

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter we may observe,

- I. The preface and introduction to the whole epistle, to v. 16.
- II. A description of the deplorable condition of the Gentile world, which begins the proof of the doctrine of justification by faith, here laid down at v. 17. The first is according to the then usual formality of a letter, but intermixed with very excellent and savoury expressions.

ROMANS 1:1-7

THE APOSTLE'S COMMISSION

In this paragraph we have,

I. The person who writes the epistle described (v. 1): *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ*; this is his title of honour, which he glories in, not as the Jewish teachers, *Rabbi, Rabbi*; but a servant, a more immediate attendant, a steward in the house. *Called to be an apostle*. Some think he alludes to his old name Saul, which signifies *one called for*, or *enquired after*: Christ sought him to make an apostle of him, Acts 9:15. He here builds his authority upon his call; he did not run without sending, as the false apostles did; *kletos apostolos* — *called an apostle*, as if this were the name he would be called by, though he acknowledged himself not meet to be called so, 1 Corinthians 15:9. *Separated to the gospel of God*. The Pharisees had their name from separation, because they *separated themselves to the study of the law*, and might be called *aphorismenoi eis ton nomon*; such a one Paul had formerly been; but now he had changed his studies, was *aphorismenos eis to Euangelion*, a gospel Pharisee, separated by the counsel of God (Galatians 1:15), *separated from his mother's womb*, by an immediate direction of the Spirit, and a regular ordination according to that direction (Acts 13:2, 3), by a dedication of himself to this work. He was an entire devotee to the gospel of God, the gospel which has God for its author, the origin and extraction of it divine and heavenly.

II. Having mentioned the gospel of God, he digresses, to give us an encomium of it.

1. The antiquity of it. It was *promised before* (v. 2); it was no novel upstart doctrine, but of ancient standing in the promises and prophecies of the old Testament, which did all unanimously point at the gospel, the morning-beams that ushered in the sun of righteousness; this not by word of mouth only, but in the scriptures.

2. The subject-matter of it: it is concerning Christ, v. 3, 4. The prophets and apostles all bear witness to him; he is the true treasure hid in the field of the scriptures. Observe, When Paul mentions Christ, how he heaps up his names and titles, *his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*, as one that took a pleasure in speaking of him; and, having mentioned him, he cannot go on in his discourse without some expression of love and honour, as here, where in one person he shows us his two distinct natures.

(1.) His human nature: *Made of the seed of David* (v. 3), that is, born of the virgin Mary, who was of the house of David (^{<417>}Luke 1:27), as was Joseph his supposed father, ^{<414>}Luke 2:4. David is here mentioned, because of the special promises made to him concerning the Messiah, especially his kingly office; ^{<412>}2 Samuel 7:12; ^{<421>}Psalms 132:11, compared with ^{<413>}Luke 1:32, 33.

(2.) His divine nature: *Declared to be the Son of God* (v. 4), the Son of God by eternal generation, or, as it is here explained, *according to the Spirit of holiness. According to the flesh*, that is, his human nature, *he was of the seed of David*; but, *according to the Spirit of holiness*, that is, the divine nature (as he is said to be *quicken'd by the Spirit*, ^{<418>}1 Peter 3:18, compared with ^{<414>}2 Corinthians 13:4), he is the Son of God. The great proof or demonstration of this is *his resurrection from the dead*, which proved it effectually and undeniably. The sign of the prophet Jonas, Christ's resurrection, was intended for the last conviction, ^{<413>}Matthew 12:39, 40. Those that would not be convinced by that would be convinced by nothing. So that we have here a summary of the gospel doctrine concerning Christ's two natures in one person.

3. The fruit of it (v. 5); *By whom*, that is, by Christ manifested and made known in the gospel, *we* (Paul and the rest of the ministers) *have received grace and apostleship*, that is, the favour to be made apostles, ^{<418>}Ephesians 3:8. The apostles were made a spectacle to the world, led a

life of toil, and trouble, and hazard, *were killed all the day long*, and yet Paul reckons the apostleship a favour: we may justly reckon it a great favour to be employed in any work or service for God, whatever difficulties or dangers we may meet with in it. This apostleship was received *for obedience to the faith*, that is, to bring people to that obedience; as Christ, so his ministers, received that they might give. Paul's was for this obedience *among all nations*, for he was the *apostle of the Gentiles*, ^{<5113>}Romans 11:13. Observe the description here given of the Christian profession: it is *obedience to the faith*. It does not consist in a notional knowledge or a naked assent, much less does it consist in perverse disputings, but in obedience. This obedience to the faith answers the *law of faith*, mentioned ^{<5127>}Romans 3:27. The act of faith is the obedience of the understanding to God revealing, and the product of that is the obedience of the will to God commanding. To anticipate the ill use which might be made of the doctrine of justification by faith without the works of the law, which he was to explain in the following epistle, he here speaks of Christianity as an obedience. Christ has a yoke. "*Among whom are you*, v. 6. You Romans in this stand upon the same level with other Gentile nations of less fame and wealth; you are all one in Christ." The gospel salvation is a common salvation, ^{<5103>}Jude 1:3. No respect of persons with God. *The called of Jesus Christ*; all those, and those only, are brought to an obedience of the faith that are effectually called of Jesus Christ.

