



## Lesson 2 ~ From Good News to Bad News

Romans 1:16-32

### Discussion Starter

- What setting in creation (mountains, sea shore, sunsets, etc.) causes you to feel closest to God? Why?

### Introduction

**T**he gospel is for *all people* – and *all people* need the gospel. If we were to reduce the message of Romans to one, short sentence, this might be it. Paul's *Letter to the Romans* is a carefully reasoned and detailed argument proving the truth of both parts of this statement.

After stating that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of *everyone* (1:16), Paul moves on to show that *everyone* needs this salvation, regardless of race, background, status or religion. *All have sinned* – Paul declares – *all fall short of God's glorious standard* (Romans 3:23).

In Romans 1:18-3:20, Paul will examine

four groups of people with the purpose of showing that all stand guilty before God, without excuse. The first group are "**secular, non-religious**" people (1:18-32); the second group are "**moral**" people (2:1-16); the third group are "**religious**" people (2:17-3:8); and the fourth group is **all humanity** (3:9-20). No one is left out!

Bad news is sometimes hard medicine to swallow, but Paul knows that we all have to admit our problem before we can receive the solution. We will accept the salvation that Jesus offers only when we admit that we are guilty sinners who cannot save ourselves.

### Preparation

1. Before you read **Romans 1: 16-32**, ask God to open your eyes so that you may see wonderful truths in his Word (**Psalms 119:18**). You may want to make the following prayer your own:

*Triune God – Father, Son and Spirit,*

*I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God's Word with only my mind.*

*I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.*

*So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.*

*I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand,  
with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.*

*I ask this in the powerful name of Jesus.*

*Amen*

2. Read **Romans 1:16-32** slowly and thoughtfully. As you read and reread, *underline or highlight* any verses, phrases or words that are meaningful to you. Put a *question mark* beside anything you don't understand. Put a ✓ beside anything you would like more information about.

**You may also want to read the Scripture in another translation.** The Scripture handouts for these lessons contain the *New International Version* (NIV) and the *New Living Translation* (NLT). The questions are phrased to be answered from **either** of these versions. Other translations and paraphrases should only be used as supplementary texts to help your understanding.

3. Sum up the Scripture passage for this lesson in a short *sentence, phrase* or *title*.

## 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 ?

- ♥ 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*)?

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

G \_\_\_\_\_ (1:16)                      S \_\_\_\_\_ (1:16)

R \_\_\_\_\_ (1:17)                      F \_\_\_\_\_ (1:17)

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

John 3:16-17 - <i>gospel</i> (good news)	Titus 2:13-14 - <i>salvation</i>
2 Corinthians 5:21 - <i>righteousness</i>	Romans 3:22; 10:17- <i>faith</i> (belief/trust)

- ♥ 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**?
- ♥ An acronym for **FAITH**: **F**orsaking **A**ll **I**n **T**rue **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*?

**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)?

- ♥ 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?
7. Why can't anyone claim *innocence* before God because of *ignorance* about God (1:19-20; Psalm 19:1-3)?

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

- ♥ How can "futile or foolish thinking" and a "heart that is darkened and confused" be dangerous?
- ♥ 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.

- ♥ Do you think Paul is saying that these things are true of every single person or of humanity in general?
  - ♥ 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)?

- ♥ Would you consider this "action" by God punishment? Why or why not?
  - ♥ How is this "giving over" or "letting them go ahead" an act of "tough" love (Ezekiel 20:25-26, 39, 43-44)?
12. In 1:24-26, what are some specific consequences of God's "giving them over" to their desires?

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?
  - ♥ 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**.)
13. What happens to relationships and communities when people *refuse to acknowledge God* (1:28-32)?

- ♥ What does the list of sins in 1:28-32 suggest about sin in general?
- ♥ Do you think our culture/society reflects Paul's description of human nature? Why or why not?
- ♥ How is 1:28-32 a picture of the Fall of humanity as described in **Genesis 3**?

## *Response*

Consider again the list of sins Paul gives in 1:29-30. On the back of this sheet, make a list of traits that are the opposite of the behaviors that Paul mentions.

Evaluate your life against the characteristics you have listed. Where do you see God working in your life? Where would you like to see more evidence of his changing you? Spend some time in quiet reflection and prayer. Ask God to continue to change you so that you more and more display the character of Christ. If you see shortcomings in your life, how does **Romans 8:1-2** encourage you?