



Have you ever had one of those water cooler conversations about God and someone asks the question, "Well what about the innocent native who has never heard about Jesus?" Most of us look down at our watch at that point and say, "Well looks like break time is over, I better get back to work!"

In our study this week, Pastor Tim takes us to the book of Romans to help us answer this interesting and important question.

If you have a "water cooler" questions you'd like to ask, you can go to [www.crossroadswired.com](http://www.crossroadswired.com) and click the "questions" button at the bottom of the page. Pastor Tim will choose some of your questions and answer them to wrap up this message series on the weekends of November 21/22 and 28/29.

Grace and Peace,

Deering Dyer  
Small Groups Pastor

## Group Study Questions

1. Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? How did that make you feel? Now, have you ever been accused of something you **did** do? How did that make you feel? What's the difference?
2. At first blush does it seem unfair that God might send an innocent person to Hell that might have never heard of Him? Why or why not?

Read Romans 1:18-25 aloud as a group.

**Leader's Note: A commentary reference for this section of scripture is provided at the end of this study guide.**

3. In Romans 18:1 we see that the **JUDGEMENT** of God is real. Do you ever find it difficult to think about or discuss the wrath of God? Why or why not?

4. How is God's wrath different than man's wrath?

"A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury and wrath of God than there are to His love and tenderness."  
-Arthur W. Pink

5. To whom is God's wrath directed (see v.1)?
6. Who qualifies as "ungodly" or "unrighteous"? Ask someone to read the following verses aloud: **Romans 3:10, Romans 3:12 and Romans 3:23.**
7. Given the scriptures cited in question 6, can anyone be called innocent? Discuss.
8. In this letter, Paul is teaching us that we are all sinful and unrighteous (the theological term is depraved). How is this view different from conventional wisdom and thought?

9. So then how are we supposed to know about God? Pastor Tim points out that the **EXISTENCE** of God is clear.

Read Psalm 19:1-6. Discuss ways that you see God and know about Him through His creation.

10. Read Romans 19, 20. How do these verses describe God's general revelation (see sidebar) of Himself?

11. Even though God plainly and clearly reveals Himself to us, Pastor Tim points out that our **REJECTION** of God is inevitable. Discuss how we see this in Romans 1:21-23.

12. Introspection - In what ways do you reject God?

13. Read Romans 1:24-31. How do we see that the **ABANDONMENT** by God is consequential to our rejection of Him?

14. Is there any hope? Of course there is. Read the following verses and discuss how this abandonment does not have to be eternal.

**2 Peter 3:9 -**

**Jeremiah 29:13 -**

**Ephesians 2:4-5 -**

### **General Revelation**

A term used to declare that God reveals something about the divine nature through the created order. This self-revealing of God through creation is called general because it only gives "general" or "indirect" information about God, including the fact of God's existence and that God is powerful. This is in contrast to special revelation, which is more "specific" and "direct," and includes the appearance of the living Word (Jesus Christ himself) and the written Word of God (the Scriptures), revealing a holy, loving and just God who graciously provides forgiveness of sin.

*(From the "Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms, p. 54)*

## **God's Righteousness Revealed in Condemnation<sup>1</sup>** *From the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

The first step in the revelation of the righteousness that God provides for people by faith is to set forth their need for it because they are under God's judgment. The human race stands condemned before God and is helpless and hopeless apart from God's grace.

### *A. Condemnation against pagan humanity (1:18-32).*

This section looks at the human race prior to the call of Abram and the establishment of a special people of God. This situation persisted in the pagan world of the Gentiles as distinct from the Jews.

#### 1. REASONS FOR CONDEMNATION (1:18-23).

God never condemns without just cause. Here three bases are stated for His judgment of the pagan world.

##### *a. For suppressing God's truth (1:18).*

1:18. This verse serves as a topic sentence for this entire section. In addition, it stands in contrastive parallel to verse 17. The continuing revelation (the verb is being revealed in the pres. tense) of the wrath of God is an expression of His personal righteousness (which also "is being revealed," Gr., v. 17) and its opposition to human sinfulness. Therefore people need the continuing revelation of "a righteousness from God" (v. 17) that He provides. God's wrath is directed against all the godlessness (*asebeian*, "lack of proper reverence for God") and wickedness (*adikian*, "unrighteousness") of men, not against the men as such. (God's wrath will also be revealed in the future; cf. 2:5.) God hates sin and judges it, but loves sinners and desires their salvation.

