



# Epistle to The Romans



## Lesson 2: The Pagan Predicament, Romans 1:8-32

### Review

The last lesson we learned that the Epistle to The Romans is considered the most comprehensive statement of theology in the entire Bible! The theme of Romans is the Grace of God revealed! Very few people really understand the full depth of the Grace of God. God's Grace is the remedy to cover the gap from God's righteousness and our iniquity.

We learned that Paul was not an unlettered fisherman. On the contrary, he was probably one of the most educated individuals on the Earth at that time. He was incredibly well educated in Hebrew and Greek.

The last half of Acts is mostly about Paul; it ends with him going to Rome, so it's appropriate the epistle to follow Acts is Romans. It is a continuation of Acts in many ways. Romans is the most comprehensive statement of the Gospel in the entire Bible. Some call it the "Gospel according to Paul."






The impact of Romans on world history is unequalled by any other book of the Bible. The years a.d. 590 - 1517 are known as "The Dark Ages"; during this time, the grace of God was nearly obscured. The early church understood the grace of God, but grace gradually eroded into forms of legalism (keeping rules). The reemergence of an awareness of the grace of God led to the Reformation.

Finally, we need to keep in mind that Paul is writing to believers. Romans is not designed to evangelized unbelievers but to teach and instruct those who are committed to Christ.

Now we start a series of lessons that are a complete diagnosis of man's sin.

### The Predicament of:

-  **Romans 1: The "Pagan Man"**
-  **Romans 2: The "Moral Man"**
-  **Romans 3: The "Religious Man"**

**7]** *To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul's salutation, like that in all his epistles, expressed the desire that they enjoy God's grace (Greek charas) and peace (Hebrew shalom). Paul always covers both the Greek and the Hebrew. Again, his epistle was written to believers: the unsaved are never named God's "beloved."

## Introduction and Reasons for Writing

**8]** *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.*

Paul made a practice of beginning his letters with a word of thanks to God, a specific prayer, and a personal message to the recipients. He rejoiced that news of their faith had spread all over the (known) world, (i.e., the Roman Empire). This was accomplished without modern travel or communications (on foot, city by city).



**9]** *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;*

**10]** *Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.*

**11]** *For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;*

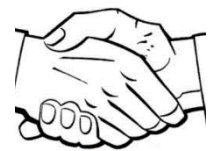
His constant intercession for them had the new note of petition for his projected visit (vv. 9-10); a heart-desire of long standing that finally was definitely on Paul's agenda (v. 10; cf. 15:23-24).

Verse 11 reminds us that we must keep the "personal letter" spirit of Romans before us if we are to be truly benefitted by it. Just as Paul told Timothy to teach, exhort, charge, command, rebuke, to be urgent in season and out of season—so must we exhort, command, rebuke, etc. (2 Tim 4:2). It is a personal benefit to us all.

## Spiritually Beneficial Visit

**12]** *That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*

Like Paul, we are to be comforted to be with other Christians. It ministers to us personally. Paul's visit would be mutually beneficial spiritually; he desired to minister for three purposes:



- 1) to the strengthening of the Romans (1:11; "to impart some spiritual gift" means either to exercise his own spiritual gift on their behalf or to bestow on them spiritual favors, i.e., blessings),
- 2) to see some spiritual fruit (a harvest, v. 13) among them and, in turn,
- 3) to be strengthened by them (v. 12). In this sense Paul's ministry at Rome would be the same as in other centers of the empire.

**13]** *Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.*

**14]** *I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.*

## Paul a Debtor

As a result of his “apostleship” (v. 5) to the Gentiles, Paul felt obligated (“I am a debtor”) to the entire human race to proclaim God’s good news (vv. 14-15).



To the Jew, the whole world was divided into Jews and Greeks, religious prerogative being taken as the line of demarcation. To the Greek and Roman, the world was similarly divided into Greeks and Barbarians (those who didn’t speak Greek), “non-Greeks,” civilization being the criterion of distinction (Cf. Col 3:11, Scythians being an extreme example of savageness).

