



## Mankind Needs the Gospel Romans 1:18-32

### Introduction

In the first part of chapter one, Paul presented the revelation of God's righteousness in the gospel message. In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed *from faith to faith* (Romans 1:17). The revelation of God's righteousness is in direct contrast to the revelation of God's wrath in Romans 1:18. Paul will now go on to describe the unrighteousness of humankind, which provokes God's wrath. He shows our dire need of God's righteousness. The word *For*, which introduces Romans 1:18, connects what follows with what went before (in verses 16 and 17) to show why the gospel is necessary. Only the gospel, by the power of God, delivers sinners from God's wrath.

Beginning in Romans 1:18 and continuing through 3:20, Paul shows that every person is infected with sin (Romans 3:10 and 23) and that all sin is condemned by God (Romans 3:19). All people are guilty, both Jews and Gentiles, and all are subject to God's wrath. The whole world is subject to God's judgment. Consequently, everyone needs the salvation provided in the gospel. At the heart of the gospel message is Christ's death on the cross. Christ died on the cross for sinners. This was God's great saving act. That sin was a very real problem is shown by the fact that God's Son came to die as the means whereby it would be put away. Paul will expound this gospel, but before he comes to the remedy he makes his diagnosis of the disease. "He has a careful argument that we are all sinners....It is only when we realize in the depths of our being that we are lost that we are ready to receive the salvation that God gives." (*The Epistle to the Romans*, Leon Morris).

Most scholars see this portion of Paul's letter as addressed primarily to the Gentile world because there is no mention made of God's Law. However, most of what is written can be applied to Jews also. Paul's writing is very general and reveals the sin of all human kind. Romans 1:18-32 is a daunting picture of man without God. Paul writes of God's wrath upon man's sin. He shows how man's ungodliness takes him on a downward spiral into the depths of unrighteousness. He shows why mankind needs the gospel.

### Outline of Romans 1:18-32

- I. The Wrath of God - Romans 1:18-20
- II. The Depravity of Man - Romans 1:21-32

### I. The Wrath of God - Romans 1:18-20

In *The One Volume Bible Commentary*, J.R. Dummelow defines God's wrath as "His steadfast indignation against sin." God is holy; *Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory* (Isaiah 6:3). See also Revelation 4:8. Sin is an affront to God's majestic holiness and an infinite offense to His glory. Sin justly provokes God's wrath. "Nothing is less tolerable in the order of things, than for the creature to take away the honor (glory) due to the Creator and not repay what he takes away" (Anselm of Canterbury as quoted in *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?*, James Montgomery Boice).

Some people are offended by God's wrath, choosing to see Him only as a God of love who freely offers forgiveness. However, the Bible clearly teaches the wrath of God (Deuteronomy 11:16-17; Jeremiah 4:4; John 3:36; Ephesians 5:3-6; Revelation 6:16-17; etc.). The apostle Paul plainly writes that *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness* (Romans 1:18). The remainder of Romans 1 explains that statement and shows why mankind needs to be saved from God's wrath.

- A. *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven - Romans 1:18*

The word *revealed* means "to uncover" or "to make known." It has the connotation of being continually revealed. God's wrath is being revealed now and will also be ultimately revealed on the day of judgment, as described in Romans 2:5-9. Sometimes God's wrath is seen in natural consequences which result from sin. Sometimes God's wrath is revealed by His personal intervention as in His curse on the earth (Genesis 3:17-19), the flood (Genesis 7), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), and so on throughout the Scriptures. However, the ultimate measure of God's wrath is seen in what it cost His Son on the cross. Someone has rightly observed that to be subjected to the wrath of God is the epitome of human misery.

- B. *The wrath of God is revealed.....against all ungodliness and unrighteousness - Romans 1:18*

*Ungodliness* is idolatry, sin directly against God, which results from lack of a true relationship with God.

Ungodliness always leads to *unrighteousness*, which is a lack of conformity in thought, word, or deed to the character and law of God. John MacArthur labels this immorality (*The MacArthur Study Bible*). Ungodliness and unrighteousness evoke the wrath of God because they totally oppose God's truth and revelation of Himself.

1. Men *suppress the truth in unrighteousness* - 1:18

Although the truth is clearly evident, men hate it and try to suppress it. Paul's phrase pictures truth being held prisoner to men's sin. Their thoughts, words, and actions oppose what they know of the truth and they also prevent others from knowing the truth.

