

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND WRATH REVEALED TO GENTILES

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Introduction: The letter to the Romans is considered by many to be the premier letter of Paul's writings. It was written to the believers at Rome around 58 A.D. while Paul was staying at Corinth during his third missionary journey (Acts 20:2-3). There are at least four important purposes why God led Paul to write Romans. First, it was to instruct these and all New Testament believers about the fundamental doctrine of salvation (1:18-8:39). Second, it was to reveal that God had a future plan for Israel, His special people (Rom. 9-11). God loves people from all nations and will save those that love His Son, but He will manifest His grace in a greater way when He restores this nation that has rebelled against Him since the days of Moses. Third, it gives practical instructions for the conduct of a person that has been saved (12-16). Fourth, it solicited prayer support from the believers in Rome for Paul's anticipated visit to them and financial support for his subsequent western missionary journey (15:28-31). The theme of Romans is the righteousness of God through faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:16-17).

In Paul's introduction, he reveals three things about himself. First, he said that he was a debtor to the Greeks and non-Greeks, to the wise and to the foolish (1:14). Second, he was ready to preach the Gospel to those in Rome (1:15). Third, he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because it was the power of God, to grant the righteousness of God, to save all people by faith in the word of God (1:16-17). He began with hope for sinners before he dealt with despair for evil-doers that comes from sin.

Following his introduction and greeting, Paul began the first section of his logical presentation of the doctrine of salvation. First, he clearly proved that the actions of all people are inexcusable. (1:18-3:8); hence all are sinners in need of salvation (3:9-20). Second, he proceeded to reveal God's gracious and abundant provision of salvation from their dreadful spiritual condition by justification (3:21- 5:21). Third, he then explained how believers in Christ can be victorious over sin by knowing their new relationship to Him: they were crucified with Christ and then resurrected with Him to live a triumphant life in Christ. When Christ ascended to Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in all believers to give them the power to conquer all their sinful deeds done in the flesh (6:1-8:39).

In chapter one, Paul showed that Gentiles are under condemnation because they have rejected the revelation of God in nature (1:19-20). They have substituted the true pleasures of knowing and living with God for the deceitful pleasures of sin in the world (1:21-23). So, God has given them up to the desires of their depraved hearts. Their rebellion against God has earned for them the wrath of God (1:24-32; cf. 6:23).

I. Introduction to Romans — 1:1-17

A. Identification of the Author — 1:1-6

1. His official designation — 1:1

1:1 — Paul identified himself with three qualifying clauses which not only identified him but gave him authority to write this letter. First, he was the slave of Jesus Christ, more indebted to Christ than a servant. Christ bought him out of the slave market of sin with His own blood that He shed on the cross. Such love compelled Paul to preach the Gospel of Christ with boldness (2 Cor 5:14-15). Since he was bought at such a high price, Paul knew He would provide for all his needs and protect him until his work was finished. This is true for all believers. With deep gratitude, Paul served his Master to the best of his ability. Second, Paul was an apostle of Christ (one who is sent). To be Christ's apostle, one had to see Him and be sent by Him. When Paul was saved on the Damascus road, he saw Christ and was sent to the Gentiles (Gal 1:1, 15; Acts 9:15-16; 22:14-15; 26:16-18). Third, he was set apart to declare the Gospel of God (1 Cor 15:1-4). He was Christ's ambassador to reconcile sinners to God (2 Cor 5:18-20).

2. His scriptural responsibility — 1:2-6

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1:2 — He was responsible to clarify the Gospel of God and declare it. The Gospel was promised in the Old Testament Scriptures by the prophets, but it was not clear how God would do it (1 Pet 1:9-10). The suffering of Christ (Isa 53) and the rule of Christ (Zech 14:1-4, 9) were a mystery to them. Notice how Christ had to clarify the Gospel to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:25-32) and then to His chosen disciples gathered together with some others in Jerusalem (Lk 24:44-47). Now that the Gospel was clarified, it was to be declared with authority (Mic 4:2; Isa 40:9; Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

1:3-4 — The basis of the Gospel message is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The title, Son of God, refers to Jesus as the Messiah-king (Ps 2:6-7, 12; Lk 1:31-35). This title shows His eternal relationship to the Father; He has always been the Son of God. Jesus Christ also is the Son of David. He came in the flesh as a descendant of David which was predicted and fulfilled (Isa 11:1 — Jesse was David's father; Jer 23:5; Mt 1:1; 22:45; Jn 7:42). Notice the contrast between His humanity and His deity: He was made (born) in the flesh (v. 3), but He was declared to be the Son of God according to the spirit of holiness (1:4). His resurrection served as the basis to declare Him to be the Son of God with power (cp. Acts 2:36; Eph 1:20-23; Phil 2:9-11; 1Pet 3:21-22).

