

Again, in 1:28, Paul underlines human responsibility and culpability in relation to sin.

1. *They did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God (28a)*

This is a general attitude today, e.g. the Bible is no longer taught at home or in schools. The New Atheistic doctrines (e.g. Richard Dawkins, the God Delusion,) teach human beings are better off without any kind of faith in God (which is like a virus) - exactly the opposite to what the Bible teaches here.

When we hear of atrocities committed in the name of religion (including Christianity,) we may think unbelievers have a point. But Romans 1 includes the wickedness associated with false religion (idolatry). Paul is actually getting upset about the same things the New Atheists are getting upset about today. It's just they point to very different solutions. The Atheists do not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, while Paul diagnoses this as the real source of the human predicament. The real answer is found in the righteousness revealed in the gospel of Jesus. Then the righteous life produces the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. [Galatians 5:22-23, Romans 14:17].

These 'fruits' aren't just for Sunday's, but are what the Holy Spirit wants to develop in the heart of our families and wider relationships, when we live God-centred lives.

When we do *not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God*, we chose an existence apart from God, a hell of our own making, which has the danger of becoming permanent in eternity. The resulting sins in 1:29-31 are those which tear families and nations apart.

2. *So God gave them over (28b)*

If God gives us over, we will discover what life without His grace is like. At best we will miss out on His blessings. At worst we will end up in a pig sty like the prodigal, or in a storm like Jonah. Jonah was called to Nineveh, but he headed to Tarshish, about as far away as he could possibly get (2500miles!) Yet Jonah was very much alone, and it was only at death's door in the belly of the whale that he send an emergency SOS prayer up to God. Jonah knew he was in a wrong place with God. He confessed,

Jonah 2:8 *Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.*

Like Jonah, my tendency, and your tendency, is to cling to worthless idols – because we don't believe God has something better for us. The grace of God in our lives doesn't mean we won't go through storms, but it does mean He is with us during the storms, and that makes all the difference (see Isaiah 43:2-3).

3. to a depraved (reprobate) mind, to do what ought not to be done (28c)

The reprobate mind is the mind left to itself without God. The Urban Dictionary describes reprobate as, *a low life scum-sucking piece of worthless donkey crap.*

Isaiah (64:6) calls even our righteous acts like filthy rags (or menstrual cloth!)

Jeremiah (6:28-30) calls God's people *reprobate silver, because the Lord has rejected them.*

None of this is very polite or pleasant, but it gives an idea of the filth of human sin in God's sight. And note, being *given over* isn't just passive, it's an activity of God!

The reprobate mind turns to religiosity, but it won't move God one bit, and He won't be fooled:

- Our **prayers** won't make a difference (Isaiah 1:15 – talk of unanswered prayer!)
- Our **singing** won't move God (Amos 5:23).
- Our **smug self-righteousness** won't make any difference (1Samuel 15:22).

Yet, the Lord will always be found by those who honestly seek Him with **all** of their heart and turn from their sins (Deuteronomy 4:29; Isaiah 45:22, Psalm 51:17).

4. The list of vices (29-31)

There are 2,3 or 4 lists here, depending how you view them (see below.) Are human beings really this bad? According to Paul the answer is 'Yes'! A glance at the daily news will give a list of the sins people are committing in the UK today, and it's not pleasant. But, like Paul's list, it's a snapshot. It doesn't mean everyone is doing all these things all the time. Fallen humanity can even do great acts of kindness. But who can look at this list and say, "I have never been proud, greedy, faithless etc?" The list is like a mirror, and the more we look into it, the more we will see our own sins (James 1:22-25)

Lists of vices (and virtues) was common in the ancient world. The Stoics those who relied on their own righteousness, had their list of 4 vices: folly, wastefulness, injustice and cowardice. The Jews who relied on their own religion had their list of vices, for example in the Wisdom of Solomon,

