

1:18–32 GOD’S RESPONSE TO HUMANITY’S SIN

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world,^a in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness,

malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

OVERVIEW: Following Paul’s argument, the reformers move from their emphasis on our need to be justified (i.e., “reckoned righteous”) to demonstrate *why* we need to be justified, by illuminating the stark contrast between the high standard of God’s righteousness and our unrighteousness.

First, they explain that there are two kinds of law that make humans responsible before God. The Jews had the law that came to them engraved on tablets of stone. The Greeks (Gentiles) did not have that Mosaic law, but they have the law of nature within them as the *notio Dei* (the notion that has been engraved on all minds or souls that there is a God). The reformers explore the concepts of natural law and reason and what the responsibilities and limits of each are, and they warn their readers not to suppress the truth of God or they will find their hearts darkened.

Second, the reformers explore the various facets of humanity’s initial sins that triggered God’s “handing over” of them to deeper sin. The resulting sins of lust were both the effect of, and the wages of, idolatry and, importantly, do not entail that God is the author of evil. For the reformers, idolatry seems to be an existential concern more than the issue of “unnatural relations,” for they apply the concept of idolatry to the veneration of images and the elaborations of the Lord’s Supper by the Roman

^aOr clearly perceived from the creation of the world

Catholic Church of their day and judge them to be dishonoring to God, believing they strip him of his majesty. Nonetheless, the reformers see sexual sins as a portion of the many sins of the body, and they define each of the terms in the even broader and longer list of sins provided by Paul. This extensive list leaves no one innocent or capable of living the sinless life that is essential for perfect obedience to the law, demonstrating the breadth and ugliness of sin, and thereby pointing to our unrighteousness and the necessity of salvation through Christ, through faith.

1:18 *God's Wrath Against the Unrighteous*

GOD'S WRATH POINTS TO OUR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. THEODORE BEZA: "For the wrath of God is made manifest" (*apokalyptetai*). It seems to me that Paul is alluding to the words of the prophet in [Psalm 50:6](#). The Vulgate reads "is revealed" (*revelatur*), and Erasmus renders it "is disclosed" (*patefit*) as if this wrath were disclosed by the gospel also. For, Erasmus says, it cannot be doubted that there is nothing that charges the world with sin as much as the light of the gospel does.... [But] in most respects to charge with sin pertains rather to the ministry of the law than it does to that of the gospel. But then what is Paul doing here? Has Paul here assumed the very thing that is asked by the posed question, namely, whether the gospel is the power of God unto salvation? That is, whether it is by the gospel that God asserts his power in saving men and women? Paul said that he was going to prove that faith—which is mutually related to the preaching of the gospel—conveys to us that righteousness by which we will be approved to God,

and that it therefore also shows us the way that leads to salvation. It is now redundant that he should prove this, that we obtain this righteousness by no other instrument than faith. But this is proved by this immediate argument: we are righteous before God either through faith, the alien righteousness of Christ being imputed to us, *or* by our own righteousness, that is, by observing the divine law. But in fact the whole life of men and women cries out that God has poured out his wrath from heaven on men and women. Therefore, persons in themselves are not righteous. For God is not indignant toward the righteous, but the unrighteous. Shall I go on to state from where this wrath of God arises? It results from the fact that men and women, once given any slack, are carried away to every wicked deed—which would become clearly apparent if someone were to subject his life to obeying a prescribed law, whether it be natural law or the law of Moses. This is the main thread of Paul's disputation up until the third chapter, verse 20, where this either/or syllogism is brought to a conclusion. MAJOR ANNOTATIONS (1594).¹

PEOPLE DO NOT GLORIFY GOD. ALEXANDER ALESIUS: With severe words, Paul threatens all people with eternal punishments on account of their ungodliness and unrighteousness, unless they repent and flee for refuge to the Son of God. For he says that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, from which place the Holy Spirit descending on the apostles with a spirit of burning warns of the wrath of God through them by their preaching of repentance. The invisible things of God, when they are reflected on, prove that people compre-

¹ Beza, *Annotationes Majores*, 15–16; citing [Ps 50:6](#).

hend his eternal power, and deity, and the things that belong to deity: goodness, wisdom, justice, a love of piety, and wrath kindled against impiety and the unrighteousness of those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They can also perceive this wrath revealed from heaven in such a clear fashion that the nations are handed over to a reprobate mind and to shameful passions and even a manifest perversity and insanity. This happens because although God has been known from the creation of the world, they did not glorify him with true piety or veneration in their heart or by obedience to the law. And even now they do not glorify him with true faith according to the evangelical doctrine, nor do they give him thanks for the generous gift of redemption by the Son of God. But by common natural knowledge and contempt for the truth revealed in the gospel, they contend that true piety is in the veneration of images, and that they are righteous on account of their own virtues, and they even condemn the doctrine of righteousness before God by faith and trust in the mercies of Christ, and they assail it with all manner of cruelty. *DISPUTATIONS ON ROMANS* (1553).²

DISGRACEFUL LIVES AS A SIGN OF GOD'S WRATH. WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: We see in this passage how the disgraceful mode of life of unbelieving people is itself the unmistakable judgment of an angry God. Sometimes, the wrath of God is not recognized because a person appears to be virtuous, as if covered by snow. When, however, someone is being hurled forward into a life of crime, this is a clear sign of the wrath of God. Indeed, God is angry at the failure of humans to respect him, and his wrath is being

revealed against all their impiety and injustice....

What shall we say of our time? For what kind of scandal does not clearly reign in the midst of the Christian sphere? If the wrath of God expresses disapproval of an impious mode of life, what can we anticipate? What great destruction will he unfold? *COMMENTARY ON ROMANS* (1555).³

TWO SPECIES OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. FRIEDRICH BALDUIN: He shows that unrighteousness by means of its effects, for it provokes “the wrath of God from heaven”; that is, it deserves the most just heavenly punishments, inflicted by God’s intentional governance, not happening by chance (for the “wrath of God” in this passage refers to God’s indignation and most just vengeance by which he will punish crimes previously committed), which punishments, he writes, “have been revealed.” That is, they have been aptly declared by many examples of people who miserably perished in their sins. Now he lays down two species of this unrighteousness: (1) ungodliness, and (2) wrongdoing, or impiety and injury. The former includes profanity or sins against the first table of the law;[†] the latter, sins against the second table, or violence done to oneself and to one’s neighbor. *COMMENTARY ON ROMANS* (1620).⁴

WHY THE UNRIGHTEOUS SUPPRESS THE TRUTH. THOMAS HOOKER: Question one: What is the power of the truth, or what does it do that leads wicked persons to oppose it?

Answer: It appears in four particulars: First, it is a word of information that is the first work

² Alesius, *Omnes Disputationes*, E2v.

³ Musculus, *In Epistolam Apostoli Pauli*, 29–30.

[†] I.e., the first four of the Ten Commandments.

⁴ Balduin, *Catechesis Apostolica*, 79–80.

to discover all things to us in their proper colors. The text [Proverbs 6:23](#) tells us the commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light, and the reproofs of instruction are the way of life as a lamp in the night, so that the way may be discovered. So it is with the power of the word of truth, and he that has a mind to attend carefully may be able to judge and see right from wrong. Men and women cannot go astray as long as they are directed by the light of truth. As the sun shows all the moths and blemishes in the house, so the truth is like the sun in discovering and showing every mote and blemish in us and discovering every secret and corrupt corner. All things that are reproofed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes things manifest is light. You cannot inquire to do anything without it advising you.

Second, since it is about information, it is also about quickening, a word of power that not only tells the way but enables us to walk in it; it promotes virtue and the ability to walk on cheerfully.

Truth works not only like the sun to show us the way but like a stream to carry us in the way that God would have us walk. There is not a light in the shining sun (Christ) that is not a warning to make our benumbed joints nimble. In [1 Timothy 6:3](#), Paul calls it the wholesome word of truth that he says nourished Timothy. [Psalm 119](#): “I will never forget your commandments because thereby you have quickened me.”

