

Lesson 7

October 18, 2026

Our Need for Salvation:

The whole world is guilty before God.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

Exploring two chapters of Paul's Letter to the Romans, we will delve into the themes of sinfulness and divine wrath. Our study begins by examining humanity's rejection of God's truth through willful suppression, ungodliness, idolatry, and foolishness, resulting in worshiping creation instead of the Creator. The results of this rebellion are evident in paganism, more corruption, and sinful behaviors. The pervasive nature of sin is seen in the actions and speech of fallen humanity, revealing the universal need for redemption. The study also explores how sin hinders our relationship with a righteous God, stressing the need for reconciliation and transformation through faith in Jesus.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Letter to the Romans is one of Paul's earliest Biblical writings, with some scholars considering it possible the first. Written during the mid-to-late AD 50s, it was addressed to the church in Rome and delivered by Phoebe, a deaconess (Romans 16:1). At the time, Paul had not yet visited the church in Rome but expressed a heartfelt longing to meet and fellowship with its members. Paul's unwavering commitment to spreading the Gospel is evident in his eagerness to proclaim the message of salvation within the heart of the Roman Empire. This letter reflects his profound dedication and willingness to engage with the church in Rome.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. REASONS FOR GOD'S WRATH: Romans 1:18-23.

- A. Ungodliness and the Suppression of Truth, (18-19)
- B. Idolatry and Foolishness, (20-23)

2. THE CONDITIONS OF GODLESSNESS: Romans 1:24-32.

- A. Paganism and Rejection of God, (24-27)
- B. Moral Corruption and Depraved Behavior, (28-32)

3. THE DEPTH OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY: Romans 3:9-20.

- A. Universal Sinfulness, (9-12)
- B. Corruption of Speech and Actions, (13-20)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. REASONS FOR GOD’S WRATH: Romans 1:18-23.

A. Ungodliness and the Suppression of Truth, Romans 1:8-19.

In these two verses, Paul transitions from the introduction to the letter’s core message. In verse 17, he focuses on the righteousness of God as revealed through His people living by faith. In verse 18, Paul shifts focus to the reality of God’s wrath, which “is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” This contrast emphasizes the gravity of sin and its consequences; Paul warns that God’s judgment is not arbitrary but directed at those “who hold [suppress] the truth” through their unrighteous actions. God’s wrath is an appropriate response to humanity’s deliberate rejection of His truth and moral order.

Christians in Rome – the heart of a pagan empire – were very aware of the cultural and spiritual challenges surrounding them. While Paul commands the faithfulness of the followers of Christ in Rome, he does not shy away from addressing the rampant sinfulness and idolatry in their society. He condemns godless behaviors and indulgent lifestyles that characterized many in that environment, making it clear that such actions are incompatible with the righteousness of God. Paul emphasizes the importance of repentance and the reality of divine accountability. By highlighting righteousness revealed through faith and God’s wrath against sin, Paul sets the stage for a deeper exploration of humanity’s need for salvation and the redemptive power of Christ. This dual emphasis serves as a foundation throughout the letter, urging readers to consider their lives in the light of God’s truth and justice.

B. Idolatry and Foolishness, Romans 1:20-23.

Despite having clear evidence of God’s eternal power and divine nature through creation, people chose to reject Him. Nature powerfully reveals there is a Creator, but instead of seeking “the uncorruptible God,” sinful humanity chose to worship created things (v. 23). This happens when people fail to acknowledge God as the source of all life.

Foolishness, as described in verses 20-21, is the result of rejecting the truth of God’s existence, which is displayed in nature. When people refuse to glorify or honor God, “their minds became dark and confused” (NLT). They claim to be wise but demonstrate foolishness by worshiping images lacking life, intelligence, or power. They exercise a willful denial of God’s authority with a preference for self-made substitutes. This passage depicts the consequences of disregarding divine wisdom, which is displayed both generally in nature and specifically in God’s Word. We must consider our way of thinking and recognize the importance of worshiping the true God, who alone is worthy of honor and praise.

The further someone moves away from the revelation of God and His truth, the more distorted and darker their mind becomes. Consider the recent perverse idea that a person (even a child) can ignore the gender of their birth and simply choose to be male or female and engage in physical mutilation to try to make their decision a reality. Only by seeking, worshiping, and surrendering to God’s truth can a confused mind be healed and made whole. It seems there is no limit to the depths of sin for those who reject God, but there is also no limit to the joy and pleasures available in God’s presence (Psalms 16:11).

