

When the Compass Stops Pointing North

I. Humanity's Condition (Romans 1)

- Humanity exchanges the Creator for creation; Truth is suppressed in unrighteousness; Sin leads to spiritual and moral corruption; People become “without excuse”.

Key Questions:

- How is God perceived and why are people without excuse?
- What is a debased mind and where do we see it today?
- Why does God allow evil?

II. General Revelation

God Reveals Himself Through:

Creation (Romans 1:19–20, Psalm 19:1):

- Our very existence stands as proof that there must be an all-powerful, transcendent, and perfectly holy Creator who exists outside of creation.

Conscience (Romans 2:14–16):

- “In our fallen world all whose minds are not in some way impaired have a conscience that at some points directs them and from time to time condemns them...and when conscience speaks in these terms **it is in truth the voice of God.**” - J.I. Packer
 - Our conscience teaches us about God and His character.
 - When it is suppressed, we lose the guard rails that God put in place to keep us safe.
- As our desires become more and more like Christ's, we get to see an even deeper look into the heart of God. As our hearts begin to beat in tandem with His, we naturally begin to desire the salvation of all people (1 Timothy 2:4).

What is our responsibility (*ability to respond*)?

- Every human being has been given the capacity to perceive that God exists. We either:
 - Acknowledge Him as sovereign Lord.
 - Or exchange the truth about Him for a lie.

God has given everyone enough ‘light’ to lead them to Him (Acts 14:16-17).

III. Special Revelation

God Reveals Himself More Fully Through:

- Scripture, Jesus Christ, The message of the Gospel

We all have a piece of special revelation: *the Bible*.

- The Bible is able to pierce the hearts of men, convict them of their sin, and cause them to humble themselves before the Creator of the universe.

Special revelation leads us to the God who desires all people to be saved.

IV. The Debased Mind

A debased mind is:

- A failed moral compass.
- The inability to properly distinguish good from evil,
- A conscience hardened by continual rejection of truth.

Ephesians 4:17–19:

- Because of *their* hardness of heart, they have *become* callous and given *themselves* up to practice impurity. They didn't start that way, they became that way.
- Sin becomes normalized; Evil is celebrated; Truth is exchanged for lies.

V. God “Giving Them Over”

- God allows people to pursue their chosen rebellion
- This is both judgment and consequence
- Hardening is not necessarily irreversible

God can still use brokenness and rebellion to lead people toward repentance.

VI. Why Does God Allow Evil?

Key Truths:

- Real love and real relationships require freedom.
- Free will makes evil possible.
- God remains sovereign over creation.
- God can redeem evil for good.

VII. The Cross: Where Love and Justice Meet

- Jesus took on humanity
- Christ bore God's justice in our place
- Through faith we receive forgiveness and righteousness

The cross is the greatest display of both:

- God's justice and God's love

VIII. Final Application

Romans 1:16–17:

- Do not be ashamed of the gospel; live by faith.
- Share the truth boldly and lovingly.
- Point people toward Christ, not culture.

Closing:

- Culture constantly changes direction; Christ remains True North; fix your compass on Him.

When the Compass Stops Pointing North

Jack Sparrow...I assume that we have all heard of him, but for those of you who haven't seen the Pirates of the Caribbean films, here's a quick summary of his character. Captain Jack is a whimsical pirate who always seems to find himself in the most peculiar of situations. Throughout the films, we see him being cursed because he stole some treasure, he steals Davy Jones' heart and puts it in a jar of dirt, and he was eaten by the giant beastly known as the Kraken.

But what's really peculiar about Jack, is what he possesses. In the films, we see Jack constantly checking his compass. This makes sense, of course, considering he is a pirate captaining his ship, he should be keeping an eye on his compass to ensure that his crew has the proper heading.

The only problem is, unlike every other compass that's in good working order, Sparrow's compass doesn't point North... Where does it point to then, I wonder? Well, we eventually find out that instead of his compass pointing North, it points to the thing that the holder wants most in the world.

So, instead of his compass fixing him and orienting him in one consistent unchanging objective direction that he can use as a reference point for determining whether or not he is lost, his compass is subject to his own will, and changes based on his most prevailing desire.

Now, why am I even talking about Jack Sparrow and his silly little compass, other than the fact that he is one of the most iconic characters ever to appear on the silver screen. Well, because it's fairly common to refer to our sense of morality, or our conscience, as our "moral compass".

