

1. **Introduction:** Today we begin the verse-by-verse part of our study of Romans. Many people scoff at the idea the Bible is truth. That has been the case for hundreds of years. James Montgomery Boice, in his commentary on Romans, mentions the story of two such unbelieving doubters, Lord Lyttleton and Gilbert West, both 19th century English barristers. They were fervent in their belief but honest enough to know they should thoroughly investigate the evidence.

- They decided to each write a book disproving one essential Christian belief.
- West would write to prove there was no factual basis for Jesus' resurrection.
- Lyttleton would write to prove Paul was not an apostle. He would do this by proving there was no factual evidence that Paul was confronted by the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road.
- Paul had no contact with Jesus during the incarnation. Apostles must have had personal contact with Jesus. If Paul did not meet the risen Jesus, he could not be an apostle and would be proven to be a liar.
- Discrediting Paul would eliminate much of the New Testament.
- West and Lyttleton agreed to carefully study all available evidence and judge it according to legal principles for establishing validity of evidence.
- At the end of that process, they began to write their books.
- While writing, they held several conferences. During one meeting West told Lyttleton that in his study of the evidence for Jesus' resurrection he had discovered it was very well attested. He now thought there was something in it.
- Lyttleton said he was glad of West's comment because he had concluded there was something in the stories about Paul's Damascus Road experience.
- When the two books were finished, they met again. Lyttleton said to his friend, *"Gilbert, as I have been studying the evidence and weighing it by the recognized laws of legal evidence, I have become satisfied that Saul of Tarsus was converted as the New Testament says he was and that Christianity is true: I have written my book from that perspective."*
- West replied he had become convinced of the truth of Jesus' resurrection, had come to believe in Jesus, and had written his book in defense of Christianity.
- Studying the evidence had led both unbelieving lawyers to believe in Jesus and become convinced the Bible is true. Their books are available in libraries today.

- Men have plans, but God often has different plans. West and Lyttleton's goal was to prove Christian beliefs false. While they worked to prove Christianity false, God led them to discover truth and come to believe in Jesus.
- West and Lyttleton's opposition to Christianity led them to the truth when they Studying the evidence honestly led the men to truth. Many others have written denying the Bible and the Christian faith without ever considering the evidence.

2. Romans 1: 1-7: *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

- Romans has had a powerful effect on many people through the ages. My prayer is it will have a powerful positive effect on you and me as we study it together.
- Paul begins with a presentation of his credentials as an apostle and a greeting to his fellow believers in Rome.
- Paul says he is a servant (or more accurately a slave) of Christ Jesus. Jesus totally owns him. He is under Jesus' authority. In other writings Paul says that every person is a slave to that which they place first in their life.
- Having grown up as a strict Pharisee devoted to the purity of Judaism, Paul, believed followers of Jesus were members of a blasphemous sect who should be forcefully eliminated.
- Paul successfully persecuted believers in Jerusalem and nearby areas. Then he sought and obtained authority to go to Damascus to apprehend believers in that area and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.
- But God had another plan. On the way to Damascus, Paul was confronted by the risen Christ. During the confrontation, he was converted, and called to be an apostle. An apostle is one who is commissioned and given authority.

- As an apostle, Paul’s specific commission was to bring Gentile nations to the obedience of faith in Christ.
- The grace Paul received changed him from persecutor to apostle. He was transformed and became an ardent missionary on behalf of Christ, successfully spreading the good news of the gospel over huge areas of the empire.
- For the remainder of Paul’s life, he faithfully preached the gospel promised through God’s prophets concerning God’s Son, ***“who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead.”***
- Paul’s letter is to believers. He closes this portion with a benediction – grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Paul next moves from explaining the basis for his authority, to thanking God for the believers in Rome.