III. The persons to whom it is written (v. 7): *To all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints*; that is, to all the professing Christians that were in Rome, whether Jews or Gentiles originally, whether high or low, bond or free, learned or unlearned. Rich and poor meet together in Christ Jesus. Here is,

1. The privilege of Christians: They are *beloved of God*, they are members of that body which is beloved, which is God's *Hephzibah*, in which his delight is. We speak of God's love by his bounty and beneficence, and so he hath a common love to all mankind and a peculiar love for true believers; and between these there is a love he hath for all the body of visible Christians.

2. The duty of Christians; and that is to be holy, for hereunto are they called, *called to be saints*, called to salvation through sanctification. Saints, and only saints, are beloved of God with a special and peculiar love. *Kletois hagiois* — *called saints*, saints in profession; it were well if

all that are called saints were saints indeed. Those that are called saints should labour to answer to the name; otherwise, though it is an honour and a privilege, yet it will be of little avail at the great day to have been called saints, if we be not really so.

IV. The apostolical benediction (v. 7): *Grace to you and peace*. This is one of the tokens in every epistle; and it hath not only the affection of a good wish, but the authority of a blessing. The priests under the law were to bless the people, and so are gospel ministers, in the name of the Lord. In this usual benediction observe,

1. The favours desired: *Grace and peace*. The Old-Testament salutation was, *Peace be to you*; but now grace is prefixed — *grace*, that is, the favour of God towards us or the work of God in us; both are previously requisite to true peace. All gospel blessings are included in these two: *grace and peace*. *Peace*, that is all good; peace with God, peace in your own consciences, peace with all that are about you; all these founded in grace.

2. The fountain of those favours, *from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*. All good comes,

(1.) From God as a Father; he hath put himself into that relation to engage and encourage our desires and expectations; we are taught, when we come for grace and peace, to call him our Father.

(2.) *From the Lord Jesus Christ*, as Mediator, and the great feoffee in trust for the conveying and securing of these benefits. We have them from his fulness, peace from the fulness of his merit, grace from the fulness of his Spirit.

◀18▶ ROMANS 1:8-15

PAUL'S LOVE TO THE ROMAN CHRISTIANS

We may here observe,

I. His thanksgivings for them (v. 8): *First, I thank my God*. It is good to begin every thing with blessing God, to make that *the alpha and omega* of every song, *in every thing to give thanks*. — *My God*. He speaks this with

delight and triumph. In all our thanksgivings, it is good for us to eye God as our God; this makes every mercy sweet, when we can say of God, “He is mine in covenant.” — *Through Jesus Christ*. All our duties and performances are pleasing to God only through Jesus Christ, praises as well as prayers. — *For you all*. We must express our love to our friends, not only by praying for them, but by praising God for them. God must have the glory of all the comfort we have in our friends; for every creature is that to us, and no more, which God makes it to be. Many of these Romans Paul had no personal acquaintance with, and yet he could heartily rejoice in their gifts and graces. When some of the Roman Christians met him (⁴⁰⁵Acts 28:15), he thanked God for them, and took courage; but here his true catholic love extends itself further, and he *thanks God for them all*; not only for those among them that were his helpers in Christ, and that bestowed much labour upon him (of whom he speaks ⁵⁰⁵Romans 16:3, 6), but for them all. — *That your faith is spoken of*. Paul travelled up and down from place to place, and, wherever he came, he heard great commendations of the Christians at Rome, which he mentions, not to make them proud, but to quicken them to answer the general character people gave of them, and the general expectation people had from them. The greater reputation a man hath for religion, the more careful he should be to preserve it, because *a little folly spoils him that is in reputation*, ²⁰⁰Ecclesiastes 10:1. — *Throughout the whole world*, that is, the Roman empire, into which the Roman Christians, upon Claudius's edict to banish all the Jews from Rome, were scattered abroad, but had now returned, and, it seems, left a very good report behind them, wherever they had been, in all the churches. There was this good effect of their sufferings: if they had not been persecuted, they had not been famous. This was indeed a good name, a name for good things with God and good people. As the elders of old, so these Romans, *obtained a good report through faith*, ⁸⁰⁰Hebrews 11:2. It is a desirable thing to be famous for faith. The faith of the Roman Christians came to be thus talked of, not only because it was excelling in itself, but because it was eminent and observable in its circumstances. Rome was a city upon a hill, every one took notice of what was done there. Thus those who have many eyes upon them have need to walk circumspectly, for what they do, good or bad, will be spoken of. The church of Rome was then a flourishing church; but since that time how is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! Rome is not what it was. She was then espoused a *chaste virgin to Christ*, and excelled in beauty; but she has since *degenerated, dealt treacherously, and*

embraced the bosom of a stranger; so that (as that good old book, *the Practice of Piety*, makes appear in no less than twenty-six instances) even *the epistle to the Romans* is now an epistle *against* the Romans; little reason has she therefore to boast of her former credit.

II. His prayer for them, v. 9. Though a famous flourishing church, yet they had need to be prayed for; they *had not yet attained*. Paul mentions this as an instance of his love to them. One of the greatest kindnesses we can do our friends, and sometimes the only kindness that is in the power of our hands, is, by prayer to recommend them to the loving-kindness of God. From Paul's example here we may learn,

1. Constancy in prayer: *Always without ceasing*. He did himself observe the same rules he gave to others, ^{<408>}Ephesians 6:18; ^{<517>}1 Thessalonians 5:17. Not that Paul did nothing else but pray, but he kept up stated times for the solemn performance of that duty, and those very frequent, and observed without fail.