It's no coincidence that we compare our morality to a compass, specifically because a compass that is working properly always points objectively in one direction. No matter what stands in between you and North, the compass is going to point North. It doesn't change its direction for your convenience or for your pleasure. North is North. Otherwise, the compass has failed and is useless.

Similarly, in a moral aspect, God and His character is our North; and right and wrong, good and evil, sinful and righteous, are all dependent on who He is. What's good and bad doesn't change based on what we feel at the moment; it's objectively set, pointing at God, and that never changes.

Hebrews 13:8 tells us that, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*" This is one of many reasons why we are able to dependently point to Him as the foundation of *all* truth and morality.

We'll circle back around to Jack and his compass a little later on, but for now, I'm just going to take a moment to kind of summarize the section of Romans 1 that Harrison read earlier.

There's a lot in those seventeen verses that Paul gives us; but the bottom line is more or less that the world is in a state of spiritual and moral emergency. By choosing the "creature" over the "Creator", humanity places itself in a self-destructive cycle of sin.

By refusing to acknowledge the God that we all inherently know exists, they place themselves in a situation where they become separated from the grace of God, and they are left to live in sin, the very sin that they have made their god.

But there's a few questions that I would like to try and answer as we move through the passage this morning: How is God perceived and why are people without excuse? What exactly is a debased mind? Where do we see a debased mind today? And why would God allow for people to practice such evil acts?

There's our heading, so let's embark. Beginning with the question: How is God perceived and why are people without excuse?

Verses 19-20, *"19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."*

Paul is quite clear here in saying that, basically, the very fact that you're alive points to the existence of a *Being* greater than, and *above* everything that has been created. It's basic logic that if there is a creation, then there must have been a Creator.

Everything can't come from nothing, despite how insistent scientists have been over the past few hundred years. The fact that we exist on this planet that has everything we need for life, and more, is proof that there must be something *outside* of this universe that caused all of this to come into being.

Psalms 19:1 says, *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."* This is the idea that Paul is getting at here. The universe: the stars, the planets, Pluto even, is so amazing that someone must have put it there, and that someone must be eternally powerful and divine.

Matthew Henry says the following when commenting on this passage, *"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 hit; 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.”

Henry here is basically affirming what the ancient philosopher Aristotle pointed out almost 2500 years ago; simply that there must be an ‘unmoved mover’. Someone who moves other things, or sets things in motion, but is not moved Himself.

It’s the only logical explanation for how we got here. Someone outside of time, space, and matter must have brought them all into existence at the same time, fine tuning them to be a perfect place for us to live. Matthew Henry goes on to say,

“The workman is known by his work. The variety, multitude, order, beauty, harmony, different nature, and excellent contrivance of all the parts to the good and beauty of the whole, do abundantly prove a Creator and his eternal power and Godhead.”

So, again, our very existence stands as proof that there must be an all-powerful, transcendent, and perfectly holy Creator who exists outside of creation. By simply observing the design and complexity of our world, we catch a profound glimpse into the character of the One who made it all.

What is important to note, however, is this recognition of a *Creator* because of the *creation*, doesn’t necessarily get you to the God of the Bible. From creation, you can certainly reason your way back to a *general* creator; but from creation alone you’re probably not going to reason back to the Triune God, who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Who, as the Father, sent the Son through the Spirit to accomplish redemption on a cross... You probably won’t come to that conclusion just by staring at a tree.

What Paul talks about here, in being able to perceive the divine nature *ever since the creation of the world* is typically referred to as “general revelation”. And just so we’re all on the same page, general revelation can be defined as “the revelation of God to all people, at all times, and in all places that proves that God exists and that He is intelligent, powerful, and transcendent.”

While creation is one form of general revelation, and is mentioned here in Romans 1, another form of general revelation is brought up in Romans 2. That other form of general revelation is our conscience.

Romans 2:14-16, “*14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their*

conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”

God has given all people in all times a working moral compass. A compass that is *not* like Captain Jack’s compass that only points to his greatest desire.

J.I. Packer says this about our compass, or conscience, “In our fallen world all whose minds are not in some way impaired have a conscience that at some points directs them and from time to time condemns them, telling them that they ought to suffer for wrongs they have done (Rom. 2:14ff); and when conscience speaks in these terms it is in truth the voice of God.”

What does he mean by that? That our conscience is “in truth the voice of God?” Well, in a sense, what Packer is saying is that God speaks to us, and reveals Himself to us, through our conscience, that *by nature*, tells us what is good and what is evil.

