

**Facilitator Notes for *Set Free!* – A Study in Romans
Lesson 2 – From Good News to Bad News – Romans 1:16-32**

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

Questions

Read Romans 1:16-17 in both Bible versions. (Remember, these are the *theme verses* for *Romans*.)

1. Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel ?

Because the gospel is the power of God that saves anyone who believes – regardless of race or culture. The Greek word for “power” is the same from which the word dynamite is based on. The gospel is not just a belief system. When someone believes, powerful things happen in their life – all for the better. No one is too bad or too far from God to be saved – to pass from spiritual death to spiritual life.

- ♥ Is this a good enough reason for you not to be ashamed of the gospel in our culture? Why or why not?
- ♥ When are you most bold in sharing the *gospel* (good news)? When are you most sheepish?

2. According to 1:16-17, to whom does God grant *salvation* and how does a person become *righteous* (*right-in-God's-sight*)?

God grants salvation to anyone who believes the good news (gospel). A person is made righteous in God’s sight by faith or by believing the truth about Jesus and what he did to rescue us from spiritual death. We don’t deserve this gift of salvation (being saved from the penalty of our sins) nor can we earn it by being a good person. We only have to believe in our heart and God gives us this wonderful gift.

3. Paul uses four *terms* in 1:16-17 (NIV), whose meanings need to be understood if we are to makes sense of his theme statement. List these four *words* below:

Gospel(1:16)

Salvation (1:16)

Righteousness(1:17)

Faith (1:17)

4. What do you learn in the following verses that helps in your understanding of each of these four *terms*?

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| <p>John 3:16-17 – <i>gospel</i> (good news) These verse are sometimes called “the gospel in a nutshell” for the contain all the basic truths about the good news. God’s motivation behind the gospel is LOVE. Jesus was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice in order for us to be made right with God – he became human (and remains human for all eternity) and died a violent death in our place. Whoever believes (accepts) what Jesus did for them is given eternal life (an intimate relationship with God). God motive is never to condemn us – but to save us.</p> | <p>Titus 2:13-14 – <i>salvation</i> Verse 14 is a good description of “salvation.” Salvation frees us or redeems (buys us back) from every kind of sin (sin is always bondage); salvation cleanses us – makes us clean in God’s sight and makes us again belong to God (adopted into his family, we become his children. Salvation changes us from the inside out so that we become people who are eager to do what is good – what pleases God.</p> |
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2 Corinthians 5:21 - righteousness

The penalty of our sin (which is death – separation from God) has to be paid in order for us to have a relationship with God. There is nothing we can do to pay this penalty and still live. So Jesus, who lived a perfect, sinless life as a human, paid the penalty in our place. If we believe and accept what he has done, we are made “right in God’s sight” and God accepts us as his children.

Romans 3:22; 10:17- faith (belief/trust)

We are made right in God’s sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. Faith is unconditional trust in what God did for us. Faith is understood with the head, but believed in the heart. Faith always makes a difference in our lives. It is impossible to have genuine faith and not be a changed person.

♥ Who was the first person to share the *gospel* with you? How did you react? What was the result?

♥ How is **living by faith (1:17)** different from living by 1) **sight**, 2) **works**, or 3) **feelings**?

If we live by sight, it means we won’t believe until something is “proved” to our satisfaction. We want to “see” in order to believe. Faith, however, is believing in order to “see.” If we live by works, we try to earn our way into God’s good graces. Good works result in good consequences, but no one is perfect and no one can be good enough. Sin is a condition we have and good works cannot “cure” us of it. If we live by feelings, our relationship with God will continually change. We will feel close to God when we feel good about ourselves and how we are doing spiritually and then feel far from God when we fail to be “good.” Faith affects our feelings, but faith is not based on our feelings. Faith is believing and trusting what God says is true regardless of our feelings or circumstances.

♥ An acronym for **FAITH**: **F**orsaking **A**ll **I**n **T**rust **H**im. What things do we forsake in order to trust in Jesus?

In Romans 1:16, Paul stated that *the gospel is for all people*. Now he is ready to build his case that *all people need the gospel*. In the verses we will study for this section of the lesson (1:18-32), Paul launches into a somber indictment against human nature as he exposes its dark side. His negative assessment of the human condition is often offensive to those who have been raised to believe in the basic goodness of human nature. Nor is the idea of God’s wrath an easy concept for many of us to accept. But let’s examine Paul’s arguments carefully and honestly with the hope that admitting to the truth will, in the end, be the best thing that happens to us!