In the third place it is a cord; if you are dull, it will pluck you on. And, in the fourth place, it is a word of conviction with power to overthrow all the gainsaying of a man or woman; it meets with every cavil, it stops all the base tricks and devices of our sinful minds. In [Luke](#)

[21:10](#), Christ says to the disciples—if they should be brought before magistrates—“Take no care what you shall say,” and in verse [15](#), “For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to gainsay, nor resist.” [THE WRATH OF GOD AGAINST SINNERS](#) (1639).⁵

WE CANNOT FULFILL THE LAW. MARTIN LUTHER: Christ always begins his preaching of the gospel with this point. He first reveals and teaches what reason cannot have or know from the law, namely, that all people, no matter how they are and live by nature, are damned and under sin. Right at the beginning of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul also demonstrates and concludes this. Thus this decree and conclusion is stated first, namely, that, in their natural state and with all their abilities, people cannot fulfill God’s law, even though they presume to keep it. Keeping the law does not mean doing the works externally according to human powers. Consequently, the law cannot help people to righteousness before God nor deliver them from sin and eternal wrath. [SUMMER POSTIL](#) (MAY 27, 1526).⁶

1:19 God Has Revealed Himself to All

THE TWO KINDS OF LAW THAT MAKE HUMANS RESPONSIBLE. JOHANNES BRENZ: The whole human race is distinguished into two orders: Greeks, which we customarily call “the nations,” and Jews. But Paul clearly teaches that they both are altogether without excuse for their ungodliness, even those to whom no law had been given like the Jews had. For even

⁵ Hooker, *Three Godly Sermons*, 12–15*; citing [Eph 5:14](#); [Lk 24:2](#).

⁶ [LW 78:34*](#); citing [Rom 1:18–3:20](#).

though they had not received a law written in tablets of stone, a law had been divinely engraved within them. They call this *prolēpsin* and “the law of nature.” So even if they did not possess the law written in the Scriptures, they nevertheless possessed the law of nature. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1588).⁷

THE INEXPUNGABLE *NOTIO DEI* IMPLANTED BY GOD. MARTIN BUCER: “For God revealed it to them.” This is the proof of what he had just said, that an idea of God is manifested to them. For since God himself revealed himself to humanity, the things that are lawful for men and women to know about him cannot be hidden from them. Thus it is most certain that this idea of God—that he possesses power over all things, and is the Highest Good—is impressed on and engraved in the minds of all, so that nobody willing to admit that he believes it to be the truth can deny that this idea was put within him by God. For those ideas that are not formed within us by the Author of nature himself are usually, in the common experience of all men and women, found to be uncertain and to not last very long. But that God exists is innate to us all and, as it were, engraved in the soul. Not only has this idea not grown old with the passage of time and the ages of humankind, but it has been confirmed and increased in strength to such a point that no matter how many people may strive by the most diligent efforts, they will nevertheless be unable to expunge this idea of God from the soul. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1562).⁸

IF WE HAVE REASON, WHY DO WE NEED THE

⁷ Brenz, *In Epistolam*, 498.

⁸ Bucer, *Metaphrasis et Enarratio*, 57 (this is a reprint of the 1536 edition).

SCRIPTURES? JOHANNES BRENZ: You will say: if human reason can, by itself, pursue so much knowledge of divine things by the light of nature, what need do we have of the Scriptures? Or what is the usefulness of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ our only Savior? I answer: we should know that although human reason does possess by its own nature a certain awareness of divine things, on account of that sin commonly called “original sin,” people, in their natures, are deprived of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this natural awareness is obscured, and sometimes is so drowned out that people hold opinions that are a long way away from what right reason would teach. For this reason there have been those who have not only doubted, but even firmly denied, that there is a God. We, therefore, have need of the Scriptures, which scatter this obscurity and darkness. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1588).⁹

1:20 *Creation Reveals God*

THE GOODNESS OF CREATION POINTS TO GOD’S GOODNESS. HEINRICH BULLINGER: By these words, all things are understood to carry this revelation, as long, of course, as the works of God are weighed with careful judgment. For God in and of himself is the omnipotent, highest, true, eternal, good, wise, and righteous subsistence of all things. The great mass of the world is the most unassailable proof that all other things also subsist in God. For it was formed by his power and wisdom, was guided by his righteousness and truth, and is most beautiful and most useful as a result of his goodness. Clearly it could not have been these things unless its Maker were eternal, omnipo-

⁹ Brenz, *In Epistolam*, 500.

tent, and truly the greatest. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1533).¹⁰

UNIVERSE'S ORDER REVEALS THE MIND OF GOD.
JOHANNES BRENZ: Let us see, therefore, in what way God has made himself known to the Gentiles, or rather to us as well, by means of this visible and tangible world. In the first place, although the truth that there is a God is not seen with external eyes, it is nevertheless established by a certain use of their reasoning faculty reflecting on this visible world. The human intellect was capable of discovering this truth. For the Gentiles saw from the nature of things that the alternation of seasons and movements in the heavens were entirely predictable. They perceived that everything, as much in the heavens as on earth, is administered and governed by an astonishing, orderly arrangement. But that such things should be governed with such an immensely long lasting regularity cannot happen by chance or without design. For which reason, by the judgment even of human reason by itself, it is necessary to confess that there exists some Mind that governs such a universal mass and conserves it in such a remarkably orderly way. We call this Mind, *to agathon* (the Good), or God. For if someone should carefully consider man himself who is called a *mikrokosmon*, which means a “little world,” he will necessarily have to confess that there is a God. For a person’s mind, which is his supreme faculty, does not have its existence from itself, but from something else. But a cause is far superior to its effect. Therefore, that Mind which is the cause of the human mind is necessarily superior to it. And

this most supreme Mind is called God. For in not only their writings but also in their sacred rites, the Gentiles bear testimony that they have discovered by these arguments and other reasoning of this kind that there is a God. And this is what Paul said: that his eternal power and deity has been understood from the creation of the world. In other words, from this world it can be known—by natural reasoning—that there is a God and that he is eternal. Therefore, whereas the essence of God as it is in itself is not seen, nor is his essential power, wisdom, goodness, or severity seen, nevertheless they are set before human reason as things to be perceived from reflection on this world. For where it is understood from the governance of the world that there is a God, by the same intellect we also comprehend that God is infinitely powerful and wise. For who could govern and conserve with such perpetuity and order such a great mass unless they were endowed with the highest power and wisdom? For he sets forth his visible goodness when he gives profitable temporal things and we discover from the nature of the thing itself that all things have been fashioned for human utility. That God personally watches over and cares for all things is not in itself visible, but is made visible in the things he has created. “For he who created the eye, does he not see? He who created the ear, does he not hear?” He who created within parents a care for their children, will he not care for his own creatures? Therefore, in eyes, ears, and the care of parents is revealed to us the watchful care that God exercises for all, his hearing of their groans, and his yearning for their salvation. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS.¹¹

¹⁰ Bullinger, *In Sanctissimam Pauli ad Romanos*, fol. 18r.

¹¹ Brenz, *In Epistolam* (1564), 499–500; citing [Ps 94:9](#).

GOD REVEALS THE INVISIBLE THROUGH THE VISIBLE. MARTIN BUCER: “For his invisible things.” That God has revealed himself to men and women and that he has made manifest that which can be known about him, Paul proves by those things that, when they arise among men and women, could not exist unless they were infused by God himself. For those things that are known about God are invisible things that are deduced from things that are visible, the deduction of which is so far beyond the grasp of men and women that it can by no means be confessed without a peculiar and certain revelation of God. He also at the same time explains the manner in which he effects this awareness within us. This is clear from the fact that we have no awareness of God apart from his own self-revelation. “The eternal power and deity of God.” This means that he holds all things in his hand and controls them according to a most perfect order (this is what is meant by the term “eternal power”), while showing himself to be the Highest Good and the Father of those who seek him (this is what is implied by the term “divinity”). I assert that these invisible things of God are such that cannot be observed by the senses and are, therefore, not perceived by the mind. But they are comprehended—clearly and firmly known—by God himself revealing the *noumena* (things deduced by the mind’s reasoning). COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1562).¹²

CHRIST TAUGHT BY POINTING TO CREATION. HANS HUT: If someone wants to comprehend and confess God’s power and divinity, God’s invisible essence, through the works (or creatures) of all creation since the beginning of the

world, then he must note and consider that Christ always communicated the kingdom of heaven and the power of God to the common person through the use of parables, pointing to a creature or to different handicrafts or different human occupations. He never sent the poor and simple to books (as our scholars do now). Rather, he taught and witnessed the gospel to them through their work—to peasants by their fields, seeds, thistles, thorns, and rocks. A BEGINNING OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN LIFE.¹³

