

JUDGES & ROMANS: RUINED TO RIGHTEOUS

Lesson 4: Ruin of Depravity

Key Verse: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.~ Romans 1.18

Emergency Room doctors wish people would avoid at least six things (they are in the “Diamonds” section below). God wishes you would avoid one thing: His wrath. Knowing that sin’s entry into His creation has resulted in people’s **total depravity**, He did what it took to give everyone the opportunity to avoid His **wrathful** judgment: He sacrificed His Son, Jesus. Now His people will be judged by Him in light of His Son’s sin-cleansing blood (forgiveness). Otherwise, one’s time before their Judge will be driven by His wrath against their sin.

Hallowed be the Name that cleanses us from the permanent stain of our sins. Holy are You LORD God.

Romans 1.18-2.29 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. **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 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.

CH 2 Therefore 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. **2** We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.

3 Do 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? **4** Or 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?

5 But 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. **6** He will render to each one according to his works: **7** to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; **8** but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. **9** There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, **10** but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.

11 For God shows no partiality. **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, **20** an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— **21** you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? **22** You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? **23** You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. **24** For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” **25** For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.

26 So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? **27** Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. **28** For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. **29** But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Diamonds: The six things emergency room doctors wish you would avoid¹ are never putting your feet on the dashboard (if the airbag deploys it slams your knees into your head among other possibilities), damaging your eyes when doing yardwork (yard scraps become projectiles that damage your eyes), mowing your lawn in flip flops (flip flops cause falls that lead to amputations), place boiling pots where little ones can reach them (scald burns of children under 5 are 61% of all burn center admissions, put boiling pots on the back burner), running into the bathroom when choking (fear of vomiting cause us to run to the bathroom which isolates and prevents help), and finally to avoid taking another person’s medications (this causes delays in treatment when we use Dr. Google and risks causing allergic reactions/harmful contraindications from our prescribed medications).

The list of things to avoid an emergency room visit seems much more possible to avoid than the natural inclination to suppress the truth of God (Romans 1.18). Likely it didn’t take Paul too long to develop his exhaustive list of the ways people suppress the truth of God, as well as its horrendous consequences (Romans 1.21-2.2). From our social media feeds to the news shows we watch to the dramas we stream, we are all too familiar with these consequences in our world today. However, lest we become like those Paul condemns for their self-righteousness, judgmental, and legalistic mindset, as well as their hypocrisy (Romans 2.3-29), let’s look what Jesus said was His mission and purpose as He lived in the midst of the same reality:

1. What does Jesus say is His purpose during His late-night, life-changing conversation with Nicodemus recorded in John 3.16-21?

Given Paul’s history as one who persecuted Christ-followers, alongside his ivy-league rabbinical education, it is easy to imply Paul’s tone in this week’s passage as hateful and disgusted, even a throwback to his old mindset (Acts 26.9-11). However, Paul had met Christ and had been given a mission from Him! This *radically* changed Paul (Acts 26.19-23).

2. Note Paul’s sense of humor as he reveals the good news of salvation to King Agrippa recorded in Acts 26.24-32 (V 29). It is King Agrippa who also marvels at Paul’s choice to be imprisoned (V 32). Ponder how Paul lived out Christ’s call to Him in the same grace and love Jesus commanded in Luke 6.27-36. How do you reconcile being reviled by the lifestyle, behaviors, anger, and harm of the godless (Romans 1.18-32) with Jesus’ commands in Luke 6.27-36? What tips and practical help does Paul’s example of proselytizing to a godless king (Acts 26.24-32) provide for us as we too share the gospel to the godless?

We must be cautious that our response to acts of violence does not blaspheme the name of God (Romans 2.23-25)! A heart circumcised by God’s indwelling Spirit (Romans 2.29) singularly pursues “praise...from God”. As we have studied in Judges, this is accomplished through wholehearted devotion, worship, and obedience to God. Jesus reminds us of who He came to die for in his intimate and eternal life-changing conversation with the two criminals He suffered alongside (Matthew 27.38-44; Luke 23.32-43). We see examples of both the godless and the religious hypocrites in the story of Jesus’

¹The New York Times, *Well* Newsletter, September 2, 2025

crucifixion. We also see how a person willing to come to terms with the truth about themselves, their sin, and their just punishment changes their eternal destiny when honest before Jesus: salvation! (Luke 23.40-43)

3. Read Matthew 27.38-44 and Luke 23.32-43. Imagine you are a first-hand witness to Jesus' crucifixion. As you hear the insults from those around you, as well as the women grieving from the sidelines (Matthew 27.55; Luke 23.55), you suddenly can focus and tune in on the conversation Jesus is having with one of the criminals. What is most shocking to you as you listen to Jesus, and why?

Paul packed a lot of hard truths in Romans 1.18-2.29! As mentioned, Paul addresses two categories of godlessness: those who suppress God's truth and those who through self-righteousness and hard-hearted hypocrisy destroy God's truth. Below are key concepts that explain the mindset that drives people either to God or away from God.

