

Romans 1:18–32 and Sin & Judgment

Prayer

Introductory Questions

- What is *sin*? What do all sins have in common?
- What is God's *wrath*? How does God express his wrath?

Introduction

Romans 1:18–32 explains that all people sin and deserve the wrath of God. We are without excuse before him, for he has revealed himself *through creation*, not simply through the Bible.

This passage is part of a larger section of Romans (1:18–3:20) in which the apostle Paul asserts that God has revealed himself to all people, all people are guilty of sin, and therefore all people deserve his wrath. “All humans apart from special revelation [particularly the Bible] are “without excuse” (1:18–32). The Jewish people are also “without excuse” (2:1–3:8). All humans are under sin and helpless to change their situation (3:9–20)” (Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 103). Therefore, *all people need a Savior*.

We divide Romans 1:18–32 into three main sections: (1) The Revelation of God's Wrath against Sinners (v. 18), (2) Humans' Rejection of God's Revelation of Himself through Creation (vv. 19–23), and (3) The Judgment of God (vv. 24–32). We conclude this lesson by explaining the nature of sin and God's judgment in more detail.

1. The Revelation of God's Wrath against Sinners

- “16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.” (Rom. 1:16–17)
- “For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” (Rom. 1:18)

Romans 1:16–17 summarizes the main themes of the letter. Paul is not ashamed of *the gospel*, which is the good news that God has intervened to save his people in the person and work of Jesus Christ—particularly through his death and resurrection (v. 16). Why is Paul not ashamed? Because the gospel is the power of God to save all who believe, “first to the Jew, and also to the Greek” (gentiles/non-Jews) (v. 16). How does God save people through the gospel? In the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed in history—in Jesus! “The righteousness of God” means that God is righteous to save his people and grant them a

righteous status in his presence, *based on the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus* (v. 17; cf. 3:21–26). This righteousness “is revealed from faith to faith”—probably *from the faith of the Jews to the faith of the gentiles* (v. 17; cf. v. 16) (Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 66–82).

Why is it so important to review these verses before addressing verse 18? God has revealed his righteousness and it can only be received by faith, “*for [because!] God’s wrath is revealed...*” (v. 18) (Moo, 111). Just as “the righteousness of God” is being revealed *in history*, so the wrath of God is being revealed *in history*. God’s wrath is his personal, punishing response against sinners—expressed in terrible consequences. His wrath is always justified and always in response to what people deserve. He reveals his wrath “from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people,” because they suppress God’s truth (v. 18).

- Considering there are so many willfully sinful people who are living *comfort-filled lives*, how does it make sense that God is *currently* revealing his wrath throughout the world?
- What does it mean that people *suppress God’s truth*? How have you done that at times? How can we fight against that tendency?

2. Humans’ Rejection of God’s Revelation of Himself through Creation

19 Since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse. 21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. (Rom. 1:19–23)

God reveals knowledge about himself in two ways: (1) through *general (or natural) revelation* and (2) through *special revelation*. General revelation is knowledge about God’s existence, attributes, and expectations that comes to all people *through creation*. Special revelation is knowledge about God’s existence, attributes, and expectations that comes to people *through supernatural means*, such as God’s revelation of himself in the Bible (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 146). Humans are accountable to God and guilty before him *considering both categories*.

In Romans 1:18–32, Paul highlights that humans are guilty and stand condemned *because they have rejected God’s general revelation*. Referring to Romans 1:18, why is God’s wrath revealed? Because God has revealed truths about himself that are “evident” (v. 19). Through creation God has revealed “his invisible attributes,” namely “his eternal power and divine nature,” which have been clearly seen and understood since the creation of the world (v. 20). Therefore,

“people are without excuse” (v. 20). Although they knew something *about* God (without knowing him personally), they did not glorify him as their God or show him the gratitude he deserves (v. 21). “Instead, their thinking became worthless [or futile], and their senseless *hearts were darkened*” (unable to perceive God truly and respond to him appropriately) (v. 21). Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools (v. 22)—evidenced by how they “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for” man-made images (v. 23; cf. v. 25).

- As you observe and contemplate God’s creation, what do you know to be true about God?
- Why do so many people reject these evident truths about God? In these verses, how does humanity express its rebellion against God and rejection of his truth?

3. The Judgment of God

- “24 Therefore *God delivered them over* in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.” (Rom. 1:24–25)
- “26 For this reason *God delivered them over* to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.” (Rom. 1:26–27)
- “28 And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, *God delivered them over* to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right. 29 They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful.” (Rom. 1:28–31)
- “Although they know God’s just sentence—that those who practice such things deserve to die—they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.” (Rom. 1:32)

How does God respond to humanity’s rejection of him? In this context, God delivers people over to their deepest desires—to sin even more. Three times we read “God delivered them over” (vv. 24, 26, 28). He “delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity,” to the degrading of their bodies (v. 24). The essence of their sins was *idolatry*: they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and they worshipped and served created things instead of the Creator (v. 25). He “delivered them over to disgraceful passions,” including homosexual lust and actions (vv. 26–27). And he “delivered them over to a corrupt mind so

that they do what is not right,” which led to many other sins in their hearts, words, and actions (vv. 28–31). They commit such sins and “applaud” (or approve) those who do likewise (v. 32).

- Whether currently or in the past, has God delivered you over to more sin? How so?
- What makes it so difficult, at times, to admit your sin, turn from it, and turn back to God in faith?

Sound Doctrine: Sin and Judgment

Here we ask and answer basic questions about humanity’s sin and God’s judgment:

1. **What is sin?** At the most basic level, sin is anything we think, say, or do that violates God’s commands as outlined in the Bible (1 John 3:4). As it relates to our hearts, sin is what we do when we are not worshipping, loving, desiring, hoping in, or trusting God; it is our enjoyment of people and things *more than God* (Rom. 1:25).
2. **What is God’s judgment?** At times, it refers to God’s *impartial assessment* of people’s thoughts, words, and actions—to determine if they are acceptable in his sight or not (Acts 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10). But God’s judgment can also refer to his *negative verdict* that results in punishment for those who rebel against his expectations (Rev. 19:1–2).
3. **What is God’s wrath?** It is his opposition to and punishment of sinful people—for all those who refuse to turn from their sins (Rom. 1:18; 2:5). It is his personal, destructive reaction to rebellion.
4. **How does God express his condemning judgment—his just wrath—against sinners?** *First*, God may bring immediate judgment, such as when he killed Ananias and Sapphira for lying to him (Acts 5:1–11). *Second*, as we studied in this lesson, he hands people over to more sin (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). *Third*, for all who will not turn from their sins and trust in Jesus, there awaits his eternal wrath—a conscious, unending suffering (Rom. 2:5; Rev. 20:14–15).

Our only hope is to trust in Jesus, who *through his death* satisfied the justice and wrath of God on our behalf (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2). Thank you, God, for your grace—in and through Christ!

- Do you believe that *all non-Christians throughout the world* are destined to hell if they will not turn from their sins and trust in Jesus? Why or why not?
- What is one thing that you can do in response to this lesson?

Prayer