The word unwise, (cf. Titus 3:3) in the next sentence group, refers to being uncultured.

**15]** *So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.*

Paul’s sense of debt to the Gentile world produced an eagerness to evangelize it, including the capital of the known world, Rome. Talk of guts! Rome shook the entire world: it was the center of everything. And Paul went there with “just the Gospel...”

#### **Four “For’s”**

The summary text and core of the entire epistle (Romans 1:16-18):

- 1) The Gospel;
- 2) Its universal saving power;
- 3) Its secret is the revelation of God’s righteousness on the principle of faith; and
- 4) Its accord with the Old Testament (Hab 2:4).

**16]** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

The theme of the letter. Paul gladly proclaimed it as God’s panacea for mankind’s spiritual need. He identified it as the infinite resources, the “power,” or spiritual ability of God applied toward the goal of salvation in the life of everyone who believes, regardless of racial background.

Paul’s eagerness to evangelize sprang also from his estimate of his message, the gospel (1 Cor 15:1-4). [This is the 4th of 5 times Paul used the word “gospel”: vv. 1, 9, 15-17.]

“The power of God unto salvation...” Not unto reformation, education, progress, nor development, nor “fanning an innate flame.” It is for lost man and no other. Christ did not come to make bad men good, He came to let dead men live. Men are involved either in salvation or in its opposite, perdition (Phil 1:28).

He acknowledged, however, a priority for the Jew expressed in the Word first, which has sufficient textual support here and is unquestioned in Romans 2:9-10. Because the Jews were God’s Chosen People (Rom 11:1), the custodians of God’s revelation (Rom 3:2), and the people through whom Christ came (Rom 9:5), they have a preference of privilege expressed historically in a chronological priority. Jesus stated it, “Salvation is from the Jews” (Jn 4:22).

In Paul’s ministry he sought out the Jews first in every new city (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). Three times he responded to their rejection of his message by turning to the

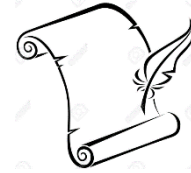
Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:25-28; cf. Eph 1:12). Today, evangelism of the world must include the Jews, but the chronological priority of the Jews has been fulfilled. There is now no distinction between Jew and Greek either in the fact of sin (Rom 3:22) or the availability of salvation (Rom 10:12). Cf. Gal 3:28; Col 3:11.

### **The Theme of the Letter**

**17]** *For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*

The theme of the letter = The righteousness from God is revealed.

“Of God” identifies this as a righteousness that God provides for people on the basis of and in response to faith in the gospel (cf. 3:22).



God declares men righteous not by faith as the obtaining cause, but out of reliance upon His own Word as true, and that alone.

In response to faith, this righteousness is imputed by God in justification and imparted progressively in regeneration and sanctification, culminating in glorification (Cf. Rom 8:29-30).

Here also is the linkage with the other two epistles of this trilogy on Hab 2:4: “The Just Shall Live by Faith.” Habakkuk 2:4 has led to a Trilogy of epistles in New Testament:

- ✠ The Just... (Who are they?) Romans (Rom 1:17)
- ✠ ...Shall live (How?) Galatians (Gal 3:11)
- ✠ ...By Faith! Hebrews (Heb 10:39)

To justify a person is do declare him/her legally righteous. It is a standing.

### **God’s Righteousness Revealed Against Pagan Man**

The first step in the revelation of the righteousness that God provides for people by faith is to set forth their need for it because they are under God’s judgment. We are born into a fallen race. The human race stands condemned before God and is helpless and hopeless apart from God’s grace.

This next section looks at the entire human race prior to the call of Abram and the establishment of a special people of God. This then persists in the pagan world of the Gentiles as distinct from the Jews. It still persists in our world today.

God never condemns without just cause. Here, three bases are stated for His judgment of the pagan world:

- 1) For Suppressing God’s truth (v.18);
- 2) For Ignoring God’s revelation (vv.19-20);
- 3) For Perverting God’s glory (vv.21-23).

### **1) For Suppressing God’s Truth**

**18]** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;*

This verse serves as a topic sentence for this entire section and it stands in contrast to verse 17. The wrath of God is in the present tense as a continuing revelation, it “is being revealed.”