2. Charity in prayer: *I make mention of you*. Though he had not particular acquaintance with them, nor interest in them, yet he prayed for them; not only for all saints in general, but he made express mention of them. It is not unfit sometimes to be express in our prayers for particular churches and places; not to inform God, but to affect ourselves. We are likely to have the most comfort in those friends that we pray most for. Concerning this he makes a solemn appeal to the searcher of hearts: *For God is my witness*. It was in a weighty matter, and in a thing known only to God and his own heart, that he used this asseveration. It is very comfortable to be able to call God to witness to our sincerity and constancy in the discharge of a duty. God is particularly a witness to our secret prayers, the matter of them, the manner of the performance; then our Father sees in secret, ^{<406>}Matthew 6:6. *God, whom I serve with my spirit*. Those that serve God with their spirits may, with a humble confidence, appeal to him; hypocrites who rest in bodily exercise cannot. His particular prayer, among many other petitions he put up for them, was that he might have an opportunity of paying them a visit (v. 10): *Making request, if by any means*, etc. Whatever comfort we desire to find in any creature, we must have recourse to God for it by prayer; for *our times are in his hand*, and all our ways at his disposal. The expressions here used intimate that he was very desirous of such an opportunity: *if by any means*; that he had long and often been disappointed: *now at length*; and yet that he submitted it to the

divine Providence: *a prosperous journey by the will of God*. As in our purposes, so in our desires, we must still remember to insert this, *if the Lord will*, ⁵⁰⁴⁵James 4:15. Our journeys are prosperous or otherwise according to the will of God, comfortable or not as he pleases.

III. His great desire to see them, with the reasons of it, v. 11-15. He had heard so much of them that he had a great desire to be better acquainted with them. Fruitful Christians are as much the joy as barren professors are the grief of faithful ministers. Accordingly, he *often purposed to come, but was let hitherto* (v. 13), for man purposeth, but God disposeth. He was hindered by other business that took him off, by his care of other churches, whose affairs were pressing; and Paul was for doing that first, not which was most pleasant (then he would have gone to Rome), but which was most needful — a good example to ministers, who must not consult their own inclinations so much as the necessity of their people's souls. Paul desired to visit these Romans,

1. That they might be edified (v. 11): *That I may impart unto you*. He received, that he might communicate. Never were full breasts so desirous to be drawn out to the sucking infant as Paul's head and heart were to be imparting spiritual gifts, that is, preaching to them. A good sermon is a good gift, so much the better for being a spiritual gift. — *To the end you may be established*. Having commended their flourishing he here expresses his desire of their establishment, that as they grew upward in the branches they might grow downward in the root. The best saints, while they are in such a shaking world as this, have need to be more and more established; and spiritual gifts are of special use for our establishment.

2. That he might be comforted, v. 12. What he heard of their flourishing in grace was so much a joy to him that it must needs be much more so to behold it. Paul could take comfort in the fruit of the labours of other ministers. — *By the mutual faith both of you and me*, that is, our mutual faithfulness and fidelity. It is very comfortable when there is a mutual confidence between minister and people, they confiding in him as a faithful minister, and he in them as a faithful people. Or, the mutual work of faith, which is love; they rejoiced in the expressions of one another's love, or communicating their faith one to another. It is very refreshing to Christians to compare notes about their spiritual concerns; thus are they sharpened, *as iron sharpens iron*. — *That I might have some fruit*, v. 13. Their edification would be his advantage, it would be fruit abounding to a

good account. Paul minded his work, as one that believed the more good he did the greater would his reward be.

3. That he might discharge his trust as the apostle of the Gentiles (v. 14): *I am a debtor.*

(1.) His receivings made him a debtor; for they were talents he was entrusted with to trade for his Master's honour. We should think of this when we covet great things, that all our receivings put us in debt; we are but stewards of our Lord's goods.

(2.) His office made him a debtor. He was a debtor as he was an apostle; he was called and sent to work, and had engaged to mind it. Paul had improved his talent, and laboured in his work, and done as much good as ever any man did, and yet, in reflection upon it, he still writes himself debtor; for, *when we have done all, we are but unprofitable servants.* — *Debtor to the Greeks, and to the barbarians*, that is, as the following words explain it, *to the wise and to the unwise*. The Greeks fancied themselves to have the monopoly of wisdom, and looked upon all the rest of the world as barbarians, comparatively so; not cultivated with learning and arts as they were. Now Paul was a debtor to both, looked upon himself as obliged to do all the good he could both to the one and to the other. Accordingly, we find him paying his debt, both in his preaching and in his writing, doing good *both to Greeks and barbarians*, and suiting his discourse to the capacity of each. You may observe a difference between his sermon at Lystra among the plain Lycaonians (^{<4445>}Acts 14:15, etc.) and his sermon at Athens among the polite philosophers, (^{<4472>}Acts 17:22, etc.) He delivered both as debtor to each, giving to each their portion. Though a plain preacher, yet, as debtor to the wise, he speaks wisdom among those that are perfect, (^{<4816>}1 Corinthians 2:6. For these reasons he was ready, if he had an opportunity, *to preach the gospel at Rome*, v. 15. Though a public place, though a perilous place, where Christianity met with a great deal of opposition, yet Paul was ready to run the risk at Rome, if called to it: *I am ready* — *prothymon*. It denotes a great readiness of mind, and that he was very forward to it. What he did was not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. It is an excellent thing to be ready to meet every opportunity of doing or getting good.

