

## Romans 1:18-32 Answers When God Gives Up

**Background:** Paul did not start the church in Rome but he was excited about going there to encourage the church, to be encouraged by the church and to preach the gospel to the lost.

**Themes:** Since Paul had never been to Rome, one of his purposes in writing was to lay out for them the gospel that he preached. Rome had potential to be an important base of operations and support for Paul. It was important to be sure that Paul and the Romans were on the same page regarding the gospel.

**Overview:** Romans has 16 chapters and 5 sections: Sin, Salvation, Sanctification, Sovereignty and Service. Today we begin the first section, Sin. In particular, the Sin Section deals with the purpose of the Law of Moses and the possibility of being right with God by obeying the Law.

**Review: Based on 1:16-17, how can a person get the God's power for salvation?** It is for everyone who believes. Righteousness comes by faith. It is *sola fide*. Evidence that a person has experienced the power of the gospel for salvation is that he will respond in faith to the truth of the gospel.

-----

**\*\*\*\*Romans 1:16-17 speaks of God's power for salvation. What is it that we need salvation from (1:18-23)?** We need salvation from the wrath of God upon us for our sinfulness (1:18). It has been said that the hard part in evangelism is not getting people saved, it is getting them lost. People simply do not believe they are under the wrath of God. There is little conviction of sin. God has been reduced to a slightly out of touch benign grandfather figure who dotes over people, who is never ever critical and who greatly appreciates any spare time you can give Him.

ESV **Psalm 2:12** Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

**1. What exactly is wrath (1:18)?** The Greek word is *orgé* which in humans is an internal emotion, an agitation of the soul. It carries the idea of anger or indignation. It can also refer to the punishment itself resulting from the anger (Thayer #3709). Wrath is the divine reaction to evil. With God wrath has to do with anger and judgment more so than an emotion (BAGD, p. 579). Wrath is the permanent attitude of God toward sin. God's wrath is as permanent and consistent as His love (NBD, p. 1262).

God and sin are like light and darkness. The two cannot co-exist. The presence of light immediately drives away darkness.

**True or False:** “The Old Testament God is a God of wrath but the New Testament God is a God of love.” This is patently false. This false idea caused liberal commentator William Barclay to identify with the little girl who said, “Mummy, I love Jesus but I hate God” (Barclay, *Discovering Jesus*, p. 55). Both testaments reveal the same God. The flip side of God’s love is His wrath.

ESV **John 3:36** Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

**Word Study:** “Revealed” (1:18) is from *apokalupto* (apocalypse) and means to uncover or to disclose. The idea is that sin will not be overlooked; God’s wrath will be revealed against it (Rienecker, p. 349). The fact that God’s wrath is revealed from heaven is stated in 1:18. How it is revealed is explained in the verses that follow.

**Righteousness and Wrath:** According to 1:17, the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. According to 1:18, the wrath of God is also revealed from heaven. Every person will ultimately experience one or the other. Which do you want?

**Word Study:** The Greek underneath ungodliness (1:18) is *asebeia* and refers to a lack of reverence toward God. It is impiety. The *a* means no and *sebo* means respect (Thayer #763). It describes someone who has no respect for God, who does not worship God. The NIV has godlessness.

**Word Study:** unrighteousness (1:18) is from *adikia*, literally not righteousness. It is the idea of injustice (by a judge) and unrighteous deeds or actions. The NIV renders this as wickedness.

**What one example of unrighteousness did Paul cite in 1:18?** The example given is the suppression of truth by unrighteousness.

**When Paul wrote that men suppressed the truth (1:18), which truth did he have in mind (1:19-23)?** (*Reread 1:19-23*). They suppressed the truth about God, exchanging the truth about God for idols. This is a key, bedrock sin. It is not living up to what we know about God.

**2. According to 1:19, why is God’s wrath against those who suppress the truth about God?** The sentence starts with “for” (1:19), indicating a reason why their suppression of the truth was so serious: God plainly made known to them what He is like. They have no excuse. Sometimes people say, “I think God is trying to tell me something” as if God were a poor or ineffective communicator. If God decides to tell you something, there won’t be any doubt about it! God’s wrath is against those who suppress the truth that He has made known to them.

**3. According to 1:20, what media (radio, TV, newspaper, etc.) did God use to make known his eternal power and divine nature? See Psalm 19:1.** God used the created order around us (nature). This is called natural revelation. This revelation goes back to the beginning of time (since the creation of the world). The Bible never bothers to try to prove God's existence. The creation of the world is proof enough of a Creator. The fool says in his heart that there is no God.

ESV **Psalm 19:1** The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

**4. How can invisible attributes be clearly perceived (1:20)?** They can be perceived through nature. Similarly, we cannot see wind but we can see its effects.

**5.** In electronics, surge suppressors (MOVs, transorbs, gas filled discharge tubes) are good things. **What declaration is made about truth suppressors in 1:20?** They are without excuse. The Greek is *anapologétos*; *a* mean no; *apo* means off and *logos* means talk. In an apology one talks off the offense he has made. To be without excuse means there is no way to talk off the charges. You are without "defense, inexcusable" (Thayer).

