

October 18, 2026 (Lesson 7)

OUR NEED FOR SALVATION

1. **Reasons for God's Wrath** (Romans 1:18-23)
2. **The Conditions of Godlessness** (Romans 1:24-32)
3. **The Depth of Human Depravity** (Romans 3:9-20)

Central Truth: The whole world is guilty before God.

Focus: Fathom the gravity of rebellion and godlessness, and confess our need for salvation.

Evangelism Emphasis: People must acknowledge their godlessness before they can grasp their need for salvation.

Golden Text: "There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God" (Romans 3:11).

The Book of Romans provides clear and in-depth treatment of vital Christian doctrine. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church at Rome, set out to explain the nature of Christian faith. He addressed a variety of issues. However, his overall purpose was to unfold a wonderful teaching document on the Christian faith.

Paul wrote the letter during his three-month stay at Corinth on his third missionary journey. He had not yet visited Rome but fully intended to in the near future (Rom. 1:10; 15:22-23). He wrote while staying with Gaius (16:23).

Apparently, the letter to the Romans was not written because of any great internal conflict within the church at Rome. The book was probably written as the result of several concepts which had developed in Paul's mind regarding Christian doctrine. He saw the opportunity to write these teachings down and forward them to Rome in hopes of eventually arriving and further developing them in person.

In the first chapter, Paul presented preliminary greetings and the foundation for his teaching on Christian doctrine. Central to his teaching is the idea of not being "ashamed" of the gospel of Christ (1:16). The gospel of Christ does not present any occasion or opportunity for a person to be put to shame.

On the contrary, Paul provides in the Book of Romans an outline and description of the opportunities which the Gospel does present. These are occasions of power, strength, and

everlasting hope. This lesson, as well as the entire unit of lessons, will investigate key passages in which Paul demonstrates the Gospel which puts the Christian in the position of God's power and not shamefulness.

1. REASONS FOR GOD'S WRATH

A. Suppressing the Truth (Romans 1:18-20)

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ¹⁹ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 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.

Romans 1:18 begins Paul's assessment of the total human condition. The problem of sin with its wickedness, evil, and violence did not pose a problem for Paul in the sense of questioning the existence of God. For Paul, the fact that sin existed and that there was apparent judgment for sin was sufficient in itself to prove the existence of a holy God. Our holy God has no other recourse but to respond to the sinful condition by manifesting His wrath. This is not because He is bitter or against us but because He is opposed to sin. If God failed to show His wrath against sin and its consequences, then He would not really love us.

Note that Paul understood God's wrath as being revealed "from heaven." This was not mere chance but part of the divine plan to save sinners. Humanity's sin is called "ungodliness and unrighteousness." This sin occurs because human beings who have knowledge of the truth from observing creation "hold," or maintain, the truth in their own sinful unrighteousness. In other words, people know the truth in their heart but refuse to accept it, because they desire to live by the pleasures and dictates of their flesh.

Verse 19 shows what may be known of God, in the fact of His existence and His moral law being made manifest to humanity. Whenever people have acknowledged through creation the reality of God, they have received godly, moral wisdom and insight.

Paul affirmed that creation has revealed the invisible (spiritual) truth of God's moral nature and it is "clearly seen" (v. 20). In particular, two aspects of God have been revealed through creation: God's eternal power and the fact of His divinity. Nature reveals to humanity (wherever it is willing to listen and not be bound by the deception of its own lusts) that the Creator is everlasting and divine.

§ *Why are all people "without excuse" (v. 20) about the existence of God?*

B. Professing to Be Wise (Romans 1:21-23)

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. ²² Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 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.

Contrary to the popular theory of evolutionary development in history, the Scriptures declare that humanity once "knew God" (v. 21), then fell; not that man gradually worked his way up through totemism and polytheism to monotheism. Their knowledge of God, as revealed through nature, was sufficient to enable them to glorify God "as God." But they failed utterly to live up to what they knew! In fact, they were not even "thankful" to God as Creator for the blessings of nature—an all too common feature of life today. Forgetting God as Creator, they attributed nature's favors to luck, to chance, to gods that were the products of their own reason and ingenuity. The results of this view of life became evident first in human beings themselves. Their understanding became "darkened" (Eph. 4:18), and "blinded" (2 Cor. 4:4); hence, they "became futile in their thoughts" (Rom. 1:21 NKJV). Their "hearts"—a comprehensive term for all their faculties, whether intellect, feelings, or will—were alienated from God. Once they disowned God, the source of all light and truth (John 1:9), moral darkness settled down in their hearts.

"Professing" (in the sense of unfounded assertion) themselves "to be wise," sophisticated, and in that sense, self-sufficient, they only demonstrated the opposite: "they became fools" (Rom. 1:22). And that, frankly, is God's view of the natural person even in the twenty-first century (see Ps. 53:1).