1:5-6 — It was through this exalted divine-human Son of God that Paul received grace (God's unmerited favor) and apostleship. He was commissioned as an apostle to bring the Gospel to all nations for Christ's sake. The believers at Rome (mostly Gentiles) were included in this group. They had been called by Jesus Christ and were resting in His salvation.

B. Identification of the Recipients — 1:7-15

1. Paul's characterization of them — 1:7

1:7 — Their physical location was in Rome. Their intimate relation to God was "beloved," which speaks of His tenderness. They were the recipients of God's love. Their spiritual responsibility, "called saints," made them responsible to be separated from evil and to be consecrated to God. Paul gave them the usual greeting. He desired God's grace (God's unmerited favor) to be bestowed upon them. He also wanted God's peace for them: the new relationship a believer can have with God (Rom 5:1). The source of these greetings was to be from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Paul's concern for them — 1:8-15

1:8-10 — In this section Paul indicates his interest in these Roman believers. He proves his love for them in a threefold manner. First, he thanked God for them because their faith was well-known throughout the Roman world (1:8). Note his thankfulness was through Jesus Christ and unto God. Second, his interest is proved by his incessant prayers for them (1:9). He even called God as his witness in this matter. His sincerity is demonstrated by the service he rendered to God. Third, his interest is manifested by his prayer to be able to visit, but it had to be according to God's will (1:10).

1:11-15 — Paul's desire to visit them was based upon spiritual motives. First, he wanted to impart to these believers some spiritual gift which would produce two benefits: strength for these believers in their Christian life and encouragement for himself (1:11-12). This spiritual gift was probably the unfolding of some doctrine and its practical application. Second, he wanted to have fruit among the Romans as he had in other parts of the Roman Empire. Fruit includes both the conversion of sinners and their subsequent sanctification. However, in spite of his desire, his plans had so far been hindered. Sometimes he was hindered by Satan but it was allowed by God (1 Thes 2:18) and at other times by the restraining power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6-7). Third, he realized his obligation was to preach the Gospel to the whole Gentile world (1:14). This obligation was placed upon him by God (1 Cor 9:16-17; Acts 9:15-16). The terms, "Greeks" and "Barbarians" refer to a language-culture division. The "wise" and "unwise" distinction deals with those who make good decisions and foolish decisions. Paul also was ready to preach the Gospel to those in Rome, the most powerful city in the western world.

C. Identification of the Subject — 1:16-17

Note: Paul here introduces the theme of his letter to the Romans. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God to save those that believe the promise of God to obtain the righteousness of God.

1. Attitude toward the Gospel — 1:16a

1:16a — Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because it had the power to change sinners into saints. How? Jesus Christ received all the sins of all people and shed His blood on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of all people. This satisfied the holy nature of His Father so He could declare sinners righteous when they received His Son's sacrifice (cf. 1 Jn 2:2). God made His Son the sin offering for our sins, Who had no sin of His own, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21). The righteousness of God is life, whereas the unrighteousness of sinners is death. Jesus said that He had come to give life to sinners and that they might have it more abundantly (Jn 10:10). This truth made Paul ready to preach the Gospel of Christ at Rome, the center of political power in his day. Rome depended on its army to rule the world. Romans thought it was foolish to think that a man who died as a criminal on a Roman cross was the source of power. Paul knew better. He knew the power of the Gospel had radically changed his life and the lives of many others, so he was not ashamed of it.

2. Application of the Gospel — 1:16b

1:16b — Sinners must apply the Gospel message to their lives to be saved. How? They must believe that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross paid the penalty of their sins. They must believe the power of God that raised His Son from the dead will give them eternal life.

