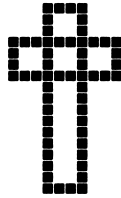


THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

The Book of Romans Study Guide | Part 1

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Righteousness and Wrath Revealed

Romans 1:16–20

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Big Idea: The gospel reveals more than a story; the person and attributes of God are made known through the events described in the gospel message.

Opening Questions:

- According to this text, what does the gospel reveal?
- Do you think revelation is received or discovered?
- In what other ways are God’s attributes made known?

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Going Deeper

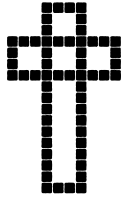
Note Paul's developing argument throughout this chapter: he is eager to preach the gospel to the Romans (v. 11) because he is unashamed of the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation (v. 16). However, here the gospel is a message that communicates more than sentimental stories or personal insights. Rather, it reveals the person and attributes of God. The gospel Paul is eager to deliver is, in part, the mighty works of God that reveal both his righteousness and wrath (v. 17, v. 18; exemplified in Acts 2:11–36).

The gospel is an actualizing proclamation. It reveals the righteousness of God in its message, and through its divine power transforms its hearers into righteous — “obedience of faith” — Christians (v. 17; see v. 4–5). Therefore, salvation is that byproduct of the divine power demonstrated in the gospel events and transmitted through its message, namely, the personal application of Jesus' multi-faceted redeeming work (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21; 2 Timothy 1:8–12).

While the righteousness of God has capacity to transform, Paul also affirms that it has the right to condemn (v. 18–19). Whenever God is known (revealed) two consequences follow: salvation or judgment. According to this text, God's righteousness is upheld in justifying the repentant sinner, or in exposing the unrepentant self-righteous. There is no excuse, then, that God's wrath is the consequence when God's self-disclosure is rejected and suppressed (v. 20). The gospel message reveals the very person of God, establishing between man and his Creator a new relationship of redemption or condemnation (cf. Ephesians 2:1–3; Colossians 1:13–14; Romans 5:6–11).

So What?

- The gospel message is truly good news. Jesus' death and resurrection is powerful to bring about death-defying, sin-cleansing, curse-reversing salvation in otherwise hopeless individuals, such as ourselves. Yet, how can we subtly make the gospel message less than what it is? How can we be tempted to minimize the significance of what is revealed in the gospel?
- The gospel is genuinely hard news. The righteousness of God justifies the unrighteous and exposes the self-righteous. Are there occasions where we may be tempted to shy away from or be ashamed of the consequences of gospel proclamation? What fears come to the surface when reflecting on how others may respond to the gospel message? And in turn, how can we balance the good and hard news of the gospel when sharing it with others?



The Insanity and End of Sin

Romans 1: 21–32

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of

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evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

“A fish absorbs oxygen from water, not air, so it's free only if restricted to water. If 'freed' from water and put on grass its freedom to move and live is destroyed. Freedom isn't the absence of restrictions, it's finding the right ones. What is 'water' to a human being? ...” This is a quote, possibly, from Tim Keller. Augustine of Hippo also said that every human being has a “God shaped hole” that can only be filled with God. The trouble that we see in Romans 1:21ff is that mankind in his sinful (broken) condition did not honor, give thanks to, or acknowledge Him. The outcome is breakneck speed of a downward spiral of chaos and disorder and brokenness. Man cannot exist outside of being the image bearer of God to represent Him. However, man's futile effort to represent himself apart from who God made him to be has led mankind to do and become all that is wrong in the eyes of God.

Big Idea: When God is out, everything breaks.

Opening Questions:

- What does it mean when we say that we are born in sin? Are we sinners because we sin or do we sin because we are sinners?
- How pervasive is sin? If men are born in sin, is there a place in the very fiber of human makeup that is absent or neutral of sinful influence?
- How long has the history of the world been affected by the very sin that plagued Adam and Eve? Is there any glimmer of hope of this world becoming what God has originally intended apart from God's intervention?

Going Deeper

The Apostle Paul unashamedly preached the gospel because: 1. It is the power of God and 2. There is great urgency because of the wrath of God. In our passage, Paul forensically explains why mankind is in such horrible shape. Sin has deceived man to think that “a fish can actually live out of water.” Sinful man's mindset has been transfixed on autonomy (in other words, free from God and his sovereignty), not knowing that this is a futile effort and a self-destructive work. Paul speaks as

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a matter of fact that mankind knows God (cf. 1:19–20). However, a treasonous act was committed against God by mankind in the following way: 1. They did not honor him as God; 2. They did not give thanks to him; 3. They actively chose the lie rather than the truth that they already knew about God. In summary, mankind simply did not acknowledge God.

The outcome couldn't be graver: 1. Men became futile in their thinking and their hearts were darkened; 2. Men became foolish while claiming to be wise; 3. God lifted the restraint and allowed men to become enslaved to their own lusts and whatever their darkened hearts would desire.