What’s cool about this, is that when we listen to, and examine, what our conscience is guiding us towards, we actually begin to learn more and more about God and His character. For example, when we feel guilty for lying, it’s because God doesn’t lie and when we lie, we are going against the moral standard that is God Himself.

When you accidentally leave the grocery store without paying for the rotisserie chicken that you forgot your kid was holding, you’ll probably feel guilty; that’s because stealing is unjust, God is just, so when we feel guilty for stealing, God is teaching us about His justice.

But what happens when this moral compass that God instills within humanity is suppressed? Enter: Captain Jack Sparrow and his compass that only points to his greatest desire...

When the conscience is suppressed, it no longer points to the objective standard of morality; the new standard, the new North to which it points, becomes the sinful desires that God uses our conscience to keep us away from.

Part of why God gives us our conscience is to give us some internal restraints. But these restraints aren’t bad, they’re good. God gives us these restraints for our benefit; they’re meant to keep us safe from what may look good on the outside, but is actually going to harm us if we pursue it. But again, if we ignore and continue to push against these restraints, they begin to get easier and easier to get past.

And what starts to happen is instead of feeling guilty for lying, it becomes fun. Instead of feeling guilty for stealing, the thrill of the heist is irresistible, and the next thing you know, you’re stealing \$100 million dollars worth of jewels from the Louvre!

Or even worse, walking around the grocery store snacking on the grapes that you haven't paid for yet...

But on the other hand, as Christians, when we are born again and become a new creation, I believe we get to see an even deeper look into the heart of God by examining our renewed conscience. As our desires become more and more like Christ's, we will feel guilt, or feel convicted at least, over things that never used to bother us before we were saved.

For example, there may have been a time in your life when you had the opportunity to share the gospel with someone, but for whatever reason, you refrained from doing so. Later on, when thinking back on that situation, there were probably some feelings of guilt, or at least some sort of regret for not sharing your faith with that person.

Why would that be the case? Well, I would posit that it's because as our minds are renewed in the likeness of Christ, our desires begin to align with His. As our hearts begin to beat in tandem with God's, we naturally begin to desire the salvation of *all* people. This beautifully mirrors the very heart of God described in **1 Timothy 2:3-6**,

“3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

So, by examining the revelation that God has given us, through creation and conscience, we can begin to understand who God is and who He wants us to be.

But as amazing as this general revelation is, *it is not* enough to save you. *We are not* saved by general revelation alone. People are not saved by acknowledging the existence of a creator; there needs to be more there in order to receive the gift of salvation through faith. Salvation requires a personal, faith-filled response to the specific truth of Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:8-10,

“8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

But check this out: General revelation, while not being enough on its own to save you, can lead you to the light by which to acknowledge God as God. But, since this revelation is able to get you started on that path to God, if it is ignored, results in condemnation.

If you continue on in verse 20 of chapter 1, Paul says, “*So they are without excuse*”. Without excuse...Now, it’s really important that he says that here because it reveals a lot about what our responsibility is in regards to how we are to respond to this general revelation.

And what is our responsibility? Well, responsibility literally just means: the ability to respond.

Paul is arguing that every human being has been given the capacity to perceive that God exists. Because we possess this ability, we face a choice: we can either pursue the One who first sought us, or we can suppress His truth in unrighteousness. The fact that they are ‘without excuse’ means that they are fully capable of doing either or; either acknowledging Him as sovereign Lord, or exchanging the truth about Him for a lie.

To put this into perspective, imagine I told my son, “I want you to change the oil in your mom’s car by the end of the day.” If the sun goes down and the oil hasn't been changed, and I confront him saying, “Why isn't this done? You have no excuse!”, you would rightfully step in and correct me. Why? Because my son is only two years old! You would say, “Of course he has an excuse! He completely lacks the ability and the knowledge to change a car's oil.”

It’s a similar thing here. When Paul says they are without excuse, it’s because they have the ability and the knowledge needed to positively respond to the revelation given to them by their Creator. Those who don’t are *choosing* to reject what they already know is true.

Matthew Henry says this in regards to what Paul says about humanity being without excuse, “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 only him. Though some have greater light and means of knowledge than others, yet all have enough to leave them inexcusable.” (**Acts 14:16-17**, “*16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness*”)

The very fact that it says that *they are without excuse* tells us that they all have, or we all have, the ability to recognize God and acknowledge Him as the Creator. God has given each person enough light to notice Him in the ways in which He has chosen to reveal Himself. Those who take that little bit of light and humbly follow it where it leads, will be rewarded with more light until they are faced with the glorious truth of the gospel.