ROMANS 1:16-18

PAUL'S DISCOURSE ON JUSTIFICATION

Paul here enters upon a large discourse of justification, in the latter part of this chapter laying down his thesis, and, in order to the proof of it, describing the deplorable condition of the Gentile world. His transition is very handsome, and like an orator: he was ready to preach the gospel at Rome, though a place where the gospel was run down by those that called themselves the wits; *for*, saith he, *I am not ashamed of it*, v. 16. There is a great deal in the gospel which such a man as Paul might be tempted to be ashamed of, especially that he whose gospel it is was a man hanged upon a tree, that the doctrine of it was plain, had little in it to set it off among scholars, the professors of it were mean and despised, and every where spoken against; yet Paul was not ashamed to own it. I reckon him a Christian indeed that is neither ashamed of the gospel nor a shame to it. The reason of this bold profession, taken from the nature and excellency of the gospel, introduces his dissertation.

I. The proposition, v. 16, 17. The excellency of the gospel lies in this, that it reveals to us,

1. The salvation of believers as the end: *It is the power of God unto salvation*. Paul is not ashamed of the gospel, how mean and contemptible soever it may appear to a carnal eye; for *the power of God works by it the salvation of all that believe*; it shows us *the way of salvation* (^{<4417>}Acts 16:17), and is the great charter by which salvation is conveyed and made over to us. But,

(1.) *It is through the power of God*; without that power the gospel is but a dead letter; the revelation of the gospel is the revelation of *the arm of the Lord* (^{<2511>}Isaiah 53:1), as power went along with the word of Christ to heal diseases.

(2.) It is to those, and those only, that believe. Believing interests us in the gospel salvation; to others it is hidden. The medicine prepared will not cure the patient if it be not taken. — *To the Jew first. The lost sheep of the house of Israel* had the first offer made them, both by Christ and his apostles. *You first* (^{<4426>}Acts 3:26), but upon their refusal the apostles turned to the Gentiles, (^{<4436>}Acts 13:46. Jews and Gentiles now stand upon the same

level, both equally miserable without a Saviour, and both equally welcome to the Saviour, ^{<381>}Colossians 3:11. Such doctrine as this was surprising to the Jews, who had hitherto been the peculiar people, and had looked with scorn upon the Gentile world; but the long-expected Messiah proves *a light to enlighten the Gentiles*, as well as *the glory of his people Israel*.

2. The justification of believers as the way (v. 17): *For therein*, that is, in this gospel, which Paul so much triumphs in, *is the righteousness of God revealed*. Our misery and ruin being the product and consequent of our iniquity, that which will show us the way of salvation must needs show us the way of justification, and this the gospel does. The gospel makes known a righteousness. While God is a just and holy God, and we are guilty sinners, it is necessary we should have a righteousness wherein to appear before him; and, blessed be God, there is such a righteousness brought in by Messiah the prince (^{<7024>}Daniel 9:24) and *revealed in the gospel*; a *righteousness*, that is, a gracious method of reconciliation and acceptance, notwithstanding the guilt of our sins. This evangelical righteousness,

(1.) Is called the *righteousness of God*; it is of God's appointing, of God's approving and accepting. It is so called to cut off all pretensions to a righteousness resulting from the merit of our own works. It is the righteousness of Christ, who is God, resulting from a satisfaction of infinite value.

(2.) It is said to be *from faith to faith*, from the faithfulness of God revealing to the faith of man receiving (so some); from the faith of dependence upon God, and dealing with him immediately, as Adam before the fall, to the faith of dependence upon a Mediator, and so dealing with God (so others); from the first faith, by which we are put into a justified state, to after faith, by which we live, and are continued in that state: and the faith that justifies us is no less than our taking Christ for our Saviour, and becoming true Christians, according to the tenour of the baptismal covenant; from faith engrafting us into Christ, to faith deriving virtue from him as our root: both implied in the next words, *The just shall live by faith. Just by faith*, there is faith justifying us; *live by faith*, there is faith maintaining us; and so *there is a righteousness from faith to faith*. Faith is all in all, both in the beginning and progress of a Christian life. It is not from faith to works, as if faith put us into a justified state, and then works preserved and maintained us in it, but it is all along from faith to faith, as ^{<4085>}2 Corinthians 3:18, *from glory to glory*; it is increasing, continuing,

persevering faith, faith pressing forward, and getting ground of unbelief. To show that this is no novel upstart doctrine, he quotes for it that famous scripture in the Old Testament, so often mentioned in the New (~~314~~ Habakkuk 2:4): *The just shall live by faith*. Being justified by faith he shall live by it both the life of grace and of glory. The prophet there had placed himself upon the watch-tower, expecting some extraordinary discoveries (v. 1), and the discovery was of the certainty of the appearance of the promised Messiah in the fulness of time, notwithstanding seeming delays. This is there called *the vision*, by way of eminence, as elsewhere *the promise*; and while that time is coming, as well as when it has come, *the just shall live by faith*. Thus is the evangelical righteousness from faith to faith — from Old-Testament faith in a Christ to come to New-Testament faith in a Christ already come.