Humanity's vain imaginations and senseless reasonings issued in moronic actions. First, they "changed," or exchanged, the "glory of the uncorruptible God" into the images of likenesses of corruptible men, birds, beasts, and reptiles (Rom. 1:23). These "images" were the products of their vain imaginations and darkened hearts. Various forms of animal life were deified by the Egyptians. The Romans worshiped images of both men and of animals. "Creeping things," especially the serpent, were objects of worship in Chaldea and Egypt. In Egypt, the snake was especially regarded as sacred. Religion based on corruptibles of whatever form could lead to only one inevitable result: moral degradation.

Two Ways

There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn't true; the other is to refuse to believe what is true.—Soren Kierkegaard

2. THE CONDITIONS OF GODLESSNESS

A. Vile Passions (Romans 1:24-27)

²⁴ Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 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. ²⁶ For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: ²⁷ And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

What startling words these are in Romans 1:24: “God . . . gave them up.” He left them to face the foolishness of their ways. The result was that they stooped to a life of degradation that manifested itself in the lowest and most disgusting forms of lust (vv. 23-24). In addition to sexual impurity, they “changed the truth of God into a lie” by turning from the worship of God to worship of idols, serving “the creature more than the Creator” (v. 25). The truth is that people can find lasting fulfillment only by worshiping and serving God.

Note the words: “For this cause God gave them up” (v. 26). Their choice of idols over God led to all sorts of impurity. Their decision not to glorify God as God had a practical impact on their conduct. Paul is candid in his discussion of sexual perversions. He specifically speaks of lesbianism and male homosexuality (vv. 26-27). Jude wrote: “Don’t forget Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns, which were filled with immorality and every kind of sexual perversion. Those cities were destroyed by fire and serve as a warning of the eternal fire of God’s judgment” (v. 7 NLT).

This sensual behavior was common among the Romans and often spoken of without any sense of shame. To the contrary, they were proud of their sexual deviance. Tragically, the same thing is happening in Western society today. The only natural sexual relationship the Word recognizes is a heterosexual one (sex between a man and a woman) within marriage (see Matt. 19:4-6).

Numb to Sexual Sin

I fear many of us have become numb to the poison we are drinking. When it comes to sexual immorality, sin looks normal, righteousness looks very strange, and [Christians] look a lot like everybody else.—Kevin DeYoung

B. Debased Minds (Romans 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; ²⁹ Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, ³⁰ Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, 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.

Paul declared those who abandon Biblical truth regarding sexuality and choose to walk in their own way will become more and more corrupt and face the consequences of loving darkness and refusing to walk in the light. God will abandon them to a reprobate mind to do unmentionable deeds—“things that should never be done” (Rom. 1:28 NLT).

The characteristics of those who have been given over to a reprobate mind are described in the remaining verses of this chapter. The bottom line is that they have become an unrighteous people and all the evils mentioned spring from their unrighteousness. Such unrighteousness gives rise to all manner of wickedness that knows no bounds. Among these evildoers are “whisperers” (v. 29), who speak evil of others privately. “Backbiters” (v. 30) do the same thing publicly. Whisperers might be

worse than backbiters because they give the person being slandered against no recourse to defend themselves.

People who love unrighteousness are “haters of God” (v. 30). They do not like His government over them or His righteous rule. Another characteristic of such people is they cannot be reasoned with; they are irreconcilable and vindictive. Furthermore, they cannot be trusted to honor any contract they sign (v. 31). Also, they are “unmerciful,” showing no compassion for anyone who is in distress.

Paul tells us those who live by these standards not only know their deeds are wrong, but they are also aware that such conduct comes under the judgment of God and is deserving of death (v. 32). Yet, they persist in their vile lifestyle. How many of our generation are leaving God out of their lives and are guilty of the same evils Paul lists in this passage?

§ *What are people with depraved minds “filled with” and “full of” (v. 29)? What are they “without” (v. 31)?*

3. THE DEPTH OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

A. None Are Righteous (Romans 3:9-12)

¹⁰ As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹² They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

The first phrase in 3:9, “What then?” refers back to verses 1-8. In that section, Paul looked at some of the argumentation used by the Jews of that day. They had argued that, in a sense, their unrighteousness served the righteousness of God. They felt God’s righteousness was made all that more glorious when compared to their unrighteousness. As puzzling as it may be, they felt this comparison vindicated their unrighteousness.

Paul refuted this by clearly stating one who is unrighteous remains unrighteous in light of the judgment of God. A person’s sin is still under the judgment of God, regardless of how glorious the righteousness of God may seem when compared to a man or woman’s unrighteousness.

In verse 10, Paul established Scripture as the primary proof of human sinfulness. We know by observation that humanity is sinful. However, we are convinced of the depth of sin by Scripture. Further, the implications of sin are revealed only by Scripture.

