



GUILTY

Ignoring God leads to destruction.

ROMANS 1:18-28,32

Pick any destination in your town. How many ways can you get from your home to that spot? You can probably come up with dozens of possible routes, but some would be better than others. One might even be the best. Life is a lot like that. It's a journey to find meaning. The world gives us plenty of options claiming to offer true peace and purpose. But when the time came for God to unveil His plan for the human race, He only provided one option. He only made one way—and His name is Jesus.

What might a person turn to in his or her search for meaning? How would you rank the items you listed from most tried to least?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 1:18–2:16

The Christians in Rome lived in the most powerful city in the most powerful empire the world had ever known. They were at the center of the action and were building a reputation for faithfulness that even made Paul take notice. But they were also on the brink of systematic persecution. Believers turned heads because they refused to worship the Roman pantheon of gods—including the emperor. In time, their choice to name only Jesus as Lord would turn the government against them. Within a decade of Paul's letter, the persecution would steadily increase.

Paul wanted the Roman Christians to have a strong foundation for their faith. He challenged them to examine their faith and to make sure they were standing on the truth of the gospel—the gospel for which he had been named an apostle (1:13-15) and which held the only power for salvation (1:16-17).

Paul began unpacking his theology by examining how far humanity had strayed from God. Since Eden, people had continued to rebel against their Creator and placed themselves under His wrath and judgment (1:18). They had warped everything holy and made God into their image instead of celebrating His image in themselves (1:25-28). Those who insisted on rejecting Him would end up being rejected by Him (1:28).

The judgment unbelievers will experience at the hands of God is not based on some capricious whim. God will measure their actions by the truth of His perfect standard. God will play no favorites. Each person's works will speak for themselves (2:1-11).

The condition of people's hearts is reflected in their actions. Whether those individuals are Jews or Gentiles, what they do communicates more than what they say. While we are not saved by our works, those works speak volumes about whether we are surrendered to God or still in rebellion against Him.

Read Romans 1:18-28,32 in your Bible, underlining God's response to humanity's rejection of Him. How would you describe the basic relationship between God and humanity?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REVEALED IN NATURE (ROM. 1:18-20)

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.

VERSES 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 *ungodliness 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*.

Where do you see God's presence and work through what He has created? What have you learned about Him by observing what He has made?



KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin (Gen. 3:1-10).

REPLACED BY NONSENSE (ROM. 1:21-23)

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.

VERSES 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. Even though ***they knew God***, they ***did not honor him as God***. This was an intellectual knowledge, not a saving knowledge. People refused to ascribe to Him the position and authority He deserved. Instead, they valued the creation more than the Creator. Because they rejected truth, their ***thinking*** became ***futile***. They weren't capable of thinking rational 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 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 we are simply ***fools***.

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 **birds and animals and creeping things**. The prophet Jeremiah said the idols of his day were "like scarecrows in a cucumber field" (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.

With what false gods do people try to replace God today? How do our substitutes demonstrate our foolishness?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare related passages.*

Read Romans 1:20-29 looking for opportunities for repentance that were ignored. Then read Exodus 6:6-7; Numbers 10:9-10; and Psalm 34:4 looking for opportunities for repentance that were heeded. How would you contrast these examples with the way God delivered His people when they repented? What does this comparison teach us about God's holiness, mercy, and justice?

DELIVERED OVER (ROM. 1:24-28)

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.

VERSES 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 **dishonoring** 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.

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 **the creature rather than the Creator**. This is essentially because they have denied the existence and authority of a Creator.

How does getting what we desire lead to greater problems?

VERSES 26-27

Again Paul used the word **exchanged**. 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 are contrary to nature***. They exchanged normal sexual relations for an alternative that really was no alternative. Meanwhile, men had ***gave up natural relations with women*** and ***were consumed with passion for 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.

VERSE 28

Paul again emphasized how the darkened mind of humanity is blinded to God's perfect plan. The idea that humans ***did not see fit to acknowledge God*** points to arrogance and ignorance. Again, Paul noted that God delivered them over to ***a debased 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.

DESERVING DEATH (ROM. 1:32)

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.

VERSE 32

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 His ***righteous decree*** 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.

Why is God justified in judging all sin?



IN MY CONTEXT

- God reveals Himself in His creation.
- Rejecting God’s truth leads to darkness and foolishness.
- Rejecting God leads to devaluing life.
- Refusing to honor God justifies a sentence of death.

In what ways have you been blinded to sin? How did you realize your need for God? How can you help others realize their need for God?

Where is darkness at work in your community? How can you help bring God’s light to those places?

List some people you know living under God’s death sentence today. How can you and your Bible study reach those individuals with the gospel?

Prayer Needs