The outward expressions are as follows: 1. Worship of everything, BUT God (v. 23), which is a worship of self; 2. Perversion of sex (vv. 26–27) by seeking to distort and destroy God's design for marriage (Genesis 2) which is a representation of triune God; 3. Other hosts of evil (vv. 29–31) by searing the conscience to do what ought not to be done; 4. Celebration and exaltation of sin (v. 32) by giving hearty approval of those that flaunt and propagate sin.

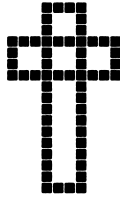
So What?

Since this section of Scripture is written in third person plural (they), we can easily detach ourselves from it and look at the passage from a spectator's point of view. However, we all were once dead in our trespasses and sin (Ephesians 1–3). Our lives from one degree or another were no different at the core. The expression of our sinful condition may not have been as egregious (in human terms), but we (like the rest) were walking spiritual zombies and in our hearts we sought for autonomy and for our own sovereignty from God.

If we are truly honest, we (more than we would like to admit) still struggle with our desire for sovereignty and it shows every time we struggle to believe God's Word that leads us to obedience. Our true freedom is found when we completely surrender to the very wisdom of God through our willing submission to his Word. We need to live within the confines of God's Word (a holy restriction), or we will be like fish out of water and such "freedom" will destroy us.

Prayer Focus

Father, it must be such a sad picture for you to see us in our futility struggling to build our proverbial Tower of Babel over and over again. Forgive us for striving not



Judgment

Romans 2:1–19

¹Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ²We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

⁶He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸but for those who are self-seeking[a] and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹For God shows no partiality.

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¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ 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 ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,

Big Idea: Those who judge hypocritically will be exposed by God's impartial judgment.

Opening Questions:

- Read 2 Samuel 12:1–12 and Amos 1–2 and draw a comparison between these Old Testament prophets and the approach Apostle Paul has in Romans Chapter 2 with arrogantly religious Jews. What does this reveal about the nature of sin? How does this bolster Paul's argument of our need for the gospel?
- Paul rebukes the judgments of hypocrites who stand guilty of that which they accuse others of doing. Read Proverbs 27:6, Proverbs 9:8b, and Galatians 6:1–2. Identify how Christians should make judgments and confront the sin in other Christians.
- Read Romans 2:6–11. What is the basis of God's judgment? Why does this condemn us? What do our deeds reveal? Compare the vocabulary of verses 7–8 with Chapter 1:21–23.
- How does Paul emphasize God's justice and impartiality in judgment? What difference does it make, having or not having the Law? Why will the outcome be the same either way?

Going Deeper

In the latter half of Chapter 1, Paul had been addressing the Gentile part of his audience. However, in Chapter 2, he pivots and addresses the Jews in the church. Paul is wise and knows their temptation to gloat in their “people of God” status. In this diatribe, Paul will outline the certainty of God’s judgment coming for those who would judge partially and hypocritically, since God’s righteous judgments are impartial and surely coming.

Paul’s rebuke isn’t because people judge. The Bible absolutely directs us to judge properly, exhibiting all the fruits of the Spirit. Paul’s rebuke is because they judge hypocritically. The problems of hypocrisy are all around us. It’s not so much that Christians fail or sin, it’s that they pretend that they don’t. They’re inauthentic and unwilling to admit they’re not really who they say they are. Hypocrites are frauds and imposters — people who live a lie. God sees the heart and will judge accordingly.

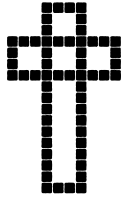
When Paul says in verse 6, “[God] will render to each one according to his works”, he isn’t promoting works salvation. Paul’s point is this: external practices of religion do not equal inward transformation. And on the final day of judgment, God will judge the motives of the heart where inward works reside — beyond outward performance of religion to inward motivations. Some works that look good on the surface are not really going to look that good when the motives for why they are done are revealed. Just because a work looks good doesn’t mean that it is good. God is never going to judge someone simply by their external actions — he sees down to the heart.

On the other hand, we need to remember that our works show the reality (or non-reality) of what we believe. There are two things that declare what we believe: our mouth and our heart. If they disagree, God takes the testimony of our lives every single time!

So What?

What does a life declare about one’s belief in, and surrender to, Jesus? Go back and look at verses 7 and 8.

In verse 7, Paul provides two indicators of a heart truly right with God. First, patiently living in a godly way has become a persistent life pattern. Second, the rhythm of doing good causes one to seek God’s glory, honor, and immortality



No One is Righteous

Romans 3:1–20

¹Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ²Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,

*“That you may be justified in your words,
and prevail when you are judged.”*

⁵But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

⁹What then? Are we Jews[a] any better off?[b] No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ *no one understands;*

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no one seeks for God.

¹² *All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.”*

¹³ *“Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.”*

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

¹⁴ *“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”*

¹⁵ *“Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

¹⁶ *in their paths are ruin and misery,*

¹⁷ *and the way of peace they have not known.”*

¹⁸ *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

¹⁹ *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being[c] will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

Big Idea: Since everyone has sinned, both Jews and Gentiles, everyone needs to be justified. Every sinner needs the gospel of the righteousness of God.