2. THE CONDITIONS OF GODESSNESS: Romans 1:24-32.

A. Paganism and Rejection of God, Romans 1:24-27.

In verses 24-25, Paul reveals the spiritual results of idolatry and pagan practices, especially as related to sinful sexual acts. He highlights the tragic outcome for those who turn away from worshiping the one true God, explaining that a person determined to pursue such practices risks being given over to their sinful desires. Individuals exchange God's eternal truth for lies by turning to physical objects, natural elements, and their own desires over the Creator himself. This distortion of worship brings chaos and confusion, resulting in lives of dishonor, impurity, and a lack of divine guidance.

Paul provides a warning concerning the essence and outcome of sin. Here, paganism is described as more than idol worship. It signifies a larger rejection of God's sovereign rule and unchanging truth, especially as it relates to human behavior. When people allow material possessions, fleeting pleasures, or carnal passions to take precedence over their commitment to God, they enslave themselves to their selfish and sinful cravings.

In two verses, Paul states, "God gave them up." First, "God ... gave them up to uncleanness" (v. 24), meaning moral and physical depravity. Second, "God gave them up unto vile affections" (v. 26), which Paul defines as women changing "the natural use into that which is against nature." In both verses, God giving them up was the direct result of sexual immorality and perversion. In verse 27, Paul adds the sins of the men, saying "men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another," which is a reference to homosexual behavior. By engaging in these behaviors, men and women rejected God and pushed any thought of Him or His moral standards out of their minds.

B. Moral Corruption and Depraved Behavior, Romans 1:28-32.

In verse 28, Paul notes that in response to their rejection of Him, God "abandoned them to their foolish thinking" (NLT). This means God allowed them to pursue their dark passions and therefore, experience the judgment that followed. Their sinful actions poured out from hearts "filled with ... evil, covetousness, malice" (v. 29 ESV). Their unrighteous lips spoke words of deceit, gossip, slander, and boasting (vv. 29-30). These "haters of God" and "inventors of evil" were "foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (vv. 30-31 ESV).

Although they know "the judgment of God," such people commit behaviors "worthy of death" (v. 32). "Yet they not only do them, but they even [enthusiastically] approve and tolerate others who practice them" (v. 32 AMP). Much like the people Paul had in mind during his time, there continue to be people who celebrate and take "pride" in some of the vilest behaviors imaginable, including terminating the lives of the unborn. Such people are in danger of being delivered by God to their passions and the divine judgment that will follow.

The word "reprobate" (Romans 1:28) is a translation of the Greek word 'adokimos,' which literally means "not approved." It refers to someone who is "unapproved" and has been "rejected or cast away." Paul used this word in 1 Corinthians 9:27 when he said he took authority over his "body," keeping it in "subjection: lest...I myself should be a castaway." Like

Paul, every Christian must maintain purity in thought, word, and deed to maintain a right relationship with God. Paul states that failing to keep his own body in subjection would result in his being 'adolkimos,' rejected by God. In short, our bodies (actions and practices) will follow the lead of our minds and could take us down the road to rejection by God. To avoid this, we must retain God in our thoughts, meaning we always consider our actions in the light of God's Word and will.

3. THE DEPTH OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY: Romans 3:9-20.

A. Universal Sinfulness, Romans 3:9-12.

In most cities outside Judea, the churches consisted of people from both Jewish and pagan backgrounds. Therefore, when Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, he was addressing people coming from two very different religious experiences. Before their conversion to Christianity, each group had its own history, traditions, and practices, and judged the others differently based on their past. The religious background of the Gentile Christians would have included pagan sexual immorality. At the same time, the Jewish Christians had to overcome their dependence on the Law of Moses as a requirement of salvation. Paul addressed the immoral behaviors of pagan society, but Paul also addressed the perception by some among the Jews that, as descendants of Abraham, they were chosen and therefore not under sin. Paul concludes that "both Jews and Gentiles ... are all under sin" (v. 9).

Paul insisted that no one is inherently righteous stating, "There is more that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (v. 11). This must have been shocking to the ears of Jewish Christians who often seemed to presume a certain moral superiority. After all, they had the Law of Moses as a covenant with God. Paul emphatically stated that everyone had been looking in all the wrong places. Together, Jews and Gentiles had "become unprofitable ... none ... doeth good, no, not one" (v. 12). The Law should have led the Jews to see their need for a Savior in Jesus; the Gentiles should have seen the handiwork of God in nature and worshiped Him. Instead, all of humanity had failed, and therefore everyone needed a Savior – a Redeemer – to reconcile them with God.