PHILOSOPHERS AND THE INVISIBLE THINGS. JUAN DE VALDÉS: Paul means to say that by this fabric of the world, which is the work of his hands, God manifested to humanity those things that are invisible in him, including his eternal power and his Godhead. Among the invisible things of God I understand St. Paul to mean his goodness, his truth, and his justice. And those who have read the works of the philosophers well know that where discussing God—although, due to pride, they have not conjectured rightly—they still to a certain extent have succeeded in hitting on these things through their use of reason, and through the understanding that God has given them. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1556).¹⁴

WHY THOSE WITHOUT THE GOSPEL ARE NOT EXCUSED. JOHANNES BRENZ: Although the Gentiles, or nations, in their natural state had no awareness of the gospel of Christ and lacked the Holy Spirit, they ought not nor can be accordingly excused from their sin. For what reason? Here Paul explains what he meant when he had said a bit earlier, that the Gentiles

¹² Bucer, *Metaphrasis et Enarratio*, 72 (this is a reprint of the 1536 edition).

¹³ CRR 12:123–4*; citing Mt 13:3–8; Mk 4:26–34; Lk 8:5–8; Jn 12:24.

¹⁴ Valdés, *Commentary upon St. Paul’s Epistle*, 13*.

“suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” For the “truth” is that there is a God, that God is eternal, powerful, wise, good, and the Governor of all things. The Gentiles recognized this truth. But it is “unrighteousness” that God be likened to mortal men and women, beasts, reptiles, gold, silver, stones, wood, and other things of this kind. It is also unrighteousness and a lie that God needs human service and is cared for by human hands. To “suppress the truth in unrighteousness,” therefore, is to clearly know that God is—that he is eternal, powerful, and the Governor of all things—but nevertheless to not honor him as God, and as eternal, powerful, and the Governor of all things. Or, in other words, to not believe in him, to not put one’s trust in him, to not call on him in times of need, but instead to change his glory into an image fashioned in the likeness of a creature, and to drag down his heavenly majesty to the lowliness of bodily and earthly things. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1588).¹⁵

1:21 *The Darkening of Foolish Hearts*

DESCRIBING DECEPTION. DESIDERIUS ERASMUS: *Evanescere* (to vanish) refers to something that first appeared to the eyes as a false image, then later vanishes like vapor. Paul refers to those who have been deceived by their own reasoning. That is, things happened far otherwise than they had anticipated. What follows next testifies to that: “Asserting themselves to be wise, they were made foolish.” In fact, “to be deceived” is this: When you have hoped for the highest wisdom, but encounter the summit of stupidity; when you have dreamed of the brightest light, only to be plunged in deepest

darkness; when at one time you proposed for yourself a glory rare among humans, only to collapse into shameful lusts, from which even brutish animals instinctively shrink back. ANNOTATIONS ON THE NEW TESTAMENT (1527).¹⁶

BEWARE OF YOUR HEART DARKENING. RUDOLF GWALTHER: “And their foolish heart was darkened.” For they covered themselves in dark clouds when, not being zealous for the things that God had manifested about himself, they followed the principles of their own flesh, concerning the nature of which many things will be said in what follows. Let us remember that this is what is clearly stated by Paul concerning the Gentiles.... But in the same manner this can even be said of Christians, and of some it can be said with great reproach, who having abandoned the Word of God have set up a worship of God fashioned out of their own mind and pretend that there are new gods and so cover themselves in darkness by which the light revealed in the gospel of truth is obscured. Therefore, let us be on our guard against the reasoning of our flesh, nor let us give admittance to commonly held human superstitions; but rather let us be zealous for the Word of God alone, which Jesus Christ proclaimed, who is the catholic Teacher of eternal truth and the light of the world. Those “who follow” him “will not walk in darkness.” To him is due blessing, honor, glory, and power for eternity. Amen. SERMONS ON ROMANS (1590).¹⁷

ONLY THOSE WHO WANT TO ERR ARE HARDENED. BALTHASAR HUBMAIER: To that God answers, not I: “Therefore, Israel, because you

¹⁵ Brenz, *In Epistolam*, 501.

¹⁶ Erasmus, *In Novum Testamentum*, 331.

¹⁷ Gwalther, *In d. Pauli Apostoli*, 13v; citing [Jn 8:12](#).

wanted to err, be blinded and be hardened, because you wanted to follow your dreams and human laws, not hearing me, but doing that which was good in your eyes, and because you despised my commandments, therefore, this happened to you as also to the Romans, for thus I punish sins with sins.” Christ also says: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often did I want to gather you like a hen gathers its chicks under its wings, but you did not want to.” Therefore, your house will be waste. For God does not want to make anyone err or be hardened, except the one who himself wants to err wantonly and be hardened. Thus the doctor abandons the sick one who does not obey him nor take his medicine. [FREEDOM OF THE WILL](#).¹⁸

THE LIMITS OF HUMAN REASON. JOHANN WIGAND: “Knowing.” That is, insofar as they are able by the light of nature and reason, for he is speaking of the nations. It needs to be noted how far into truth the nations are able to advance by such lights as these: they are able to know that there is a God, that his essence is without bounds, that he existed before the world was, that he is wise, just, all-powerful, good, and the avenger of crimes. They also know that God is to be worshiped and called on, that he sees all things, governs all things, and sustains all things. Thus far human reason can arrive at the truth, but it is not able on its own or by rational arguments to determine anything about the true and proper essence of God or his purpose of grace toward sinners. That is, it cannot ascertain that God is one essence but in three persons, or that out of merciful compassion on account of Christ’s blood he is willing to receive and save those

sinners who believe. In such matters a thick darkness reigns and continues its hold in the hearts of all men and women after the fall, except for in the church of God. [ANNOTATIONS ON ROMANS \(1580\)](#).¹⁹

IDOLATROUS WORSHIP VERSUS THE LORD’S SUPPER. [PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI](#): On the one hand, creation had taught them that the one God whom they had acknowledged was to be worshiped with the greatest zeal and purity. But on the other hand, it also incited the passions and allurements of the pleasures that ought to be cast out in that true and lawful worship of God. But clever men and women thought up ways that both could be joined together at the same time: for they introduced a worship of God that was composed of gold and silver, choice sacrificial victims, extravagant banquets, games, shows, and other things of this kind, that might minister to the pleasures of their flesh. As a result, the same activities served both God and their own sensual amusements.

Nor any less than this are some in our own day doing the things that Paul is now railing against, things that correspond to the idolatries of those times. For Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper so that in it the Lord’s death might be commemorated and communicants might receive the fruit of that death, that they might be joined to Christ, that they might be always united to one another in greater friendship, that they might mortify depraved passions, and that they might be again and again renewed with new life by the divine food. This is the worship that God requires in this sacrament from his people. But not content with

¹⁸ [CRR 5:487*](#); citing [Mt 23:37](#).