2. God has made Himself known - 1:19-20

God has clearly revealed Himself in His creation. He has also given us eyes to see and a mind to understand. We need to open our eyes and see that God's awesome power, goodness, and wisdom are evident all around us. His power is seen in the wind, the storm, earthquakes, and waves crashing on the shore. His goodness is seen in the warm sunshine, gentle rain, fruitful trees, fragrant flowers. Who can deny His wisdom in the perfection of a tiny newborn baby or the intricacy with which the human body functions? See Job 5:10; Isaiah 40:21-26; Psalm 19:1-6; 66:10-13; 139:14; Acts 14:17.

C. Mankind is *without excuse* - Romans 1:20

God's power and deity are so clearly seen in the awesome beauty and order of creation that there is no excuse for ignorance. God holds people accountable to the revelation they have been given. Those who shut their eyes are justly liable.

## II. The Depravity of Man - Romans 1:21-32

Paul demonstrates that man's works never produce righteousness but only wrath. Man is ungodly by nature and the natural man will inevitably fall into a downward spiral of ungodliness and unrighteousness, being *by nature children of wrath* (Ephesians 2:3). This passage pictures the total helplessness and hopelessness of man to help himself because he is *dead in...trespasses and sins* (Ephesians 2:1).

A. Man's ungodliness - Romans 1:21-24

*Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful.*

1. Specific sins - 1:21-23

Ungodly men knew God. They knew enough to know

that they should glorify (honor) Him and give Him the thanks He deserves.

a. Refusal to glorify God - 1:21

The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." This is not just a good suggestion; it is demanded in Scripture. *By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored* (Leviticus 10:3). *Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in holy array* (Psalm 29:2). *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:31). Paul's indictment against the ungodly is that they refused to ascribe glory to God when their knowledge was sufficient. See Acts 12:20-23 for an example of a man who refused to glorify God.

b. Refusal to thank God - 1:21

They refused to thank God for all His blessings which were evident in the world around them and in their very lives, *for in Him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28).

c. Became *futile in their thoughts* - 1:21

They attempted to find meaning in life outside of God. Consequently, all their thoughts were meaningless. *The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile* (1 Corinthians 3:20).

d. *Their foolish hearts were darkened* - 1:21

When we think of the heart, we usually think of the emotions. But in Paul's day, the heart was considered to be the inner man, the very center of life, consisting of all mental function, feeling, will, and thought. The heart determined the whole course of one's life. A darkened heart is a heart devoid of wisdom and spiritual understanding, filled instead with lies and corruption. Their hearts were foolish because they took pride in their own wisdom rather than in the truth.

e. *Professing to be wise, they became fools* - 1:22

They firmly believed in their own wisdom, but they were only making fools of themselves. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (1 Corinthians 3:19).

f. They became idolators - 1:23

They exchanged the majestic, glorious, matchless worth and reality of the eternal God for the cheap, ordinary,

corroding images of man and animals. They worshiped man-made idols instead of the God who created man and all living things.

## 2. God's judgment - 1:24

*Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.*

### a. God gave them up - 1:24

*Gave them up* is a term from the Greek judicial system. It was a phrase which referred to the handing over of a prisoner to his sentence. Because men rejected what they clearly knew of God and turned to idols, God handed them over to the power of their own sin.

In his commentary, Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris writes "God shuts people up to the consequences of their sin so that they will see their error and look to Him for mercy and for a better way."

### b. Consequences - 1:24

Their idolatry resulted in degradation as ungodliness led to immorality. Their uncleanness began in the lusts of their hearts. Remember that in Paul's day the heart was considered the very core of one's being. That is where their uncleanness began, and it spread and grew to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves. Paul may have in mind the ritual prostitution which was common in the pagan religions. He was writing this letter from Corinth which was known for having thousands of "sacred" prostitutes.

## B. Downward spiral of ungodliness - Romans 1: 25-27

Romans 1:24-32 pictures a downward spiral into sin as God continually gives up or gives over the ungodly to their own sin. The phrases *God gave them up* or *God gave them over* is repeated three times—in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28. Paul reveals how refusal to acknowledge God is the beginning of the end for the sinner. He portrays the character of the downward spiraling sin and the degree to which it ultimately extends.

## 1. Man's sin expressed - 1:25

### a. Exchanged the truth of God for the lie - 1:25

God is the Truth! *The truth of God*, therefore, includes God Himself, all truth concerning Him, and all truth He has made known. Men preferred *the lie*. They denied the existence of God and created their own gods. They

devised their own truths which were foolish speculation and conjecture. But the lie goes beyond their thoughts and schemes. The lie includes the deviant behavior associated with their philosophies and vain religion. Men were more comfortable living the lie than the truth.

