

Bad News

Romans 1:18-2:29

The Main Problem

❑ In Romans 1:17, Paul writes “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed.” This is the good news! However, in the next verse he writes, “The wrath (anger)¹ of God is being revealed” (1:18). Read Romans 1:18-23.

1. Why is the wrath of God being revealed? What is the main problem? (1:21)²



❑ Failure to honor and thank God leads to futile thinking and foolish, darkened hearts (1:21).³ People have exchanged God for other things. Paul mentions idols in the form of man and other creatures (1:23), but the principle extends to anything that displaces the true God.

2. In our world today, what types of things have displaced the true God? What do people “worship?” What are people devoted to? What do people rely on, or trust in?⁴

❑ The Bible says that people (*all* people) are “without excuse” (1:20). Every single person is accountable to God for his or her attitude toward Him.

3. Why are all people “without excuse?” (1:19-21)⁵ What does 1:20-21 mean?



The Bad Consequences

❑ Read Romans 1:24-32. The words “exchanged” and “God gave them over to” are repeated. People “exchanged:” worship of the true God for the worship of idols (1:23); the truth of God for a lie (1:25); natural relations for unnatural ones (1:27).⁶ Therefore, God “gave them over to:” sexual impurity (1:24); shameful passions (1:26); and a depraved mind⁷ (1:28).

¹ ‘God’s wrath’ is a just, pure and holy anger against unrighteousness and evil. While God is ‘compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love’ (Psalm 103:8), His wrath brings serious judgment that should be feared.

² Simply put, people do not glorify (honor) God as God. They ‘suppress the truth’ (1:18) and fail to acknowledge God as the Creator and Source of every good thing; thus they fail to give thanks to Him (1:21).

³ Proper honor of God is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. See Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, 15:33; and Psalm 111:10.

⁴ People have exchanged worship of the Creator for worship of created things. Besides man-made idols, people have worshiped the moon, stars and planets. Today, people have displaced the Creator God with ‘Mother Earth.’ Many worship false gods. Others consider religion to be foolish, but they have their own ‘gods’ – position, status, money, possessions, education, etc. Many put their trust in man (a created thing) who will supposedly solve all the world’s problems through education and science. Paul says, ‘Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools’ (1:22).

⁵ This passage speaks of ‘general revelation,’ which is God’s revelation to all persons at all times and in all places. God reveals himself through nature, history, and human consciousness (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20, 2:14-16). Through general revelation, God’s ‘invisible qualities’ can be ‘seen’ and ‘understood’ in a limited way. Of course, some people deny such evidence of God. See ‘Does Nature Speak?’ (PDF including footnotes) on the ICF website. Though people may deny evidence of God’s existence, the evidence exists, and people are accountable to God.

⁶ ‘unnatural’ (*para physis* – against nature) – violation of God’s created natural order reflective of His purposes.

1:26-27 is one of several Bible passages that speak directly against homosexual practice – a big issue in our time.

⁷ A ‘depraved mind’ is a mind disqualified from being able to understand and acknowledge the will of God. Thus they ‘do things that should never be done’ (1:28, NLT). They are filled with wrong attitudes and actions (1:29-32).

4. What does it mean that God “gave them over” to these things?⁸

- ❑ The “wrath of God is being revealed” by God’s “giving them over” to the degrading cycle of sin. Furthermore, this sin leads to death.⁹ This is “bad news.” But there’s “good news” ahead!

Reflection/Application

- If you are not a believer, deeply consider the things called “general revelation.” Consider the beauty, wonder and design of nature. Consider your moral consciousness. Consider the deepest desires of your heart (e.g., meaning, purpose, peace and joy). Critically examine the factors affecting your unbelief and be willing to respond to God’s revelation.
- As a Christian, verses 18-32 should motivate you to share the good news. Are you doing it?

You Too!

- ❑ In Romans 1:18-32, Paul speaks of “they.” As chapter 2 begins, Paul switches to “you” (2:1). “They” refers mainly to Gentiles (non-Jews) – those who had received “general revelation.” “You” (in chapter 2) refers mainly to Jews, who had received “special revelation.”¹⁰ Jews had “the Law” to instruct their lives. These verses could also speak to “moral Gentiles.”¹¹
- ❑ When Jews and so-called moral people read 1:18-32, they would probably say, “Yes, those pagans have no excuse. They deserve God’s judgment!” However, what does Paul say?
 - 📖 “You...have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for [when] you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you...do the same things” (2:1).
 - 📖 “All who sin apart from the law [of Moses] will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law” (2:12, *NIV*).
 - 📖 “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves,¹² even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” (2:13-15, *ESV*).
- ❑ Romans 2 obviously applies to self-righteous, hypocritical people. What about people who “obey the law?” Can people do enough “good things” to avoid God’s judgment? As we will see, the answer is ‘no.’ That is bad news. However, there is good news ahead in Romans!

Reflection/Application

- As a “Christian,” read Romans 2 and consider how the principles might apply to you. Reflect on your attitudes toward others, your example, and the basis of your relationship with God.¹³

⁸ God’s actions are similar to a judge who hands over a criminal to the punishment his crime has earned. People have already rejected God and chosen sin, so God gives them over to the degrading cycle of sin.

⁹ Verse 32 indicates something else that God has revealed. Wrong actions (such as those listed in 1:29-31) deserve death. ‘Death’ is not just physical, but spiritual. Spiritual death is separation from God, who is the Source of life.

¹⁰ ‘Special revelation’ is God’s revelation to particular persons at definite times and places. In particular, the Jews had the Scriptures (the written record of God’s special revelation).

¹¹ In 2:17, it is clear that Paul is addressing Jews, but 2:1-16 can be extended to a more general application.

¹² This refers to the innate sense of right and wrong in humans, attested by the conscience (however imperfect).

¹³ We are not righteous in God’s sight because our ethnic or family background, church attendance, religious rituals, Bible study, or our good works. We cannot earn it! Our relationship with God is not based on mere outward appearance. It is an inward work of the Spirit (2:28-29). It is by God’s grace, received through faith. At the same time, we should avoid hypocrisy and the dishonoring of God’s name (2:17-24). This too is by God’s grace.