¹⁹ Wigand, *In Epistolam S. Pauli*, 18v.

this, people—either because it was difficult to do, or because they always wished to add their own inventions to divine things—dreamed up external ornaments, vestments, gold, silver, precious stones, candles, little bells, and innumerable ceremonies by which they tried to commend this sacrament. But these serve their own interests also. They desired that men and women stand on the sidelines as merely spectators and hearers of the Mass, while they mutter their ... prayers and imagine they have thereby performed the divine mysteries. By human judgments of this kind the true and lawful use of the sacrament instituted by Christ is nearly abolished. This is what human inventions lead to. In this way the foolish heart is rendered fatuous, so that it prefers lightsome and frivolous things before the necessary and weighty. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1560).²⁰

1:22–23 *Exchanging God's Glory for Idols*

How THE GENTILES BECAME FOOLISH. HEINRICH BULLINGER: Here Paul explains most clearly how it is that they suppressed the truth in unrighteousness, and also how they did not glorify God, but became foolish. It was because they believed themselves to be wise, since they considered themselves to have discovered that the ideas derived particularly from idolatry—which the foolish minds of philosophers were appropriating for themselves through their powers of reasoning—are what is true and righteous. As a result, they became utterly foolish and exhibited this folly as a sign of what was in their soul. For they altered the incorruptible glory of God and, as much as

they could, adulterated his ineffable majesty. As if by a miserable human image, or by the likeness of living things that are less than human, they could picture or represent that Beginning of all things, and the Highest Good and Being of the universe itself! Certainly nothing more foolish could possibly be imagined. This is how the greatest apostle of Christ convicted the Gentiles of ungodliness. The wrath of God deservedly falls on such great impiety. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1533).²¹

EXCHANGING GOD'S GLORY FOR AN ONION AND A MOUSE. JOHANN WILD: "And change the glory." That is, though knowing God they did not render him honor by expecting and asking him for all things, but placed their confidence in creatures; not only in living ones but in stones and wood: "Saying to stones: 'you are my father' and to wood, 'you have brought me forth.'" Notice here first of all the progress of sin, how much impiety grows unless it is immediately uprooted by repentance. Learn also how much we should abhor idols, for something of the divine glory is diminished by them and "truth is exchanged for a lie." Now, he mentions four kinds of idols: (1) the "likeness of men and women," as were the idols of Venus, Minerva, Jupiter, and so on; (2) "of flying things," for the Egyptians worshiped the hawk and the ibis; (3) "of four-footed things," for some worshiped cattle, sheep, rabbits, and others; (4) "of creeping things" such as serpents and dragons. Men and women were so blinded that they could even worship pitiful living things like the mouse. For it is found in the histories that such things as the onion, insects, the oven, fever, and sickness were dignified

²⁰ Vermigli, *In Epistolam S. Pauli*, 71–72.

²¹ Bullinger, *In Sanctissimam Pauli ad Romanos*, C3v.

with the names of deities. Further, take note here that outward idolatry has its root in impiety within the heart. For since men and women are self-sufficient in nothing, they have need of help from another, and since they will not wait on the true God or ask him, it necessarily follows that they will invent for themselves another, or rather many other gods, from whom they might have recourse to for help. For because men and women are lacking in many things, they did not believe that one God was sufficient to meet all needs, so they fabricated many gods. EXEGESIS OF ROMANS.²²

IDOLATERS DIDN'T THINK THE IDOLS THEMSELVES WERE GODS. NIELS HEMMINGSEN: He is describing the vanity and foolishness of the powers of human reasoning when it comes to God and the worship paid to him, which is that crude and monstrous idolatry into which the whole earth has fallen. Nor was there other occasion for the invention of idols and images than that mistaken opinion in which men and women thought themselves to be serving the true God by prostrating themselves before idols or images. Nor should it be thought that the makers of images were so crude as to think that wood and stones were gods, but rather they said that they were stirred up to worship the true God by means of such helps, and this is why those wishing to pray prostrated themselves before them—which rite of worshiping God the Holy Spirit condemns here. A prudent and pious disciple of Christ will easily be able to learn from this passage how we should regard those heathenish and diabolical abominations that today are observed to the disgrac-

ing of the gospel of Christ, so much so that on their account ministers of the gospel are being persecuted. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1562).²³

FOLLOW MOSES AND PAUL BY SHUNNING IMAGES. ANDREAS BODENSTEIN VON KARLSTADT: You will have to admit that Paul is a fulsome preacher of the gospel and the new law. He reached the depth of Moses' meaning and brought it to light. He proclaimed Christian promise in an abundantly comforting fashion. You must then also say that when Paul prohibits images, I will also shun them. Now hear this. Paul says, "They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image not only of a dead human being, but also of birds, four-legged, and crawling animals." Can you perceive how evil and harmful Paul considers images to be? He says that those who honor images rob God of his glory and equate him with creatures. In this way they diminish and blaspheme God. Moses also says repeatedly that God cannot tolerate our images and likenesses. Thus Moses and Paul agree. And I have shown from the letters of Paul that no one who honors images comes to God. ON THE REMOVAL OF IMAGES.²⁴

PLACING ANYTHING ABOVE GOD OR HIS WORD IS IDOLATRY. DIRK PHILIPS: But some, who worship the molten calf and want to have a visible God, forsake Moses who tarries on the mountain. That is, they turn away from the living God, and from the Lord Jesus Christ who ascended to heaven and delays his return as they imagine. Therefore they fall on a strange worship and choose for themselves idols that are visible. Thus they play and leap around the golden calf. For whoever loves or honors any creature

²² Wild, *Exegesis in Epistolam* (1558), 60r–61r; citing Jer 2:27.

²³ Hemmingesen, *Commentarius in Epistolam*, 52–53.

²⁴ CRR 8:120*.

above the Creator, or instead of God, or whoever regards any human doctrine as equal to or above God's Word, or whoever sets his righteousness or seeks his salvation in any false worship which God himself has not instituted with one express word, without doubt worships the golden calf and is reckoned before the Lord as a servant of idols. However gloriously he may embellish or adorn his idolatry with the appearance of holiness, calling it true worship, it is, nevertheless, before God nothing other than idolatry. For God alone will be God and Lord and be confessed as such. He will also not be served according to our opinions but according to his Word alone. CONCERNING SPIRITUAL RESTITUTION.²⁵

PARALLELS TO THE GOLDEN CALF AND TO VENERATION OF IMAGES. [HULDRYCH ZWINGLI](#): "They changed the glory." He explains how it is that they desired to serve this divine power and energy, since it was clearly apparent to them. Sometimes they fashioned the greatest winged god, and at other times a serpent, and they served such things in place of God. Sometimes they even fashioned images of some human, such as Mars, Saturn, or Venus. It was their custom to set up both pleasant and unpleasant gods over the nations—one to turn them away from evils, another to furnish them with good things that should be followed. Accordingly, we have both Jove and Vejovis[†] and so on. (It might also here be noted in passing that the nations did not serve the idols themselves, but the god whom the idol stood for and in whose image the idols were fashioned, a god whom

they believed was in the heavens.) Therefore, Paul lays a charge against the nations, that they knew of God but did not rightly serve the One they knew. He thereby takes away from them all excuse, charging them to be no less sinners than the Jews who had served a calf or rather, served God through a calf. And we, when we were under the reign of the pope, were in no way inferior to the Gentiles in this sin. For what didn't we serve? ANNOTATIONS ON ROMANS (1539).²⁶

1:24 God Gave Them Over to Lust

HANDED OVER TO SINFUL DESIRES. [MARTIN BUCER](#): "On account of which God handed them over." It was with utmost wrath that God resolved to hand over, give over, and deliver up to the desires of their hearts those whom he had fashioned in his own image that by his Spirit they might do all that is virtuous, holy, and divine. Today, these desires, where the Spirit of Christ is absent, are altogether beastly; or rather, because men and women are capable of reason, they are much more deviant and monstrous than beasts, who, unlike beasts, cannot at all restrain themselves even within natural boundaries. For what monsters are there that throw themselves like this into sexual behaviors that do not serve the production of offspring, to say nothing of being contrary to nature? Who so insanely take pleasure in food and drink that results in their own destruction? How many escape such madness by their desires for receiving honors and influence, by which motives irrational creatures are unmoved? All things are greater when it comes to humankind, for which reason the sins

²⁵ CRR 6:330–31*; citing Ex 32:1; 1 Cor 10:7; Acts 1:9–11; Deut 5:7; 12:2–4; Is 28:9; Mt 15:2.

[†] The anti-Jove.