Failure to give God His due inevitably results in failure to treat people, created by God in His image, the right way. Conversely, people (in their unrighteousness toward others) continue to suppress (*katechontōn*, lit., "holding down") the truth (cf. 1:25; 2:8) concerning both God and man. People had God's truth but suppressed it, refusing to heed it. And these wicked ones did this in an attitude of wickedness (*en adikia*). This suppression of the truth is Paul's first reason for God's condemnation of the pagan world.

##### *b. For ignoring God's revelation (1:19-20).*

These verses declare that knowledge concerning God is available to all. This knowledge is called natural revelation because it is seen in the created world, is accessible to the entire human race, and is not soteriological, dealing with salvation effected by Christ.

1:19. Paul called this knowledge plain (*phaneron*), which means visible or clear. This is true because God has made it plain (*ephanerōsen*, the verb related to the noun *phaneron*). Some scholars translate the phrase to them as "in them," insisting that verse 19 is speaking of the knowledge of God within the being of man through conscience and religious consciousness. Preferable is the position that verse 19 states the fact of natural revelation and verse 20 explains the process. One support for this view is the word "for" which begins verse 20 and indicates a tie between the verses.

1:20. "What may be known about God" (v. 19) is now called God's invisible qualities and identified as His eternal power and divine nature. Since "God is spirit" (John 4:24), all His qualities are invisible to physical eyes and can be understood by the human mind only as they are reflected in what has been made, that is, in God's creative work. The self-existent God, however, is the Creator of all things, and therefore since the Creation of the world His "invisible qualities" have been clearly seen. Paul may have intended a play on words between the noun translated "invisible qualities" (*aeorata*) and the verb translated "clearly seen" (*kathorata*) because they share a common Greek root. Both the verb "clearly seen" and the participle "being understood" are in the present tense, which emphasizes the continuous nature of the action. The word *theiotēs*, translated "divine nature," occurs only here in the New Testament and embraces the properties which make God God. Creation, which people see, reveals God's unseen character—the all-powerful Deity. An Old Testament parallel to these verses is Psalm 19:1-6.

Paul's conclusion to this description of natural revelation is important—men are without excuse. The witness to God in nature is so clear and so constant that ignoring it is indefensible. Their condemnation is based not on their rejecting Christ of whom they have not heard, but on their sinning against the light they have.

##### *c. For perverting God's glory (1:21-23).*

1:21. This reason for God's condemnation of the pagan world builds on the preceding one just as that one built on the first. The relationship is seen in the use of the same Greek connective (*dioti*) at the beginning of verses 19 and 21, in the latter translated for. People's suppression of the truth is seen in their rejecting the clear evidence of God as the sovereign Creator and their perversion of that knowledge into idolatry.

The clause *although they knew God* refers to an original experiential knowledge of God such as Adam and Eve had both before and after the Fall. How long this knowledge of God continued before it was perverted is not stated, but God was known by

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<sup>1</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:441

pres. Present;

Gr. Greek

v. verse

cf. confer, compare

lit. literal, literally

people. This fact makes human actions all the more reprehensible. One would suppose that to know God would be to honor Him, but these people neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him. They turned from the very purpose for which God made them: to glorify Him for His Person and thank Him for His works. With such willful rebellion against God it is little wonder that their thinking became futile (*emataiōthēsan*, lit., “became worthless, purposeless”; cf. Eph. 4:17) and their foolish (*asynetos*, “morally senseless”; cf. Rom. 1:31) hearts were darkened (cf. Eph. 4:18). When truth is rejected, in time the ability to recognize and to receive truth is impaired (cf. John 3:19-20).