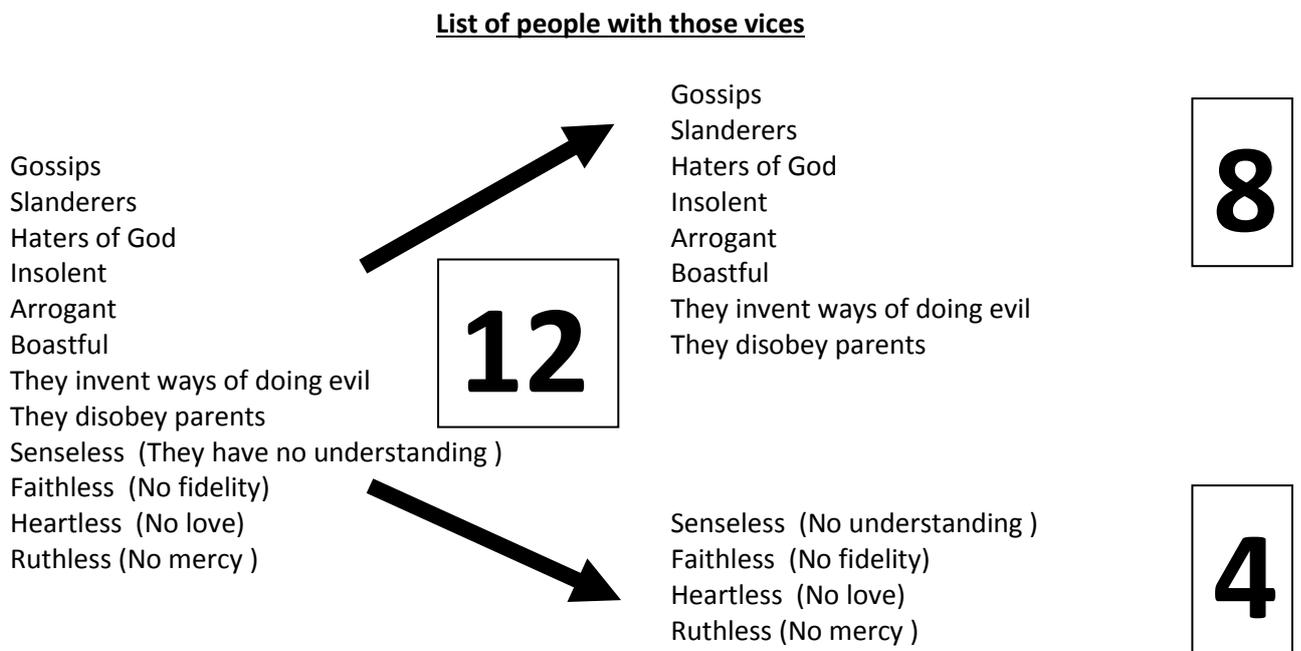
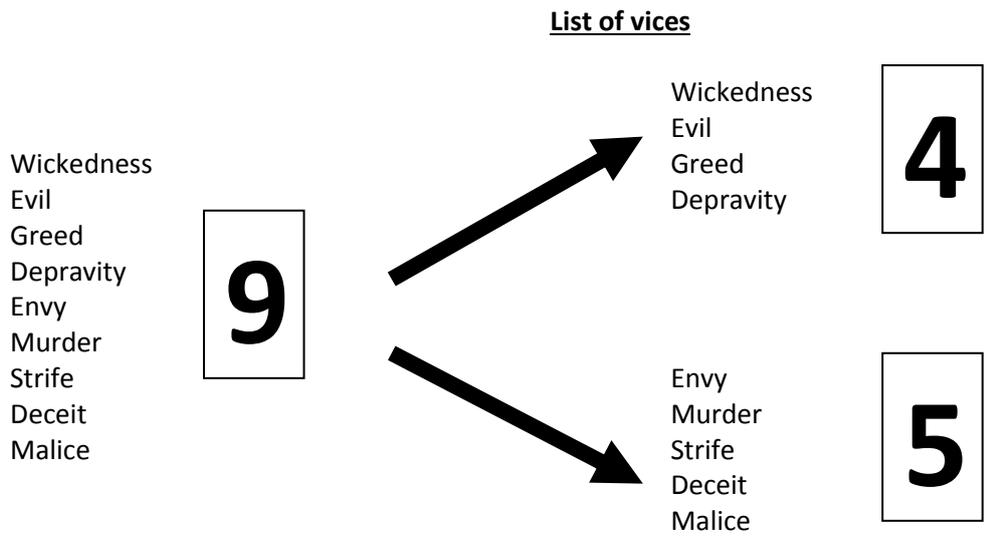
Wisdom of Solomon 14:25-27 *And all things are mingled together, blood, murder, theft and dissimulation, corruption and unfaithfulness, tumults and perjury, disquieting of the good, forgetfulness of God, defiling of souls, changing of nature, disorder in marriage, and the irregularity of adultery and uncleanness. For the worship of abominable idols is the cause, and the beginning and end of all evil.*

Paul created his own list, he wasn't just copying. But it seems to me he already had in mind the moralists and religious people, whom he 'talks' to in chapter 2 & 3.

If you have tried to live a good life, or if you come from a religious background with good morals, it's much harder to realise you are a sinner in need of God's grace.

But if you come from the 'pagan' background with the kind of fallenness Paul is describing in 1:21-31, you're not going to need too much convincing that you are a sinner! Yet in the glorious gospel a righteousness from God is revealed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ whereby we can be put right with God when we trust completely in Him.

A closer look at the list of vices:



NB The KJV has 2 extra vices, 'Fornication' and 'Implacable', but these are absent from NIV because the best manuscripts don't included them.