Man is without excuse. God's wrath has come, is coming and will come upon man for his sins.

**6. Did this truth suppression take place way back in ancient history or is it still going on today (1:18-20)?** Yes! It happened back when Adam and Eve were alive and it is still happening today. The verbs in 1:18-20 are in the present tense; it is an on-going suppression.

**History:** Adam and Eve had spoken with God in person. They had lived in the Garden of Eden. After the Fall, Adam and Eve had many children and grandchildren, etc. They lived around 900 years. They No doubt they told their descendants about the true God. Yet these people rejected that testimony. They did not listen. They suppressed the truth. They because so wicked that God totally destroyed their world by the Flood. Afterwards, the only people left were Noah and his family. They knew God. They spoke with God. Doubtless they told their descendants about the true God. Noah lived 350 years after Flood. His sons lived longer than that. Yet as before people did not listen to Noah; they suppressed the truth and worshipped idols. So too after Abraham; his descendants (the Jews) fell into idolatry. So too today people suppress the truth of God revealed in nature and the Bible.

**Did these men know God in a saving way or in some other way (1:21)?** They obviously did not know God in a saving sense, but in the sense that they knew truth about God, that He exists and about his invisible attributes.

**Although they knew God, what did they not do (1:21)?** They did not honor him as God or give thanks to Him.

**Word Studies:** These men went from knowing about God to having futile thinking and darkened hearts (1:21). Futile is from *mataloó* and means vain, empty, useless. Foolish is from *asunetos*; *a* means no and *sunetos* mean intelligent; thus without understanding

**7. Why would people suppress the truth about God (1:12)?** People loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. They had become futile in their thinking and had darkened hearts. They have heart trouble!

**ESV John 3:19-20** . . . this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

**8. Although claiming to be wise, what foolish trade did men make (1:21-23)?** (*Reread*). They exchanged the glory of God for idols, 1:23.

**Word Study:** Fools (1:22) is from *moraino* (transliterated moron). The root *momos* means blame, disgrace, blemish or insult (Thayer). Men are not lacking in intelligence, yet they are foolish in their rejection of God's lordship over their lives (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2159).

**9. What one word describes the sin of 1:23?** They committed idolatry. Idolatry seems to be sort of a root sin leading to many other sins. It is a failure to recognize God as God and substituting something else in His place. The *ESV Study Bible* states that modern idols don't look like ancient idols: idols today are mental rather than metal. People still devote their lives to, and trust in, many things other than God (p. 2459).

**ESV Matthew 6:24** No one can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve God and money.

**American Idol:** American idols include science ("I believe in science"), secularism, humanism, nationalism, naturalism, ecology, money, pleasure, sex, romance, entertainment, sports, education, prestige, power, rock singers, movie stars or great athletes (McArthur, *The Wrath of God*, p 83).

---

**\*\*\*\*How did God respond to the exchange of truth for a lie (1:24-25)?** God made a little exchange of His own: He gave them up to impurity. Impurity (1:24) is from *akatharsia*. Catharsis refers to cleansing; to be *akatharsia* is to be not clean in a moral sense. It is the impurity of lustful, profligate living.

**Word Study:** "lusts" (1:24) is from *epithumia*; *epi* serves as an intensifier and *thumia* (thermos) means hot; so hot heat, passion. Barclay it is the passionate desire for forbidden pleasure (p. 21).

**10. What is the difference between giving people up and giving up on people (1:24)?** If you give up on someone you just leave him alone. If you give someone up you are turning him in or turning him over to something else. God does not merely passively give up on people who commit idolatry; God actively gives them over to degraded passions.

**Credit Due:** The title of this lesson, When God Gives Up, was taken from chapter 2 of Warren Wiersbe's book, *Be Right*.

**11. How many times in 1:24-25 did Paul indicate the reason why God gave them up to impurity?** He indicated it twice, once by the word therefore (which refers back to the exchange of 1:23) and then again in 1:25 (because they exchanged the truth for a lie).

**God's Judgment:** Don't miss this point: Being turned over to sexual sins in general (lusts of the heart and the dishonoring of the body) is the active judgment from God for idolatry. A society consumed with sexual sins is a society under God's judgment.

-----

**\*\*\*\*To what unnatural depth will these dishonorable passions go (1:26-27)?** The dishonorable passions extend even to homosexual behavior.

**Changing Times:** "When we read Romans 1:23-32 it might seem that this passage is the work of some almost hysterical moralist who was exaggerating the contemporary situation and painting it in colours of rhetorical hyperbole. It describes a situation of a degeneracy of morals almost without parallel in human history. But there is nothing that Paul said that the Greek and Roman writers of the age did not themselves say" (Barclay, p. 23). The old commentaries (such as by John Brown or William Barclay) said 1:26-27 seem extreme but describe the unimaginable but common sins of Roman society. Sadly, it is now the common sin of Western society and not so unimaginable.