And when that ultimate light shows us our own darkness, our own sin, we don't have to shrink away in despair. Instead, we can rejoice in the good news that Christ died in order that we all might be cleansed of our sin, just as it says in **1 John 2:2**, "*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*"

Unfortunately, the reality is that not everyone will be saved. Many will ignore the revelation that God has given them and do everything they can to cover the light that exposes their darkness.

This is precisely what Paul exposes earlier in verse 18: humanity actively *suppresses* the truth. As you read further into the chapter, he explains that even though people knew God, they refused to honor Him as God or give thanks to Him.

Instead, they willfully *exchanged* His eternal glory for images of created things, trading the truth of God for a lie. Those who reject God are not acting out of innocent ignorance; they are choosing to turn away from what they already know deep down to be true.

Now, what's important to note here is that in order to suppress something, or exchange something, that means you must have had possession of it in the first place, right? You can't exchange something that you don't have...

Imagine this. Imagine walking into Costco empty-handed, trying to exchange something to get your money back. You're not going to walk out of there with any money back, I'll tell you that much. In fact, you're probably going to walk out of there with \$1.50 less than you walked in with, because you're out of your mind if you think you're going to be able to be that close to the food court and not buy a hot dog.

But I digress. You cannot exchange what you do not possess, which means each of us has been given enough light to at least begin on the path that leads to salvation. **Acts 14 again**, "*he did not leave himself without witness.*"

But that's just the beginning; we still need more than general revelation to be saved. That's where special revelation comes in. Special revelation is what gets you from reasoning back to a general creator, to being able to know who your Creator is, and that He loves you, and that He wants a relationship with you, and that He *values* that relationship so much that He sent His Son to die for you.

Special revelation includes everything from physical appearances of God, dreams, visions, to the written Word of God, and most importantly, Jesus Christ; who, of course, is the *most* special, special revelation.

But the thing on that list that we all have in our hands right now, or on our book shelves at home, is the supernatural Word of God, also known as the Bible.

God miraculously guided the authors of Scripture to correctly record His message to mankind. The Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). The Word of God is inspired, profitable, and sufficient (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

God determined to have the truth regarding Himself recorded in written form, and the Bible includes everything that humanity needs to know *about* Him, what He expects *of* them, and what He has done *for* us.

That's special revelation. And what's amazing about the Bible is that even though it was written thousands of years ago, it's still alive today, sharper than any two edged sword, as Hebrews 4:12 says. This two edged sword is able to pierce the hearts of men, convict them of their sin, and cause them to humble themselves before the Creator of the universe.

The Bible isn't like any other book. It isn't like the Book of Mormon or the Quran. The Bible was breathed out by God and its words have power. It's what God wanted us to know about Him and what He has done for us, and the truths that it contains supernaturally draws men to Him and gives them a desire to know Him.

It's able to open our eyes to the truth about our sinful condition and show us that our only hope is to trust in the only one who has the power to free us from our bondage to sin.

We're powerless to do that on our own; we can only put our faith in the one who is able to do that for us. And that's where special revelation leads us. It leads us to the truth about who we are, who God is, and what He has done for us.

It leads us to the God, "*who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" - **1 Timothy 2:4**

And that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. And we all have the ability, the responsibility, to do that. Hence, why we are without excuse if we don't. If God left us with no way to know Him, or if He made us incapable of recognizing and responding positively to His grace, we would be *with* excuse, not *without* excuse.

So, praise God that He loves us and desires a relationship with us. Praise God that, "*He does not retain his anger forever; because he delights in steadfast love.*" as it says in **Micah 7:18**.

Praise God that He desires our salvation and provides a way for all to receive such a beautiful gift. The gift of salvation by grace through faith. Without that, and without Him making a way for us, and accomplishing *all* of salvation for us, we would be lost in our sick state of sin.

But the mighty Physician heals us and brings us back into a right standing with Him.

Unfortunately, the reality is, most people *do* suppress this truth, they *do* exchange the truth about God for a lie. So, what happens to those people? Well, Paul tells us what happens to those people. **Verse 28**, “*And 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.*”

This begs the question, what is this ‘debased mind’? A “debased mind” is more than just sinful thinking, but a mind that has lost the ability to properly evaluate truth and goodness. It’s a failed moral compass, no longer functioning as designed (like Jack’s compass that only points to what he desires).

