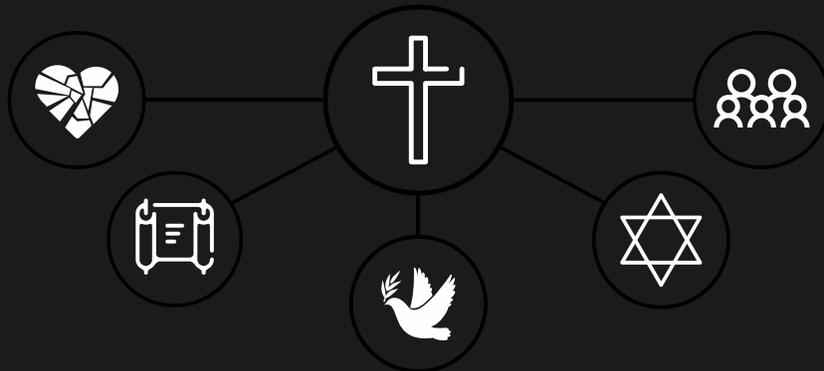




# ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



**Title:** Romans and the Future Gospel

**Text:** Romans 1:18-32

**Date:** October 2, 2022

**Main Idea:** The root of our unrighteous condition is exchanging the truth about God for a lie.

## Personal Study Guide

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READ ROMANS 1:18-32

## Highlight – What stands out?

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This section is divided into two parts:

1. Unrighteousness defined (verses 18-23).
2. Unrighteousness applied (verse 24-32).

### **Let's look at verses 18-23.**

1. What are repeated words and phrases in these verses?
2. What do we learn about God in this section?
3. What do we learn about humanity's condition in these verses?

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## Explain – What does this mean?

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### Unrighteousness Defined (verses 18-23)

1. Think back to verses 15-17. Paul is defining faith and the righteousness of God. What is that definition?
2. How is unrighteousness defined in verses 18-23? What is the key characteristic of unrighteousness?
3. How many times is “for” mentioned in these verses? How does this preposition help advance Paul’s argument about the heart of unrighteousness?
4. Based on these definitions, what are the two paths in this life? How does that help level the playing field between Jews and Gentiles?

- Look up the following verses and answer this question: How do these passages help explain what Paul is getting at in Romans 1:18-23

<b>Verses</b>	<b>Connection to Romans 1:18-23</b>
Acts 17:22-29	
Job 12:7-9	
Psalms 19:1-6	
Jeremiah 5:21-22	

### **Unrighteousness Applied (verses 24-32)**

- There is a progression in Paul's argument. A key tool in Bible interpretation is to always ask what the "therefore is there for." So look at verses 24. What is the first word? Why is it there and what is it explaining?
- Three times Paul says "God gave them up." Why does God "give them up"? And what are the sins mentioned that lead to this result? Make a list and try to put them in categories.
- There is a progression in Paul's argument. Look at verses 25, 28, and 32. What leads to this progression based on these verses? What is the heart of their sinful behavior?

# Apply – How does this change me?

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## Unrighteousness Defined (verses 18-23)

1. In what ways does unrighteousness lead us to “suppress the truth?”
2. How does creation speak to who God is? What do we learn about him in the things that have been made?
3. Think about your life before God saved you, how did you worship “created things rather than the creator.” What created things does our culture worship today?

## Unrighteousness Applied (verses 24-32)

1. Based on how Paul progresses his argument, is there a sin listed here that is worse than any other sin? Why is God’s wrath poured out on sin based on these verses?
2. Is there a sin listed that you struggle with or have been freed from? How does that change how you view the other sins listed that you do not struggle with or have not practiced previously?

3. How have Christians misunderstood Paul's teaching on the sins mentioned in these verses?
4. Of these sins mentioned, which ones are we the most comfortable with today? Which ones are we least comfortable with? How does Paul speak to those sins?