**12. Verse 26 begins with "for this reason"; for what reason?** See back to 1:24-25. The reason God gave them up is because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

**13. How is homosexuality described 1:26-27?** See also *Genesis 13:13, 18:20-21, 19:4-7, 13, Leviticus 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:8*. It is clearly sinful since it is in and of itself a judgment from God, it is a dishonorable passion, it is unnatural, it is contrary to nature and it is shameful.

**ESV Leviticus 20:13** If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination . . .

**ESV 1 Corinthians 6:9** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

**14. Based on 1:26-27, are some people just naturally born homosexual? Why?** It appears that a person would first have to commit the sin of idolatry before receiving the due penalty of being given up to dishonorable passions. On the other hand, it is also true that we are all born sinners with a sin nature, so it is possible some have a stronger predisposition to one sin over another.

**15. In 1:27, what is the error that received a due penalty?** Since homosexuality is a penalty for idolatry, I am of the opinion that the error is the error of idolatry and the due penalty is homosexuality. On the other hand, if the error is the homosexuality itself, then the due penalty is not stated (AIDS comes to mind as a penalty).

-----

**\*\*\*\*What else does God give people up to (1:28-32)?** God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

**Three Strikes:** In baseball, three strikes and you're out. This (1:28) makes the third time Paul stated that God gave people up to sin (1:24, 26). It is sort of like a spiritual Burger King where you "Have it your way" (except it is not a good thing).

**ESV Proverbs 26:11** Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.

**16. According to 1:28, why did God give people up to debased minds?** The reason given is since they did not see fit to acknowledge God. There is a cause and an effect.

**Example:** A similar effect is seen with Pharaoh, who at first hardened his own heart, then had his heart hardened by God.

**17. What does debased mean (1:28)?** Debased is from *adokimos*; *a* means not and *dokimos* mean to approve; thus, not approved, not standing the test, rejected, disqualified.

**"Not fit" & "debased":** The words "did not see fit" are from a Greek word for not, *ouk*, and the root *dokima*. It is the verb form of debased (*adokimos*). It is almost like Paul was saying they flunked God so he flunked them.

**According to 1:28, what does a debased mind do?** It does things that ought not to be done. Paul then went on to detail what some of those things are (1:29-31).

**What are some improper things a debased mind does (1:29-31)?** (*Reread aloud*). A debased mind is "filled" (1:29) with all manner of unrighteousness.

**18. What are to make of the fact that murder and hating God are in the same list with gossip and disobedience to parent (1:29-31)?** The point is that apart from Christ we are all sinners, all given up to depravity. Some of us are worse than others (Adolph Hitler versus Albert Schweitzer), but compare to God we all are deserving of God's wrath. You may not have committed sexual sins, but you are guilty of some of these other sins (1:29-31). Paul began by stating that's God wrath was revealed from heaven again "all" ungodliness (1:18).

ESV Romans 3:23 . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .

**19. According to 1:32, what is God's decree for those who practice such things?**

*Compare 6:23.* God's decree is death (both physical and spiritual).

ESV Romans 6:23 . . . the wages of sin is death . . .

ESV Genesis 2:17 . . . in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

**In 1:32, despite the fact that such things deserve the death penalty, what do people do?**

They not only practice the bad things themselves but give approval to others who practice them.

**George Orwell:** "The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those that speak it."

### So What?

**20. What root sin triggered God's wrath (1:18-32)?** The sin of idolatry, of suppressing the truth, brought on God's wrath. The consequence of idolatry is the moral disintegration of society (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2158).

**21. According to 1:18-32, exactly how does God reveal his wrath against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men?** God's wrath is evident in the fact He gave men over (1:24, 26, 28) to impurity, to dishonorable passions and to a debased mind.

**Note:** Homosexuality is not the bottom on the sin ladder. It is more debased than heterosexual sins, but any sin makes us deserving death.

**22. How does the truth of Romans 1:18-32 change your understanding of God?**

The Greatest demonstration of both God's love and His wrath was displayed at Calvary's cross. God loved us so much that He poured out His wrath for our sin on Jesus so that we will have life.

**23. What does Romans 1:18-32 teach about man?** In 1:16-17 Paul infers that both Jew and Greek need salvation from God's wrath. In 1:18-32 Paul explains what we and our ancient ancestors did to deserve God's wrath.

**Total Depravity:** The doctrine of total depravity does not mean we are as bad as we possibly could be. Indeed, there is relative good among men (as when a mother places herself between a vicious dog and her baby). Total depravity might be better thought of as radical depravity: sin has affected every aspect of our being (mind, will, emotions) to such an extent that left to ourselves we would never on our own chose Jesus, never submit to Jesus, never believe in Jesus, never worship Him as Lord.

**24. In light of Romans 1:18-32, why is it so important that salvation is by faith and not by works?** We are so wicked we could never earn our own salvation.

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at [www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF](http://www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF).

Stephen E. Atkerson  
www.NTRF.org  
05/18/14