B. Corruption of Speech and Actions, Romans 3:13-20.

These verses provided a sobering reflection on the corruption of human speech and actions, Emphasizing the universality of sin and humanity's inability to achieve righteousness through their own efforts. Verse 13 describes the depravity of speech, likening the throat to an "open womb" (NKJV) with a tongue that practices deceit. The imagery conveys the destructive power of words that emanate from a sinful heart. "Snake venom drips from their lips" (NLT) expresses the deadly nature of corrupt speech, which can damage relationships and lead others astray. Improper speech reflects a deeper spiritual problem – "cursing and bitterness" (v. 14) reveal the condition of the heart (see Matthew 12:34).

In verses 15-16, the focus shifts from words to the actions of sinful humanity, describing people whose "feet are swift to shed blood" and whose ways are filled with "destruction and

misery.” The absence of peace (v. 17) and the lack of “fear of God” (v. 18) characterize lives dominated by sin.

Notably, Paul concludes this section by stating that no one will be justified by the works of the Law (vv. 19-20), for the Law serves to make humanity aware of sin but provided no power to overcome it. This passage is a humbling reminder of human fallenness, it points us toward the need for divine grace and redemption through Jesus Christ, who alone can transform our hearts, purify our speech, and guide our actions toward godliness.

No matter how hard we work, how many good deeds we perform, or our efforts will always fail to merit salvation. It is a humbling yet liberating realization that redemption is not something we can earn or achieve through our works, but rather is a gift freely given by God’s grace. When we surrender our striving and place our trust and faith in His mercy, we find peace in Him that surpasses understanding. Accepting His love and grace, supplied in abundance through Christ, is more than enough to cover even our greatest sins and failures.

John Newton, who wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace,” said, “When I was young, I was sure of many things; now there are only two things of which I am sure: one is that I am a miserable sinner; and the other, that Christ is an all-sufficient Savior. He is well-taught who learns these two lessons.”

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

As we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we walk worthy of our calling. Still, it is faith in the path Jesus provided, and not our efforts to achieve righteousness, that leads to salvation.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Paul lists many things that are evidence of unrighteousness, and we could add many more. The list of sins is seemingly endless, but the church should point to God’s love, mercy, and grace as the remedy for all of them.

The Greatest Letter Ever Written

The Greatest Letter Ever Written is the title of a 471-page book by Dr. French L. Arrington, published by Pathway Press. It is a thorough and excellent study of the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans. The following are some excerpts from the introductory part of the book.

“What would the church be without Paul's great letter to the Romans? ... There is a unique quality of this book that has greatly impacted Christians throughout history and continues to impact us.

“From studying Paul's Letter to the Roman, we can learn the content of the Christian faith like nowhere else in the New Testament ... Paul's words are loaded with divine truth and require careful study and thought.

“The Letter to the Romans has had a significant place throughout the history of the church ... The position it occupies in the New Testament indicates that the early church saw it as the most significant letter that Paul wrote.

“Romans has had a remarkable influence on the early life of the church and its theology ... One of the great thinkers of the early church, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul [AD 130-200], had a true affinity for Paul's teachings.

“Irenaeus' doctrine of salvation was centered in Christ's life and death, and he emphasized the importance of the Holy Spirit as the means of living the Christian life. Irenaeus' answer to the question of why Christ came from heaven was 'that He might destroy sin, overcome death, and give life to man.' Like Paul, Irenaeus say the coming of Christ in the flesh as absolutely essential to salvation..." For He who was to destroy sin and redeem man from guilt had to enter into the very condition of man.'

“Irenaeus' teaching on salvation and the Christian life reflects the strong influence of Romans on the thinking of one of the most creative thinkers in the second-century church, who in turn has greatly impacted the belief and life of the Christian church."

WORKSHEET

Looking for Truth

According to the American Worldview Inventory 2025, nearly “three-quarters of all Americans (74%) at least occasionally rely upon their emotions to discern moral truth.”

- Is this reliance on emotions wise? Why or why not?

The survey showed the other leading sources Americans seek for truth are “the Bible (44%), public policies and laws (41%), scientific and mathematical claims (40%), and social norms, majority beliefs, and cultural traditions (39%),” reported pollster George Barna.

The other leading sources are non-Christian philosophies and religions, personal experiences, and input from other people.

- How do the results of this survey relate to what Paul experienced in Romans 1:22-23?
- According to Romans 1:25, how had some people changed “the truth of God into a lie”?
- How do some people try to change God’s truth today?