- General revelation: (Romans 1.19-21) "...through general revelation people can know God's power, deity, and glory (not His saving grace through Christ)...God's self-revelation...[is] made to everybody everywhere...[is] made through the natural order...reveals God's glory through creation" and has been made known since creation, continuing even today.
- Special revelation: "...God [has revealed] Himself to humanity through historical events, His Word, and through Jesus Christ. Through special revelation, human beings learn about God's character, His will, His purpose for creation, and His plan of redemption...through a saving relationship with Him in the person and work of Jesus Christ."²
- Natural revelation: (Romans 1.20, last sentence) "...a worldwide moral sense in human beings...[despite the influence of culture]...[that] testifies to everybody everywhere both that there is a difference between right and wrong, and that evil deserves to be punished (Romans 1.32)."³
- Natural religion/theology: "...the belief that it is possible for human beings to come to know God through nature, and therefore, as the way to God, creation is an alternative to Christ."⁴

Paul also warns of the consequences for those who base their personal outcome before God's coming judgment on God's salvation as revealed and provided in Jesus Christ, or on their own work and efforts to save them from God's penalty for sin: death (Romans 1.32-2.12). Below are three definitions of key concepts Paul describes or references that help us understand how important our decision is to either choose salvation in Christ, or salvation in self-righteousness.

- Exact retribution: (Romans 2.5-6) "...the principle that the basis of God's righteous judgment will be what we have done."⁵ (Psalm 62.12; Proverbs 24.12; Jeremiah 17.10, 32.19; Matthew 16.27; Revelation 2.23b, 20.12-21.8, 22.12-17)
- Divine Judgment: (Romans 2.9) "...although justification is indeed by faith, judgment will be according to works...the day of [God's] judgment will be a public occasion. Its purpose will be less to determine God's judgment than to announce it and to vindicate it. The divine judgment, which is a process of sifting and separating, is going on secretly all the time, as people set themselves up for or against Christ, but on the last day its results will be made public...And the only public evidence available will be our works, what we have done and have been seen to do. The presence or absence of saving faith in our hearts will be disclosed by the presence or absence of good works of love in our lives...authentic saving faith always issues in good works..."⁶
- Circumcision: (Romans 2.29) "...a God-given sign and seal of His covenant with [His people] (Genesis 17.9-14). But it was not a magical ceremony or charm. It did not provide them with permanent insurance cover against the wrath of God. It was no substitute for obedience; it was rather a commitment to obedience..." (Leviticus 26.41; Deuteronomy 10.16, 30.6) Now brought about by the Holy Spirit, circumcision is "inward and invisible", "in the heart, not the flesh", "by the Spirit, not the law", and "wins the approval of God rather than human beings." That said, what "matters to God is the deep, inward, secret work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts."

4. We told you Paul packed a lot of hard truths in Romans 1.18-2.29! Which of the key concepts Paul explains in this week's passage helps you understand God more? Which of them help you understand the importance of Jesus?

²The Gospel Project, #2. *Special Revelation*

³Stott, pp. 58-59

⁴Stott, g. 59

⁵Stott, p. 69

⁶Stott, p. 69

5. Without a doubt, the world is watching how professing Christ-followers are behaving and what we are saying. Prayerfully confess (in private) any hypocrisy, an uncircumcised heart, and/or a mindset like the godless. Knowing that Jesus suffered and died to bring salvation to “the barbarians...the wise and to the foolish” (Romans 1.14) as well as the criminals, the godless, and the religious hypocrites, how are you living so that when God judges your secrets and actions (Romans 2.6-7,10,16), they will reveal a circumcised heart singularly devoted to God’s glory, honor, and peace?

Deity: Wrathful⁷~ (Romans 1.18; Leviticus 26.14-39) In simplest terms, God’s wrath is “His displeasure with evil; it is expressed in judgment and punishment” (Romans 1.18; Ephesians 5.6; Colossians 3.5-6). God is opposed to and hates evil. As such, He will punish all evil.

“God’s wrath hangs over all in rebellion against Him and will be manifested in the future day of the Lord and the final judgment in the lake of fire (Revelation 20.11-15; Romans 2.5). Because God is holy and righteous, God must punish sin.” Sin invites God’s punishment (Ephesians 4.18; Romans 5.10, 8.7).

Man’s sin negatively affected his relationship to creation. Man’s mandate to rule and subdue the earth and its creatures is not revoked, but creation now works against man and frustrates his efforts (Genesis 3.17-19; Psalm 8.4-8).

“When man sinned against God, his sin erected a legal and relational barrier between him and God. The divine law was broken; man thus incurred guilt and is required to pay the penalty of spiritual death. The holiness of God was offended, and thus God’s wrath was aroused against sin. This leaves man alienated from God; broken fellowship and even hostility marks the relationship between God and man, who is in bondage to sin and death (Luke 21.22-24; Romans 1.18-20, 2.5-6; Revelation 6.16).”

