



## God's Righteousness & Man's Cycle of Self Destruction—Romans 1:16-32

TO: THE CAPITOL COMMUNITY

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*One of the traumas of life in the physical realm occurs when you are sick and don't really know what the problem is. Doctor's run test after test with no apparent answer. Your trauma continues because you don't know the problem and until you do, you cannot come to grips with it. So too in the spiritual world. Romans 5:12 tells us that the whole world is sick because of the sin of Adam. Even so, in the spiritual realm, men seem to ignore the problem. It is here that Paul takes us today in our study. But first, in two short verses, he presents the theme of Romans, and the cure for the sin sick soul of men.*

### 1. SHAMED—BUT NOT ASHAMED (ROMANS 1:16-17)

*<sup>NKJ</sup> Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*

**Query:** It is interesting that Paul would start out with the statement "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ..." Why does Paul need to make this statement? What prompts him to say this?

- A. Rome was the capital of the world. It was the seat of world culture and pride; the essence of pomp and power. Many there would consider themselves far too refined to listen to the words of a preacher regarding some itinerant Jew who died on a Roman cross. Perhaps Paul was thinking of the shame he would endure in such a culture as he spoke of Christ.
- B. Perhaps the opinion of the "so called" wise would bring shame. Even in Athens, the

academic center of thought and wisdom, his message was rejected with scorn. Would the same happen in Rome?

But Paul says **NO**. He will not be ashamed of the Gospel because, unknown to sinful man, this Gospel is the very power of God. Men need a savior; they need the Gospel; this very Gospel that Paul would preach!

There are at least eight reasons why Paul was **not ashamed** of the Gospel, and why we should not be ashamed of the gospel. Consider: **The Gospel is:**

1. **The "Good News."** The word *gospel* means "good news," and no rational person should be ashamed of a desirable proclamation.
2. **The way of salvation.** This is not just any salvation. It is about the saving of ourselves.
3. **God's Way of Salvation** not man's way. The Gospel is God reaching out to save perishing men and women, not sinners reaching out to seize God.
4. **The Power of God.** The word used here is *dunamis* which is the Greek word from which we get the term *dynamite*. The Gospel carries with it the omnipotence of God, whose **power** alone is sufficient to save men from sin and give them eternal life<sup>1</sup>
5. **A Gospel for Everyone.** It is for everyone—"everyone who believes." It is first for the Jew and then also for the gentile.
6. **Salvation Revealed to Sinners.** The Gospel is not something that we could have figured out ourselves. It was revealed by God.
7. **A Righteousness from God.** Man is incapable of perfect righteousness. The best he can do is a righteousness that is relative to man. This is an

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important point! God's righteousness and man's righteousness are two utterly different kinds of righteousness. They are different in genus, they are different in species, and they are different in source, aim, scope and quality. Anyone who thinks that human righteousness is just a lesser form of divine righteousness, (just slightly inferior to) but moving in the same direction, has failed to comprehend the very heart teaching of the Word of God<sup>2</sup>. (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

### 8. **By Faith from First to Last**<sup>3</sup>. "...from faith to faith: as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (17b)

Here is where many of us are vulnerable to error. We know salvation is *from* faith because we begin by simply embracing the good news of the gospel but then we go from faith to works. We think we have to mobilize, organize, and agonize over our spirituality.

"No," says Paul. "It's *from* faith *to* faith." The just shall live by faith. Faith is not only the starting point of your salvation—it's the staying power of your Christian walk. "Even as you received Christ," Paul would say to the Colossians, "so walk ye in Him" (see Colossians 2:6). "Oh foolish Galatians," he would write, "are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit are you now made perfect by the flesh?" (see Galatians 3:1–3). The just shall live by faith—faith in the finished work of the Cross, faith in the resurrected presence of Jesus Christ<sup>4</sup>.

As powerful as the Gospel is, there is one thing that it cannot do: it cannot save any man until that man sees himself as a guilty, lost, condemned sinner. Therefore, before he begins to talk about saving sinners, Paul takes a whole section of his letter to demonstrate that men need the Gospel. **This Gospel is a universal gospel for a universal need.**

We now come to revelation of the wrath of God by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the righteousness of God has been revealed, so too, is God's wrath. No one likes to teach on this subject, and yet not to do so, would be to marginalize portions of Scripture, which in itself, would lead to false teaching. This is a

dominant Bible teaching, and one that is directly in our way as we study Romans, so we must deal with it.

