

Romans 1:18-23

The ancient world was not simply a less advanced version of our own—it was a different world altogether. To understand where we are today, you have to grasp just how different it was.

Porous Selves and Pagan Idols

Before the Reformation in the 1500s, people were what Charles Taylor calls *porous selves*. The self was not sharply bounded. The rhythms of nature, the moods of the gods, the health of the tribe—all leaked into the self. A miscarriage or a flood was not just “bad luck”; it was a collective omen. The question wasn’t “Why did this happen to me?” but “What did we do to deserve this?”

Because everything was read as supernatural and collective, idolatry flourished. Many needs, many gods: rain idols, fertility rites, household charms. The marketplace was lined with altars because the ancient self felt open to anything—and therefore beholden to everything.

The Distinction of the Creator

Then the Reformation shattered the spell. As Scripture returned to the people—read in their own tongue rather than fenced off by an elite, often essentially pagan priesthood—Europe remembered that the God who made everything is *distinct* from the world He made. The world is not God; it is His creation. He speaks with authority to every sphere of life, and He is not to be confused with nature itself.

Ordered Cosmos, Ordered Inquiry

That Creator–creation distinction did more than correct theology; it liberated inquiry. If the world is not divine but crafted by a wise and faithful God, then it is lawful, intelligible, and worthy of study. Causes and effects are not caprice; they are creaturely regularities under providence. As image-bearers, our minds are fitted to the world because both come from the same Mind. No surprise, then, that the scientific revolution blossoms in cultures catechized by biblical theism. (Kepler could call astronomy “thinking God’s thoughts after Him.”)

This is why cultures steeped in mystical monism never built rockets to the moon: if reality is an undifferentiated whole to be escaped or dissolved into, you contemplate it; you don’t dissect, measure, and launch payloads through it. Western science arose where people believed the universe is **not** God but **from** God—ordered, stable, and open to experiment.

Of course, a tragedy followed the triumph. The method that flourished under God’s order was soon absolutized *against* God. The fruit of Reformation clarity was severed from its root. “Science” was rebranded as metaphysics: a closed box of nature with no upstairs. Origins were retold without a Creator; purpose was replaced by process; providence by chance. We kept the laws but denied the Lawgiver. This was the very ambition of the Enlightenment—to rid the

world of God. To put it plainly: the Reformation corrected the false enchantment of the ancient world, putting Creator and creature in their rightful place. The Enlightenment went further, and fatally so—it sought to *disenchant* the modern world, stripping it of transcendence altogether.

What Paul describes in Romans 1:18–23 is nothing less than the prophetic blueprint of this very exchange. When he writes that men “suppress the truth in unrighteousness,” he names the move of the Enlightenment: to keep the fruit of God’s revelation while cutting off its root. They “knew God” through His creation but “did not honor Him as God or give thanks.” That is the scientific revolution turned rebellion—laws without the Lawgiver, order without the Ordainer. And just as Paul warns, the result was not greater wisdom but a downward spiral: “claiming to be wise, they became fools.” The glory of the Creator was traded for the glory of creation itself—first in idols, then in “isms,” until at last the worship of nature and the worship of man replaced the worship of God.

Romans 1 is not merely ancient history; it is the inspired analysis of how a Reformation insight, unmoored from God, inevitably devolves into Enlightenment idolatry. And what Paul saw then is what we now call *secularism*—the systematic attempt to build a world on God’s order while denying the God who ordered it. In the West, we have lived through this secular age, what Charles Taylor calls *the age of disenchantment*. The world is explained without reference to God. Man is told he is nothing more than matter in motion, a collection of chemicals wired by chance. Biology replaces meaning, neurology replaces mind, sociology replaces soul. The buffered self is sealed in: no windows open to transcendence, no voice from outside, only an echo chamber of material causes and effects.

But, as Francis Schaeffer tirelessly pointed out, man cannot live this way. He cannot live as though he were a machine. He cannot treat his wife, his children, or his neighbor as mere atoms and impulses. He cannot silence the stubborn reality of beauty, love, morality, or hope. The very things secularism tells him are illusions are the very things he clings to when he suffers, celebrates, or creates. So he resists—sometimes by irrational “leaps” into mysticism or art, sometimes by clinging to borrowed fragments of Christianity without its foundation, but always by betraying the system he professes.