²⁶ Zwingli, *In Evangelicam Historiam*, 409.

committed by them are more monstrous and more impetuous where perversity takes possession of them. Without doubt, since the fall of our first parents this claims possession of every faculty that humanity has. Therefore, there is no clearer or more certain proof of divine wrath than that a person has been handed over to his or her lusts. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1562).²⁷

DON'T BLAME THE GARDENER FOR THE BAD TREE. **LUCAS OSIANDER:** As we said a bit earlier, there is no graver sin than idolatry. "On account of which" God also punishes this sin in the gravest manner, permitting the Gentiles to fall into detestable crimes, the very mention of which is abhorrent to the virtuous soul. "God handed them over" (says Paul) "to the desire of their hearts." He removed from them the whole of his governance (as it relates to their manner of life) and permitted them to freely follow their ungodly desires so that they act on whatever things their corrupt flesh might suggest to them. God is not the author of sin. For just as a bad tree that a gardener does not reckon worthy of being cared for any further (since it is bad) in time will without doubt become worse, but the blame for its badness cannot be charged to the gardener, just so, when God deserts depraved people so that in time they fall headlong into a worse depravity, one must not assign any blame at all to God. It was in this way that God handed the Gentiles over, Paul says, that they might fall straightway "into uncleanness"—that is, "that they might dishonor their own bodies among themselves." Or more correctly, "mutually," so that they

reproachfully contaminate their bodies by detestable carnal passions toward each other—we will speak in more detail about this kind of sin a bit later. It is by the just judgment of God that they have fallen into such infamous and shameful deeds, "since they changed the truth of God into a lie." For that which they knew concerning God, they corrupted, obscured, and perverted, and what's more, they contaminated it with unlawful, foolish, and utterly empty idolatrous worship. EXPLICATION OF PAUL'S EPISTLES (1583).²⁸

ADMITTING GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER ALL THINGS. **MARTIN BUCER:** Let us grant this, that in everything God inclines the hearts of each according to their own judgment. A man can do absolutely nothing to make himself good. And he, therefore, can never fail to follow his evil desires, being sentenced by God. We deny God if we do not acknowledge he brings about all things. Therefore, when people before God's judgment seat of reckoning attribute ability to themselves, they flee the smoke and throw themselves headlong into the fire.... Who knows the reason why God made wolves to devour sheep rather than sheep to devour wolves? Or why he created fleas, lice, and countless others? And how extraordinary it is that God directs not only human beings but also the rest of the world in such a way that most would not want it to change. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1562).²⁹

CONSEQUENCES FOR IGNORING GOD'S CALL. **BALTHASAR HUBMAIER:** Leonhart: How does God draw or call a person?

²⁷ Bucer, *Metaphrasis et Enarratio*, 70 (this is a reprint of the 1536 edition).

²⁸ Osiander, *Epistolae S. Pauli*, 15.

²⁹ Bucer, *Metaphrasis et Enarratio*, 72–73 (this is a reprint of the 1536 edition).

Hans: In two forms, outwardly and inwardly. The outward drawing occurs through the public proclamation of his holy gospel, that Christ has commanded to preach to all creatures in the whole world, which is now proclaimed everywhere. The inward drawing is this, that God also illuminates the person's soul inwardly, so that it understands the incontrovertible truth, convinced by the Spirit and the preached Word in such a way that one must in one's own conscience confess that this is the case and it cannot be otherwise.

Leonhart: Explain this by an example.

Hans: Gladly. Just as one hears outwardly with his ears and inwardly understands: All that enters into the mouth does not make one unclean. He knows too that Christ said this. In his conscience he is now convinced that this must be true, and he cannot oppose it at all with clear Scripture. That is the outward and inward drawing of God, which everyone can safely believe and trust. But if he does not do this, God will abandon him and with just judgment give him over to a perverted mind, blind, harden, and strike him with a deceiving mind like Babylon, the Jews, and the Romans. A CHRISTIAN CATECHISM.³⁰

LUSTS MORE TYRANNICAL THAN LIONS AND TIGERS. ANDREW WILLET: The Lord at one time gave the idolatrous Samaritans over to lions, but he gives over these idolatrous Gentiles to their own hearts' lusts and vile affections, which more tyrannized over them than lions and tigers, for when the body is given up to wild beasts and deprived of life nothing happens against the condition of our mortal

nature, but when the mind is ruled by lust and so the affection prevails against reason, this is monstrous and unnatural. A SIX-FOLD COMMENTARY UPON THE EPISTLE OF ROMANS (1611).³¹

FLESH OR SPIRIT MUST BE AFIRE. MARTIN LUTHER: Rule: When young persons have no spark of reverence for God in their hearts but go their way without a thought about God, I can hardly believe that they are chaste. For as they must live either by the flesh or by the spirit, either their flesh or their spirit must be afire. There is no better victory over the burning of the flesh than to have the heart flee and turn away from it in devout prayer. Where the flame of the spirit is burning, the flesh soon cools off and becomes cold, and vice versa. LECTURES ON ROMANS (1516).³²

1:25 *Unholy Exchanges*

HUMANS EXCHANGED UNTRUTH FOR TRUTH. KONRAD PELLIKAN: By way of repetition, he explains again why God, in wrath, has handed over so many who are wise according to the flesh and destitute of true faith in God to such a sick mind that they turn out more wretched and filthy than beasts. "For the truth of God"—is that there is One who creates, reigns over, and most perfectly orders all things, that he appears and shows himself through his works, and that he invites us to a true worship of him. But by their carved images, men and women have set before themselves and venerated a lie, contrary to the dictate of right reason and the interior witness of a good conscience, the voice of which nobody fails to hear

³⁰ CRR 5:362–63*; citing Mk 16:15; Mt 15:17; Jer 51:7; Mt 13:15–17.

³¹ Willet, *Hexapla*, 98; citing 2 Kings 17:25.

³² LW 25:167*.

frequently, but those who live according to the flesh pay it no attention. So also do those who venerate and value their false and foolish divine images and human gestures as containing more truth than—and who choose to adhere to their theologians more closely than—the Word of the Lord and the sacred Scriptures. So also do those whose sluggishness of body and sensual desires do not very willingly obey that faculty of judging of what is proper that was implanted in the human heart, but instead necessarily push them to become increasingly worse, unless the faith of true religion and the fear of God should persuade them otherwise. [Although], therefore, the heavens, the stars, the earth, animals, and even men and women themselves are living examples of the wisdom, goodness, and power of God, so that by these things the Maker can clearly be learned of and known, men and women nevertheless prefer to fashion and set before themselves the productions of their arts, from which things they most foolishly presumed to learn about and search out a God who is infinitely dissimilar to such things. They also choose to believe and obey their own thoughts rather than the Word of God and the will of the Creator who so severely prohibits and abominates all such things as these. COMMENTARY ON ALL THE APOSTOLIC EPISTLES (1539).³³

STRIPPING THE CREATOR OF HIS MAJESTY. LOUIS DE DIEU: Even if they wished to purify themselves from idolatry, that they should worship not only creatures but also the Creator, they are still *anapologētoi* (without excuse) because they worship the creatures above the Creator, and where the Creator is held to be lower than

creatures, he is stripped of all his majesty. OBSERVATIONS ON ROMANS (1646).³⁴

GOD KNOWS AND TESTS YOUR HEART. ANDREAS BODENSTEIN VON KARLSTADT: Thus God helps the godless and wicked, even though they seek help with creatures contrary to divine counsel and will. He tolerates when you say, Blessed Mary in Grünthal in Franconia restored my sight, or, the blessed blood in the marches made me walk straight again, or, St. Anne at Denten preserved me from poison and death, even though the saints do not hear or know of our pleas and vows. However, out of great goodness, God helps by being silent for a time, even though you rob God of his honor by ascribing it to a creature.

God does this because he knows your heart better than you do; he sees that you have forsaken him and that you have made for yourself new gods of the saints; yes, what is even greater, God sees how you run after the images of saints. For this reason God leaves you to the desires and lust of your heart and allows you to run to your eternal loss, as is written in [Romans 1](#).

It is not without reason that God overlooks your faults and allows that you thus go astray. For you first left God and carried his glory in and to a creature. This is for one. For the other, it is written that God imposes times when deceiving gods such as lying prophets and preachers will arise, and he does not prevent false prophets, such as popes, bishops, and monks, from preaching to us. Why does God do this? Because he tests us by this to see whether we desire to cling to and stay with him. So that it may become apparent to every-

³³ Pellikan, *In Omnes Apostolicas Epistolas*, 20–21.