“Righteous” (v. 10) stresses virtuous acts, demonstrating that no individuals are justified before God. In other words, no one has achieved righteousness as a result of their own actions, no matter how virtuous.

Paul used Psalm 14:2-3 as the basis for Romans 3:11-12. The Old Testament verses stressed God’s assessment as He viewed humanity from Heaven. God first observed that sinful people did not “understand” the ways of God. Sinful people have continually seen the things of God, but sin has kept them from perceiving their true meaning. Paul’s assertion that “there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (verbalized in verse 12 and alluded to in verses 10 and 11) reveals the all-encompassing nature of sin, which dwells in all of us.

Considering all of the components of verses 11 and 12, a process relating to rejection of the path of God and the effects of this rejection can be seen. The sinner cannot perceive the path (“none that understandeth”). The sinner does not endeavor to follow God’s path (“none that seeketh after God”). He or she has intentionally turned out of the path (“all gone out of the way”). As a result, sinners are on the path of uselessness (“together become unprofitable”). And finally, they are unable to do anything of godly virtue (“none that doeth good”). The picture reflects the complete corruption of unregenerate people—they are nowhere near the path of God.

§ *What have “none” done (v. 11), and what have “all” done (v. 12)?*

B. No Fear of God (Romans 3:13-20)

¹⁵ Their feet are swift to shed blood: ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways: ¹⁷ And the way of peace have they not known: ¹⁸ There is no fear of God before their eyes.

²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

There are five descriptions of character corruption in Romans 3:13-14: sin's stench, deceit, death, cursing, and bitterness. The stench of sin is conveyed in the phrase "their throat is an open sepulchre." The force of the Greek text portrays a grave which had been closed and is now standing open. As a result, the bodily remains which were closed in the grave now bear a foul stench. The sinner's life bears the stench of death, no matter how good he may think he is.

The death inherent in sin is depicted in "the poison of asps is under their lips" (v. 13). In ancient literature this is the highest expression of deathly pain, the poison of the asp. This is a description of both the motive and result of sin. As with the concept of deceit, the sinner may not intend death, but sin ultimately bears nothing else. The curse and bitterness of sin is found in "whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (v. 14). The sinner has nothing but cursing, rather than blessing to offer.

Verses 15-17 depict sinners' conduct in relationship to others, to themselves, and to God. Their conduct in relationship to others is described in verse 15. They shed the blood of others. In other words, they have little regard, and even bold contempt, for the lives and integrity of others.

The impact of sin on a person's self-relationship is captured in verse 16. The sinner's personal life is racked by ruin and toil, never experiencing the accomplishment and edification which come only from God.

Finally, the effect of sin on a person's relationship with God is conveyed in verse 17. The sinner has removed himself from the ways of God, the "way of peace." This peace comes only by the grace of God operating in a believing heart.

Verse 18 is the climax of Paul's description of sin. The reason people sin is that they do not fear the Lord. This verse is a quotation of Psalm 36:1. People live sinfully because they do not believe/dread the punishment of the Lord. They do not believe God is "terrible" (meaning powerful in His judgment) enough to judge them eternally for the consequences of their sin. Paul has had much to say about the consequences of sin. However, the crushing conclusion of sin is that it comes for those who reduce the magnificence and judgment of the Lord. There is no fear of the Lord before their eyes.

In Romans 3:19, Paul addressed the contention that the consequences of sin described by the Law did not necessarily apply to everyone. Paul attacked this position because it was false. The Law had been given by God, and all who heard it came "under" [were surrounded by] its consequences. The Law assured that the world was "guilty before God."

The solution to the human predicament was not to perfectly perform "the deeds of the law" (v. 20), for this is impossible. Instead, the Law makes us "conscious of sin [and the recognition of sin directs us toward repentance, but provides no remedy for sin]" (Amp.).

The Gospel

The Gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.—
Timothy Keller

OUR NEED FOR MERCY

Paul's list of sinners would have been surprising for many of his readers. The Jews thought their adherence to the Law, their heritage, and their nationality would save them. The Gentiles had not

been confronted with the reality of their sin. The intellectuals had reasoned themselves into innocence.

Paul was writing to Rome—the center of sophistication, power, commerce, and politics in his day. Rome was a fortress dedicated to the achievement of humanity. No army could defeat her, no intellect could challenge her, and no people could transcend her. The city and her people held the world in their hands. Her rulers spoke for the world and, in Rome's eyes, even for the "gods."

Assaulting the imagination, achievement, and religion of Rome, Paul was crying out, "You have all sinned!" "You have all failed in the eyes of God!" "No one is exempt!" "There is absolutely no one who is righteous—no, not even one!"

If we do not feel we have sinned, we will not see our need for mercy, much less be grateful. The self-vindicating sinner will not receive God's mercy because the need for mercy will not even be seen.