### b. Worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator - 1:25

Rather than worshiping and serving the Creator of all things, they worshiped and served idols they had made with their own hands. Paul ends this section with an *Amen* to affirm the glory and the blessedness of God.

## 2. God's judgment - 1:26-27

*God gave them up to vile passions.* They had abandoned the worship of the one true God, so they were abandoned to their own lusts. Paul describes the particular perversions God allowed them to sink into.

### a. Female perversion - 1:26

Paul does not use the normal Greek word for women, but a more general term meaning "female." Moral degeneracy did not just affect the men but extended even to the "fairer sex."

### b. Male perversion - 1:27

*Men....burned in their lust for one another.* Paul paints a vivid picture of Roman society in the first century and homosexuality is clearly in view. William Barclay in The Letter to the Romans) comments on this verse: "There is nothing that Paul said about the heathen world that the heathen moralist had not themselves already said....Society from top to bottom was riddled with unnatural vice....Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors were homosexuals."

Paul calls their behavior *shameful* and speaks of their *receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due*. Elsewhere in his writing, Paul had delineated the law of sowing and reaping, *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap* (Galatians 6:7). Today we may think of AIDS as the penalty of the perversion mentioned, but Paul probably had in mind sexual perversion as the penalty in itself.

## C. Ungodliness results in unrighteousness - Romans 1:28-32

As man turns from God and is caught in the downward spiral of sin, unrighteousness becomes unrestrained. Paul shows how far this evil, immoral behavior goes.

## 1. Ungodliness - 1:28

*They did not like to retain God in their knowledge.* They didn't like to have God as part of their knowledge so they deliberately refused to know Him.

## 2. A debased mind - 1:28

The Greek word translated *debased* (*depraved* in NASB) means "not passing the test" or "not approved." It was used to describe substandard coins or metals which were worthless because of impurities. *God gave them over to minds so perverse that they were unable to reason.* As a result, they did things which were *not fitting*, the opposite of what was wise and sensible and according to sound conscience.

## 3. Twenty-three specific sins - 1:29-32

Paul's list of twenty-three sins shows the full extent of the depravity of man's mind. They were *filled with* and *full of* sin. They were immersed in sin. Sin occupied their hearts and minds to overflowing so there was no room for good or virtue. The specific sins were:

*Unrighteousness*, referring to injustice.

*Sexual immorality*, described in verses 26-27, also includes all violations of the 7th commandment (Exodus 20:14).

*Wickedness* is a general inclination to evil.

*Covetousness* is a consuming desire to have more.

*Maliciousness* is a disposition to seek revenge and hurt others.

*Envy* "reminds us that evildoers are not just one happy band of brothers. There is a divisiveness about evil which sets people apart from one another" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

*Murder* was a very common sin in Rome. Masters put their slaves to death for the smallest infraction, even on a whim.

*Strife* is contention and quarreling.

*Deceit* is cunning and manipulativeness.

*Evil-mindedness* is intentional wickedness; a desire to do evil to others for the sheer pleasure of it.

*Whisperers* (*gossips* in NASB) speak evil behind a person's back.

*Backbiters* (*slanderers* in NASB) speak evil of others for the pleasure it brings.

*Haters of God* act hatefully toward God.

*Violent* (*insolent* in NASB) is adding insult to injury.

*Proud* means arrogant, haughty, or puffed up.

*Boasters* are both proud and ostentatious.

*Inventors of evil things* are those who use ingenuity in planning wickedness.

*Disobedient to parents* is any violation of the 5th commandment (Exodus 20:12). "It is a part of the law

originally inscribed on the heart, the traces of which are still to be found in the natural love of children to their parents. When people disregard this duty, they depart from the original constitution of their nature, and disregard the voice of God in their hearts" (Exposition of Romans, Robert Haldane).

*Undiscerning* is literally "senseless," totally lacking in understanding of the things of God.

*Untrustworthy* means faithless; one who is an agreement breaker.

*Unloving* is to be without natural affection.

*Unforgiving* refers to savageness or heartlessness.

*Unmerciful* is a lack of compassion with ruthless actions.