A “debased mind” is basically a mind that can no longer tell the difference between what’s honorable and what is evil. It’s like someone who has ignored God so much that their thinking becomes confused and off track (their compass doesn’t point north).

The original Greek word gives the idea of something being tested and rejected; like a coin that has been tested and rejected because it is determined to be counterfeit. In the same way, people “test” God, decide they don’t want Him, and turn away.

More specifically, a debased mind means rejecting what we know about God deep down; it means ignoring our conscience for so long that it becomes harder and harder to know what’s good and what’s evil. When people keep following their own desires instead of the truth, they start believing things that look good on the surface, but aren’t actually good at all.

Over time, their conscience fades, and they stop feeling conviction about sin, which leads them further into harmful choices. We see Paul give us a similar explanation of this over in **Ephesians 4:17-19**,

*“17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to **their** hardness of heart. 19 They have **become** callous and have **given themselves** up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.”*

Once the conscience is extinguished and people lose remorse for sin, they plunge headlong into all kinds of wickedness.

The condition represents a kind of spiritual abandonment. Because people rejected God, God rejected their mental attitude and gave them over to their desires, a divine response to human refusal. Those who neglect God's internal and external evidence, gradually develop minds characterized by depravity, where they reverse the importance of everything, including evil and its origin.

This is what the Bible describes as God "giving them over." It doesn't mean God forces them into sin, but rather that He allows them to go the direction *they've* chosen. Like we just read in Ephesians, because of *their* hardness of heart, they have *become* callous and given *themselves* up to practice impurity. They didn't start that way, they *became* that way.

They had a legitimate opportunity to choose either option: sin or salvation. Like it says back in **Romans 1:21**, "*For 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.*"

Since they rejected Him, He lets them experience life without His guidance. As a result, their thinking becomes more twisted, and they begin to value the wrong things, evil things...

But this isn't meant to be the end of the story. Importantly, this divine act of giving someone over to a debased mind is not an end in itself, but could be a means toward redemption; for ultimate transformation rather than irreversible exclusion. Even this "giving over" can be part of a bigger purpose, helping people eventually see their need for God and turn back to Him.

Just like we see in Romans 9-11. In Romans 9, Paul relates what happened to the Jews to what happened to Pharaoh. Pharaoh had been given multiple opportunities to submit to God and let the Israelites go. But the Bible tells us that Pharaoh hardened his heart against God and refused to humble himself before Him, as it says in Exodus 10:4.

After, and only after, Pharaoh had hardened his own heart, God came in and further solidified his heart in order to allow for the last few plagues to take place, specifically, the Passover.

Similarly, when the Jewish leaders of the day were confronted by the Christ, the Son of God, they refused to acknowledge Him for who He is. So, Jesus hid the truth from them by speaking in parables, and they continued in their rebellion against Him. As a *response* to *their* rejection of Him, God hardened them, in a sense, in order to bring about His ultimate plan of redemption.

So, while He used Pharaoh in his rebellion to bring about the first passover, He likewise used the Pharisees in their rebellion to bring about the last passover.

But it doesn't end there for the Jews.

When we keep reading into chapter 11 of Romans, Paul reminds us that if their temporary rejection meant reconciliation for the rest of the world, their ultimate acceptance will be nothing short of breathtaking.

God's plan for Israel is not that they will continue in their unbelief, but that the partial hardening that they are experiencing will be removed, and they will be grafted back in and be fully included in the unfolding story of salvation, where Jewish and Gentile believers stand together through faith alone, as one family under the mercy of God.

So, while God's hardening, or giving over, is a judicial act, it is not meant to be a permanent removal from the possibility of salvation. God can use other means to get those who are hardened, or given over to a debased mind, to acknowledge their sinful state, allowing them to humbly call upon Him for the help that we all desperately need.

But the good news is that at least we don't see any of this debased mind activity in our day and age, right?... I say that as we're in the midst of so called "pride" month, where all of the sudden every organization becomes gay. The Yankees are gay, the Eagles are gay, Disney's gay, Skittles are gay; everybody's gay for the month, I guess.

The evidence of what Paul calls a debased mind is just as overwhelming in our culture today as it was 2000 years ago. Humanity, while improving technologically, has made little to no growth on the moral frontier; for how could they without Christ?