Read Romans 1:18-23

5. Describe your initial reaction to these verses. What comes to mind when you think of God’s *wrath* or *anger*? Often, God’s wrath (anger) evokes negative connotations in people because they see God’s anger as the same a human anger – thus the image of a condemning, angry God who is waiting for us to slip up so that he can punish us. However, regardless of our feelings or past experiences, this view of God needs to be rejected as a lie and we need to believe what the Bible reveals about God. God IS Love and Light – and there is NO darkness in him.

God’s wrath (anger) – God’s *anger* is NOT like human anger which is often an irrational and out-of-control emotion comprised of pride, hostility, spite and the desire for revenge. God’s *wrath* has none of the traits of human anger, nor is it ever demonstrated by God *losing his temper* or *flying into a rage*. Rather, God’s wrath or anger is God *acting in revulsion against sin and evil*. **Wrath** is God’s deeply personal hatred or loathing of **all evil**. It is **evil**, and **only evil**, that arouses God’s wrath. The opposite of wrath is NOT love. The opposite of wrath is *neutrality* when it comes to evil. (Would you really want God to be *neutral* – unbiased, open-minded, disinterested – concerning evil?) Wrath is God’s **consistent opposition to sin and evil** and his **refusal to ever condone it**.

6. Against what **attitude** and **action** does God show his wrath or anger (1:18)?

The NIV and NLT translations of this verse have a subtle difference. NIV says that God’s wrath is revealed against **all godlessness and wickedness** of men who suppress the truth. NLT says that God shows his anger **against sinful, wicked people**. This is a slight difference in wording, but a big difference in meaning. NIV is the better translation. The object of God’s wrath is not people, but godlessness and wickedness – evil itself. God hates sin, but he always loves the sinner and continually calls the sinner to repentance.

- ♥ Do you think God's wrath is fair? Why or why not?
- ♥ Do you think God's wrath contradicts his nature of a God who is love (1 John 4:8)? Why or why not?
- ♥ What do you think are some reasons why sin, godlessness, and evil stirs anger in God?

God is most grieved by the **consequences** of sin and godlessness. This is not what he planned for humans created in his image. Sin separates us from God – and that breaks God's heart.

7. Why can't anyone claim *innocence* before God because of *ignorance* about God (1:19-20; Psalm 19:1-3)? No one can claim innocence because no one is ignorant about God. We are created in God's image and God has put the knowledge of Himself in every human heart. Every human has a sense of moral standards (right and wrong). Where do these standards come from? God has written them on our heart. And, without exception, people's **moral standards** are always higher than their **behavior**. So, we are without excuse.

We also see evidence of God in his creation – all that he has made – and if we are "intellectually honest," we have to admit that there is a God. Humans have never discovered God on their own; God always reveals himself to us and his intricate and beautiful creation is one of the more obvious ways that he reveals his existence. Just as observing a beautiful painting leads a person to conclude that there is an artist, so observing our universe leads us to conclude that there is a supreme designer and creator. This is the "truth" that people try to suppress (Rom. 1:18).

Although creation's testimony has been distorted by sin entering God's creation, nature still reveals a God of power, intelligence, order, beauty and love.

- ♥ What are some reasons why a person would not want to acknowledge and honor a Creator even though the Creator's existence is obvious? If we admit that there is a Creator and that we came from Someone higher and more powerful than ourselves, then we have to admit that we have a responsibility to that Creator; thus, we would know that we cannot live life "our way" and be our own "god," making up our own rules. If we admit that we came from a Divine Being, then we would have to admit that we will probably return to that Divine Being after death – and more than likely, have to give an account for how we lived. Rather than admit this, humans will jump through all sorts of hoops and practice denial rather than admit that there is a Supreme Creator. This is why the cultural wars over things like evolution and creationism are so huge today. Evolutionists have a lot to lose if Creationist are right! (Or, depending how you look at it, a lot to gain!)
- ♥ If a person sees God in creation and desires to know God, what does God promise to do (Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 7:7)? How is the Christ-follower an important part of this process (Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 10: 13-15)? God promises that if a person begins to seek God (because they want to know him), God will "be found." If we ask, seek and knock – God will reveal himself in some way – usually through another person who knows God. This is why Jesus' command to go into all the world and make disciples is so important. Our part in God's plan of revealing Himself is all important. Knowing that God exists is not enough. People must learn that God is loving and they must understand what he did to show that love to us. They must be shown how to accept his forgiveness of their sins. That is where we come in – as we share what Jesus has done for us with others.

8. What *attitude* results when people suppress or push away the truth that they instinctively know about God (1:21)?

A general attitude of rebelliousness that refuses to acknowledge God, worship him or give him thanks for all his good gifts (not to mention LIFE itself)! Refusing to thank God for who he is and what he has done leads to darkness of mind and soul – a selfish, self-centeredness and spiritual blindness. Because humans are "wired" to worship something or someone – we begin to make God in our image instead of acknowledging that we are made in God's image. Futile thinking, darkness and pride replace truth and absolutes. Purpose, satisfaction and real love are lost.

