



EXPLORATION

Romans 1:18-28,32

Central
TRUTH

God is just,
people are
not. All
people have
rejected God
and deceived
themselves.

We need
God's grace.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish 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 and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

*Prepare for your group
meeting by reading the
passage two times.*

Talk it Out

.01 WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD **JUSTICE**?

.02 HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE JUSTICE?



This week's **FOCUS**

When we hear the word *justice*, we might think of our judicial system by which we attempt to make sure that innocent people are not punished and guilty people do not go free. You might also think of super hero groups like the “Justice League” who fight evil forces in an attempt to protect innocent people. Justice has to do with what is right and good. The very concept of justice implies an objective standard of what is right and wrong. Today we are going to see how Paul, having said that the gospel reveals God’s righteousness or justice, is going to demonstrate how out of step we are with what is right and good. In fact, we are going to see that God is just, people are not. All people have rejected God and deceived themselves. We need God’s grace.

Explore

OPTIONS

.01 Injustice

Play a quick trivia game with your students. The subject of the trivia can be anything. There are lots of great trivia sites online where you can find good questions, but make sure the questions are appropriate for your group. After playing the trivia game, see who got the most answers correct and award those students with a certificate. Make the certificate really lame: just a sheet of paper with a hand-written note that says, “Congrats, you won!” Give all the students who did not win a piece of candy. As the students who won protest that this is unfair, point out that we are going to discuss God’s justice revealed in the gospel today. Give the students who won a piece of candy. God is just, people are not. All people have rejected God and deceived themselves and are in need of grace.

.02 Justice

Share a famous story of wrongful imprisonment—a story of someone who was convicted of a crime that they did not commit only to have evidence come out later that cleared them of wrongdoing. Examples could include the story of Ricky Jackson who was imprisoned for 39 years for a murder he did not commit, or Sunny Jacobs who was cleared of wrongdoing in 1992 after being sentenced to death and spending 17 years in prison. Look up these stories and familiarize yourself well enough that you can tell one such story in a manner appropriate for your group. After sharing a story, ask students how hearing these stories makes them feel. Such stories make us upset for those wrongfully convicted. It upsets our sense of justice. Today we are going to see that our God is just. He always does what is right. While this might seem like bad news for sinners like us, we will also see that God’s justice is ultimately good news. God is just, people are not. All people have rejected God and deceived themselves. We need God’s grace.



CONVERSATION

Read Romans 1:18-23.

.03 LOOK BACK AT ROMANS 1:16-17. WHAT DOES THE GOSPEL REVEAL? HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO WHAT PAUL SAYS GOD HAS REVEALED IN VERSE 18?

.04 WHY HAS GOD REVEALED HIS WRATH AGAINST SIN (VV. 18-19)?

Romans 1:16-17 serves as something of a theme verse for the Book of Romans. In fact, Romans 1:18-8:39 essentially unpacks how the gospel is God's power unto salvation and how it reveals God's righteousness (v. 17). Righteousness has to do with what is just and good. Here in Romans 1:18-23 Paul reveals why the good news about Jesus (which leads to salvation) is so desperately needed. It is needed because our God does what is right and good. That means He cannot ignore our ungodliness and unrighteousness. Encourage students to take a moment and consider what our world would be like if no one was ever punished for wrongdoing. While we might not like to talk about God's anger against sin, we must for at least three reasons. First, the Bible, particularly Romans, has a good deal to say about this subject. Secondly, knowing that God's wrath is revealed against human sin confirms that He is good, giving us hope that He is going to restore goodness and order to our sinful, broken world. And finally, we must talk about God's anger against sin because we are sinners and, apart from Christ, are under His wrath.

.05 WHAT HAS GOD MADE OBVIOUS TO ALL PEOPLE ACCORDING TO VERSES 19-20? WHAT HAVE ALL PEOPLE DONE WITH THIS KNOWLEDGE (V. 18)?

We were made to know, love, and serve God (Isa. 43:7). This has always been the way that human beings flourish. And yet, flourishing is often not our experience. Instead, we live in a world of frustration, disappointment, and loss. Why is this? Paul essentially says that it is our fault. We, human beings, have been very aware of God's "eternal power" and "divine nature" (v. 20) and yet we've chosen not to glorify Him (v. 21). In other words, we know that God is our Creator and that He is infinitely powerful and just and yet we have rejected Him as our Lord and king. Remember last week we saw Paul explain how the gospel centers on Christ's lordship—His establishing God's righteousness on earth? Here Paul is highlighting the human problem inherent in that reality—we are not righteous and we've willingly rejected God as our king.