This is why, for both Taylor and Schaeffer, secularism is not simply false—it is *unlivable*. It reduces man to machine, but man will not be reduced. He is made in the image of God, and though he suppresses the truth, he cannot escape it. His very resistance is proof that he is more than matter, more than biology, more than a machine.

From Porous to Buffered

Here is where Taylor’s analysis returns. History swung from porous superstition to what he calls the *buffered self*: the modern individual sealed inside an “immanent frame,” insulated from transcendence, explaining everything from the inside out. Ancient man saw gods everywhere; modern man sees only atoms and algorithms. Both miss the living God—*distinct from* creation yet *active in* it.

Schaeffer's "Line of Despair" in Culture

Francis Schaeffer traced how this shift showed up not only in our view of nature but in our view of ourselves—especially in art. Once you exile God from the lower story (facts, nature), you try to smuggle meaning in the upper story (values, “leaps” of faith). Inevitably, **nature eats grace**: the lower story swallows the upper; facts devour “values”; mechanics eliminate meaning.

Watch the descent, medium by medium:

- **Painting:**
 - **Giotto → Renaissance:** recovering perspective, depth, and the dignity of the real world (creation affirmed).
 - **Rembrandt:** the weight of the person before God—light and shadow suggesting moral depth.
 - **Impressionism:** the subject dissolves into technique; reality becomes sensation on the retina.
 - **Cubism (Picasso):** the person is fragmented—no coherent center, only angles.
 - **Dada/Surrealism (Duchamp, Dalí):** the absurd as method; the *anti-art* of the urinal; dreams replace doctrine.
 - **Abstract Expressionism (Pollock):** chance and gesture; meaning outsourced to the viewer's mood.
- **Music:**
 - From Bach's ordered polyphony (cosmos as choreography) to **John Cage's 4'33"** (silence as composition): if the universe is accidental, *noise equals music*. Form gives way to formlessness; structure is a bourgeois myth.
- **Literature & Theatre:**
 - **Dostoevsky** still wrestles with God; by *Beckett's Waiting for Godot*** , waiting itself is the point—meaning is permanently deferred. Words become mausoleums of lost transcendence.
- **Architecture:**
 - **Gothic cathedrals** lift the eye; form is confession.
 - **Le Corbusier/Brutalism:** “a house is a machine for living.” Beauty is optional; utility enthroned. Concrete replaces confession.

Schaeffer's point is not about taste; it's about **truth**. When the Creator is exiled, creation does not stay humane. The arts become *anti-art* because the "I" has no stable "who," only a flicker of impulses. Technique replaces telos. Nature, unbounded by grace, consumes the person.

Romans 1:24-31

Paul says that when men "exchanged the truth about God for a lie," God "gave them up" (Rom. 1:24–31). This "giving up" is not passive neglect but active judgment: God hands man over to his chosen delusion. And what follows is not freedom but the destruction of objective categories themselves.

That is what we see in the cultural debris of modernity. If there is no Creator, then there is no design. If there is no design, there are no definitions. "What is art?" becomes unanswerable. A crucifix in urine, a banana taped to a wall, a statue made of dung—these are not jokes but symptoms. The point is not to create beauty but to erase the very standard of beauty. It is what happens when a debased mind denies transcendent norms: the category of art dissolves into anti-art. As Schaeffer saw, nature eats grace, and once grace is gone, ugliness masquerades as genius.

But Paul presses further. The most striking cultural marker of this collapse is not simply bad art but disordered desire. Homosexuality, he says, is the visible sign of an invisible exchange—men and women rejecting the Creator's design and turning instead to what is "contrary to nature" (Rom. 1:26–27). This is not an isolated sin, but the key symptom of a society that has abandoned what Taylor calls "the norming norms." When a people embrace what God calls unnatural as normal, they have declared war on creation itself.

Romans 1 reads like today's headlines: categories destroyed, distinctions blurred, truth suppressed, meaning inverted. What we call postmodernism is simply Paul's prophecy fulfilled—the buffered self finally collapsing into the porous, but this time without God. A world with no sacred and no profane leaves us with nothing but the grotesque: everything is sacred, therefore nothing is. And in that vacuum, sin fills the void with its own liturgy: confusion as clarity, rebellion as identity, debasement as freedom.