And a society that grows further and further away from Christ, will look more and more like what Paul describes for us in Romans 1. So, what does that look like today in our culture, in our society, in our country? Well, here's just a few examples of things that have happened recently that show evidence of a debased mind becoming the new normal.

Since the NBA finals have just ended/are coming to a close, let's talk about the lore that's happened with them recently.

Many of you may be aware of this, but there's a Christian basketball player who played for the Chicago Bulls, named Jaden Ivey. About 2 months ago or so, Jaden Ivey posted a video of himself on instagram speaking out against the NBA's promotion of pride month.

In the video, Ivey says that LGBTQ is unrighteous and that the NBA's celebration of this unrighteousness goes against what we as Christians know is true.

What's crazy is that within a few hours of posting the video, the Chicago Bulls decided to let Jaden Ivey go, stating that his conduct was "detrimental to the team".

Now, do the Bulls have every right to run their organization however they want to run their organization, firing whoever they want to fire? Sure. But the silly part, is when you find out that the NBA has a multi-hundred-million-dollar partnership with the United Arab Emirates.

I don't know if you know much about how things work in the Middle East, but I can tell you that all same sex relationships are illegal and can result in several years in prison. And if you're under the more extreme Sharia law, same sex relationships are punishable by death...

So, on one hand the NBA says let's make a deal with people who openly punish homosexuality, but on the other hand we'll fire a dude who says LGBTQ is unrighteous. I've heard this referred to as the 'demonic double-standard'.

There's a meme out there that shows what's meant to be a golden statue of Nebuchadnezzar, but he's wearing a pride flag around his waist. All around this statue, this idol, are a bunch of NBA players and all of them are bowing down to this idol of sin and lust and debauchery, except Jaden Ivey.

What this shows is that the NBA, and really our culture, now expects people to celebrate certain beliefs, to the point that refusing to do so can cost someone their career. Jaden Ivey stood up against this evil and got canned, got fired for living for Christ rather than for his own self-righteousness, or fame, or money, or whatever.

So, good job to Mr. Ivey, and hopefully his courage will give others, who claim to be Christians, the courage to obey God rather than men as well.

This verse from Matthew should be an encouragement to all of us when we find ourselves in the midst of persecution. **Matthew 10:32**, "*So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,*"

Another glaringly obvious area of our culture where we see the evidence of a debased mind is in the abortion arena. This one is easy to identify and as Christians, we should all be able to point out why abortion is evil, and is ultimately the result of people rejecting God and choosing to live in unrighteousness.

If we take a second to look at the trajectory of abortion in our country, we can see the process of the conscience being seared, and the heart being hardened, that has ultimately allowed for the legalization of murder.

Abortion went from being highly looked down upon, or even rejected, to being tolerated, to being accepted, to being *celebrated*. But it doesn't even stop there. It has gone from being

celebrated to now if you don't support abortion, then *you* are rejected. So, we've gone from abortion being rejected, to the culture rejecting people who don't go along with abortion, celebrating those who are "brave" enough to kill their unborn child.

Paul calls this out in the last verse of chapter 1 when he says, "*Though 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.*"

One thing that has stuck with me ever since I heard it a few years ago is a comment made by a talk show host named Bill Maher. Bill Maher is very much against pro life. He's a staunch advocate for abortion. But this one clip that I saw actually had him starting out by kind of defending the pro life stance, which is a bit surprising.

He was pushing back against the false idea that people who are pro life hate women. He rightly said that those who are against abortion don't hate women, we just think that abortion is murder. But then he said this, and this is what has stuck with me. He actually acknowledged that yes, abortion kind of is murder, but he's just okay with that...

Kudos for his honesty, saying the quiet part out loud and at least acknowledging what everyone knows is true; but the fact that he can say that and really truly mean it without feeling any sort of remorse or guilt, is evidence that God has given him over to a debased mind, at least in this area of his morality.

This last example I'm sure everyone saw, but it took place during President Trump's recent State of the Union Address.

For the sake of time, I won't go into all the details, but the shocking and concerning part was when Trump recognized a young woman who had been through a lot of abuse due to her school's insistence that SHE was actually a HE and that she should socially transition to being a boy.

As if that wasn't bad enough, they did this all without letting her parents know, and she was ultimately taken away from her parents because they didn't refer to their daughter as their son. Long story short, she was finally reunited with her family and was able to start healing and moving her life in a positive direction.

But what's really sad is that while the Republican side of the room all stood up and cheered for this young woman, glad that a mother and daughter had been reunited, the Democratic side of the room just sat on their hands, refusing to even clap.