II. The proof of this proposition, that both Jews and Gentiles stand in need of a righteousness wherein to appear before God, and that neither the one nor the other have nay of their own to plead. Justification must be either by faith or works. It cannot be by works, which he proves at large by describing the works both of Jews and Gentiles; and therefore he concludes it must be by faith, ~~315~~ Romans 3:20, 28. The apostle, like a skilful surgeon, before he applies the plaster, searches the wound — endeavours first to convince of guilt and wrath, and then to show the way of salvation. This makes the gospel the more welcome. We must first see the righteousness of God condemning, and then the righteousness of God justifying will appear *worthy of all acceptance*. In general (v. 18), *the wrath of God is revealed*. The light of nature and the light of the law reveal the wrath of God from sin to sin. It is well for us that the gospel reveals the justifying righteousness of God from faith to faith. The antithesis is observable. Here is,

- 1.** The sinfulness of man described; he reduceth it to two heads, *ungodliness and unrighteousness*; ungodliness against the laws of the first table, unrighteousness against those of the second.
- 2.** The cause of that sinfulness, and that is, *holding the truth in unrighteousness*. Some *communes notitae*, some ideas they had of the being of God, and of the difference of good and evil; but they held them in unrighteousness, that is, they knew and professed them in a consistency with their wicked courses. They held the truth as a captive or prisoner, that it should not influence them, as otherwise it would. An unrighteous

wicked heart is the dungeon in which many a good truth is detained and buried. *Holding fast the form of sound words in faith and love* is the root of all religion (^{<81B>}2 Timothy 1:13), but holding it fast in unrighteousness is the root of all sin.

3. The displeasure of God against it: *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven; not only in the written word, which is given by inspiration of God* (the Gentiles had not that), but in the providences of God, his judgments executed upon sinners, which do not spring out of the dust, or fall out by chance, nor are they to be ascribed to second causes, but they are a revelation from heaven. Or *wrath from heaven is revealed*; it is not the wrath of a man like ourselves, *but wrath from heaven*, therefore the more terrible and the more unavoidable.

<81B> ROMANS 1:19-32

THE IDOLATRY OF THE GENTILES

In this last part of the chapter the apostle applies what he had said particularly to the Gentile world, in which we may observe,

I. The means and helps they had to come to the knowledge of God. Though they had not such a knowledge of his law as Jacob and Israel had (^{<817D>}Psalm 147:20), yet among them *he left not himself without witness* (^{<4447>}Acts 14:17): *For that which may be known*, etc., v. 19, 20. Observe,

1. What discoveries they had: *That which may be known of God is manifest, en autois* — among them; that is, there were some even among them that had the knowledge of God, were convinced of the existence of one supreme *Numen*. The philosophy of Pythagoras, Plato, and the Stoics, discovered a great deal of the knowledge of God, as appears by abundance of testimonies. *That which may be known*, which implies that there is a great deal which may not be known. The being of God may be apprehended, but cannot be comprehended. We cannot by searching find him out, ^{<81D>}Job 11:7-9. Finite understandings cannot perfectly know an infinite being; but, blessed be God, there is that which may be known, enough to lead us to our chief end, the glorifying and enjoying of him; and these things revealed belong to us and to our children, while secret things are not to be pried into, ^{<81D>}Deuteronomy 29:29.

2. Whence they had these discoveries: *God hath shown it to them*. Those common natural notions which they had of God were imprinted upon their hearts by the God of nature himself, who is the *Father of lights*. This sense of a Deity, and a regard to that Deity, are so connate with the human nature that some think we are to distinguish men from brutes by these rather than by reason.

3. By what way and means these discoveries and notices which they had were confirmed and improved, namely, by the work of creation (v. 20); *For the invisible things of God*, etc.

(1.) Observe what they knew: *The invisible things of him, even his eternal power and Godhead*. Though God be not the object of sense, yet he hath discovered and made known himself by those things that are sensible. The power and Godhead of God are invisible things, and yet are clearly seen in their products. He works in secret (^{<3318>}Job 23:8, 9; ^{<3315>}Psalm 139:15; ^{<2115>}Ecclesiastes 11:5), but manifests what he has wrought, and therein makes known his power and Godhead, and others of his attributes which natural light apprehends in the idea of a God. They could not come by natural light to the knowledge of the three persons in the Godhead (though some fancy they have found footsteps of this in Plato's writings), but they did come to the knowledge of the Godhead, at least so much knowledge as was sufficient to have kept them from idolatry. This was that truth which they held in unrighteousness.

(2.) How they knew it: *By the things that are made*, which could not make themselves, nor fall into such an exact order and harmony by any casual hits; and therefore must have been produced by some first cause or intelligent agent, which first cause could be no other than an eternal powerful God. See ^{<3311>}Psalm 19:1; ^{<2315>}Isaiah 40:26; ^{<4174>}Acts 17:24. The workman is known by his work. The variety, multitude, order, beauty, harmony, different nature, and excellent contrivance, of the things that are made, the direction of them to certain ends, and the concurrence of all the parts to the good and beauty of the whole, do abundantly prove a Creator and his eternal power and Godhead. Thus did the light shine in the darkness. And *this from the creation of the world*. Understand it either,

[1.] As the topic from which the knowledge of them is drawn. To evince this truth, we have recourse to the great work of creation. And some think this *ktisis kosmou*, *this creature of the world* (as it may be read), is to be understood of man, the *ktisis kat' exochen* — *the most remarkable*

creature of the lower world, called *ktisis*, ^{<4185>}Mark 16:15. The frame and structure of human bodies, and especially the most excellent powers, faculties, and capacities of human souls, do abundantly prove that there is a Creator, and that he is God. Or,

[2.] As the date of the discovery. It as old as the creation of the world. In this sense *apo ktiseos* is most frequently used in scripture. These notices concerning God are not any modern discoveries, hit upon of late, but ancient truths, which were from the beginning. The way of the acknowledgement of God is a good old way; it was from the beginning. Truth got the start of error.

