

The Christian Manual: Study 2, Romans 1:18-32

Romans Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: Why is the world getting worse? Although we have more technology, more learning, more research, more access to information than any people who ever lived, the world is not a better place to live in. We still have crime, addiction, war, evil, and dysfunction. Why?

Section 1: Acts 1:18-20 Pushing the Truth Away

¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being

understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Paul is stringing together cause and effect statements related to all mankind. The **first** Cause is God. God has made known to all men what can be made known of Him in the creation. What can be known about God from the creation? When we look at the universe, it screams of design and a designer. Its vastness and intricateness speak of God's vast power. Lastly, when we look at man, we see that his creator had to be personal, since man is personal. Also, since man has within him a conscience that guides him, an innate sense of right and wrong, the creator must also have this sense. Therefore, just looking at nature will tell man that there is a designer who is powerful and personal and cares about good and evil.

Secondly, mankind responded to this revelation with godlessness and wickedness. Godlessness is completely putting God out of mind. It is ignoring him. Wickedness is performing immoral acts that are against God's will. Their wickedness became a force against the truth, pushing it away, forcing it out of their lives and not allowing it to be seen by others.

Thirdly, Since men have revelation of God that they have rejected, they are without excuse and the wrath of God is being revealed against them. F. F. Bruce wrote about God's wrath: "It is felt that the word 'wrath' is scarcely suitable to be used in relation to God, it

is probably because wrath as we know it in human life so constantly involves sinful, self-regarding passion. Not so with God: His 'wrath' is the response of His holiness to wickedness and rebellion."¹

What Paul is doing in this section is simply saying, "Look around you. As people walk away from God, are they becoming more moral, more civil, nicer, better people? Or are they becoming more selfish, more rude and difficult to live with, more violent and crude, more irresponsible? What we find is that when we move away from God we become more inhuman and community is much harder. God has designed everything to function according to His truth. When people move away from this truth their lives fall apart. "Truth is just as it is. God Almighty made the world to be a mathematical universe and all things run according to mathematical laws. He has a moral world, which runs according to moral laws that are as exact and unchanging as His mathematical laws."²

What would we expect to happen if one of the contractors building a large building had a ruler that was two inches too short? None of their measurements would be right. Their part of the building would be off and the infrastructure holding the building up would be weak. When the building collapsed, we wouldn't be surprised. The same is true of the moral universe. When people ignore the truth, and suppress it with their wickedness, they are trying to build a civilization with a short moral ruler. It will eventually collapse.

¹ *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, pg. 83

² *Living as a Christian*, by A. W. Tozer, pg. 213

Section 2: Romans 1:21-32 The Wickedness Grows

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

All truth begins with God. He is the foundation, the only true starting point. Those who want to live according to reality will glorify God (lift Him up in their thinking and actions) and will thank Him (for all things have come from His hands).

Any philosophy or approach to life that begins apart from God is doomed to failure. It is foolishness and without light. In other words, they are incapable of seeing things as they really are.

They claim to be wise. We have many honored professors in colleges with degrees from prestigious institutions who begin with the presupposition that God does not exist. They are fools. They

might be experts in evolution, materialism, existentialism, pantheism, the sciences, or any number of well-organized and thoroughly developed fields of study. But if they begin without God—relying instead on natural forces (called uniformitarianism), they are in darkness. Although within them their souls call out that there is more than the material, that man has value, that morals are real, that there had to be a designer for such a well-designed world, they hold tenaciously to their errant doctrines.

In ancient times, these inward impulses found expression in idolatry. Rather than worship the God who had made man in His own image, they worshipped statues they made in their own image. Rather than taking their value and meaning from One above, they turned their eyes downward and took their value from something less than they were. People still do this. Consider the people who take their value from things made with human hands rather than from God. Idolatry is ever with us.

So what does God do? He lets them free to pursue whatever lusts are bubbling up inside them. Sin becomes king.