Trump's response to this is the best part though. He points to the Democrats' side of the floor and says, "These people are crazy! I'm telling you, they're crazy." Which is just so true.

To not even be able to acknowledge another person being rescued from abuse and returned to her family, is actually crazy and shows the moral state of their minds. Their moral compass has been severely damaged and they are clearly losing their ability to recognize good from evil.

The last thing that I want to talk about is the "why?" Why would God allow this evil to happen? Can't God just step in and stop all this terrible stuff from taking place?

The Christian apologist, Frank Turek, has a pretty good response when he gets that type of question. He'll ask this question in return, "If God was to get rid of all of the evil at midnight tonight, would you still be here at 12:01?"

God could easily remove all evil from the universe, but He chooses not to. We may not always understand why, but we're not necessarily supposed to. What we are supposed to do is know that God is in control of His universe, and He's not going to let anything happen that is going to thwart His ultimate plan.

Ecclesiastes 11:5, *"As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything."*

God is so much more infinitely wise than we are, that we can't understand how all things work together the way that they do.

There's a 19th century French Dominican priest named Jacques-Marie-Louis Monsabré, who said this in regards to this topic:

"If God would concede me His omnipotence for 24 hours, you would see how many changes I would make in the world. But if He gave me His wisdom too, I would leave things as they are."
— J.M.L. Monsabre

We are inside of time, God is outside of time. We are limited to our human capacity, God is infinite. We can't always see how the evil that results from being in a fallen world could possibly result in any good. But God, being all powerful and infinitely wise, is able to redeem the evil things that happen in this world.

But why did God allow the possibility of evil in the first place? Why even create Adam and Eve with the capacity to disobey Him? Well, Pastor Dan actually touched on this a bit a couple of weeks ago when he said that a redeemed man is better than an innocent man.

The reason that the redeemed man is so much better than the man who never had the option to fall in sin, is because the redeemed man can see the vastness of God's love and grace. Man has put himself in this situation of desperately needing to be redeemed. Because at some point, we all sin, falling short of the glory of God and therefore deserve death.

But even in that sin, even in all those acts of rebellion against God, He still holds out his hands to us, desiring that we humbly go to Him. And anyone who understands the massive weight of their sin, will better understand the abundance of love that was displayed through Jesus at the cross.

Alistair Begg, in one of his sermons, explains that for God, the cross is the pulpit from which He preached His love to the world. There's no greater display of love that can be seen than what took place on that cross some 2000 years ago.

There's an old hymn called "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" that says,

*Oh, safe and happy shelter!
Oh, refuge tried and sweet!
Oh, **trysting** place where heaven's love
And heaven's justice meet.*

Oh, *trysting* place. You're all sensible people, I'm sure you know what a tryst is. But just in case you forgot, a trysting place is a secret meeting place, specifically, a meeting place between lovers. Now, what may immediately come to mind when you hear of this type of secret meeting place is perhaps a place in the woods. Perhaps, amidst the trees there stands a single tree with a pair of initials and a heart inscribed upon it.

Perhaps, that is what the hymn writer had in mind when imagining this hymn. Perhaps, she was thinking of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, hung on a tree in order to redeem us and show us the vastness of His love. Perhaps, she realized that this meeting place had been appointed before the foundation of the world, to turn the evil intentions of those who crucified Christ into the greatest good that we've ever known.

Unredeemed humanity would not have that story. If humanity had never sinned, Jesus would have no reason to add humanity to His deity, or to endure suffering and death at the hands of the very creatures who rebelled against Him.

Yet in His love, Christ added humanity to His deity and willingly took our punishment upon Himself so that, through faith in Him, we could not only be *forgiven* but *given* His righteousness.

God entered the bloodstream of humanity in order to be the perfect man, so the infinite justice of the Father could be poured out on *Him* instead of on *us*.

That way, God remains both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. *Oh, trysting place where heaven's love and heaven's justice meet.*

So, God in His infinite wisdom, allowed for man to fall in order for fallen, sinful man to be able to experience an overwhelming abundance of grace and love. And this kind of love is only possible because God gave man the ability to freely choose to obey or disobey.

A.W. Tozer says this about God giving man this capacity,

“God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby countervail the sovereign will of God but fulfills it, inasmuch as the eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it. If in His absolute freedom God has willed to give man limited freedom, who is there to stay His hand or say, 'What doest thou?' Man's will is free because God is sovereign. A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so.”