1:22-23. When the true Source of wisdom is rejected (cf. Ps. 111:10), people’s claim to be wise is an idle boast. Progressively they became fools (*emōranthēsan*, lit., “became stupid”), a reality demonstrated by the worship as gods of idols in the forms of people and animals (cf. Rom. 1:25). The ultimate irony in humanity’s refusal to glorify the true God is the insanity or stupidity of idolatry described in Isaiah 44:9-20. Man’s refusal to acknowledge and glorify God leads to a downward path: first, worthless thinking; next, moral insensitivity; and then, religious stupidity (seen in idol-worship).

## 2. RESULTS OF CONDEMNATION (1:24-32).

In a real sense the results of God’s condemnation on rebellious humanity are nothing more than the natural consequences of suppressing truth, ignoring revelation, and perverting God’s glory. However, God did more than simply let nature take its course. God acted to abandon (the thrice-mentioned “gave them over” [vv. 24, 26, 28] is *paredōken*, “abandoned”) people to expressions of a corrupt lifestyle that deserved God’s wrath and the sentence of death (v. 32).

### a. *Abandoned to fornication (1:24-25).*

1:24. One aspect of mankind’s corruption (to which God actively let people go) was sexual profligacy. The frequency of live-in lovers, wife-swapping, and group sex parties today only confirms this result of God’s abandonment. Sex within marriage is a holy gift from God, but otherwise sex is impurity (lit., “uncleanness”) and the degrading of . . . bodies by using them contrary to God’s intent.

1:25. In a sense this verse repeats the truth of verse 23, but it expresses more. The truth of God is not only the truth concerning God but also God’s truth concerning all things, including mankind. This truth is that people are creatures of God and can find true fulfillment only in worshiping and obediently serving God the Creator. A lie (lit., “the lie”) on the other hand says that the creature—angelic (Isa. 14:13-14; John 8:44) or human (Gen. 3:4-5)—can exist independent of God, self-sufficient, self-directing, and self-fulfilling. Mankind made himself his god in place of the true God. Because God the Creator is forever praised (in contrast with creatures who are undeserving of worship), Paul added Amen. This word transliterates in both Greek and English the Hebrew word meaning “so let it be.” As an affirmation, not a wish, it places approval on what has just been said (cf. comments on 2 Cor. 1:20).

### b. *Abandoned to sexual perversion (1:26-27).*

1:26-27. Also God gave them over to shameful lusts (lit., “passions of disgrace”). This involved, as the text states, both sexes engaging in homosexual instead of heterosexual relationships. Women deliberately exchanged natural relations (with men in marriage) for unnatural ones (with other women). This is the second “exchange” the unregenerate made (cf. v. 25). Men . . . were inflamed with lust (*orexei*, “sexual lust,” used only here in the NT and differing from the more common word for lust in v. 26).

The words translated women and men in these verses are the sexual words “females” and “males.” Contemporary homosexuals insist that these verses mean that it is perverse for a heterosexual male or female to engage in homosexual relations but it is not perverse for a homosexual male or female to do so since homosexuality is such a person’s natural preference. This is strained exegesis unsupported by the Bible. The only natural sexual relationship the Bible recognizes is a heterosexual one (Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:4-6) within marriage. All homosexual relations constitute sexual perversion and are subject to God’s judgment. Such lustful and indecent acts have within them the seeds of punishment (**due penalty**).

### c. *Abandoned to depraved lifestyle (1:28-32).*

1:28. Pagan humanity’s rebellion also included the rejection of the knowledge (*epignōsei*, “full knowledge”; cf. v. 32) of God. In a sense they put God out of their minds. God’s responding judgment was abandonment (cf. vv. 24, 26) to a depraved (*adokimon*, “disapproved”) mind, which expressed itself in attitudes and actions that ought not to be done (lit., “what is unfitting or improper,” a technical Stoic word).

1:29-31. The mental vacuum created by dismissing God was filled (the perf. tense implies filled full) with four forms of active sin: wickedness (*adikia*; cf. v. 18), evil (*ponēria*), greed, and depravity (*kakia*, “badness or malice”). These four in turn express themselves in 17 more specific types of wickedness. The first two, envy and murder, sound much alike in Greek: *phthonou* and *phonou*. Also the four vices in verse 31 each begin with the Greek letter alpha (“a” in Eng.).