



Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 2 – Who Needs the Gospel? | Romans Chapter 1:18–32

Our first session finished on a high note, with Paul saying that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. The good news is that anyone can be saved by putting their faith in Jesus. It really is amazing when you consider that God has given us this life-changing, eternity-altering relationship with Him when, in fact, the only thing we deserve is punishment for our sin. But to fully appreciate and share the good news, we need to acknowledge the bad news.

The church in Rome quickly discovered Paul's capacity to get to the root of a problem and waste no time doing it. Imagine these believers crowded into someone's house, hearing Paul's letter for the first time. They nod and smile as Paul commends them for their faith, blessed to hear that the preacher prays for them. He is anxious to visit, and for their part, they're happy for him to come. Then Paul's words take a serious turn and so does the mood. Listeners swallow hard at Paul's candid portrayal of sin. Some shift uncomfortably. A mother cups hands over her child's ears. Some piously shake their head at the tawdry description of *other* people's sins. With typical candor, Paul speaks directly to them in the next chapter. For now, he is just getting started but his objective is clear: *everyone* needs the gospel.

Icebreaker

"I have good news and bad news." Which would you rather hear first, and why?

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the reason for God's wrath and what that means for our world.
- Consider the consequences of exchanging truth for a lie.
- Pray authentic prayers that embrace the truth and live out the gospel.

What's the Problem?

Read Romans 1:18–32

Paul describes what happens when people willfully suppress the truth. After reading this passage, would you say the human condition has changed much from Paul's day to ours? Why or why not?

Paul takes a closer look at the root cause of rebellion against God.

1. These verses are difficult to read, and we can be sure Paul did not write them casually. Paul was not on a rant against people he didn't like—he was acknowledging our desperate need for the gospel (as stated previously in verse 16). In verse 17, Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 to make his point that rebellion against God was nothing new and righteous living will never happen apart from a saving faith in God.

a. *Why doesn't God do something?* In Habakkuk's day, Judah was on the brink of collapse. Israel's long pattern of rebellion was wreaking havoc in society. In Habakkuk 1:2–4, what did the prophet complain about to God?

b. God's answer must have astounded Habakkuk. Simply put, the situation would get worse before it got better. God's plan to deal with wickedness and make His people righteous went further than the frustrated prophet could see. God would address the sinful rebellion of humanity on a much bigger scale in *His perfect time* (see Habakkuk 2:2–4). In the meantime, God told Habakkuk, you need to trust Me and live by faith. God didn't ignore Habakkuk's complaint, He answered. Ultimately, what was Habakkuk's response? For help with your answer, read Habakkuk 3:2, 17–19.

c. Now back to Rome, in Paul's day. The world that Roman believers were living in was not so different, but Paul had good news! Jesus Christ came into this world of wickedness to give people a way—the *only* way—out of darkness into light. Paul wasn't ashamed and he didn't water down the reality that God holds every person accountable for their choice. What about now? Is our world much different? Why is the gospel still good news?

John 3:16–21

1 John 1:8–9

2 Corinthians 5:17

Good to Know

Says who? – This was Paul's first direct contact with the church in Rome. They knew of him through Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2; Romans 16:3) but Paul didn't rely on his reputation to persuade them. The weight of his words rested firmly on the foundation of Scripture. In fact, 35% of what Paul wrote in Romans are direct quotes or references to the Old Testament.

2. **The wrath of God.** One of the main ideas in Romans is that God does not tolerate or ignore sin. The wrath of God is not a popular topic, even in some churches. Wrath is a word that conjures up violent images of sinful, human anger—but God’s wrath is not vindictive, impulsive, or out of character with His righteousness and love. Let’s consider what we need to understand about God’s wrath.

a. There will be a future “day of God’s wrath” when those who don’t repent will be punished and those who have believed will be spared from God’s wrath (see Romans 2:5–10).

But the wrath that Paul is talking about in verse 18 is God’s expressed anger toward unbelief and sin during the present time. What makes God angry? Use verses 18–25 for help and answer in your own words.

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

“**wrath**” (orgé) Divine judgment; God’s settled and just response to the violation of His righteous standard.

“**glorify**” (doxazo) Esteem; give honor to; recognize God for who He is and what He does.

“**suppress**” (katécho) Hold back or hold down; to deliberately silence, withhold, or restrain.

“**debased**” (adokimos) Unworthy; corrupt; degenerate; detestable to God.

b. Paul used two words to identify what would motivate a person to *suppress* the truth. A basic definition helps to show how one leads to the other and perpetuates a cycle of unbelief. Add your thoughts to the definitions below and give some examples of what this might look like in daily life.

Ungodliness (attitude): Neglect towards, and lack of reverence for, God.

Unrighteousness (actions): Disregarding what is right; doing what is wrong.

c. As believers, we still have a human inclination to explain away truth that is difficult or that we would rather avoid. What guides and guards us from suppressing truth?