9. What are some specific consequences of suppressing the truth by refusing to acknowledge God as the Creator who deserves gratitude and worship (1:21-23)?

Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. They began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused.

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (Claiming to be wise, they became utter fools instead. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people, or birds and animals and snakes.)

- ♥ How can "futile or foolish thinking" and a "heart that is darkened and confused" be dangerous? Humans were created out of the love of the triune God and made to live in loving, intimate relationship with God. Bottom line – humans are a mess without God and it is a downward spiral to leads to all sorts of grief, heartache and sin.
- ♥ Why do you think people would rather worship the *creation* instead of the *Creator* (1:23)?
- ♥ Paul mentions *idols* made to look like people and animals (1:23). *Idols* are anything that is loved and exalted more than or in the place of God in a person's life. What are some of the *idols* of our culture?

Read **Romans 1:24-32**.

10. Summarize in your own words what these verses are saying about human nature.

Sin is a downward spiral – it doesn't get better, it only gets worse.

The Message paraphrases these verses this way:

So God said, in effect, "If that's what you want, that's what you get." It wasn't long before they were living in a pigpen, smeared with filth, filthy inside and out. And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshiped the god they made instead of the God who made them—the God we bless, the God who blesses us. Oh, yes! Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either—women didn't know how to be women, men didn't know how to be men. Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men—all lust, no love. And then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it—emptied of God and love, godless and loveless wretches.

Since they didn't bother to acknowledge God, God quit bothering them and let them run loose. And then all hell broke loose: rampant evil, grabbing and grasping, vicious backstabbing. They made life hell on earth with their envy, wanton killing, bickering, and cheating. Look at them: mean-spirited, venomous, fork-tongued God-bashers. Bullies, swaggers, insufferable windbags! They keep inventing new ways of wrecking lives. They ditch their parents when they get in the way. Stupid, slimy, cruel, cold-blooded. And it's not as if they don't know better. They know perfectly well they're spitting in God's face. And they don't care—worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best!

- ♥ Do you think Paul is saying that these things are true of every single person or of humanity in general? There are different degrees of goodness and depravity – and all humans are not equally good or equally depraved. But sin is always a downward spiral and no human being has ever lived up to the good that they do know. We are all sinners by nature (birth) and by practice (behavior).
- ♥ Do you agree with Paul's assessment of human nature? Why or why not?
- ♥ Do you think these verses refute the notion that people are basically good? Why or why not?

11. What does God do if a person or a society insists on exchanging **Truth** for a **lie**, the **Authentic** for a **counterfeit**, and what **is made** for the **Maker** (1:24, 26, 28)?

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires; So God let them go ahead and do whatever shameful things their hearts desired.

God gave them over to shameful lusts; God abandoned them to their shameful desires.

God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done; God abandoned them to their evil minds and let them do things that should never be done.

- ♥ Would you consider this "action" by God punishment? Why or why not? God doesn't have to "punish" us, as such. He just lets us experience the consequences of our own actions!

♥ How is this "giving over" or "letting them go ahead" an act of "tough" love (Ezekiel 20:25-26, 39, 43-44)? Even in letting us experience the consequences of our own actions, God is still calling us back to himself, hoping we will see our need of him and repenting and returning to him. Experiencing the consequences of sin will often help us see our need for God.

12. In 1:24-26, what are some specific consequences of God's "giving them over" to their desires?
sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another;
worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator;
shameful lusts -- even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

It is important to note that in 1:26-27, Paul was not singling out *homosexuality* as a sin more serious or terrible than any other sin. Instead, he was using it as an example of what happens when the natural is exchanged for the unnatural, the counterfeit for the authentic, and the truth for a lie. It is the second example of this "exchange" in a list of three, with the first being **sins of worship (1:21-23)** and the third being a whole list of **personal and relational sins (1:28-32)**. It is also important to note that Paul was writing to a Gentile culture where homosexuality and pederasty was not only accepted and openly practiced, but was often thought to be a higher form of love than heterosexual love. It is just as true today as it was in Paul's day, that if a person or society insists on having it their own way, God will "give them over" to what they desire. It should also be noted that *homophobia* (fear or hatred of homosexuals) is itself a sin as serious as the sin it condemns, combining both **arrogance** and **malice** listed in 1:29-31.

♥ Any departure from **God's design** for sex (and for life as a whole!) has consequences that are harmful to us. In 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, what does the Bible say is the danger of all sexual sin?