### II. **MAN'S CYCLE OF SELF-DESTRUCTION ROMANS 1:18-32**

We have looked at the introduction of Paul's letter, and now move to the first section (1:18-3:20), which discusses sin. An outline could be as follows:

- The Gentiles under sin (1:18–32)
- The Jews under sin (2:1–3:8)
- The whole world under sin (3:9–20)

Paul now discusses the Gentiles, and how they got into the awful darkness that engulfs them and how God's wrath was revealed against them. Notice the downward steps in Gentile History.

#### A. **THEY KNEW GOD (VV. 18-20)**

*<sup>NKJ</sup> Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,<sup>19</sup> because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,*

**Query:** God had given them a twofold revelation of Himself. Can you pick out the two ways He did it?

God clearly showed Himself via conscience ("in them") and creation ("to them"). Man did not begin with ignorance and gradually work his way up to intelligence; he began with a blazing revelation of the power and wisdom of God and turned his back on it. God has revealed Himself from the very time of creation, so that people who have never heard the Gospel are still without excuse.

#### B. **THEY GLORIFIED HIM NOT AS GOD (VV.21-23)**

*<sup>NKJ</sup> Romans 1:21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.<sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools,<sup>23</sup>*



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*and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.*

**Query:** What do you see as the culprit in their thought process?

Vain thinking and foolish reasoning turned men from the truth to lies. Indifference leads to ingratitude, resulting in ignorance. People today bow before the Greek and Roman philosophers and honor their words above the Word of God; but Paul calls all of these philosophies “empty imaginations” and “times of ignorance” (Col. 2:8; Acts 17:30).

### C. THEY CHANGED THE TRUTH OF GOD (VV24-25)

***NKJ Romans 1:24** Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,<sup>25</sup> who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

The word “changed” should really read “exchanged.” People replaced God’s truth with Satan’s lie! What is Satan’s lie? Worshiping the creature and not the Creator; worshiping man instead of God; worshiping things instead of Christ. Satan tempted Christ to do this in Matt 4:8-11. In Romans 1:18 the Gentiles “held down the truth,” and now they “exchange the truth” for a lie! The truth believed and obeyed sets us free (John 8:31-32); the truth rejected and disobeyed makes us slaves.

### D. THEY REJECTED THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (VV. 26-32)

***NKJ Romans 1:26** For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.<sup>27</sup> Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.<sup>28</sup> And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;<sup>29</sup> being filled with all*

*unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,<sup>30</sup> backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;<sup>32</sup> who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.*

These people had begun with a clear knowledge of God (vv. 19, 21) and His judgment against sin (v. 32); but now they reached the lowest level of their downward fall: they did not even want to have knowledge of God! “The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God”” (Ps. 14:1)

### III. THE REVELATION OF THE WRATH OF GOD

Even today we see the tragic results of this decline. No one outside of Christ is immune. Evolutionist would have us to believe that humans have “evolved” from primitive, ignorant, beast-like forms into the marvelous creatures they are today. Paul says just the opposite: man began the highest of God’s creatures, but he made himself into a beast! Note the three judgments of God on those outside of Christ.

- God gave them up to uncleanness and Idolatry, vv. 24-25
- God gave them over to vile passions, vv. 26-27
- God gave them over to a reprobate mind, vv. 28ff.

God gave them up! This is the revelation of the wrath of God (v. 18). The sins listed here are too vile to define or discuss, yet they are practiced today around the world with the approval of society. People know that sin will be judged, yet they take pleasure in it anyway<sup>5</sup>.

### IV. CONCLUSION/APPLICATION

Were it not for the Gospel of Christ, we would be in this slavery to sin ourselves. 2 Corinthians 9:15 seems an appropriate verse on which to end:

***NKJ 2 Corinthians 9:15** Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*



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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John, *The MacArthur New Testament commentary Romans 1-8*, (Moody, Chicago, ©1991) p51

<sup>2</sup> Barnhouse, Donald Grey, *Main's Ruin, Romans 1:1-32*, (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, ©1952) p180

<sup>3</sup> Boice, James Montgomery Boice, *Romans Volume 1* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, ©1991) p112-117 outline

<sup>4</sup> Courson, Jon, *Jon Courson's Application Commentary*, (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, ©2003) S869

<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W. *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*. (Victor Books, Ill. ©1997,c1992) S.364