## c. The full extent of the sin - 1:32

Paul makes it clear again that these sinners do not sin because of ignorance. They had knowledge of God and His righteous judgment. They knew how they should act. They knew that their actions were deserving of death. It was even evident in the world around them because many of the sins Paul mentioned were punishable by death even in pagan nations. But they not only continued to sin themselves, they encouraged others to sin by *giving their hearty approval* (NASB). "This shows the depth of their corruption. It is moral insanity. It is the bottom of the downward spiral of sin. The sinner hates God, hates his fellow man, and hates himself. He would kill God if he could, he does kill his fellow man when he can. (And) he commits spiritual suicide every day of his life (John H. Gerstner, "The Atonement and the Purpose of God," in Our Savior God: Man, Christ and the Atonement, James Montgomery Boice, ed.).

This is the picture of man without Jesus Christ in the world. It is a picture of total depravity and hopelessness. It shows why every person needs the salvation provided in the gospel of God.

**Applications**

1. God has made Himself known through all the created, observable things of this world. Have you opened your eyes to see?

2. How do you honor and glorify God in your life?

3. What will you give thanks to God for right now?

4. When you need wisdom, do you go to God? *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given him* (James 1:5).

5. In what ways have you followed your own wisdom above the wisdom of God?

6. What "idols" do you worship above God? (Power, money, success, some person, sex, etc.?)



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## QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

### Day One: Read all lesson notes and references.

1. How does Romans 1:18-32 show mankind's need for God's righteousness?
2. What did you learn about God's wrath?
3. What impressed you about God's revelation of Himself in nature?
4. What did you learn about the depravity of the human mind from Romans 1:18-32, the lesson notes, or the lecture?

### Day Two: Read Romans 2:1-16.

5. a. Who was without excuse in Romans 1:20? Give the pronoun used.  
b. Who has no excuse in Romans 2:1 (Give pronoun.)  
c. To whom does this refer? Use the Romans passage and your own opinion to describe what kind of person Paul is addressing.  
d. ♥ (Heart Question) Does this passage refer to you? Why or why not?
6. What do you learn about God's judgment from this passage?

### Day Three: Read Romans 2:1-3.

7. a. Why is there no excuse for judging others?  
b. If you can, give a one word description of the judgmental person in verse 1.
8. a. When you judge others, what do you do to yourself? Why is this so?  
b. When you judge others, what do you get that you justly deserve?
9. a. What does *such things* refer to in verses 2 and 3?  
b. From what you learned in Romans Chapter 1, why will those who do such things not escape God's judgment?

### Day Four: Read Romans 2:4-6.

10. a. What did those who were passing judgment despise?

- b. What did they refuse to acknowledge?
  - c. What does repentance mean to you?
  - d. ♥ (Heart Question) Will you share with your group how the goodness (kindness) of God led you to repentance?
11. a. How are the hearts of these judgmental people described?
- b. What was the treasure of their hearts?
  - c. When will they fully experience what they are treasuring in their hearts?
  - d. How do the following Scripture passages describe that day?  
Psalm 110:5  
  
2 Corinthians 5:10  
  
Revelation 20:11-15
- 12 a. On what basis will God judge each person?
- b. How do the following verses confirm that?  
Job 34:11  
  
Isaiah 3:10-11  
  
Jeremiah 17:10  
  
Matthew 16:27

**Day Five: Read Romans 2:7-11.**

13. What two categories of people are described and what does each reap?
14. a. According to Romans 2:9-10, with whom will judgment begin?
- b. What other group of people can also expect judgment

15. a. From verse 11, what was Paul's argument meant to show?
- b. How do these Scripture passages confirm that there is no partiality with God?
- Deuteronomy 10:17
- Acts 10:34-35
- Galatians 2:6

**Day Six: Read Romans 2:12-16.**

16. What is the *law* referred to in this passage. See 1 Kings 2:3, Hebrews 9:19, and James 4:12 for help.
17. a. In verse 12, what two categories of sinners does Paul mention in relation to the law?
- b. How will each be judged?
18. a. In verse 13, what two categories of people are mentioned in relation to the law?
- b. Which will be justified?
- c. Use Luke 6:47-49, James 1:22-25, and James 2:14-17 to show how Romans 2:13 applies to you.
19. a. Why is it that Gentiles, who do not have God's law, sometimes act according to the law?
- b. From verse 15, list three things which work together to encourage any person to do what is required by God.
20. a. From Romans 2:5, what is *the day* spoken of in verse 16?
- b. By whom will God judge the secrets of men on that day?
- c. ? (Thought Question) Why is it fair and appropriate that He should be the mediator of judgment?
- d. What more do John 5:22, Acts 17:31, and 2 Corinthians 5:10 teach about Jesus Christ and judgment?