II. Their gross idolatry, notwithstanding these discoveries that God made to them of himself; described here, v. 21-23, 25. We shall the less wonder at the inefficacy of these natural discoveries to prevent the idolatry of the Gentiles if we remember how prone even the Jews, who had scripture light to guide them, were to idolatry; so miserably are the degenerate sons of men plunged in the mire of sense. Observe,

1. The inward cause of their idolatry, v. 21, 22. They are therefore without excuse, in that they did know God, and from what they knew might easily infer that it was their duty to worship him, and him only. Though some have greater light and means of knowledge than others, yet all have enough to leave them inexcusable. But the mischief of it was that,

(1.) They *glorified him not as God*. Their affections towards him, and their awe and adoration of him, did not keep pace with their knowledge. To glorify him as God is to glorify him only; for there can be but one infinite: but they did not so glorify him, for they set up a multitude of other deities. To glorify him as God is to worship him with spiritual worship; but they made images of him. Not to glorify God as God is in effect not to glorify him at all; to respect him as a creature is not to glorify him, but to dishonour him.

(2.) *Neither were they thankful*; not thankful for the favours in general they received from God (insensibleness of God's mercies is at the bottom of our sinful departures from him); not thankful in particular for the discoveries God was pleased to make of himself to them. Those that do not improve the means of knowledge and grace are justly reckoned unthankful for them.

(3.) *But they became vain in their imaginations, en tois dialogismois* — in their reasonings, in their practical inferences. They had a great deal of knowledge of general truths (v. 19), but no prudence to apply them to particular cases. Or, in their notions of God, and the creation of the world, and the origination of mankind, and the chief good; in these things, when they quitted the plain truth, they soon disputed themselves into a thousand vain and foolish fancies. The several opinions and hypotheses of the various sects of philosophers concerning these things were so many vain imaginations. When truth is forsaken, errors multiply *in infinitum* — infinitely.

(4.) *And their foolish heart was darkened.* The foolishness and practical wickedness of the heart cloud and darken the intellectual powers and faculties. Nothing tends more to the blinding and perverting of the understanding than the corruption and depravedness of the will and affections.

(5.) *Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,* v. 22. This looks black upon the philosophers, the pretenders to wisdom and professors of it. Those that had the most luxuriant fancy, in framing to themselves the idea of a God, fell into the most gross and absurd conceits: and it was the just punishment of their pride and self-conceitedness. It has been observed that the most refined nations, that made the greatest show of wisdom, were the arrantest fools in religion. The barbarians adored the sun and moon, which of all others was the most specious idolatry; while the learned Egyptians worshipped an ox and an onion. The Grecians, who excelled them in wisdom, adored diseases and human passions. The Romans, the wisest of all, worshipped the furies. And at this day the poor Americans worship the thunder; while the ingenious Chinese adore the devil. Thus *the world by wisdom knew not God,* ^{<412>}1 Corinthians 1:21. As a profession of wisdom is an aggravation of folly, so a proud conceit of wisdom is the cause of a great deal of folly. Hence we read of few philosophers who were converted to Christianity; and Paul's preaching was no where so laughed at and ridiculed as among the learned Athenians, ^{<417>}Acts 17:18-32. *Phaskontes einai* — *conceiting themselves* to be wise. The plain truth of the being of God would not content them; they thought themselves above that, and so fell into the greatest errors.

2. The outward acts of their idolatry, v. 23-25.

(1.) Making images of God (v. 23), by which, as much as in them lay, they *changed the glory of the incorruptible God*. Compare ^{<EAGD>}Psalm 106:20; ^{<ZHD>}Jeremiah 2:11. They ascribed a deity to the most contemptible creatures, and by them represented God. It was the greatest honour God did to man that he made man in the image of God; but it is the greatest dishonour man has done to God that he has made God in the image of man. This was what God so strictly warned the Jews against, ^{<GHS>}Deuteronomy 4:15, etc. This the apostle shows the folly of in his sermon at Athens, ^{<HTD>}Acts 17:29. See ^{<ZHD>}Isaiah 40:18, etc.; 44:10, etc. This is called (v. 25) *changing the truth of God into a lie*. As it did dishonour his glory, so it did misrepresent his being. Idols are called lies, for they belie God, as if he had a body, whereas he is a Spirit, ^{<ZHD>}Jeremiah 23:14; ^{<ZHD>}Hosea 7:1. *Teachers of lies*, ^{<ZHD>}Habakkuk 2:18.