“If there is to be any redemption from sin and reconciliation to God, man’s sin must be atoned (paid) for. And yet man’s spiritual death and depravity leave him unable to pay the penalty for his sin” (Romans 2.12, 3.23).

God’s anger is not “a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No; while God will vindicate His dominion as Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive.”⁸

“However, God in His Love has appointed the Lord Jesus Christ to stand in the place of sinners to bear their sin, guilt, and punishment and thereby satisfy God’s wrath on their behalf (Isaiah 53.4-11; John 1.29)...Christ had to bear the outpouring of God’s unmitigated wrath against sin in order to satisfy justice completely” (2 Corinthians 5.21; Galatians 3.13; 1 Peter 2.24).

“Both the Levitical sacrifices (Leviticus 1.3-4) as epitomized in the Day of Atonement and the rite of Passover portray the sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Exodus 12.24-27)...Just as the blood of the slain lamb protected Israel from the execution of God’s judgment, so also the blood of the slain Lamb, Jesus, protects His people from the Father’s wrath against their sin” (Romans 5.9, 8.1; Ephesians 2.3-5; 1 Corinthians 5.7; 1 Thessalonians 1.10).

The legal eviction process (in Texas) provides us with a tangible application of the reality of the result of sin: eviction from God’s Presence (Genesis 3.23-24). When a judgment of eviction is given by the judge, the evicted tenants have the option of appealing or seeking a reversing of the judgement. However, to do so comes at a cost: one full month of rent. Without paying the court (who gives it to the landlord) one month of rent in full, the evicted tenant has no ability to appeal the judge’s ruling. As such, the eviction stands and the tenant must remove all their possessions and themselves from the residence by

⁷MacArthur, J. & Mayhue, R., *Biblical Doctrine*, A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017) pp. 303, 458-459, 522-523

⁸AW Pink

the end of the 5th day from the judgment (weekends included in the 5-day count).

6. How is Jesus the payment for your appeal process before your Judge according to Romans 1.16?

However, if at the end of the 5-day count for application of an appeal the resident has not removed their possessions and/or themselves, the landlord files a “writ of possession”. This legal document is delivered by the court’s officer to the now illegal resident of the home, posting it clearly. This document informs the resident that they have 24 hours to remove themselves and their possessions.

7. According to Paul (Romans 1.19-20), how does God clearly “post” His right to ownership, worship, and rule of all of creation and all people?

At the 24th hour, the court’s officer and the landlord will return and remove both the illegal resident and their possessions *on that day!*

8. According to Paul in Romans 2.6-10, what are the two unique consequences for suppressing the truth of God (1.21, 25, 28, 32) and/or for embracing self-righteousness (2.1, 3-6, 8-9, 23-25) rather than God’s Righteousness offered through Jesus Christ?

9. Jesus is clear that once the appeals process runs out, eviction, or eternal separation from Him, will take place (Luke 16.19-31). Where are you in the appeals process? Has Jesus paid for your appeal, reversing God’s judgment of hell and torment? Are you still struggling with paying for the appeal with your own currency of works, trying harder to be perfect, or self-conflagration under the false promise that your suffering will cover the cost of your sins?

Doctrine: Total Depravity⁹~ (Romans 1.21-25) This doctrinal term describes “the unmeritoriousness of man before God because of the corruption of original sin.”

“...total depravity means that the corruption has extended to all aspects of man’s nature (Jeremiah 17.9; Matthew 7.11; Ephesians 4.18), to his entire being (Genesis 6.5; Mark 7.20-23); and total depravity means that because of that corruption there is nothing man can do to merit saving favor with God” (Romans 1.28, 2.9-18; Ephesians 2.3).

10. What is God’s remedy for total depravity?

Your Scripture-Soaked Prayer:

⁹ Evangelical Dictionary of Theology

Lecture Outline:

Aim: Sin is incompatible with God's design.

- I. Excuseless Depravity (Romans 1.18-32) **T1:** Because sin is incompatible with God's design, our need for Jesus Christ is critical.
 - a. In what ways do you suppress the truth about God?
 - b. What excuses do you make for continuing in your sin?
 - c. How sick and tired are you of your sin?
- II. Eternal Destinations (Romans 2.1-29) **T2:** Because sin is incompatible with God's design, His judgment is just.
 - a. What is the condition of your heart? Is it hard and impenitent or soft and repentant?
 - b. Is your way of living and thinking more defined by the fruit of the fall or the fruit of the Spirit? On the Day of Judgment, will you reap God's rewards or His wrath?
 - c. What good works are you busy doing to honor and glorify God?

Keller, Timothy, *Romans 1-7 For You* (Charlotte, NC: the good book company, 2014) pp. 25-64

The Gospel Project, *The 99 Essential Doctrines: #*, Lifeway Christian Resources (2018)

Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter to the Romans: The NIV Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: 2018) pp. 101-186

Stott, John R.W., *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 2020) pp. 53-81