Our society is pushing the acceptance of homosexuality. But this is completely against God's intended use of man's body. Paul focuses on this because in homosexuality people not only deny God, but they also deny the structure of their own bodies. Consider a nut and a bolt. They go together. A builder who has only bolts or only nuts, is frustrated. God designed our bodies to fit together, male and female. Those who participate in homosexuality are choosing against God's design for their own bodies. Everything in nature is designed according to its function. Homosexuals do not make

smoothies with their cars. They do not roof their houses with Jell-O. Even so, they should use their bodies according to God's design.

Today people are told, "If you have homosexual urges, you should not deny them." This is crazy. People have all kinds of weird urges (we can imagine plenty). We don't condone them when *they* are acted upon. They bring shame, social breakdown, and (in some cases) prison time. It is only homosexuality that is treated as an acceptable lifestyle. Just a few years ago homosexuality was classified in the textbooks as deviant sexual behavior. It is against God's design, and is thus sin. Those who would live for God will not participate in this sin.

Homosexuality was not the only sin mentioned. Paul goes on to describe:

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.

Sounds like our world. We are quickly becoming a Godless society. And this is perfectly understandable. As a society, we have moved away from the light into the darkness. We have drifted from righteousness and holiness, to sinfulness and depravity. We have ran from Him who loves us and gave Himself for our salvation and have hurtled head-long towards an empty world of darkness and isolation and hate. We have rejected heaven and accepted hell.

Paul explains that not only have people done this, but they have such little shame that they heartily approve all others who do the same. There was a time when people who acted irresponsibly were shunned, their judgment questioned. Now, the more vile a celebrity is, the better. We can all name well-paid famous celebrities who bounce in and out of rehab, who have multiple sexual encounters, who dress scantily and who are often being arrested for assault. These people are not shunned, as they would be in a Christian-minded society. They are glorified and exalted in the press. The worse they are, the more their faces are pasted on the tabloids.

No one would say that we live in a civil society. Bullying and brutality are rampant. There is a fundamental disregard for others and their value. Paul would say, "Of course there is! What did you expect? When a civilization walks away from God, this is what you get."



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Christianity is not a religion we can do in one compartment of our lives, separated from all the other parts. Christianity is not isolated from life. God created mankind to be in a loving relationship with Him. This relationship brings healthy psychology (solid, well-adjusted people), healthy sociology (good relationships of dignity and respect), healthy families (loving parents who are married and stay married), healthy ethics (a real foundation of right and wrong).

Just as drawing close to God brings beauty and life to ourselves and our society, moving away from God brings personal emotional and psychological problems and addictions. People will become selfish and will put their worth in idols taking many forms (money, fame, things, appearance, etc.) It will cause social relationships to deteriorate. Marriages will fail, families will implode, communities will be subject to crime and vandalism. Countries will go to war.

The church is the place where God can be central in people's lives. It is the place where individuals, saved by the blood, can approach God in an ever-deepening relationship. As they do, they will become centered on God, growing in dependence on Him and His Spirit. They will separate themselves from the things of this world, no longer being dependent on them for security and identity. They will see other Christians as brothers and sisters with a common Father. Christians have the opportunity to build a society based on God's love and the presence of His Spirit. They can become the body of Christ, each person a cell in the body and the body showing Christ to the world. When the world sees well-adjusted Christians and a healthy Christian community, they will wonder at the beauty.



CONNECT: Icebreaker

Do the following experiment in groups of four (materials plastic cups and cards that cover the tops):

Water Glass Trick. Fill a cup one-third with water. Cover the entire mouth with an index card. Holding the card in place, take the cup to the sink and turn it upside down. Remove your hand from underneath. Voilà! Because the water inside the cup is lighter than the air outside, the card is held in place by about 15 pounds of force from the air pushing up, while the force of the water pushing down is only about one pound of force.