3. Romans 1:8-15: *“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.”*

- Though he has not yet visited them, he knows them from their widely acknowledged faith and good reputation.
- He thanks God for them and prays for them regularly. He asked God to enable him to visit them. So far other obligations hindered him, but he now expects to see them soon.
- Paul yearns to impart things from the Spirit to strengthen them both - faith strengthening faith.
- Paul then makes the following dramatic, heart-felt declaration

4. **Romans 1:16**: *“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.*

- Today the world’s self-appointed “wise people” think the Gospel is foolishness.
- Paul is convinced it is the power of God for **salvation for all who believe**. That is truly good news!
- By “salvation” Paul means God saving people from a personal threatening danger every person faces. That danger is ungodly, unrighteous thoughts, words, and deeds that offend God’s holy nature and trigger His wrath.
- If Paul was ever ashamed of the gospel, it doesn’t show in his record. He boldly proclaimed the gospel wherever he went and in all kinds of situations.
- Far from being ashamed, Paul gloried in preaching the gospel. But most people do encounter situations in which the pressure of circumstance causes them to be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel.
- Since the Fall, no one can achieve righteous standing before God without His intervention. No one has the necessary spiritual capability. No knowledge, work, sacrifice, or self-merit will suffice.
- How can anyone possibly become righteous before God? Only by God’s gracious intervention.
- The key that unlocks the door to righteousness before God is “true faith” in the atoning work of our Lord Christ Jesus.
- How can “true faith” be acquired? Paul answers, it is a gift from God. Paul spends the next sections of the letter through 8:39 in explaining the why, wherefore, and consequences of God’s incredible gift of faith.

5. **Romans 1:17**: *“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”*

- The NIV translates this verse as, *“For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed--a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”*
- Salvation is by God’s grace from first to last. In the gospel God reveals a righteousness available to people independent of human action.
- The righteousness bestowed by God through His gift of faith is a righteousness that endures throughout this life and the life to come.

- “Righteousness revealed” refers to the manifestation of God’s righteousness as it accomplishes its purpose. Righteousness can’t be seen, but its results can.
- God’s gift of salvation is by His grace alone, unaffected by a person’s good works, sins, race, worldly status, or personal achievement.
- Salvation is freely given to everyone who believes, but not everyone believes.
- God’s righteousness must be received by faith (firm trust in God). That means believing God is who He says He is and that He has provided salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

6. Who Needs Righteousness: Why does God make righteousness available? Who needs it? Scripture says everyone needs righteousness.

- In Romans 1:18-3:20 Paul argues all people fall short of God’s requirement “to be in the right before Him.”
- Failure to be “in the right” before God means being “in the wrong” before Him. Those in the wrong before God are subject to His wrath.
- For reasons he cites, Paul concludes all mankind is guilty. No one is righteous and no one can in their own power become righteous.
- The universal power of salvation revealed in the gospel is necessary to counter the universal depravity revealed when all humanity is examined.

7. Romans 1:18-20: *“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.”*

- Paul speaks of people without Christ, people who neither acknowledge God or give thanks to Him for His common grace.
- In verses 1:18 – 3:20 Paul paints a dark, devastating picture of humanity fallen under God’s wrath. He shows that sin pervades all humanity and builds a case against sinners of all types. Every human being who remains apart from Christ is trapped by perversity against God and His will.
- This passage is easy to misunderstand. The point is not that God has condemned humanity, but that humanity has condemned itself by its failure to obey God.

All people desperately need to be saved from their own fallen nature. They need to be spiritually recreated.

- Paul does not say that disobedient people are eternally condemned. Believing the gospel is a way out of their horrible situation, a way provided by God.
- Paul says the wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven. What does he mean?

8. God's Wrath: Wrath is the holy revulsion of God's whole being against all that is in contradiction to His holiness.

- God's wrath is like gravity. If a trapeze artist slips and falls, they inevitably will fall to the ground unless a net intervenes. Unless there is intervention, thinking, speaking, or doing things that oppose God's holy character will cause God's judicial and punitive wrath. Trying to oppose God's holy character, like trying to outwit gravity, is futile. God's wrath must not be taken lightly.
- There is a "wrath" of judgment coming at the last day, but God's wrath is also seen in past and present history.
- God's wrath is directed at the evil people think, speak, and do.
- Humanity is universally unable in their natural state to be "in the right" before God. Their nature leads people to suppress truth that points to God.
- The problem addressed by God's wrath is pinpointed in John 3:36, "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*"
- People without salvation are on the brink of trouble, because without God's intervention, their fallen nature will lead them deeper and deeper into sin.