Leader Pack / **ITEM 6:** Point students to the definition of sin on the **14 Words in Romans** poster.



COMMENTARY

Romans 1:18-23

18-20. While God's righteousness has been revealed through the gospel (1:17), His *wrath* is also being *revealed*. The two are closely connected since God's righteousness is the basis for His wrath.

Paul used *wrath* to explain God's intense anger toward *godlessness* and *unrighteousness*. While human wrath can be motivated by sin, God's wrath is completely just. Since Eden, humans have rejected God's authority. His holiness cannot allow sin to stand unpunished. As long as individuals live in rebellion, they live under God's wrath.

Paul also noted that ungodly people suppress the truth. When they reject the truth, they also reject the origin of truth—God Himself. It would be one thing if God had never revealed Himself, but that is not the case. God has made Himself known to us. Paul told the Romans that everything we know—or can know—about God is possible because *God has shown* it to us.

Even God's *invisible* attributes were obvious to those who looked for them. His existence and power are evident through the created world. As David wrote, nature itself proclaims God's glory (Ps. 19:1). Because God is seen through what He has made, His highest creation—humanity—will be held accountable for its rebellion. Those who refuse to acknowledge God are *without excuse*.

21-23. Nature makes God's existence and power clear. But Paul explained that knowing about Him was not enough. He described a progression of humanity spiraling from bad to worse. First, even though *they knew God, they did not glorify him as God*. This was an intellectual knowledge, not a saving knowledge. People refused to ascribe to Him the honor, position, and authority He deserved. Instead, they valued the creation more than the Creator. This led to decay in their minds and hearts. Because they rejected truth, their *thinking became worthless*. They weren't even capable of thinking rational, realistic thoughts. At the same time, their *hearts were darkened*. They became more self-absorbed and alienated from their Creator.

Rebelling against God, humans claimed superior wisdom. This attitude reflected the nature of Satan. The devil had fallen from God's presence because of his own arrogance. What's more, he had promised Adam and Eve that the forbidden fruit would make them wise like God (Gen. 3:5).

Paul's emphasis on wisdom may also refer to the rise of mystery religions in the first century. Many cults were built on belief in a special knowledge available only to privileged individuals. These twisted theologies only served to drive people deeper into their own arrogance and further from God's truth.

People have been deceiving themselves since the fall. While we tend to overstate our wisdom, Paul noted that this strategy results in us becoming *fools*.



CONVERSATION

continued

.06 PAUL SAID PEOPLE HAVE SUPPRESSED THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD IN VERSE 18. WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO US AS A RESULT OF THIS (VV. 21-23)?



Discipleship Moment: *Do you remember when you first realized you were a sinner? How did you respond to this realization? Consider sharing this story with the students in your group.*

.07 WHAT DO MOST PEOPLE CLAIM TO BE (V. 22)? WHAT ARE THEY IN ACTUALITY (V. 22)? WHAT DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT OUR SITUATION APART FROM JESUS?

Paul says humankind's decision to suppress the truth of God's lordship has really left them in a bad place. Paul says that this rejection has broken humanity at the most fundamental level—their thoughts and their hearts—meaning their desires and intentions. Paul will later outline some of the sinful outward actions that people give into as a result of this, but here his point is that people's minds and wills have been corrupted by sin. And remember Paul outlined how all human beings are responsible for this because all people have willingly suppressed the truth about God in unrighteousness (v. 18). People have known that God is Creator, Lord, and King, and yet they choose to reject Him because the way they think is fundamentally broken. This broken thinking is best illustrated in verse 23. Here we see that people have exchanged the glory of their Creator and Lord instead have begun worshiping idols—creations of other human beings. Furthermore, most people think they are wise as they worship idols and reject God (v. 22), but in reality, Paul says their foolish hearts are darkened. If left unchecked, our selfish desires will not only keep us from being close to God but will also damage ourselves and our relationships with others.



Cultural Context: *The idea of worshiping the kind of idols Paul talks about in verse 23 probably doesn't tempt you or your students; however, this verse is incredibly relevant to the culture in which your students live. For more information, see the Cultural Context note in the Commentary.*

Read Romans 1:24-28,32.

.08 WHAT IS THE RESULT OF ALL OF MANKIND'S BROKEN THINKING AND MOTIVES?

Leader Pack / ITEM 7: For more information on how the good news of Jesus takes center stage in the first half of Romans, see **The Gospel in Romans** poster. Here in Romans 1, we are confronted with the fundamental problem the gospel addresses: human sinfulness.