<https://www.asme.org/career-education/articles/k-12-grade/5-ways-to-demonstrate-air-pressure-to-children>

After the activity, have the students brainstorm why the card held and the water didn't pour out. Don't tell them how it works ahead of time.

Application: We are surrounded by forces. Air pressure is a force that works invisibly upon us and our world all the time. In the same way, there are spiritual forces acting on us and our world. Although these are also unseen, they determine what kind of life we live and what kind of world we live in.



WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Section 1 Romans 1:18-20

God is a God of wrath. “God’s wrath is a real thing it is His “No” over against sin which gives the sinner over to destruction. This wrath-situation can only be changed by God Himself.”³ We need to understand this. God is not neutral when it comes to sin. He doesn’t sit idly by and say, “Well, okay, do whatever you want.” No, God has created all people to be in relationship with Him. He has sent His own Son to secure that relationship. He is deeply invested, He cares more than we can imagine. The intensity of love required to bring us to Him is matched by his intensity of hate toward the sin that separates us from Him.

Those who cling to sin do so by suppressing the truth of the gospel of God meant to deliver them from it. They make fun of God and the gospel. They minimize it. They dismiss it. They call it antiquated or out of touch. But the truth of God is all around them, in nature and in their own humanness—for they are made in the very image of God.

Section 2 Romans 1:21-32

Because unbelievers do not acknowledge God or give Him thanks for all they have and are, God gives them over to their base nature. Sin flows through them, it pollutes their thinking, it infects their relationships. As they move farther and farther from the truth of God, they become more selfish and sinful. As this happens, the world becomes an ugly and dangerous place.

³ *Studies in Dogmatics: The Work of Christ*, G. C. Berkouwer, pg. 263.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Section 1 Read Romans 1:18-20

1. What does the Bible mean by the “wrath of God?” What is God’s wrath against?
2. What effect does sin have on the truth? How is this connected to God’s wrath?
3. What makes people without excuse before God? What can the unsaved know about God from nature? How do you think this works?

Section 2 Read Romans 1:21-32

1. What was the response to the creation of God? Why is it important to respond by glorifying and thanking God? What happens to those who don’t glorify and thank Him?
2. Not knowing God is to walk in darkness like a fool. Who today claims to be wise while walking in darkness?
3. What is wrong with worshipping idols?
4. What was God’s response to the people who turned away from Him?
5. What does Paul think of homosexuality and lesbianism? How does this compare with the attitudes of our culture?
6. What other evils grow out of rejecting God? Examine the things on this list. How would each one affect a person’s relationships?
7. How do the godless behave toward their parents? Why is this important to mention here?
8. Why is it wrong to approve these acts in others?



HOW DOES IT APPLY?

It can be hard to see things from God’s point of view—as they really are. We can accept the popular idea that sins are simply mistakes or problems. In reality, they are affronts against God’s holiness. Sin separates each man and woman from God, breaking the relationship that God created us for in the beginning.

God is not neutral about this. It makes Him furious. The only reasonable response is wrath.

We need to have this view of all sin—especially our own. The worst thing we can do is excuse our sin, to make it out to be a small thing. When we do this, we put a wedge between ourselves and God. Our worship grows cold and distant, our prayers are just words. Slowly our lives slide back to where they were before we were saved. Our minds follow their old patters, our language begins to slip, and our behavior becomes worldly. Within time it is impossible to distinguish us from those in Adam.

We keep our intimate relationship with God by dealing with our sin and seeking holiness (1 Peter 1:16). With prayer and discipline, we surrender every thought and action to the Holy Spirit. When we do sin, we confess it to God and receive His forgiveness and His washing of our souls (John 13:1-17, 1 John 1:9). If our sin is against another, we seek their forgiveness.

Our one passion is to be to have the deepest relationship with God possible. We do this on the positive side by living before Him, worshipping Him and praying continuously, spending time meditating on His Word, and fellowshiping with strong believers.

