans 1:29, this person's life will become “filled with” unfitting and inappropriate practices. “Being filled with” is from the Greek word *pleroo* (play-ro'-o) meaning a life so full of itself it will be full of these things listed as the consequence. “All” can be inserted in front of each to express the extreme influence of a “reprobate mind” upon a life. God gives us twenty-two characteristics of this last degree of unbelief in an individuals life and in a society predominantly filled with unbelievers.

- **“Unrighteousness”** is from the Greek word *adikia* (ad-ee-kee'-ah) referring to the violation of justice.
- **“Fornication”** is from the Greek word *porneia* (por-ni'-ah) referring to illicit sexual practices.
- **“Wickedness”** is from the Greek word *poneria* (pon-ay-ree'-ah) referring to a depravity in purposes and desires.
- **“Coveteousness”** is from the Greek word *pleonexia* (pleh-on-ex-ee'-ah) referring to a growing, greedy desire to have more and more.
- **“Maliciousness”** is from the Greek word *kakia* (kak-ee'-ah) referring to a desire to injure someone or a wickedness that is not ashamed to break laws.
- **“Envy”** is from the Greek word *phthonos* (fthon'-os) meaning life actions always prompted by envy.
- **“Murder”** is from the Greek word *phonos* (fon'-os) meaning a life full of slaughter.
- **“Debate”** is from the Greek word *eris* (er'-is) meaning a life filled with strife and contention.
- **“Deceit”** is from the Greek word *dolos* (dol'-os) referring to deceptive, crafty manipulation.
- **“Malignity”** is from the Greek word *kakoetheia* (kak-o-ay'-thi-ah) referring to bad character and bad morals.
- **“Whisperers”** is from the Greek word *psithuristes* (psith-oo-ris-tace') referring to a secret slanderer.

- **“Backbiters”** is from the Greek word *katalalos* (kat-al'-al-os) meaning a person who secretly defames another or speaks evil of them.
- **“Haters of God”** is from the Greek word *theostuges* (teh-os-too-gace') referring to a person who is exceptionally impious and wicked.
- **“Despiteful”** is from the Greek word *hubristes* (hoo-bris-tace') referring to a person who is insolent and who either heaps insulting language upon others or does them some shameful act of wrong.
- **“Proud”** is from the Greek word *huperephanos* (hoop-er-ay'-fan-os) refers to thinking of one's self as superior to others. This often expresses itself in prejudices by despising others or even treating them with contempt (disrespect).
- **“Boasters”** is from the Greek word *alazon* (al-ad-zone') referring to a vain and pretentious person.
- **“Inventors of evil things”** is from the Greek words *epheutes* (ef-yoo-ret'-ace) *kakos* (kak-os') referring to a person who schemes in his thinking and imagination of ways to undermine or harm another person.
- **“Disobedient to parents”** is from the Greek words *apeithes* (ap-i-thace') *goneus* (gon-yooce') referring to a person who obstinately resists the authority of his parents. The idea goes into insubordination against all who have authority over him.
- **“Without understanding”** is from the Greek word *asunetos* (as-oon'-ay-tos). It goes way beyond ignorance, referring to a person who lacks any real understanding of the realities of life (including spiritual realities) and therefore makes decisions without any consciousness to those realities.
- **“Covenantbreakers”** is from the Greek word *asunthetos* (as-oon'-thet-os) referring to a person who cannot be trusted to keep promises.
- **“Without natural affection”** is from the Greek word *astorgos* (as'-tor-gos) referring to a person who is incapable of loving anyone but himself.
- **“Implacable”** is from the Greek word *aspondos* (as'-pon-dos) referring to a person incapable of making commitments (let alone keep one).
- **“Unmerciful”** is from the Greek word *aneleemon* (an-eleh-ay'-mone) referring to a person unwilling to help the needy or a person without any compassion for others regardless of the severity of their predicament.

The closing statement of Romans 1:32 informs us that the Holy Spirit has fully convinced this person of God's pending judgment on his/her life. “Knowing” is from the Greek word *epiginosko* (ep-ig-in-occe'-ko) meaning this person has a thorough perception of what will happen to him once he dies yet he has no fear of God about it because he continues to deny the inner witness of his conscience to God's truths and existence.

“Judgment” is from the Greek word *dikaioma* (dik-ah'-yo-mah) referring to a sentence by a judge for a crime committed. The intent here is that this person is fully convinced in his conscience about the eternal death sentence upon him (Romans 6:23). Yet he lives in denial of that cloud of doom over his life. Because of this denial, he not only continues on this pathway to destruction, he forms a partnership with others involved in the same practices which reinforces both his sinful practices and theirs.

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1. Read Exodus 10:21 and Psalm 107:10-16 and discuss what God is doing in this third phase as recorded in Romans 1:28-32. _____

2. The last step in the digression is God giving these people over to a reprobate mind. Fully discuss what is meant by a reprobate mind and how this relates to the conscience of man. _____

3. When the mind is reprobate, discuss how this affects the five gates of the body. _____

4. When the mind is reprobate, discuss how this affects the five gates of the soul. _____

5. When God says "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge," what is He referring too? _____

6. What is the result of this in the life of this person? _____

7. List the 22 "things (practices) which are not convenient" and give the meaning of each (Romans 1:29-31).

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8. Read Romans 1:32. What is it that this person fully understands and what does he do about it? _____