COMMENTARY

The depth of humanity's foolishness is best demonstrated by what we allow to rule our lives. As spiritual beings, we naturally worship something or someone. If we don't allow God to fill that role, our darkened hearts will find something else. In ancient days, people replaced God's glory with a variety of images. Paul's language points back to creation, when God created humans in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). But godless people tried to shape Him into their own image—*mortal man*—or into the image of *mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles*. The prophet Jeremiah said the idols of his day “cannot speak” (Jer. 10:5). The false gods of the first century were no better—and neither are the ones we create today. Rejecting God's truth leads to darkness and foolishness.

Romans 1:24–28, 32

24–25. When ungodly people consistently reject God, He ultimately rejects them. When His correction is ignored, God allows humans to follow their path and experience the consequences of their choices. This does not mean that He will not take them back or that they have crossed into some kind of unforgivable sin. But it does mean that God lets them feel the full weight of their foolishness.

Paul noted that sinful humanity's rebellion takes over more and more of their lives. What started as darkness in their hearts has a corrupting influence on their physical bodies as well—especially through *sexual impurity*. He used the word *degraded* to describe the systematic decline into ungodly behavior. The implication is that the cancer of sin moves swiftly throughout the body, poisoning everything as it goes.



CULTURAL CONTEXT

It would be easy for us to look down on the people Paul mentions in verse 23 who worship statues of people, birds, reptiles, and animals because we would never do something so silly. In reality, however, people today are no different. Most teenagers today are constantly tempted to worship idols that are just as foolish: money, sex, power, popularity, acceptance, and so on. Of course people in Paul's day worshiped these things too. Want to know what idols you are worshiping? Ask yourself: What can I not live without? What would I be willing to sin to get (popularity, acceptance, possessions)? What would I be willing to sin to keep?

Paul pointed out again that godless people have *exchanged the truth of God for a lie*. Their minds have grown so dark that they cannot discern the difference between right and wrong. Even worse, they begin to equate wrong with right in their minds.

Reinforcing his comments about the images of animals in verse 23, the apostle wrote that evil people choose to worship *what has been created instead of the Creator*. This is essentially because they have denied the existence and authority of a Creator.



CONVERSATION

continued

.09 WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW PEOPLE TODAY PRACTICE THE SINS PAUL LAID OUT IN VERSES 29-31 AND EVEN “APPLAUD OTHERS WHO PRACTICE THEM” (V. 32)?

.10 HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO PAUL’S DESCRIPTION OF PEOPLE APART FROM CHRIST?

The result of all our selfish, broken thinking and motives is that we live in an incredibly unpleasant world. This isn’t to say that the world is as bad as it could be. Thankfully our God is at work, preserving the world from ultimate ruin and complete decay. While the world is not as terrible as it could be, students need to acknowledge its fundamental brokenness so that they might long for Christ to step in and redeem and renew it. We live in a world where people prey on the weak and needy, where all kinds of sexual sin is not only overlooked but even applauded—just like Paul said in Romans 1:26-27. The vision of life in this world that Paul paints in verses 28-30 is unpleasant to say the least. The fact that we can read this description, however, and feel a sense of loss, is a good sign. It means that the brokenness of the world isn’t something we are comfortable with and that we long for God to make right what is wrong with the world. If students or anyone close to you knows they are living in sin and it doesn’t bother them, you should be concerned and pray for their hearts to be softened.



Theological Context: *What does Paul mean by “God delivered them over” that he repeats in these verses? For more information, see the Theological Context note in the Commentary.*



COMMENTARY

26-27. Again Paul used the word *exchange*. Not only did people exchange a false god for the true Lord (v. 25), these individuals rejected their God-designed sexuality for self-styled depravity. Women suffered from relationships that were against nature. They exchanged normal sexual relations for an alternative that really was no alternative. Meanwhile, men had *left natural relations with women* and burned in lust toward one another.

The Roman world generally accepted homosexuality and other forms of sexual immorality. Paul clearly labeled homosexuality a sin because it reverses God's intended order and design. Believers, however, should remember that homosexuality is not an "unforgivable sin." God's grace can cover every confessed sin.

28. Paul again emphasized how the darkened mind of humanity is blinded to God's perfect plan. The idea that humans *did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God* points to arrogance and ignorance. Again, Paul noted that God delivered them over to *a reprobate mind*. He allowed them to go their own way and to face the results of their choice. Ultimately, God longs for sinners to return to Him. However, rebels are held accountable for their rejection of Him.



THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

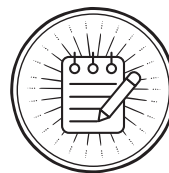
Three times in Romans 1:24-32, Paul used the phrase "God delivered them over" and then outlines sinful attitudes and behaviors that demonstrate the brokenness of our world. This does not mean that God encouraged people to dive further into these sins. In each of these instances, the people are doing exactly what they desired to do. Therefore, "God delivered them over" should be understood more as God letting them pursue what they already wanted to pursue. In other words, God is removing restraint and letting sinful people pursue their sinful passions. Even in doing this, God is providing opportunities for people to acknowledge their brokenness and turn to Christ.

32. Throughout Romans 1, Paul painted a grim picture of humanity wandering aimlessly without Christ. To make matters worse, many who reject Christ think they will somehow escape His wrath. But Paul pointed out that God has pronounced a *just sentence* against the rebels—death. This judgment is based on His righteousness. The consequence of sin is death. Humanity died spiritually in Eden. Physical death and eternal death (separation from God) entered the world at that time. But with their actions and attitudes, rebellious sinners mock the Savior and proudly spread their infection of deception, sin, and death to those around them.

CENTRAL TRUTH

God is just, people are not. All people have rejected God and deceived themselves. We need God's grace.

NOW WHAT?



.11 HOW DOES THE GOSPEL DEMONSTRATE GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS? WHY IS IT ULTIMATELY GOOD NEWS THAT OUR GOD IS RIGHTEOUS?

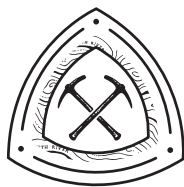
.12 WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE HONEST WITH OURSELVES ABOUT OUR SINFULNESS AND THE SINFULNESS OF THE WORLD WE LIVE IN?

.13 HOW DOES THE GOSPEL GIVE US HOPE IN THE MIDST OF OUR OWN BROKENNESS AND IN THE MIDST OF THE BROKEN WORLD WE LIVE IN?

.14 HOW CAN WE HELP ONE ANOTHER CENTER OUR LIVES AROUND THE GOSPEL?



The **Student Leader Pack** is available for purchase on lifeway.com/explorethebible. It includes valuable posters that are referenced throughout the Leader Guide, Family Connection guides that equip families to discuss the Bible together on-the-go, a Midweek expository verse-by-verse study of Exodus which complements this study, and PowerPoint templates with graphics from the quarter study to help prepare slides for teaching.



Daily DEVOTIONS

Challenge your students to choose five days this week to set aside time to dig deeper into God's Word in the devotions included in their Daily Discipleship Guides (item 005646504). These devotions are perforated so that your students can tear them out if you prefer to hold on to their Daily Discipleship Guides for them. A summary of their devotions is provided below so you can review what they will be studying on their own.

Day One

**ROMANS
1:21-25**

We see God in nature; however, when we don't acknowledge Him by giving Him glory and thanking Him, our wisdom becomes foolishness. Foolish people turn to things in creation and worship them instead of God. Disregarding God's lordship also manifests in our choosing to live according to our desires rather than the authority of God.

Day Two

**ROMANS
1:26-32**

Acknowledging God with our minds leads to obedience; on the contrary, a lack of recognizing God's authority leads to sin: dishonoring sexual desires, a corrupt mind, and all kinds of unrighteousness. Paul's list of disgraceful sins includes some "really bad" sins but also some that most people have committed. Those who choose to believe and acknowledge God see these sins, repent, and turn away from them.

Day Three

**ROMANS
2:1-8**

God is the ultimate judge; though He has all authority and power, He chooses to be gracious and merciful. We, on the other hand, do not have the authority or the grace and mercy to reflect God Almighty. Therefore, it's not our job to judge; we leave that to God. Our calling is to obey Him and love others.

Day Four

**ROMANS
2:9-12**

Whether you came from a family of Jews who had followed God for centuries or from a family of Greeks who had never thought to worship Him, the standard is the same: Those who follow God's commands will know blessings, and those who disobey will know distress. Paul's news here was a new approach, as God's "chosen people" had been the Jews for centuries. Jesus opened the door for all to come to God.

Day Five

**ROMANS
2:13-16**

Hearing God's instructions—"the Law"—does not make one righteous. The Jews had received the Law over 1500 years before Paul's letter to the Romans, but they hadn't always lived according to it. Similarly, our hearing of the Law doesn't make us right with God today. Right standing with God requires believing in Jesus for salvation, walking in obedience to Him, and submitting to His lordship.



Challenge TO LEADERS

Memorize.

Romans 2:11

Connect.

Send out a group message encouraging your students to complete this week's Daily Devotions. Be sure to complete the 5 Bible readings yourself so that you might set an example for your students of making God's Word a priority.