“The wrath of God” is an expression of His personal righteousness and is in opposition to human sinfulness. Therefore, people need the continuing revelation of “a righteousness from God” (v. 17) that He provides.

God’s wrath is directed “against all the godlessness.” The Greek word means a “lack of proper reverence for God” and wickedness or “unrighteousness”) of men, not against the men as such. i.e..... God hates sin and judges it but loves sinners and desires their salvation. The adage:

God hates the sin but loves the sinner.

Many in our world people get this backwards. We love the sin but hate the sinner!

The more you discover yourself to be a common sinner, the more you will realize God’s uncommon grace! Failure to give God His due inevitably results in failure to treat people, created by God in His image, the right way.

Think about the hate we see in our society today; on social media, in the press, during confrontations, etc...

Failure to give God his due results in failure to treat people the right way.

If you don’t treat God the right way, you can’t treat people the right way!

That is why we need people who are God fearing in our families, communities and leadership!

People in their unrighteousness toward others continue to suppress (Greek word means to “hold down”) the truth concerning both God and man. In other words, people had God’s truth but suppressed it, refusing to heed it. And these wicked ones did this in an attitude of wickedness.

This suppression of the truth is Paul’s first reason for God’s condemnation of the pagan world.

We all have enough inbred knowledge of God to condemn us!

When you live in a culture that has made it against the law to mention God in Schools, you know you got a problem. When you live in a culture, overarchingly, that denies the existence of truth, you know they will never find it.

## **2) For Ignoring God’s Revelation**

These verses declare that knowledge concerning God is available to all, as it is seen in the created world, accessible to the entire human race. The first step of wisdom is to listen to the worst that God says about us. We were born into this lost race.

**19]** *Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.*

“Manifest” here means visible or clear.

Some scholars translate the phrase “to them” as “in them,” insisting that verse 19 is speaking of the knowledge of God within the being of man through conscience and religious consciousness. Preferable is the position that verse 19 states the fact of natural revelation and verse 20 explains the process. One support for this view is the word “for” which begins verse 20 and indicates a tie between the verses.

**20]** *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

How can invisible things be clearly seen? One example would be DNA! Complex systems such as our bodies have to have subsystems that all communicate on an intimate level. Looking into the far reaches of space with a telescope. This is evidence of skillful design and implementation.



Both the verb “clearly seen” and the participle “being understood” are in the present tense, which means they are continuous nature of the action. How can something that is invisible testify to something that is clearly seen? Everywhere in the universe is evidence of design—men are without excuse.

“Things that are made” refers to workmanship. The creation is God’s great epic poem.

Paul connects observing Creation, which all people see, as revealing God’s unseen character—the all-powerful Deity. Cf. Old Testament parallel to these verses is Psalm 19:1-6. (A cosmic code which nobody can erase!) Also, Psalm 8:1-4 and Psalm 148.

### ***Read Psalm 19:1-6***

Paul’s conclusion to this description of natural revelation is important—all men are without excuse. The witness to God in nature is so clear and so constant that ignoring it is indefensible. Their condemnation is based not on their rejecting Christ of whom they have not heard, but on their sinning against the light they do have (Cf. Pharaoh, Ex 10:16; Philistines, 1 Sam 4:7,8; 5:7, 8, 11; King of Nineveh, Jonah 3:7-9).

The key word here is design. You know it is correct because it is now illegal or not permitted to teach that to your kids in school. Intelligent design is a no-no. It is significant that our society militantly insists on teaching our young people bad science to perpetuate the myth of spontaneous biogenesis, etc., which is the basis of our philosophy, psychology, political theories, and our culture.

It is amazing that science is so arrogant to assume that things were not intelligently created when we haven’t even come close to figuring everything out.

### **3) For Perverting God’s Glory**

**21]** *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

This reason for God's condemnation of the pagan world builds on the preceding verse just as that verse is built on the first. The grammar structure is clearly seen in the Greek.