Sexual intimacy – two becoming one – is the most intimate of all human interactions. This intimacy, shared by man and woman, reflects the intimacy of Christ and his Bride – the church (every person who has received the good news and come into relationship with Jesus). On the human plane, it is the closest we come to the intimacy we will share with God – Father, Son and Spirit – for all eternity. The "two becoming one" is not an option when two people have sex, regardless of their attitude or purpose. God is the inventor of sexual intimacy – and this is what happens when two humans are intimate – two do become one. There is a sharing of soul and spirit in the sexual act and a ripping apart of soul and spirit when humans are promiscuous. This is why humans feel so violated when they are sexually mistreated or abused. Sex is not just a physical act – it is also a spiritual act – always. That is the way God designed it to be.

Technically, no sin is more "sinful" than another, for all sin prevents us from experiencing God as he intended. However, some sins are more serious than others because of the **consequences that are suffered**. Sexual intimacy is God's beautiful, sacred and powerful gift to us and there are always serious, heart-breaking consequences when it is used in any way other than what God intended.

♥ Fully devoted followers of Christ have a different standard than those who don't know Jesus or those who are "religious" but don't have a personal relationship with Christ. According to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, what difference does Jesus make in a person's life? (Especially note **verse 11**.)

NIV - And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God;

NLT - There was a time when some of you were just like that, but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God. You have been made right with God because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you.

This is the beauty and power of the good news! No sin is so dark or deep that it can't be forgiven as we are cleansed of its effects and consequences. We really do become "new creations" in Christ! The old is gone and the new has come! Never again will we be condemned! We are set free to live life as God intended – experiencing love, joy and peace. Praise God!

13. What happens to relationships and communities when people *refuse to acknowledge God (1:28-32)*? Things go from bad to worse! Sin separates us from God, from others and from ourselves.

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT YOU CAN PRINT OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME.

NIV

John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Titus 2:13-14 while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, **14** who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

2Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Romans 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

1John 4:8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Psalms 19:1-3 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. **2** Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. **3** There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

Jeremiah 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Matthew 7:7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Romans 10:13-14 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” **14** How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? **15** And how can they preach

unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Ezekiel 20:25-26, 39, 43-44 I also gave them over to statutes that were not good and laws they could not live by; **26** I let them become defiled through their gifts—the sacrifice of every firstborn—that I might fill them with horror so they would know that I am the LORD.’ **39** “As for you, O house of Israel, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Go and serve your idols, every one of you! But afterward you will surely listen to me and no longer profane my holy name with your gifts and idols. **43** There you will remember your conduct and all the actions by which you have defiled yourselves, and you will loathe yourselves for all the evil you have done. **44** You will know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name’s sake and not according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices, O house of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

1Corinthians 6:15-20 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! **16** Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” **17** But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. **18** Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. **19** Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; **20** you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

1Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders **10** nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **11** And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

NLT

John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. **17** God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it.

Titus 2:13-14 while we look forward to that wonderful event when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. **14** He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing what is right.

2Corinthians 5:21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Romans 3:22 We are made right in God’s sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done.

Romans 10:17 Yet faith comes from listening to this message of good news—the Good News about Christ.

1John 4:8 But anyone who does not love does not know God—for God is love.

Psalms 19:1-3 The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship.

2 Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. **3** They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies;

Jeremiah 29:13 If you look for me in earnest, you will find me when you seek me.

Matthew 7:7 “Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened.

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **20** Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Romans 10:13-15 For “Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” **14** But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? **15** And how

will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Ezekiel 20:25-26, 39, 43-44 I gave them over to worthless customs and laws that would not lead to life. **26** I let them pollute themselves with the very gifts I had given them, and I allowed them to give their firstborn children as offerings to their gods—so I might devastate them and show them that I alone am the LORD.

39 “As for you, O people of Israel, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: If you insist, go right ahead and worship your idols, but then don’t turn around and bring gifts to me. Such desecration of my holy name must stop!

43 You will look back at all your sins and hate yourselves because of the evil you have done.

44 You will know that I am the LORD, O people of Israel, when I have honored my name by treating you mercifully in spite of your wickedness, says the Sovereign LORD.”

1Corinthians 6:15-20 Don’t you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which belongs to Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! **16** And don’t you know that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, “The two are united into one.” **17** But the person who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. **18** Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. **19** Or don’t you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, **20** for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

1Corinthians 6:9-11 Don’t you know that those who do wrong will have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, who are idol worshipers, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, **10** thieves, greedy people, drunkards, abusers, and swindlers—none of these will have a share in the Kingdom of God. **11** There was a time when some of you were just like that, but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God. You have been made right with God because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you.