John 1:12-13 says we are born into God's family by receiving His Son. We cannot be born again by "blood," that is, depending on our godly heritage; we must depend on Christ's shed blood to wash away our sins (Rev 7:14). Nor are we saved by "the will of the flesh"; our good works are like filthy, bloody rags to God (Isa 64:6). We are not born again by "the will of man," whether it be of a parent or friend. They can explain the Gospel and pray for God to convict us of our lost condition, but only God can save us when we receive His Son. He has done all the work for our salvation. It is God's gift of love to all people. Those who call on the Lord will be saved (Rom 10:13). When Jesus said, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30), He paid the full penalty for our sins. He could do it because He had no sin of His own (1 Jn 3:5). When Jesus was raised from the dead three days later, it proved His payment for our sins was sufficient. Now He gives us eternal life so we will never perish (Jn 10:28).

The sovereignty of God is revealed in three ways concerning salvation. First, He provided everything we needed for our salvation. He paid the penalty for our sins by giving His only Son to die for us (Jn 3:16). Second, He said we must repent of our sins (hate our sins) and reverently call on His Son by faith to save us (Joel 2:32; Rom 10:13). That is the only way that He will save us. If we do not receive His Son, we perish (Act 4:12; Jn 14:6; Rom 6:23). Third, He commanded all believers are to make it their business to declare the Gospel of Christ to lost sinners that we meet (Mk 16:15; Acts 1:8). We are in no position to speak about the sovereignty of God in salvation, if we are not obeying His sovereign command to witness. It would be foolish to listen to such a person talk about God's sovereignty when he does not obey God.

The Holy Spirit has a vital ministry in our salvation. He reproves (convicts) us of our sin, of God's righteousness, and of Christ's judgment, so we will come to Jesus Christ to be saved. Since Christ sent the Holy Spirit to convict us in these three areas, He expects to make a decision about His offer to save us. Some Christians say, if there is any hint of a human decision in salvation, it would weaken God's sovereign rule. They say God must elect us by His sovereign will, without our will, or He is not fully sovereign. However, the selfish will of Satan, bad angels, Adam and Eve, and Cain did not make God less sovereign, nor did the selfless will of good angels, Abel, Enoch, and Noah make God more sovereign. These Christians do not understand that God is exercising His sovereignty when He allows His created beings to make decisions for or against Him. That has been happening since He created angels and human beings. He will accomplish His will in spite of their decisions, good or bad. That

will bring more glory to Him than if He made all the decisions. So, the Spirit convicts us to lead us to repentance of sin and acceptance of Christ, but if it does not happen, God is still sovereign. He will consecrate those that receive His Son and will condemn those that reject His Son (Jn 3:16, 36).

The order in which the Gospel was presented to sinners was first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. This has reference to the spread of the Gospel message (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4, 8; 13:46). The Jewish leaders and their followers, that rejected Jesus as their Messiah, persecuted the Jews that received Jesus as their Messiah. This opened the door for the Gospel to be given to the Gentiles.

3. Ability of the Gospel — 1:17

1:17 — The Gospel of Christ is able to give us the righteousness of God. God is satisfied when we place our faith in Jesus' shed blood to pay the penalty for our sins and believe in His resurrection to give us eternal life and power over sin. When our faith is in the work of Jesus Christ, God declares us righteous (3:22, 24, 25, 28; 2 Cor 5:21). The Gospel of Christ is the only basis for God to justify us. We become new persons in Christ when we receive Him as Savior (2 Cor 5:17). This makes us saints instead of sinners and brings us into the family of God. Now we can come into His presence and call Him "Father." No human righteousness can do that. God's righteousness is imputed only to those that receive it by faith in Christ's death (10:3-4) and resurrection (10:9; Act 13:30-39). This righteousness reveals a mystery which had been hidden in God before He created the earth (16:25-26). God imputes His righteousness to us when we believe in our hearts that He raised Jesus from the dead after He paid for our sins by His shed blood. We show our faith in Jesus when we confess with our mouths that He is our Lord God (10:9-10).

"From faith to faith" — This is a difficult phrase which has been variously interpreted to mean that God's righteousness is entirely of faith (Unger); His righteousness is advancing from faith in salvation to faith in sanctification (Hoyt); it is "from faith," which starts with man's reception of God's righteousness, and continues "to faith" in his eternal possession of His righteousness (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown). Hoyt may have the best interpretation.