Opening Questions:

- Today’s culture and society champion a person’s discovery of being true to themselves. What does it mean to be true to yourself? What do you think you can discover if you accomplish such a pursuit without God?
- In what ways does our sin relate to God and his will? How can pride be connected to the root of all our sins?
- In what ways do we try to mask or cover up our sins? What do we fail to accomplish when we avoid recognizing our sins?

Going Deeper

Beginning in 1:18, Paul explains that all individuals need justification since all are sinners justly condemned by God. He first addresses the sinfulness of the Gentiles (1:18–32), then that of the Jews (2:17–29). In verses 3:10b–18 Paul demonstrates the sinfulness of all humanity.

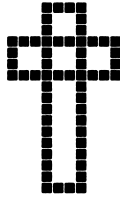
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In verses 1–8, Paul continues to elaborate his argumentation about the Spirit’s work rendering the Gentiles as true Jews with the right circumcision (2:28–29). So, Paul raises three rhetorical questions that answer the advantages ethnic Jews had over the Gentiles because they received the oracles of God—which meant God’s promise to save Israel—despite their unfaithfulness and refusal to trust and obey God. Paul concludes by affirming that God’s saving plan is not dependent upon human unfaithfulness but his faithfulness to his covenant and glory. Paul predicts this could be confusing, implying that God receives more glory when Christians do evil and are forgiven. God’s grace is not so cheap as to give the believer license to sin but so abundant that it should encourage them to joyfully pursue obedience to Christ (6:1–4).

Paul’s argument beginning in 1:18, has its conclusion in verses 11–20. His thesis for this section is found in verse 11, when he says, “None is righteous, no, not one,” and bookends with verse 18, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” These eight verses show that everyone is a sinner without exception, and rightfully so. Paul cites the Old Testament to charge humanity with sin—both Jews and Gentiles—preparing the way for the claim that right standing with God is available only for those who trust in the atoning death of Jesus Christ, the Just and Justifier of the sinner’s soul (3:21–26).

So What?

- Write your testimony. Writing and communicating your testimony clearly can be difficult at times, but it is crucial for you to know what Jesus has done in your life. Focus on your life before you trusted Christ, how you surrendered to him, and the difference in your life since you have been walking with him.
- Share the Gospel with others. Maybe you don’t know this, but talking about Jesus with others is expected of every Christ-follower (Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). Moreover, it is a vital component of the spiritual disciplines that contribute to your spiritual growth. Don’t feel that you must close the deal. Remember that all biblical evangelism is successful—regardless of the results—because you are fulfilling your role of proclaiming your Lord and Savior to the world.
- Fight sin with a greater desire for holiness and righteousness. John Piper once said, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” You were brought to newness of life because you were dead in your sins, and because of that you can now delight yourself in the magnificent blessing



The Justification of Sinners

Romans 3:21–26

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Big Idea: God's righteousness climaxed in the justification of sinners through the sacrifice of Jesus as a magnification of His attributes for all who would believe.

Opening Questions:

- Paul is continuing the discussion of the righteousness of God. In what ways is God's righteousness revealed to both Jew and Gentile?
- What is the doctrine of justification? What is the point of view of justification from a Jewish perspective and why is Paul addressing it?

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- What is the purpose of the Law? How does our view of the Law inform our need for God's righteousness to be revealed in divine grace?

Going Deeper

Paul's discussion of the righteousness of God through the law which brings condemnation now takes a climactic turn. The fullness of God's righteousness is not through the law, for all of Scripture directs us to something else (c.f. 2 Timothy 1:9–10). Remember the life of Abraham and how he was considered as righteous (c.f. Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1–4). Nor is God's righteousness fully seen in the wrath upon the ungodly (c.f. 2 Timothy 1:9–10; Romans 1:18–32). It is revealed completely in the receiving of faith in the person and work of the Messiah.

Consider God's fairness, consistency, and graciousness. Paul has explained to us the depravity of all mankind; thus, all are judged on a level field (see Romans 3:9). All are deserving of the wrath of God and yet, because of his loving kindness, God sought to bear the punishment of sin upon himself for all people. Think of it in this way: though all fell short of God's glory, God rectifies this by glorifying himself through justifying all people of faith, who would magnify his glory and know his character. The means of magnifying his character is through the justification of those who were once unrighteous but made righteous by faith in the Son's propitiatory sacrifice (c.f. 1 John 2:2).

God thus highlights his own glorious attributes: grace, love, forbearance and divine justice in his works. All of what the Bible has progressively revealed reaches its pinnacle in the justification of the sinful through faith in the work of the Son. See God and his own magnification of himself — that he shows himself just and actively justifies those who put faith in Him.

So What?

- The righteousness of God has been revealed in the glorious act of Jesus and can be freely received by faith. This is the core of the gospel, that God is the justifier of undeserving people.
- Let the full character of God overwhelm you with humility. What are the moments in our lives where we would consider ourselves “worthy” and “deserving” of God's grace and prosperity, and how does this truth renew our minds? In what ways does God being the justifier push us away from legalism and towards humility?



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