(2.) Giving divine honour to the creature: *Worshipped and served the creature, para ton ktisavta* — *besides the Creator*. They did own a supreme *Numen* in their profession, but they did in effect disown him by the worship they paid to the creature; for God will be all or none. Or, *above* the Creator, paying more devout respect to their inferior deities, stars, heroes, demons, thinking the supreme God inaccessible, or above their worship. The sin itself was their worshipping the creature at all; but this is mentioned as an aggravation of the sin, that they worshipped the creature more than the Creator. This was the general wickedness of the Gentile world, and became twisted in with their laws and government; in compliance with which even the wise men among them, who knew and owned a supreme God and were convinced of the nonsense and absurdity of their polytheism and idolatry, yet did as the rest of their neighbours did. *Seneca*, in his book *De Superstitione*, as it is quoted by *Aug. de Civit. Dei*, lib. 6, cap. 10 (for the book itself is lost), after he had largely shown the great folly and impiety of the vulgar religion, in divers instances of it, yet concludes, *Quae omnia sapiens servabit tanquam legibus jussa, non tanquam diis grata* — *All which a wise man will observe as established by law, not imagining them grateful to the gods*. And afterwards, *Omnem istam ignobilem deorum turbam, quam longo aevo longa superstitio conguessit, sic adorabimus, ut meminerimus cultum ejus magis ad morem quam ad rem pertinere* — *All this ignoble rout of gods, which ancient superstition has amassed together by long prescription, we will so adore as to remember that the worship of them is rather a compliance with custom than material in itself*. Upon which *Augustine* observes, *Colebat*

quod reprehendebat, agebat quod arguebat, quod culpabat adorabat — *He worshipped that which he censured, he did that which he had proved wrong, and he adored what he found fault with.* I mention this thus largely because methinks it doth fully explain that of the apostle here (v. 18): *Who hold the truth in unrighteousness.* It is observable that upon the mention of the dishonour done to God by the idolatry of the Gentiles the apostle, in the midst of his discourse, expresses himself in an awful adoration of God: *Who is blessed for ever. Amen.* When we see or hear of any contempt cast upon God or his name, we should thence take occasion to think and speak highly and honourably of him. In this, as in other things, the worse others are, the better we should be. *Blessed for ever,* notwithstanding these dishonours done to his name: though there are those that do not glorify him, yet he is glorified, and will be glorified to eternity.

III. The judgments of God upon them for this idolatry; not many temporal judgments (the idolatrous nations were the conquering ruling nations of the world), but spiritual judgments, giving them up to the most brutish and unnatural lusts. *Paredoken autous* — *He gave them up;* it is thrice repeated here, v. 24, 26, 28. Spiritual judgments are of all judgments the sorest, and to be most dreaded. Observe,

1. By whom they were given up. God gave them up, in a way of righteous judgment, as the just punishment of their idolatry — taking off the bridle of restraining grace — leaving them to themselves — letting them alone; for his grace is his own, he is debtor to no man, he may give or withhold his grace at pleasure. Whether this giving up be a positive act of God or only privative we leave to the schools to dispute: but this we are sure of that it is no new thing for God to give men up to their own hearts' lusts, to send them strong delusions, to let Satan loose upon them, nay, to lay stumbling-blocks before them. And yet God is not the author of sin, but herein infinitely just and holy; for, though the greatest wickedness follow upon this giving up, the fault of that is to be laid upon the sinner's wicked heart. If the patient be obstinate, and will not submit to the methods prescribed, but wilfully takes and does that which is prejudicial to him, the physician is not to be blamed if he give him up as in a desperate condition; and all the fatal symptoms that follow are not to be imputed to the physician, but to the disease itself and to the folly and wilfulness of the patient.

2. To what they were given up.

(1.) *To uncleanness and vile affections*, v. 24, 26, 27. Those that would not entertain the more pure and refined notices of natural light, which tend to preserve the honour of God, justly forfeited those more gross and palpable sentiments which preserve the honour of human nature. *Man being in honour*, and refusing to understand the God that made him, thus becomes worse than the *beasts that perish*, ^{<940>}Psalm 49:20. Thus one, by the divine permission, becomes the punishment of another; but it is (as it said here) *through the lusts of their own hearts* — there all the fault is to be laid. Those who dishonoured God were given up to dishonour themselves. A man cannot be delivered up to a greater slavery than to be given up to his own lusts. Such are given over, like the Egyptians (^{<294>}Isaiah 19:4), into the hand of a cruel lord. The particular instances of their uncleanness and vile affections are their unnatural lusts, for which many of the heathen, even of those among them who passed for wise men, as Solon and Zeno, were infamous, against the plainest and most obvious dictates of natural light. The crying iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, for which God rained hell from heaven upon them, became not only commonly practised, but avowed, in the pagan nations. Perhaps the apostle especially refers to the abominations that were committed in the worship of their idol-gods, in which the worst of uncleannesses were prescribed for the honour of their gods; dunghill service for dunghill gods: the unclean spirits delight in such ministrations. In the church of Rome, where the pagan idolatries are revived, images worshipped, and saints only substituted in the room of demons, we hear of these same abominations going barefaced, licensed by the pope (*Fox's Acts and Monuments*, vol. 1, p. 808), and not only commonly perpetrated, but justified and pleaded for by some of their cardinals: the same spiritual plagues for the same spiritual wickednesses. See what wickedness there is in the nature of man. How abominable and filthy is man! *Lord, what is man?* says David; what a vile creature is he when left to himself! How much are we beholden to the restraining grace of God for the preserving any thing of the honour and decency of the human nature! For, were it not for this, man, who was made but little lower than the angels, would make himself a great deal lower than the devils. This is said to be that *recompence of their error which was meet*. The Judge of all the earth does right, and observes a meetness between the sin and the punishment of it.

(2.) *To a reprobate mind in these abominations*, v. 28.