## **Respond – What's my next step?**

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1. Based on verses 18-23, how would you answer someone who said "I can't be held accountable for my sin. I didn't know."?
2. Is there a person you can encourage with the gospel this week who struggles with these sins?
3. How would you answer someone if they said "Christians think homosexuality is the worst sin someone can commit"? OR based on these verses, how would you respond to someone if they said "homosexuality, gossip, or disobedience to parents is not a sin?"

## **Commentary: Taken from F.F. Bruce's commentary on Romans**

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## **A. The pagan world (1:18–32)**

Before Paul elaborates further the manner in which God's way of righteousness is set forth in the gospel, he shows why it is so urgently necessary that the way to get right with God should be known. As things are, human beings are 'in the wrong' with God, and his wrath is revealed against them. There is a moral law in life that men and women are left to the consequences of their own freely chosen course of action, and unless this tendency is reversed by divine grace, their situation will go from bad to worse. Three times over the words of doom recur: 'God gave them up' (verses 24, 26, 28).

Paul's aim is to show that the whole of humanity is morally bankrupt, unable to claim a favourable verdict at the judgment bar of God, desperately in need of his mercy and pardon.

He begins with an area of human life whose moral bankruptcy was a matter of general agreement among moralists of the day—the great mass of contemporary paganism. The picture which he draws of it is ugly enough in all conscience, but no uglier than the picture of it which we have from contemporary pagan literature. What is the cause, he asks, of this appalling condition which has developed in the world? Whence come these shameful perversions, this internecine enmity within the human family? It all arises, he says, from wrong ideas about God. And these wrong ideas about God did not arise innocently; the knowledge of the true God was accessible, but men and women closed their minds to it. Instead of appreciating the glory of the Creator by contemplating the universe which he created, they gave to created things that glory which belongs to God alone. Idolatry is the source of immorality. So the author of the book of Wisdom had already said:

For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life' (Wisdom 14:12).

With Paul's language about the visible creation as a source of knowledge concerning the nature of its invisible Creator (verses 19–20) we may compare the speech at Lystra in Acts 14:15–17 and especially that at Athens in Acts 17:22–31. There is a difference of emphasis between the speech at Athens and Paul's argument here, but no contradiction: there Paul was trying to gain a hearing from pagans, whereas here he is addressing established Christians. In the Athenian speech God's creation of the world and his providential arrangement of the seasons of the year and the habitable zones of the earth for men and women's well-being are intended to lead them to 'feel after him and find him' (Acts 17:27). If, nevertheless, they acknowledge that he is an 'unknown God' to them, their self-confessed ignorance is not condoned as venial, although God in his mercy overlooked 'the times of ignorance' before the coming of Christ.

The culpable character of men and women's ignorance of God is emphasized still more here: it is a deliberate ignorance. They had the knowledge of God available to them but 'did not see fit to acknowledge God' (verse 28). The truth was accessible to them, but they suppressed it unrighteously and embraced the 'lie' in preference to it. Therefore 'God gave them up' to the consequences of their choice. And precisely here he has manifested his 'wrath'—that principle of retribution which must operate in a moral universe.

To a man so convinced as Paul that the world was created and controlled by a personal God of righteousness and mercy, this retribution could not be an impersonal principle; it was God's own wrath. If 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. Paul would certainly have agreed with Isaiah in describing the execution of God's wrath as his 'strange deed' (Isa. 28:21), to which he girds himself slowly and reluctantly; indeed, he sets forth the revelation of God's wrath here as the background to his 'proper work' of mercy, which is so congenial to his character that he speeds with joyful haste to lavish it on undeserving penitents.

But even if the picture of divine retribution, operating as a stern principle in human life, does provide a background to the everlasting mercy, it is a real and terrible background, and one that must be seriously reckoned with.