Psalms 119:9–11

Proverbs 4:23–27

2 Timothy 3:16–17

3. In what way does creation reveal something about God's eternal power and divine nature? List some things that are evident about God by observing nature.

a. Can you count the stars? Two thousand years before Paul, God took Abraham outside to look up at the night sky (see Genesis 15:1–6). If you could ask Abraham what an attempt to count stars taught him about God that night, what might his answer be?

b. One thousand years before Paul, David was so inspired by God's genius for detail, beauty, and power in creation that he wrote a song about it (see Psalm 19). Also consider the scriptures below and briefly explain what creation can teach us about God if we will take time to listen, observe, and think.*

Psalm 8:3–4

Psalm 139:3–16

Isaiah 55:8–11

Matthew 6:26–30

c. Nature itself speaks of its Creator. Evidence of God's existence and character in nature (the term for this is general revelation) is all around us. Instead of acknowledging God, what other things do people choose to worship? In what way? Use verses 20–25 for help with your answer.

People will look at something as intricate and amazing as the human body or creation around us and say it all came about randomly. The Bible says, "Only fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 53:1).

Greg Laurie
Harvest Daily Devotion
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* If you want to look more at what creation reveals about God, read the dialogue in Job 38–41 and Job's final answer: "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted...I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You. Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:2, 5–6 NASB).

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.
Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.
Psalm 19:1–2 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Observing God’s creation is good for your soul. When you’re out in nature, where are you likely to feel closest and most drawn to worship God?

What’s the Solution?

Romans 1:24–32

When people fail to acknowledge and obey their Creator, navigating life becomes a search for truth with a broken compass.

1. What repeated phrase describes God’s response toward rebellious individuals who reject truth and persist in sinful living? Read verses 24, 26, and 28 for help with your answer.
 - a. Does this mean that God is passive or disinterested in people who reject Him? Do your best to explain why, or why not.

Consider the following verses for help with your answer.

Isaiah 55:6–7

Luke 19:10

2 Peter 3:9

- b. God does not violate a person’s free will, even if they choose to reject Him. But when people cut themselves off from their Creator and exchange truth for a lie, what do they consign themselves to?

Ezekiel 18:4

John 3:36

2. “Sin is not a trifle—it’s a terror.”¹ How do we define right from wrong? Paul traces what happens when people (as individuals and as a society) reject God and choose their own way instead. In effect, God allows the downward spiral of sin to be its own punishment.

a. **Futile thoughts and foolish hearts** (verses 20–23). When God is removed, humans come up with their own answers and explanations about life. Use a dictionary to define *futile* and *foolish*.

b. **Exchanged the truth of God for a lie** (verses 24–27). Reading this passage in the climate of our culture can be difficult. Not for lack of clarity—but because it *is* clear. Paul ties previous comments on idolatry (rejecting the Creator to seek satisfaction elsewhere) with unrestrained sexual impurity. Homosexuality, Paul says, is a stark depiction of this. Our world, and even some in the church, take issue with this. But the Bible is clear, and the gospel is not silent about calling people to forsake sin.

As society continues to shift the moral and ethical boundaries, we are being pressed to know what we believe and believe what we know. This is a good thing, but speaking the truth is sometimes uncomfortable. What is necessary when we speak truth?

Colossians 4:5–6

1 Peter 3:15–16

2 Timothy 4:1–5

It’s been said that truth without grace is *mean*—and grace without truth is *meaningless*. For you personally, what aspect of speaking truth needs development? In what way?

c. **Debased minds and wicked living** (verses 28–32). If anyone is inclined to think that God finds certain sins more offensive than others, Paul corrects that. God fiercely hates *all* sin. Read these verses several times and note which behaviors are:

Socially acceptable in our culture . . .

Tacitly tolerated and/or practiced by some believers . . .

Easily overcome with a little time and effort . . .

Have affected you personally in some way . . .

Cherished enough for you to say “no” to God over . . .

“Sin is a disease that affects the entire human race. Our sinful nature often sides with the devil’s lie instead of God’s truth because we are sinners.

To those involved in this dying world, Satan will come with evil’s undiluted power to deceive, for they have refused the truth which can save them.

They see truth as a lie, and the lie as the truth.”

Billy Graham
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¹ James MacDonald, *10 Choices: A Proven Plan to Change Your Life Forever*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2008), p.42.

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* When we spend time thinking, observing, and seriously considering the outcome of living (and dying) guilty before God, the power of the gospel is good news all over again. No wonder Paul declared, “I am not ashamed of the gospel!”
 - a. God’s wrath is incentive to live a holy life. Not because we fear punishment but because we aim to be well pleasing to God (2 Corinthians 5:9). Are you willing to ask God to make you uncomfortable with a particular sin? Why or why not?
 - b. God’s wrath is incentive to share the gospel, knowing that everyone must answer for our response to Jesus. “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord,” Paul wrote, “we persuade others” (2 Corinthians 5:11). Who needs to hear *and see* the gospel lived out from you? Write down one person you will specifically pray for and reach out to this week.



Gospel at a Glance: Righteous Anger | Because God is holy, He hates sin. “Your eyes are too pure to behold evil,” Habakkuk wrote. “You cannot look on wickedness” (Habakkuk 1:13). This is why, when all the sin of the world was transferred onto Jesus during His crucifixion, God the Father turned away (Matthew 27:46). Jesus took the full brunt of God’s righteous anger and judgment that we deserved. Because God is just, there is a penalty for sin. Because God is loving, there is a Savior who died in our place. Do you want to see God’s wrath? Look to the Cross. Do you want to see God’s love? Look to the Cross.

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