People's suppression of the truth is seen in their rejecting the clearly visible evidence of God as the sovereign Creator and, unable to free their conscience, turned their perversion of that knowledge into idolatry.



The clause "although they knew God" refers to an original experiential knowledge of God such as Adam and Eve had both before and after the Fall. How long this knowledge of God continued before it was perverted is not stated, but God was known by people.

This fact makes human actions all the more reprehensible. One would suppose that to know God would be to honor Him, but these people "neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him." They turned from the very purpose for which God made them.

With such willful rebellion against God, it is little wonder that their thinking became futile. The Greek words here mean, "became worthless, purposeless", in other words "morally senseless." Their hearts were darkened. When truth is rejected, in time the ability to recognize and to receive truth is impaired (cf. Jn 3:19-20; Mt 13:10-16).

### **They Became Fools**

**22]** *Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,*

When the true Source of wisdom is rejected (cf. Ps 111:10), people's claim to be wise is an idle boast. Progressively "they became fools" literally means they "became stupid". That also describes our current culture...right now. Until man knows his state of sin, he wants no grace. If the evidence of guilt be insufficient or inconclusive, there is no need for a pardon!

**23]** *And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.*

Incorruptibility is the essence of God's being. This foolishness is demonstrated by the worship of idols as gods in the forms of people and animals (cf. Rom 1:25). The more you reflect upon the infinite glory and majesty of the eternal God, the more hideous will the unspeakable insult to Him of any kind of idolatry appear. The ultimate irony in humanity's refusal to glorify the true God is the insanity or stupidity of idolatry described in Isaiah 44:9-20, the worship of gods who are not and the demons who are.

Man's refusal to acknowledge and glorify God leads to a downward path: first, **worthless thinking**; next, **moral insensitivity**; and then, **religious stupidity** as seen in idol-worship. When the knowledge of the true and Living God is refused, false gods inevitably fill the vacuum.

And we become like the gods we worship! (Ps 115:8, 135:15-18). Egypt, once ruling the world, adopted the worship of death, and the scarab—the dung beetle!

Are idols of stone cold, unresponsive, impersonal? If you worship them, you too will become cold, unresponsive, impersonal. Is the world materialistic, harsh and unforgiving? If you worship the world you, too, will become materialistic, harsh, and unforgiving. And if you worship Christ, you will become like Him! ...Ah! Devoutly to be wished!

### **The Tragic Results**

In a real sense, the results of God's condemnation on rebellious humanity are nothing more than the natural consequences of suppressing truth, ignoring revelation, and perverting God's glory.

**IMPORTANT** Most people fail to fully understand the next few passages in their scope. Did you realize that there is a specific judgement of God for denying him as a creator? Many people do not understand this. Most people focus on God as the redeemer, but they miss the importance of his role as creator.

God does more than simply let nature take its course. God acts by abandoning the people "gave them over" or "abandoned" them to their expressions of a corrupt lifestyle, which deserved God's wrath and the sentence of death (v. 32).

**24]** *Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:*

One aspect of mankind's corruption (to which God actively let people go) was sexual recklessness. The frequency of live-in lovers, wife-swapping, and group sex parties today only confirms this result of God's abandonment.

Sex within marriage is a holy gift from God, but otherwise sex, like anything else outside the will of God, is impurity ("uncleanness") and "the dishonoring of their own bodies" by using them contrary to God's intent. These lusts are deeper than mere lusts of the flesh: they are of the heart. They will exist forever...

### **Truth Into a Lie**

**25]** *Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.*

The truth of God is not only the truth concerning God but also God's truth concerning all things, including mankind. This truth is that people are creatures of God and can find true fulfillment only in worshiping and obediently serving God the Creator.

The lie mentioned here, on the other hand, says that the creature can exist independent of God, self-sufficient, self-directing, and self-fulfilling. Mankind made himself his god in place of the true God: "humanism."

Because God the Creator "is forever praised" (in contrast with creatures who are undeserving of worship), Paul added "Amen." This word transliterates in both Greek and English the Hebrew word meaning "so let it be." As an affirmation, it places approval on what has just been said.