**18.** *The wrath of God is revealed.* Not in the gospel (in which the saving 'righteousness of God' is revealed) but in the facts of human experience: 'the history of the world is the judgment of the world' (J. C. F. Schiller). The revelation of 'the wrath to come' at the end-time (1 Thess. 1:10) is anticipated by the revelation of the same principle in the on-going life of the world. 'The idea that God is angry is no more anthropopathic than the thought that God is love. The reason why the idea of the divine anger is always exposed to misunderstanding is because among men anger is ethically wrong. And yet, even among men do we not speak of a "righteous anger"?' The exposure of pagan idolatry and immorality in these verses follows lines laid down in such works of Jewish apologetic as the book of Wisdom quoted above (see especially Wisdom 12–14), and the *Epistle of Aristeeas*; it reappears in the Christian apologists of the second century AD (e.g. the author of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, Aristides, Tatian, Athenagoras, and the *Preaching of Peter* mentioned by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.5, 39.1–43.3).

*Who by their wickedness suppress the truth.* 'In their wickedness they are stifling the truth' (NEB). 'The truth' is more precisely defined in verse 25 as 'the truth about God'.

**20.** *His invisible nature.* Lit. 'his invisible things', particularized as *his eternal power and deity*. The adjective *aídios* (otherwise found in the New Testament only in Jude 6) might be rendered 'everlasting', to distinguish it from the commoner *aiōnios*, 'eternal' (cf. Rom. 2:7, etc.). This is the only New Testament instance of *theiotēs*, 'divinity', 'divine nature' (NIV). If God's divinity is shown in creation, his full deity or divine essence (*theotēs*) is embodied in Christ (Col. 2:9).

*Have been clearly perceived.* Lit. 'being understood are perceived' (*nooumena kathoratai*), where the former verb refers strictly to the intelligence and the latter to physical sight. 'Both the verbs ... describe how, on contemplating God's works, man can grasp enough of His nature to prevent him from the error of identifying any of the created things with the Creator, enabling him to keep his conception of the Deity free from idolatry.'

**22.** *They became fools.* As in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, folly (cf. 'their senseless minds' in verse 21) implies moral obtuseness rather than mere deficiency in intelligence.

**23.** *And exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images.* Cf. Psalm 106:20, 'They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass' (a reference

to the worship of the golden calf). Here the language is generalized. The threefold classification of nonhuman living creatures, *birds or animals* (lit. 'quadrupeds') or *reptiles* (cf. Gen. 1:20–25), and the terms 'glory', 'image' and 'resembling' (cf. Gen. 1:26) suggest that 'Paul's account of man's wickedness had been deliberately stated in terms of the Biblical narrative of Adam's fall'.

**24, 26, 28.** *God gave them up.* Cf. Acts 7:42 where, because of the idolatrous tendencies of the Israelites, 'God ... gave them over to worship the host of heaven'. An impressive modern statement of this principle of divine retribution is provided by C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* (1940), pp. 115f.: the lost, he says, 'enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved'.

**25.** *A lie.* Lit. 'the lie'—the basic lie which contradicts God's truth; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:10–12.

**27.** *The due penalty for their error.* NEB, better, 'the fitting wage of such perversion'. In modern English 'error' is too weak a word to render *planē* in a context like this; cf. Jude 11, where 'Balaam's error' (*planē*) is the idolatry and fornication of Baal-peor into which the Israelites were seduced by his counsel (Num. 25:1–9; 31:16).

**28.** *A base mind.* NEB 'their own depraved (*adokimos*, "counterfeit") reason'.

*Improper conduct.* The phrase translated 'improper' (*ta mē kathēkonta*) is a technical term of Stoic philosophy, *kathēkonta* denoting actions that were 'fitting'. A similar expression is used in Ephesians 5:4, of things 'which are not fitting' (*ha ouk anēken*).

**29.** *Filled with all manner of wickedness.* The list of vices in verses 29–31 belongs to a category well attested in Greek literature of this period. Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; Colossians 3:5.

**30.** *Insolent.* Greek *hybristēs*, one who behaves with humiliating and unconscionable arrogance to those who are not powerful enough to retaliate.<sup>1</sup>

## Additional Resources:

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**Podcast:** [Knowing Faith on Romans 1:18-32](#)

**Video:** [Is it Okay to Be Gay: A Candid Conversation on Christians and Same-Sex Attraction](#)

**Article:** [Are We Living Out Romans 1? by Rosaria Butterfield](#)

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<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce, [Romans: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 6, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 88–92.