C.S. Lewis comments on this subject further by giving us a little bit of the ‘why’ regarding man and free will. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis writes this on the topic of evil and free will:

Christians, then, believe that an evil power has made himself for the present the Prince of the World. And, of course, that raises problems. Is this state of affairs in accordance with God's will or not? If it is, He is a strange God you will say: and if it is not, how can anything happen that is contrary to the will of a being with absolute power?

But anyone who has been in authority knows how a thing can be in accordance with your will in one way and not in another. It may be quite sensible for a mother to say to the children, “I'm not going to go and make you tidy the schoolroom every night. You've got to learn to keep it tidy on your own.” Then she goes up one night and finds the Teddy bear and the ink and the French Grammar all lying in the grate. This is against her will. She would prefer the children to be tidy. But on the other hand, it is her will that has left the children free to be untidy. The same thing arises in any regiment, trade union, or school. You make a thing voluntary and then half the people do not do it. That is not what you willed, but your will has made it possible.

It is probably the same in the universe. God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature

which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they must be free.

In order for the relationship that God designed for us to have with Him to mean anything at all, man must be free. Without this freedom, all of our relationships, let alone our relationship with God, would be borderline artificial.

When we look at the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, we start out by seeing God dwelling with man in the Garden. He walks with Adam, He talks with Adam, He has a personal relationship with His creation. But then sin and death enter the world, and the intimate communion that man was able to have with God is no longer possible.

The rest of the Bible is basically God providing a way for us to have a right relationship with Him again, and explaining to us how we are to receive that blessing. And when we hit the last couple chapters of Revelation, we see that come to fulfillment. When the first heaven and the first earth pass away, the redeemed will dwell with the Redeemer for eternity.

Revelation 21:3, *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”*

...Another cool thing we see when looking at Genesis and Revelation is the fact that the very beginning of the Bible *starts* with a wedding, and the last book of the Bible *ends* with a wedding. It starts with Adam and Eve and it ends with the Great Wedding, and *everybody* is invited to that awesome celebration.

And who is the bride in that last wedding? Well, we are, if we choose to be. And the Bridegroom is Jesus. And Jesus wants the bride, the Church, to be as plentiful as possible...but He's not going to force anyone to come to the wedding who doesn't want to come. It's been a long time since that first wedding, and we're all waiting for that final wedding, hoping that it will come soon.

But God is waiting patiently to start the festivities, if you will, because He wants that thing to be packed!

2 Peter 3:8-10, “8 *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*”

So, while everyone has the opportunity to attend the wedding, not everyone will freely choose to go. When this is all said and done, those whose names have not been blotted out of the Book of Life, will once again be able to dwell with the almighty God.

So, what we need to do as Christians, as the redeemed, as those who have put our hope and trust in Christ and who rely daily on His grace and provision; what we need to do is look back at **verse 16**,

“16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.””

The gospel is for everyone, and we can’t be ashamed of its message. The wisdom of the world says that it’s foolishness, but for those who put aside the ways of the world and respond to the light that God has given them, the gospel becomes the power of God unto salvation.

So, we must not be ashamed of the gospel and we must live by faith, not relying on our own achievements or moral performance, but relying on the work that Christ has done for us on the cross.

We must share the truth that we have found in Christ. We must confidently and lovingly show those who are perishing that they are indeed perishing, but that there is good news, the good news of the gospel.

And let’s not think for a second that we’re any better than anyone else, because if we’re being honest, if we were left to ourselves, all of our moral compasses would be all screwed up too. But praise God that He didn’t leave us stranded at sea with nothing but our broken consciences. He gave us an abundance of ways to know Him.

He gave us creation. He gave us our conscience. He gave us His living Word. And, He gave us His Son, Jesus Christ, who stepped into our darkness, paid the ransom for our mutiny, and became the ultimate anchor for our souls.

You and I live in a world where people are desperately trying to steer their lives by the whims of their own hearts, and they are crashing into the rocks of depravity. Our job isn't to sink their ships; our job is to point to True North. Our job is to stand firm in our faith, to refuse to bow to the modern-day idols of the culture, and to confidently proclaim that there is a God who heals, a God who restores, and a God whose mercy is still wider than the deepest ocean.

Let's make sure we don't adjust our heading to match the culture. Let's fix our eyes on the cross, fix our compasses on Christ, and navigate this world with the unapologetic boldness of the gospel.