### **Abandoned to Sexual Perversion (v.26-27)**



**26]** *For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their [females] did change the natural use into that which is against nature:*

Three Greek words used here are denoting sex only, as in lower creatures. The perversions that characterize our present society are nothing new; these perversions deliberately deny the presence of intentional design in our being...

God gave them over to “passions of disgrace” (Lit.). This is not speaking of natural or normal appetites of the body, or even the abuses of these: adultery or harlotry. It is dealing with unnatural appetites in which all normal instincts are left behind. This involved, as the text states, both sexes engaging in homosexual instead of heterosexual relationships.

Women deliberately exchanged natural relations (with men in marriage) for unnatural ones (with other women). This is the second “exchange” the unregenerate made (cf. v. 25).

**27]** *And likewise also the [males], leaving the natural use of the [females], burned in their lust one toward another; [males] with [males] working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.*

Men were inflamed with lust, the Greek means “sexual lust,” used only here in the NT and differing from the more common word for lust in v. 26. The only natural sexual relationship the Bible recognizes is a heterosexual one (Gen 2:21-24; Mt 19:4-6) and within marriage. All homosexual relations constitute sexual perversion and are subject to God’s judgment.

Such lustful and indecent acts have within them the seeds of punishment (“recompense which was meet”; due penalty). “God gave them over...” (3X: 25, 26, 28) The beginning of the working of God’s wrath in this world.

**God gave them over** - This has to be one of the most frightening verses in the entire Bible. They refused light and instead loved darkness and consequently God gave them over to the power of darkness. Some see this (and I think rightly so) in part as an explanation of Ro 1:18 where “the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven”. In this case God revealed His wrath, not by sending fire from heaven, but by abandoning sinful men to their lustful ways.

This is not a description of the finally damned, but of the at-present-lost: a present judicial action of God on earth where He lets men go their own way. This is distinct from the Great White Throne (Rev 20) where there will be no liberty left to indulge their lusts as in this present world. The lusts will remain—and probably intensify—but the ability to indulge them will be eternally removed and the damned placed under the visitation of Divine anger. “He that is filthy, let him be made filthy yet more.” (Rev 22:11)

“Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!” (2 Cor 6:2) Grace is ready to reach the worst wretch on earth!

Homosexuality is just a sin. Yes, it is. We are all born with sin. But there is something much deeper going on here. In this case, and what we are seeing in our society today, it is a judgment of God on a culture that denies him as creator.

## **Abandoned to Depraved Lifestyle (1:28-32).**

**28]** *And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;*

A reprobate mind is a mind void of judgment. Pagan humanity's rebellion also included the rejection of the knowledge of God. In a sense they put God out of their minds. God's responding judgment was abandonment to a depraved (Greek word "disapproved") mind, which expressed itself in attitudes and actions that ought not to be done or "what is unfitting or improper."

**29]** *Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,*

The mental vacuum created by dismissing God was filled with four forms of active sin:

- † wickedness
- † evil
- † greed, and
- † depravity, "badness or malice").

These four, in turn, express themselves in more specific types of wickedness.

- † Injustice: selfishness, enthroned against all rights of others;
- † Destructiveness: same word is used to describe Satan and his hosts and it denotes wickedness in hostile activity.
- † Covetousness: Which means and "itch for more." Claiming more than one's due, greedy, grasping; act of over-reaching by selfish tricks. Covetousness is idolatry (1 Cor 5:11; Eph 5:3, 5; Col 3:5).
- † Malice: malignity; maliciousness, desire to injure.
- † Full of envy: hate toward one who is above us, who is what we are not, or possesses that which we cannot have, or do not choose the path to attain.

**30]** *Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,*

**31]** *Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:*

**32]** *Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.*

This whole pattern of evil becomes the lifestyle of people who continue to do (present tense implies continuing or habitual action) these very things in open defiance of God, a defiance aggravated: a) by fully knowing that such things deserve death and b) by encouraging others in the same lifestyle. Such extremity of human rebellion against God fully warrants God's condemnation.

**Next Session: Read Romans Chapter 2: The "Moral Man."**