It is not only that we as a culture have lost all meaning it is that it celebrates it - this is where I want to make the transition into the ultimate anti-of the postmodern resistance - anti-reality - this is where the transgender movement is the most important - it is the denial of all biology all categories - all rationality

But there is one last point we often miss...the last verse

Romans 1:32

It is not only that we as a culture have lost meaning; it is that we have learned to celebrate the loss. This is the ultimate *anti*: anti-reality. And nowhere is that more obvious than in the transgender movement. This is not merely an ethical question or a private disordered desire—it is an act of cultural rebellion. It is Babel rebuilt without God. Having rejected the Creator's order,

fallen man sets himself up as god. Where there are no “norming norms,” he invents them by fiat. Out of the darkness of a debased mind he declares, “I am a woman,” “I am they/them,” “I am what I decree.” Identity becomes identity-by-decree: not discovered, not grounded, but spoken into being. Man plays god; his word is law.

This is precisely why ideological Marxism fits so comfortably into our collapse. Marxism in practice has always functioned like a political religion. If God is dead and words have no objective meaning, then words become tools of power. Speech ceases to be exchange and becomes domination; language is not for truth but for enforcement. Under that logic you do not need to convince; you need to compel. You do not need shared assent; you need repeated slogans. “Speech is violence,” some now claim — and they mean it. In a world where meaning is fungible, words are seized as weapons.

Romans 1:32 gives the scriptural climax to Paul’s diagnosis: a people who not only do what is wrong but give approval to others who do it. That is the terrifying finish Paul describes: celebration. But today there is still one more step — one Paul does not explicitly set out but which follows naturally from the trajectory he names. It is when a culture moves from celebration to *enforcement*: when refusal is punished, when dissent is criminalized, when silence itself is taken as resistance. That is the move from cultural apostasy to coercive power.

And we have seen the logic turn deadly. The attack on Charlie Kirk while he stood to speak — not to menace with a weapon but to argue and persuade — was not an accident of rhetoric. It showed us what this progression looks like in practice. When speech is recast as violence, the reply may be violence. A man with a microphone becomes a target; a stage becomes a theater of intimidation. The message behind that killing was blunt: shut up.

This is not a bug in the system of modern ideology. It is its predictable fruit. From the outset Marx and his heirs were explicit that revolution is not merely persuasion but overthrow — and overthrow, when necessary, by force. Lenin wrote that power grows out of the barrel of a gun; Mao taught the same. Once ideology becomes a substitute god, force is simply the means by which it secures its Sundays.

Solzhenitsyn saw the same logic under Soviet rule and left us the most practical antidote. In *Live Not By Lies* he explains that totalizing regimes do not chiefly demand belief; they demand participation in lies — the daily, compulsory repetition of what you know to be false. Violence props up lies; lies require violence to survive. Solzhenitsyn’s counsel is devastatingly simple and usable: refuse to repeat the lie. Never knowingly take part in it. Refuse the slogans. Refuse the forced acquiescence. Personal nonparticipation in lies is the small, accessible, devastating resistance that corrupt systems cannot long sustain.

So what does that look like for us? It is not a call to violence. It is a call to truthfulness. It is the daily discipline of refusing to say what you do not believe. It is the refusal to bend the knee to the idols of our age. It is to stand in public and private with words that conform to reality, not to the shriek of the present mob. When the system demands enforced celebration, our first task is to refuse to perform the liturgy. When silence is the price, our first task is to refuse to be silenced by lies.

The shot that fell on that stage was meant to announce the end of debate. Let the Church answer plainly: we will not live by lies. We will not be trained to repeat slogans that deny God, nature, or common reason. We will not call evil good or good evil to save our skins.

Speak. Write. Teach. Contend — but in the weapons God gives us: the Word. As Paul says, our warfare is not of the flesh but with divine power to destroy strongholds (2 Cor. 10:3–5). As Solzhenitsyn urged, refuse the lie. Do not join the song of the false god. This is how truth survives.

Romans 1:16-17

But we must remember one more point: this entire decline did not begin with a rejection of truth in general. It began with a rejection of *God*. When man refuses God, truth will always unravel. That is the root. And that is precisely where the way back must begin.

Notice how Paul begins this whole section in Romans. Before he describes the downward spiral of unbelief, he declares the upward power of belief:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (Rom. 1:16–17)

It is not just *any* words that heal a culture drunk on lies. It is *these* words. *This* Word. The gospel. Proclaim it boldly. Do not be ashamed of it. For these are the only words that carry the very power of God for salvation. They alone pierce lies, heal souls, and rebuild what has been shattered.