³⁴ De Dieu, *Animadversiones in D. Pauli*, 14.

one whether we love God with all our heart and whether we follow him alone. This is what Paul says also that there must be quarrels and divisions so that true believers might become known. REGARDING VOWS (1522).³⁵

PAUL BREAKS OUT IN PRAISE. KONRAD PELLIKAN: This is so evil, so unworthy of God, that in describing such things the apostle is most deeply disturbed in his thoughts and is compelled by the Holy Spirit to cry out and be amazed at the vileness of such human evil and foolishness and exclaim in a contrary and most holy sense, “Who is to be praised forever and ever, Amen.” It is as if he were saying, “What savage impiety! What an abominable insult to God—to him who alone is God, who alone is to be praised, who fashioned all things, who is the only Good One and Potentate—these wretched people neglect this God; by their lies they strive against honoring him. It is by means of this sacrilege of theirs that they presume to understand matters with greater prudence, to be taking thought of their fellow human as to what the best way of making progress in righteousness might be, which sacrilege both the Word of God and God himself condemns by his finger, and frequently cries out that those idols, which they contend persuade people and promote the things that stir up piety toward him, are to be altogether abominated. And yet, they even erase the second commandment of the first table of the law about not worshipping idols, as being superfluous, and by passing over it they effectively cancel it out as something written unadvisedly into the Ten Commandments by the finger of God.

As for the addition “Amen,” it confirms that

all praise and worship is owed to the one and only true God, and that faithful and true worshipers must guard against the worship of any other. COMMENTARY ON ALL THE APOSTOLIC EPISTLES (1539).³⁶

1:26–27 *Handed Over to Sin Because of Sin*

MISUSE OF OUR BODY DISHONORS US. JOHANNES BRENZ: Let us learn from this passage that our bodies and their members are dishonored not only in the manner that is mentioned here, but also by any unlawful, inordinate abuse whatever. For example: the tongue was created so that it might glorify God, speak the truth, and say those things that promote the edification of our neighbor. Therefore, people who abuse the name of God in profanity, or who lie, or who rip apart their neighbors with insults, or who are stumbling blocks to the weak on account of their impious or foul words—such people dishonor their tongues. Ears were created that they might hear the Word of God and the things that promote piety and character. For which reason, if we should turn our ears away from hearing the Word of God and toward hearing trifles, speech that tears down the reputation of another person, and other things of this kind, we dishonor our ears. In brief: our whole body was created so that it might offer itself in obedience to the Word of God. For which reason, if it passes over to the service of Satan in obedience to sins, the whole body is dishonored. Therefore, nobody, no matter how powerful an enemy they might be, can dishonor us as much as we ourselves do by the abuse of our own bodies. COMMENTARY ON

³⁵ CRR 8:60*; citing Deut 13:3; 1 Cor 11:19.

³⁶ Pellikan, *In Omnes Apostolicas Epistolas*, 21.

ROMANS (1588).³⁷

THE SIN IS BOTH THE EFFECT OF AND THE WAGES OF IDOLATRY. AEGIDIUS HUNNIUS: “For they even changed the natural use of their women.” This is an exposition of those things that he had earlier begun to mention concerning the Gentiles’ manner of life, which they horribly defiled in both sexes by the most evil sins, especially by lusts contrary to nature. This abominable uncleanness, he says, was not only the effect of idolatry but also its just punishment and wages; so that in this way, sins were being punished by sins. For, considered in themselves, these shameful acts are sins, in which respect they have Satan for their author. But they are also punishments, with respect to the preceding idolatry. Certainly God does not cause these sins in themselves, but by his just judgment he permits the Gentiles to tumble down into them with Satan pushing them. EXPOSITION ON ROMANS (1592).³⁸

THE PROGRESSION OF DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD’S WORD. PILGRAM MARPECK: The beginning of the disobedience to God’s Word consists of arrogance, presumption, pride, self-importance, boasting, and stubbornness about one’s own self-will and vainglory. From these follow murders, those who shed the blood of the innocent, mockers, blasphemers, persecutors of the truth; those who disobey parents, murderers of father and mother, liars, deceivers, and seducers; those who are envious, hateful, and hold grudges, and those who always resist the good, who tend to all wickedness; the blasphemers, those who, because of their malice, are deniers

³⁷ Brenz, *In Epistolam*, 505–6.

³⁸ Hunnius, collating *Epistolae Divi Pauli*, 85 and *Thesaurus*, 21.

of the truth; playing, eating, drinking, whoring, backbiting, and slandering the neighbor; idolaters, servants of idols, magicians, and venerators of images. All these are delivered over to a perverted mind. They change the way of nature and, against nature, enflame themselves and others with passion, man for man, woman for woman, and for dumb animals; they are seducers of children, brawlers, quarrelers, falsely zealous rioters, rebels, creators of false sects, on whom the sudden judgment of God will fall before long. Usury, avarice, which is the root of all idolatry, wrath, bad temper, villainy, slanderous talk, disgraceful words, swearers of oaths, and perjurers, all of these are the fruit of wickedness, and there can never be any hope that such fruit could become good. JUDGMENT AND DECISION (c. 1541).³⁹

1:28 A Debased Mind

GIVEN OVER TO A PERVERSE MIND. BERNARDINO OCHINO: “And because they did not see fit.” Nor did they show themselves, by the doing of upright deeds, “to retain God in their knowledge,” for not acknowledging God in Christ, they did not know God sufficiently, nor did they retain an experience, discovery, inward perception, or a clear and full view of his goodness, even though they possessed a certain kind of awareness of God from the nature of things. But this awareness was so crippled that, being dominated by the lusts that were in them, they were influenced more by the deceitful appearance of the empty shadows of this life and by images than they were by that true and substantive goodness of God. “Them.” Since they did not regard God as of great worth, nor One

³⁹ CRR 2:345–46*.

to be treated with honor—what they ought to have been animated by—“God released them to a perverse mind.” That is, he so took vengeance on them that he handed them over to an evil, unreasonable, insane, blind, and perverse mind, “to do abominable deeds,” so that because they did not know God in an appropriate way, “they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness.” EXPOSITION ON ROMANS.⁴⁰

A MIND VOID OF JUDGMENT. THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: Into a perverse and contrary mind, whereby it comes to pass that the light of conscience being once put out, and having almost no more remorse of sin, men and women run headlong into all kinds of mischief. The word in the original, *adokimon*, may be taken either actively or passively. Actively, for a mind which disapproves of all good courses, or does not prove or try good or bad nor put difference between that which is vile and that which is honorable; or passively, for a mind disallowed of God, and so in this sense is a metaphor taken from goldsmiths trying metals and choosing that which is good and precious and rejecting and reprobating that which is vile. ANNOTATIONS ON ROMANS 1:28.⁴¹

PAUL’S LIST OF SINS LEAVES NO ONE INNOCENT. LUCAS OSIANDER: But lest the Gentiles should object to Paul that they had not been contaminated by all the evil deeds mentioned earlier, and that, therefore, not everyone can be charged as guilty of sins and crimes, Paul here adds such a list of vices that nobody among the Gentiles could wholly exempt himself from, but rather would be forced to confess himself to be guilty of at least one or another vice of

this kind. He does this so that all might be convinced that humanity can not be justified in any way other than the free clemency of God, through faith. Then Paul goes on, saying: “And since they did not see fit to retain God in their knowledge.” For in a manner fitting with how they did not watch jealously over these duties, particularly those that he was just teaching about—that they should rightly acknowledge God, learn how to lawfully worship him, and then conduct it with care—they also became most dissolute in their common life together. “God handed them over by his just judgment to a reprobate mind,” that they might straightway become even more perverse, “to do those things which are not fitting,” things that are plainly unworthy of good, virtuous, and just men and women. EXPLICATION OF PAUL’S EPISTLE (1583).⁴²

1:29–31 *A Catalog of Sins*

EVERY KIND OF SIN. PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI: “Filled with every kind of unrighteousness.” A catalog of sins is here reviewed, as God’s avengers and agents of punishment, as it were. That they are said to be “filled” with these sins is wonderfully emphasized. Nor does it say merely “with unrighteousness,” but the adjective “all manner of” is added by way of *epitasin* (a stretching or an increase), since even godly men and women can occasionally slip a little and experience within themselves the beginnings of these vices. But the people in this passage are said to be not only “filled” but even to have their entire nature stuffed full of such evils. “Injustice,” by which we cause injury to our neighbor, is placed first. Then “fornica-

⁴⁰ Ochino, *Expositio Epistolae Divi Pauli*, 18.

⁴¹ Downname, ed., *Annotations*, AAA1v*.

