

## **Lesson 2: Without Excuse**

### ***A Study of God's Case Against The Gentiles***

*Scripture reading: Romans 1:16–32*

#### **Introduction**

In Romans 1:16–17, the apostle Paul declared the great theme of his letter to the church in Rome: justification by faith through the gospel, available to both Jew and Gentile. He was not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. Having stated this theme, Paul then turned to build the case for why the gospel is so desperately needed. Beginning in Romans 1:18, he presented God's prosecution of the Gentile world, demonstrating that all of humanity stands guilty before God. The charges are severe: immorality, rebellion, and hypocrisy. Understanding this section is essential because we cannot fully appreciate the beauty of justification by faith until we first see the depth of mankind's degradation.

#### **Without Excuse: God Revealed in Creation**

Paul's argument begins with the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, unrighteousness, and those who suppress the truth (Romans 1:18). This is a sobering declaration: God's anger is not hidden but actively made known against sin. Paul then explained why humanity is "without excuse." God has made Himself known through creation (Romans 1:19–20). The heavens declare His existence (Psalm 19:1–6), the complexity of the human body reveals His intelligence (Psalm 139:14), and the power of the sun, moon, stars, and weather testifies to His might. All of mankind can see His "invisible attributes" and "eternal power" in the natural world, leaving them without excuse (cf. Acts 14:15–17). However, while creation reveals that God exists, His specific will for mankind can only be known through divine revelation (1 Corinthians 2:7–12). Nature tells us there is a God; Scripture tells us who He is and what He wants us to do.

#### **Wise Fools: Rejecting God for Foolishness**

Despite the clear evidence of God in creation, mankind rejected Him, and their hearts were darkened (Romans 1:21). Paul noted that this darkness was not the original condition of humanity; people were not totally depraved from the start but rather became darkened through their own willful rejection of what they could know about God (cf. Ephesians 4:17–32). Claiming to be wise, they became fools (Romans 1:22). Paul further described this foolishness by noting that people exchanged the incorruptible glory of God for images of corruptible things—idols made to resemble men, birds, animals, and creeping things (Romans 1:23). God is perfect (Matthew 5:48), yet mankind traded the worship of the perfect Creator for the worship of imperfect created things (cf. Isaiah 44:9–17; Psalm 115:3–8; Jeremiah 10:2–5). The foolishness of the so-called wise is a recurring biblical theme (1 Corinthians 1:18–29).

## **Turn to Sin: God Gave Them Up**

Because mankind rejected God, God in turn gave them up to their sinful desires (Romans 1:24–25). This is a principle of divine justice: when people persistently refuse God, He allows them to experience the full consequences of their choices, both morally and doctrinally (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12). Paul described the resulting behavior in graphic terms. Grossly immoral conduct followed, including the perversion of natural relations between men and women (Romans 1:26–27). Paul described these actions as vile, against nature, shameful, and carrying within themselves the penalty of error (cf. Jude 7). The downward spiral continued as people were filled with every kind of unrighteousness: sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness, gossip, slander, hatred of God, violence, pride, boasting, inventing evil, disobedience to parents, and being undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, and unmerciful (Romans 1:28–31). Paul concluded this devastating catalog by stating that those who practice such things, and those who approve of others doing them, are worthy of death (Romans 1:32). Even people outside of a covenant relationship with God are accountable for their actions. Christians are therefore called to refrain from such things and to rebuke them (Ephesians 5:7, 11).

## **Conclusion**

Romans 1 paints a sobering picture of the human condition apart from God. Paul's purpose was not to condemn for the sake of condemning but to lay the groundwork for the glorious message of justification by faith that unfolds throughout the rest of the letter. By demonstrating that all people—Jew (seen in Romans 2) and Gentile alike—stand guilty before God, Paul showed that no one can earn righteousness through their own merit. The evidence of God in creation leaves everyone without excuse, and the willful rejection of that evidence leads to a devastating downward spiral of sin. Yet even in this dark chapter, the hope of the gospel shines through, for it is precisely because we are “without excuse” that we are so desperately in need of a Savior.

## Thought Questions for Class Discussion

**1.** Paul said that God's invisible attributes are clearly seen through creation (Romans 1:20). What specific aspects of the natural world do you find most compelling as evidence for the existence and power of God? Why do you think some people still refuse to acknowledge Him despite this evidence?

**2.** Romans 1:21 says that those who rejected God "became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." This implies a process rather than an instant condition. How does sin progressively darken a person's understanding, and what can Christians do to guard against this in their own lives?

**3.** Paul described people who "exchanged the truth of God for the lie" (Romans 1:25). What are some modern examples of people exchanging God's truth for the lies of the world? How can we recognize when this exchange is happening in our own thinking?

**4.** Three times in Romans 1:24–28, Paul wrote that "God gave them up" or "God gave them over." What does this phrase mean, and what does it teach us about the consequences of persistent rebellion against God? Is there a point of no return?

**5.** Romans 1:32 indicates that not only are those who practice sin worthy of death, but also those who "approve of those who practice them." Why is approval of sin considered just as serious as committing it? What practical steps can Christians take to avoid giving approval to sinful behavior while still treating others with love and compassion (cf. Ephesians 5:7, 11)?