"The just shall live by faith" — Notice three key words in Hab 2:4: "just," "live," and "faith." We are justified by faith in Christ's sacrificial blood so we can live by faith in God's righteousness (3:21-26).

Paul presented the righteousness of God in the Gospel (1:16-17) before he revealed the wrath of God in judgment (1:18-3:20). In witnessing, we should speak of God's desire to save us before we tell them of God's wrath. We need to tell them that faith in the work of God's Son puts us on the road to Heaven, but love for the world and its lusts will keep them on the road that ends in Hell.

II. Condemnation of the Gentiles — 1:18-32

The wrath of God is revealed against our ungodliness (1:18). Paul deals with the unrighteousness of the Gentiles first (1:18-32), of the moralists next (2:1-16), and of the Jews last (2:17-3:20). Gentiles had a little access to the knowledge of God in their conscience and in His creation. They can learn of God's power and deity in the things He has made. But the Jews had much access to the knowledge of God in the Scriptures. However, both Gentiles and Jews have turned away from God's revelation of Himself and His plan for their lives. So, both Jews and Gentiles are under condemnation and deserve God's wrath (3:10, 19, 23; Jn 3:36).

A. God's Wrath Revealed — 1:18

1:18 — God's wrath against sin is being revealed in the world today. The world may call His wrath natural calamities, but the Bible declares that these calamities express His wrath against sin. When believers suffer, we are being disciplined as His children. It may not be known immediately why we suffer, as in the case of Job, but God has a reason that is for the good of His children. So, God disciplines His children, but does not discipline unbelievers; they are not His children (Heb 12:7-8). Unbelievers receive His wrath for their sin. It is not a passionate emotion against sin; it is a natural repulsion toward sin. His

nature is holy, absolute purity, so that it cannot tolerate any sin that is not removed by the blood of Christ. He is longsuffering with sinners, but must deal with a sinful act as well as a sinful attitude. God's wrath punishes sinners who hold on to their sins. His favor blesses sinners who repent and receive His righteousness through Christ. Those who believe on God's Son have eternal life, but those who do not believe on God's Son shall not have life, but the wrath of God abides on them (Jn 3:36).

"Ungodliness and unrighteousness" — "Ungodliness" refers to those who deny the existence of God or dismiss His rule in their lives. "Unrighteousness" refers to those who love their sins and refuse to give them up. They repress the truth. God cannot give them His righteousness until they turn away from all their known sins.

B. God's Wrath Required — 1:19-23

1. The sinner's repression of the truth — 1:19-20

1:19 — How have sinners repressed the truth that God revealed to them? They have done it in two ways. First, they repressed the truth God gave them in their conscience. He gave them a conscience when He created them in His image. Their conscience told them that God is holy and they could not come into His presence with their sin. So, they ignored their conscience and began to worship gods of their own making -- gods that did not have such high requirements.

1:20 — Second, they repressed the truth that God reveals through His creation. The amazing work that God did in creation shows His eternal power and deity. Since He made human beings in His image, they can hear and learn the truth. Their minds have been darkened by sin, but Jesus came to give them light (Jn 1:4-9). Jesus said they are responsible to learn from God when He teaches them (Jn 6:45). They are able to grasp the truth in God's creation and in their conscience. If they accept these truths about God, He will give them more truth, sometimes through visions and dreams, but preferably through the Scriptures until they hear the Gospel. Someone will ask, "What will happen to the heathen who have not heard the Gospel?" Instead the question should be asked, "Who is willing to go to the heathen and bring them the Gospel so they can hear it?" When they hear it, they can put their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. This is what happened to the man born blind, to the Ethiopian, and to Cornelius (cf Jn 9; Acts 8, 10).

Now let us consider the reason why most people repress the truth about God that they have been given from His creation and from their conscience. No doubt there are several reasons for repressing the truth about God, but here is one reason that comes from verse 23. Since He is invisible, they have repressed the truth about Him and worshipped idols that they could see. Some worshipped the sun and moon in the heavens. Others worshipped money, the cross, a popular person, or something else on earth. There are a number of other things that sinners have worshipped that they could see (cf 1:23). Some sinners repress the truth about His invisible nature in the opposite way: they say there is no God. The Spirit had David write: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps 14:1).