[1.] They *did not like to retain God in their knowledge*. The blindness of their understandings was caused by the wilful aversion of their wills and affections. They did not retain God in their knowledge, because they did not like it. They would neither know nor do any thing but just what pleased themselves. It is just the temper of carnal hearts; the pleasing of themselves is their highest end. There are many that have God in their knowledge, they cannot help it, the light shines so fully in their faces; but they do not retain him there. They *say to the Almighty, Depart* (^{<8214>}Job 21:14), and they therefore do not retain God in their knowledge because it thwarts and contradicts their lusts; they do not like it. In their knowledge — *en epignosei*. There is a difference between *gnosis* and *epignosis*, the *knowledge* and the *acknowledgement* of God; the pagans knew God, but did not, would not, acknowledge him.

[2.] Answerable to this wilfulness of theirs, in gainsaying the truth, God gave them over to a wilfulness in the grossest sins, here called a *reprobate mind* — *eis adokimon noun*, a mind void of all sense and judgment to discern things that differ, so that they could not distinguish their right hand from their left in spiritual things. See whither a course of sin leads, and into what a gulf it plunges the sinner at last; hither fleshly lusts have a direct tendency. *Eyes full of adultery cannot cease from sin*, (^{<8214>}2 Peter 2:14. This reprobate mind was a blind scared conscience, past feeling, ^{<8214>}Ephesians 4:19. When the judgment is once reconciled to sin, the man is in the suburbs of hell. At first Pharaoh hardened his heart, but afterwards God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Thus wilful hardness is justly punished with judicial hardness. — *To do those things which are not convenient*. This phrase may seem to bespeak a diminutive evil, but here it is expressive of the grossest enormities; things that are not agreeable to men, but contradict the very light and law of nature. And here he subjoins a black list of those unbecoming things which the Gentiles were guilty of, being delivered up to a reprobate mind. No wickedness so heinous, so contrary to the light of nature, to the law of nations, and to all the interests of mankind, but a reprobate mind will comply with it. By the histories of those times, especially the accounts we have of the then prevailing dispositions and practices of the Romans when the ancient virtue of that commonwealth was so degenerated, it appears that these sins here mentioned were then and there reigning national sins. No fewer than twenty-three several sorts of sins and sinners are here specified, v. 29-31. Here the devil's seat is; his name is legion, for they are many. It was time

to have the gospel preached among them, for the world had need of reformation.

First, Sins against the first table: *Haters of God*. Here is the devil in his own colours, sin appearing sin. Could it be imagined that rational creatures should hate the chief good, and depending creatures abhor the fountain of their being? And yet so it is. Every sin has in it a hatred of God; but some sinners are more open and avowed enemies to him than others, ³¹¹⁸Zechariah 11:8. *Proud men and boasters* cope with God himself, and put those crowns upon their own heads which must be cast before his throne.

Secondly, Sins against the second table. These are especially mentioned, because in these things they had a clearer light. In general here is a charge of unrighteousness. This is put first, for every sin is unrighteousness; it is withholding that which is due, perverting that which is right; it is especially put for second-table sins, doing as we would not be done by. Against the fifth commandment: *Disobedient to parents*, and *without natural affection* — *astorgous*, that is parents unkind and cruel to their children. Thus, when duty fails on one side, it commonly fails on the other. Disobedient children are justly punished with unnatural parents; and, on the contrary, unnatural parents with disobedient children. Against the sixth commandment: *Wickedness* (doing mischief for mischief's sake), *maliciousness, envy, murder, debate* (*eridos* — *contention*), *malignity, spiteful, implacable, unmerciful*; all expressions of that hatred of our brother which is heart-murder. Against the seventh commandment: *Fornication*; he mentions no more, having spoken before of other uncleannesses. Against the eighth commandment: *Unrighteousness, covetousness*. Against the ninth commandment: *Deceit, whisperers, back-biters, covenant-breakers*, lying and slandering. Here are two generals not before mentioned — *inventors of evil things, and without understanding*; wise to do evil, and yet having no knowledge to do good. The more deliberate and politic sinners are in inventing evil things, the greater is their sin: so quick of invention in sin, and yet without understanding (stark fools) in the thoughts of God. Here is enough to humble us all, in the sense of our original corruption; for every heart by nature has in it the seed and spawn of all these sins. In the close he mentions the aggravations of the sins, v. 32.

1. They *knew the judgment of God*; that is,

(1.) They knew the law. The judgment of God is that which his justice requires, which, because he is just, he judgeth meet to be done.

(2.) They knew the penalty; so it is explained here: They knew *that those who commit such things were worthy of death*, eternal death; their own consciences could not but suggest this to them, and yet they ventured upon it. It is a great aggravation of sin when it is committed against knowledge (^{SHIT}James 4:17), especially against the knowledge of the judgment of God. It is daring presumption to run upon the sword's point. It argues the heart much hardened, and very resolutely set upon sin.

2. They *not only do the same, but have pleasure in those that do them*. The violence of some present temptation may hurry a man into the commission of such sins himself in which the vitiated appetite may take a pleasure; but to be pleased with other people's sins is to love sin for sin's sake: it is joining in a confederacy for the devil's kingdom and interest.

Syneudokousi: they do not only commit sin, but they defend and justify it, and encourage others to do the like. Our own sins are much aggravated by our concurrence with, and complacency in, the sins of others.

Now lay all this together, and then say whether the Gentile world, lying under so much guilt and corruption, could be justified before God by any works of their own.