9. God's Judicial Wrath: Human unbelief and its moral consequences draw God's judicial wrath. Human unbelief leads to unrighteousness and suppression of truth.

- When God created all that exists, He included in what He created witnesses to Himself that are both unmistakable and universal. Everyone can perceive His invisible attributes (eternal power and divine nature) through what He created. But some suppress that truth.
- Ignoring or caricaturing God's creation witness to Himself is sheer perversity.
- For this reason all people are without excuse. Abraham Lincoln once *said*, "*I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God.*"

10. Perversity: Perversity in the Bible is a deliberate turning away from holiness and righteousness such as seen in idolatry and atheism.

- Perversity against God’s person is “ungodliness.”
- Perversity against God’s moral will is “unrighteousness.” Examples include thoughts, words, and deeds that violate God’s moral will.
- Moral perversity leads to a downward moral trajectory in which people first deny God, then willfully disobey Him.

11. Romans 1:21-23: *“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. 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.”*

- Willful rejection of God’s self-revelation and failure to honor Him as God leads to such sins as atheism, idolatry, and glorification of human intellect.
- People may choose to worship their perverse ideas rather than the Creator God.
- Ignoring the true God often leads to deliberate irreligiousness like believing human science and philosophy have made belief in God unnecessary.
- Being deliberately irreligious dethrones God in one’s thinking and causes one to become irrational (futile in thinking with darkened foolish hearts).
- Ignoring God often leads people to believe they are wise and superior. In their delusion they may conceive and create either physical and mental idols.
- Such self-deception causes people to fervently believe foolish things.
- Because the root problem is spiritual, better education, culture, or economic advancement cannot free people from such fantasies.
- Notice that Paul’s list of idols begins with mortal man. That is in accord with Satan’s statement to Eve that **“you will be like God”** (Genesis 3:5).
- People made gods in their own image. Eventually they even worshipped birds, beasts, and bugs, thereby becoming lower than them, since people are spiritually lower than what they worship.
- If people are their own god they can do as they please, owing no allegiance, fearing no consequences. So people exchange the truth of God for the “lie” of becoming like God. That move toward self-deification leads to self-indulgence.

12. Romans 1:24a: “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity”

- Because people knew of God from what they see in creation but refused to honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, “**God gave them up in the lusts of their heart.**” He permitted continuing in sin and reaping the sad consequences.
- The word (*paradidomi*) translated as “gave ... up” or “gave ...over” is used several times in the NT. It is an intense verb conveying dramatic action.
- In 1 Corinthians 13:3 it describes giving one’s body to be burned. In Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2, 25 it is used of Christ’ giving Himself up to death.
- In Mark 1:14; Acts 8:3 it is used of people being committed to prison. In Matthew 5:25; 10:17, 19, 21; 18:34 it is used of people committed to judgment. In 1 Peter 2:23 it describes Christ’s committing Himself to His Father’s care.
- In Romans 4:25; 8:32 it is used of the Father delivering His own Son to propitiatory death.

13. Given Up by God to Natural Consequences: Without God’s intervention, sinners increase in sin. As they do, there comes a point where God “gives them up” to follow their own desires.

- What does this mean? Obviously, whatever the details, it implies abandonment by God. Paul’s point is that abandonment by God is exactly what such people think they want. Their desire is to be left alone to do as they please.
- There are actually two different senses in which “gave them up” is used in the Bible. The first “sense” is when God withdraws His restraining and protective hand from people allowing the natural consequences of their sins to take their inevitable, destructive course. That is the meaning in verses 18-32.
- Sin degrades people. It debases the image of God in which they were made. It strips people of dignity, peace of mind, and a clear conscience.
- Sin destroys personal relationships, marriages, families, churches, cities, and nations. “Allowed to do as they desired,” with no restraint from God and no protecting influence from Him, people follow their own desires deeper and deeper into sin.
- Progression into sin’s depths is a natural expression of an unrestrained self.

14. What is Next: Continue Romans 1 beginning with verse 1:24b.