

Romans 1:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

Analysis

Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

Paul concludes the vice list: asynētous asynthetous astorgous anelēmonas (ἀσυνέτους ἀσυνθέτους ἀστόργους ἀνελεήμονας, 'without understanding, faithless, heartless, ruthless'). Asynētous (ἀσύνετος, without understanding) echoes verse 21—moral stupidity resulting from rejecting God. Asynthetous (ἀσύνθετος, faithless/covenant breakers) describes those who violate agreements, oaths, and commitments—social fabric depends on trustworthiness. Astorgous (ἀστοργος, heartless/without natural affection) refers to lack of family love—parents abandoning children, children neglecting parents. This is unnatural, violating innate bonds.

Anelēmonas (ἀνελεήμων, unmerciful/ruthless) describes cold-hearted cruelty, lacking compassion. These four terms, each beginning with the Greek alpha privative (a-/an- = without), emphasize absence of essential human qualities. This is de-humanization—when people reject God, they become less than human, losing understanding, faithfulness, affection, and mercy. The reprobate mind (v. 28) produces reprobate behavior. The catalog (vv. 29-31) demonstrates the comprehensive corruption of humanity apart from God's grace.

Historical Context

Roman society exhibited these traits despite professed values. Infanticide (exposing unwanted babies) showed lack of natural affection. Gladiator games demonstrated ruthlessness. Political betrayals revealed faithlessness. Slavery institutionalized cruelty. Paul's list would have resonated with readers aware of society's moral decay. Yet Jewish readers, self-righteous in condemning Gentile sin, would soon face indictment in chapter 2. The diagnosis is universal: all have sinned (Romans 3:23). The remedy is also universal: the gospel (Romans 1:16-17).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does rejecting God lead to losing essential human qualities—understanding, faithfulness, affection, mercy?
2. What modern examples demonstrate 'without natural affection' (ἀστοργος)—abortion, euthanasia, neglect of elderly, family breakdown?
3. In what ways do you need God's grace to cultivate understanding, faithfulness, affection, and mercy that sin has eroded?

Interlinear Text

ἀσυνέτους	ἀσυνθέτους	ἀστόργονς	ἀσπόνδους,
Without understanding	covenantbreakers	without natural affection	implacable
G801	G802	G794	G786
ἀνελεήμονας·			
unmerciful			
G415			

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 18:2 (Parallel theme): A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.

2 Timothy 3:3 (Parallel theme): Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

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