⁴² Osiander, *Epistolae S. Pauli*, 17.

tion” is added without explicit mention of adultery, for, as Ambrose says, a graver sin is condemned by the condemnation of a lighter one. For if fornication is a sin, so much more is adultery. And if he had passed over fornication and mentioned only adultery, perhaps they might think that fornication is not a sin. This is what they say that the laws of the Romans did, which, passing over fornication, punished only adultery. *Ponēria* (wickedness)—this means laboring with the intention of doing evil to another. The word *pleonechia* (greediness) is derived from *pleon et echein* (carrying more), and those are called *pleonektai* (those who have) who busy themselves at every opportunity to possess more than others do, and to take for themselves more than is fitting even if it harms their neighbor and comes at a high cost, whether this pursuit is for wealth, or for sensual pleasures, or for public honors. *Kakia* (maliciousness)—if understood broadly this means “vice,” the opposite of *tē aretē* (virtue). Wherever there is slothfulness, there *to ekakoun* (to speak negligently) means to fall short of virtue. *Kakia* is also that vice by which we grow weary of steadfastly doing good. It also can mean “affliction” by which we do harm to neighbors. *Mestous phthonou, phonou, eridos* (full of ill will, murder, and strife)—he once again shows that they are not only in some ways stained by evils, but that they overflow with evil. He rightly conjoins “jealousy” and “murder”: the first homicide, by Cain, arose out of jealousy. Then, following the committing of murders come contentions once again. *Dolou* (deceit)—this means “fraud”; for those whom they do not possess the power to kill or oppress, they overthrow with deceit and cunning. *Kakoētheias* (evil disposition)—here we

find reproached all harsh, morose, and ill-tempered manners. These people are among those whom almost nobody can stay around. *Psithyristas* (whisperers)—whisperers are those who secretly spread abroad the things they hear or see, and lie in wait against the closest of friendships and, to the best of one’s ability, to break them up and dissolve them. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1560).⁴³

AVARICE DEFINED. JOHANNES BRENZ: “Avarice.” What, then, is avarice? Men and women are accustomed to invert the names of things. They call diligence in conserving personal property “attentiveness.” And similarly, they call the pursuit of gathering wealth, in whatever way it can be done, whether justly or unjustly, “prudence” and “honest business.” But these things must be judged for what they are. “Avarice” is not the desire to legitimately obtain and possess honest food and clothing, appropriate to the manner and condition of one’s occupation, but rather it is to not be content with one’s possessions, either those things that you already possess by the gift of God or those that you can lawfully obtain, and to crave for more than necessity requires and that is lawful, even if it causes harm to others. For that which some monarchs take for their creed, namely, “I must have even more!” is a natural instinct in nearly all men and women, so that they crave more than they can honestly acquire. This is what “avarice” means. For the desire of legitimately obtaining and possessing the things that are necessary for an honest life is a natural sense engrafted and created in men and women by God. This is why even Christ commanded us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” And in

⁴³ Vermigli, *In Epistolam S. Pauli*, 101–2.

the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, Jacob says: “if the Lord will give me bread to eat, and clothing to wear,” and so on. And the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs says: “give me neither poverty nor riches. Grant me only my necessary food.” And Paul when he wrote in the fourth chapter of Ephesians: “He who formerly stole must not steal any longer, but rather must labor by working with his hands.” These passages do not teach avarice, but rather teach a duty that is worthy of an honest man or woman. Therefore, avarice is not the natural impulse of honestly acquiring and possessing the necessary food appropriate for one’s condition of life, but it is to pay more attention to wealth than to the righteousness of God, to obtain wealth at the cost of others and by cheating, and to trust more in wealth than in the promise of God. For this reason Paul elsewhere calls avarice “idolatry,” and he calls avaricious people “idolaters.” COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1588).⁴⁴

FORNICATION DEFINED. NIELS HEMMINGSEN: “Fornication.” In the enumeration of the kinds of unrighteousness, he puts in first place that kind in which man commits an injustice against his own self, not rendering due honor to his own body, but foully contaminating it and exposing it to every kind of uncleanness. He is using the term “fornication” as a synecdoche for all unlawful sexual acts. For how gravely serious this vice is, see [1 Corinthians 6](#). COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1562).⁴⁵

FIVE TERMS DEFINED. JOHANN WILD: “Full of

envy.” Envy is jealousy of the happiness of others. To be envious means wishing good on themselves alone; neither is it enough for them to be afflicted with their own misery, unless they also torment themselves by their own choice because of the happiness of others.

“Murder.” Murder comes about not only from the act of killing itself, but in words and thoughts, wherefore Christ plainly says (and John as well), “he who hates his brother” is a murderer.

“Contention.” Contention is where some position is defended not by reason, but by stubbornness. Or it is where the truth is not sought, but animosity is encouraged. They were filled with contention because even knowing that they are wrong, they nonetheless refused to yield, but rather continued defending their error and sin.

“Deceit.” Those who cannot overcome by contention build with deceit. Who can sufficiently estimate how many deceits ungodly men and women have rolling around in their minds? Like a sharp knife (which wounds before it is felt), you have worked deceit. They sin all the more because they cannot avoid doing harm to others.

“Maliciousness.” This seems to indicate a craving to offend. Herein you can see how much humanity has fallen off from its likeness to God, whose character is to show mercy to all. But humanity is full of a craving to cause offense. EXEGESIS ON ROMANS (1558).⁴⁶

WHISPERERS AND DETRACTORS. MARTIN LUTHER: “Whisperer” and “detractor” differ in that the detractor undermines the good reputation of

⁴⁴ Brenz, *In Epistolam*, 509; citing [Mt 6:11](#); [Gen 28:20](#); [Prov 30:8](#); [Eph 4:28](#); [Col 3:5](#); [Eph 5:5](#).

⁴⁵ Hemmingen, *Commentarius in Epistolam*, 57; citing [1 Cor 6:13–20](#).

⁴⁶ Wild, *Exegesis in Epistolam*, 69r–70r; citing [Mt 5:22](#); [1 Jn 3:15](#).

another person, but the whisperer sows discord among those who live in harmony by secretly informing one person of one thing and another person of another thing. Every whisperer is double-tongued, but not every detractor is. LECTURES ON ROMANS.⁴⁷

THOSE WHO INVENT EVIL. HEINRICH BULLINGER: Next to be recounted are the inventors of evils, who, not being content with those evils with which men and women have customarily polluted themselves, in addition contrive certain new evils; or rather, you can find monsters of a certain character who measure out rewards to those who invent new forms of either torture or novel sensual pleasures. It is read that Phalaris[†] rewarded the former, Sardanapalus[‡] the latter. What shall I say of those ministers of haughtiness, arrogance, extravagance, and ostentatious displays who invent new styles of vestments? What of those merchants who trade in the shrewdest imaginable inventions of evil deceits, shams, and frauds? What shall I say of certain lawyers before whom there is no jurisprudence but that involving the gravest injustice? For they entangle what is plain, obscure what is clear, and distort what is simple so that a judicial proceeding might be even further prolonged and thereby be more costly. I need say nothing of princes and the means of acquiring wealth invented by certain nobles. For the whole world knows how shrewd they are in inventing and collecting new tributes

⁴⁷ LW 25:170*.

[†] Phalaris was a cruel tyrant in Sicily (c. 570–554 BC) rumored to have engaged in cannibalism and to have roasted people alive inside a large brass bull.

[‡] Sardanapalus was described by Ctesias of Cnidus as the last king of Assyria (7th century BC), renowned for his decadence.

and taxes. This is the very thing that Erasmus, in *A Thousand Proverbs*,[§] accused the rich of doing: demanding tribute even from the dead. But those who refuse to comply with the authors of these laws or those who represent them are condemned by not only divine law, but by human law as well. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1533).⁴⁸

PAUL'S LIST CONTINUES. PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI: *Katalalous* (backbiters)—or, “disparagers.” These differ from whisperers only inasmuch as they speak against people openly, whereas whisperers spread their poison secretly. *Theos tigeis* (God-haters)—These have a hatred for God and do not wish to ever hear, think, or speak about him. Julius Pollux said in his *Onomasticon*[†] that this word is an epithet for the impious, and he also said that it is a horrible word. For there are those who say to God, “Depart from us! We do not want a knowledge of your ways.” *Ybristas* (insolent persons)—These are those revilers who by their reproach heap verbal abuse and wrongful injuries on their neighbors. *Hyperēphanous* (arrogant)—these are those who wish everywhere to be famous, proud and haughty. *Alazonas* (boasters)—the boastful; refers to those like Thraso,[‡] boastful military commanders who attribute to themselves feats that

[§] Erasmus, *Adagio* 1.9.12 critiques the excessive taxes of the sixteenth century, including priests charging the poor for burial on sacred ground.