So, sinners are at fault when they suppress the truth about God and refuse to worship and glorify Him as their God, simply because He cannot be seen. It should be said at this point that God's creation does not reveal to people all that can be known about Him, but creation is the beginning place for faith in God before more light is given to them. Furthermore, creation does not show men how to be saved through faith in Christ; that takes special revelation through the message of the Gospel. Finally, it is imperative for believers to carry the Gospel to the unsaved in obedience to God's command to evangelize the world (Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15). As a result of their obedience, some have believed God's gift of salvation. They refused to suppress the truth about God that was revealed to them and they received His gift of salvation. God knew those who would believe before He laid the foundation of the earth and elected them (Eph 1:4; Rom 8:29-30). God is just in electing those whom He knew would receive the truth. He also is just in judging those who repress the truth about Him and refuse to believe. They are without excuse.

2. The sinner's response to the truth — 1:21-23

1:21-23 — These verses explain why unsaved sinners are without excuse: notice, they knew God. This truth is totally contrary to the human explanation for the diversity and evolution of religion. Paul clearly states that sinners have some knowledge of God but, in spite of that knowledge, they willfully refuse to acknowledge the truth about Him. So, they are not thankful for His goodness to them and they do not glorify Him (give praise to Him).

Since they refuse to acknowledge the truth that God has revealed to them, they become perverted in their religion. They become vain (empty) in their reasoning. Their heart is darkened and cannot see the truth. They pretend to be wise, but they are fools. They demonstrate their lack of wisdom by their wicked words and worthless works. They exchange the glory of the incorruptible God (immortal or imperishable) for mortal and finite things. Sinners have exchanged the incorruptible God for corruptible things (1:23). First, they made gods of men and women. Think of the gods of the Greeks and the Romans. They worshipped persons who had attained a higher rank than they had. It is much like those today who rise to the top in the entertainment world, the financial world, and the political world. They are worshipped because they want to be like them. Then sinners made gods of birds, beasts, and creeping things, which are lower than themselves. They make these gods to protect them and give them the things that they want. Think of the Egyptians in Bible times and of the Hindus in India. They want gods that will serve them. What a foolish exchange this is!

C. God's Wrath Realized — 1:24-32

1:24ff — God's wrath is now being realized in part upon wicked men who repress His truth. It is true His future wrath will be unleashed in the Tribulation (Rev 6-19) and His eternal wrath will be inflicted on them in the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:12-15; 21:8), but even in this life, God has turned them over to the natural consequences of their rebellion. The "wherefore" indicates that their repression of the truth that God revealed is now the basis for His wrath now being loosed on them. Paul indicates three stages of degeneracy.

1:24-25 — In the first stage of degeneracy, God turned them over to impurity of life caused by their lusts. This refers to adultery and other types of sexual immorality. Two reasons are cited for this. One, they exchanged the truth of God into a lie (truth that was known about Him by natural revelation). Two, they worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator. Paul then praised the Creator - God, Who is eternal.

1:26-27 — In the second stage of degeneracy, women and men turned to vile passions which included lesbianism and homosexuality. The terms used for men and women indicate animal conduct. The mention of the woman's sin first further shows the low state of degeneracy for she is usually considered the more pure. It seems worse when women degenerate to this level. This, however, was the natural result of their rejection of the knowledge of God.

1:28 — The third stage of degeneracy is a complete mental and intellectual disposition to do that which is reprobate. "Reprobate" means rejected. A mind that dwells on things that are rejected by God is unfit for any worthy action. This is the result when people willfully reject the knowledge of God.

1:29-31 — Paul then gives a series of the natural results of man's rejection of the knowledge of God. They were filled with all unrighteousness, that is, they were saturated with every sin known to man: fornication; moral perverseness; selfish greed; and all evil. This manifested itself in antisocial sins and an elevation of self. Even worse, these sinners commit their sins with pride. What a picture of the depravity of human beings!

1:32 — Not only do these wicked sinners know that they deserve the wrath of God and are worthy of death, but they also delight in others who join them in practicing these God-defying sins.