⁴⁸ Bullinger, *In Sanctissimam Pauli ad Romanos*, 32v–33r.

[†] Julius Pollux was a second-century Roman scholar who compiled the *Onomasticon*, a thesaurus of synonyms and phrases.

[‡] Thraso, a boastful captain, was a character in Terence's *Eunuchus*.

have never been seen, written, or pictured. *Epheuretas kakōn* (inventors of evil)—these are so wicked that you can propose nothing good, solid, or firm to them without their discovering something of evil in it. Or, they are those who, not being content with the forms and variety of vices that already exist, think up new kinds of wicked deeds. *Goneusin apeitheis* (disobedient to their parents)—he understands by “parents” not only progenitors but also magistrates, teachers, and pastors.

Asynetous (without understanding). These are those who do nothing with good judgment or right reason but manage all their affairs in foolishness and insanity. *Asynthetous* (covenant breakers). These do not keep their promises, agreements, or covenants. They are treacherous and covenant breakers. *Astorgous* (without natural affection). These are those who aren’t in any way moved with affection toward those who by some necessary relationship are closely connected to them. They are moved with affection toward neither parents, nor fellow freemen, nor their brothers or sisters, nor their own country, nor friends, nay, toward almost nobody. *Aspondous*—you could call these the irreconcilable, the implacable, who would start a war as soon as they become irate. *Aneleēmonas* (unmerciful)—in the last place, Paul places those who are so cruel that nothing touches them with a feeling of mercy.

Chrysostom, however, so lays out these last four vices such that by *asynthetous* (covenant breakers) he understands those who will not be reconciled with even those who are closely related to them by nature. A horse will join itself to another horse, and a cow to another cow, but these people will join themselves to no one. He takes the *astorgous* (without natural

affection) as those who are unmoved by necessary relationships, and the *aspondous* (those that can never be appeased) as those who regard no covenant or society as unbreakable. *Aneleēmonas* (unmerciful), he says, are those who show mercy to nobody. These four vices are so diligently recounted because by them or by certain signs of them ungodliness can be discovered. They are, therefore, also for our benefit, partly so that we might behold the destruction of those who live without Christ and his gospel, and partly that we might have before our eyes who the enemy is, against whom we are to fight. COMMENTARY ON PAUL’S EPISTLES (1560).⁴⁹

1:32 *Those Who Approve of Evil*

DEFINITION OF THE LAW OF NATURE. TILEMANN HESSHUS: Here a definition of the law of nature can be sought: the law of nature is the natural knowledge divinely implanted into the human mind, which remains even after the fall, in conformity to the standard of God’s own righteousness. This knowledge bears witness that there is a God and that he is both just and an avenger of wicked deeds; it shows us the difference between good and evil, and it regulates our manner of life. The whole sum of the law of nature is contained in the Ten Commandments: for God wished by that repetition of his law, both to establish the judgment of the human mind concerning God and to illuminate and stir up the sparks that remain in the ashes within humanity, whose light was almost entirely extinguished, and at the same time to disclose evidence against his spiritual sin, and

⁴⁹ Vermigli, *In Epistolam S. Pauli*, 102–3; and *Learned and Fruitfull Commentaries*, 34r–34v.

the unclean nature of humanity. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1605).⁵⁰

APPROVING OR GRIEVING OTHERS' CRIMES. JOHANNES BRENZ: A clergyman, if he does not explain the magnitude and gravity of evil deeds with as much diligence as the law of God demands, in effect consents with these deeds and is guilty of the very crimes that his listeners perpetrate. A magistrate, if he does not guard honest laws with very much care, nor warn against public crimes as much as his vocation requires of him, becomes guilty of every crime that his subjects commit. The paternal head of a family, if he winks at the sins of his family and passes over them, or even if he should be displeased with it but does not do his duty so that it is punished in a manner fitting his calling, he is rightly said to consent to it. They are masters of workers and do not care about the honesty of their servants or disciples, but only that the household completes its tasks. They are, therefore, in the eyes of God, said to consent to the crimes of their family. Common people are not as bothered by others' sins as by their own inconveniences. Such people do not plead with God, nor burn in their souls while invoking God's name that such horrific kinds of crimes might be removed from their midst. In God's eyes this undoubtedly amounts to consent to those crimes and an approval of such sins.

Now, for a collection of examples of the opposite: Moses was so distraught at the sins of his people that he wished to be erased from the Book of Life rather than that his people should perish; Jeremiah interceded for the sins of his fellow citizens without ceasing; and Paul said,

“Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is caused to stumble, and I do not burn?” For even if, in times past, all of these men had their own weaknesses, they are nevertheless examples by which it can in some way be understood what kind of feelings the godly should have toward the sins of others. Because this was lacking in the Gentiles, even the most noble among them consented in God's eyes to the wicked deeds of others and approved them. It is, therefore, a manifest and true axiom that the doer and the consenter are worthy of the same punishment. For this reason the noble Gentiles, as much as the criminal ones, are guilty of ungodliness and of the crimes committed by those who are still celebrated among them. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1588).⁵¹

TO HOLD THE BAG IS AS BAD AS TO FILL IT. JOHN TRAPP: They patronize, applaud, and approve. This is set last, as worst of all. It comprehends all kinds of consent. To hold the bag is as bad as to fill it. The law of God requires not only our observation but our preservation, to cause others to keep it, as well as ourselves. And to rebuke, at least by the expression of our countenance (as God does in [Psalm 80:16](#)), those that violate it. There is little difference ... whether you commit sin or consent to it. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1656).⁵²

THOSE WHO TOLERATE WRONG EVEN THOUGH THEY KNOW BETTER. RUDOLF GWALTHER: Let us, therefore, see what it is that Paul most strenuously accuses the Gentiles of: namely, that though they possessed the law of nature inscribed in their hearts, not only did they sin

⁵⁰ Hesshus, *Commentarius in Omnes*, 23.

⁵¹ Brenz, *In Epistolam*, 511; citing [2 Cor 11:29](#).

⁵² Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition upon the Epistle of St. Paul*, 621*; citing [Ps 80:16](#).

against it, but they also gave their support to wicked deeds and in this way became authors of the sins of many others. How commonplace is this—oh, what agony!—in this, our own age? For, if we should begin with faith and religion, there are many who acknowledge that there is one God who alone governs all things, who alone can help in every danger, and, therefore, ought alone to be invoked in prayer. They further acknowledge that there is only one Mediator between God and us: Jesus Christ, who having become a sacrificial victim on our behalf, expiated our sins and led us with him back into grace. So how is it that we see so many who, though they know these things, nevertheless turn to creatures, invoke the saints, trust in the merits of their own works, heap up superstitious worship by which the merit of Christ is for the most part emptied of meaning? Not content with this alone, they offer their full support to the inventors of superstitions: if some should have a more correct opinion, they drive them away from the confession of the truth by force of arms. This is a sin of the most savage character, all the more grave because it brings with it both insult to God and the destruction of many souls, and because it is generally committed by those who ought to be guarding among themselves and spreading true doctrine and the worship of the true God. Similar things can be said of others whose manners and custom of life people are watching.... They know that all these things are unrighteous and iniquitous, but when they ought to be correcting them in themselves, they instead persuade many others to do the same things, and even take pleasure in the iniquity of others. They are examples of a perverse mind, who unless they are corrected in the

course of time will at length become incurable. Therefore, we must be zealous to amend ourselves in these matters, and because it has never been granted to anybody to achieve perfection as long as we live in this flesh, let us with an unwavering faith lay hold of the righteousness of God that through the gospel he offers us in his Son, Jesus Christ, to whom is due blessing, honor, glory, and power forever and ever, Amen. SERMONS ON ROMANS (1590).⁵³

⁵³Gwalther, *In d. Pauli Apostoli*, 19–20.