

The Universal Guilt of Man

Lesson Scope: [Romans 1:18-3:20](#)

Unless otherwise stated references in brackets refer to the Lesson Scope

Lesson Focus

Paul began the Book of Romans on the positive subject of the “gospel of God.” But then he turned his attention to the deplorable state of mankind without God. Man is hopelessly bound by Satan’s vices unless he repents and confesses his sins.

At the time of this writing, the city of Rome was home to more than one million people. Leisure and pleasure seeking were a large part of the people’s lifestyle. There were at least 159 holidays each year, and 93 of these were expressly for games and performances. There were numerous public baths in the city as well. All the emphasis on leisure and entertainment certainly went hand in hand with the gross wickedness and corruption of the lowest sort that was found there. Thus, Paul addressed such issues in his letter.

Today we also live in a land that tolerates much wickedness. Divorce and remarriage, alternate lifestyles, and things that are “a shame even to speak of” (Ephesians 5:12) are accepted as the norm. Those that dare speak out against these things are in danger of being accused of discrimination and are looked upon scornfully.

God has revealed Himself to all men; therefore, “they are without excuse.” The Gentile world has ignored the witness of the conscience and nature, and the Jewish world has wrested the witness of the Law.

This lesson is rather negative compared to the last lesson. However, it is necessary for us to remember that without God, we are all sinners. We are only sinners saved by grace.

Be careful not to elaborate very much on the sins described in chapter 1. This passage can be discussed without describing these sins in detail, which is neither appropriate nor discreet for a group setting. The carnal man in us gets subtle delight and satisfaction from dwelling on these sinful actions.

You should point out that although all men are sinful without God, man is not totally depraved. Total depravity teaches that man is hopelessly bound

in sin and cannot do anything about it. This only serves to make room for the flesh, and is clearly an unscriptural teaching.

Lesson Aim: To prove “all the world . . . guilty before God.”

Theme Verse: [Isaiah 53:6](#) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Lesson Text

A Degenerate Course

[Romans 1:18-23](#)

¹⁸ (KJV) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ¹⁹ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. ²⁰ For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: ²¹ Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, ²³ And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. \

[Romans 1:28](#) ²⁸ (KJV) And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

[Romans 1:32](#) ³² (KJV) Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

An Inexcusable Condition

[Romans 2:1-6](#)

¹ (KJV) Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. ² But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. ³ And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or despisest thou the

riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? ⁵ But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; ⁶ Who will render to every man according to his deeds:

Romans 2:17 ¹⁷ (KJV) Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,

Romans 2:21 ²¹ (KJV) Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

Romans 2:23 ²³ (KJV) Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?

The Universal Condemnation

Romans 3:9-19

⁹ (KJV) What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; ¹⁰ As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹² They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. ¹³ Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips: ¹⁴ Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness: ¹⁵ Their feet *are* swift to shed blood: ¹⁶ Destruction and misery *are* in their ways: ¹⁷ And the way of peace have they not known: ¹⁸ There is no fear of God before their eyes. ¹⁹ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Questions for Study

A Degenerate Course

1. What is meant by “the Wrath of God is revealed from heaven” in 1:18‘?
2. How does creation reveal God to man?
3. How might we be guilty of worshiping something other than God?

An Inexcusable Condition

4. How is God good in bringing man to repentance?
5. How can we free ourselves of guilt?

The Universal Condemnation

6. List Bible references that show the depravity of man.
7. How do those who have no fear of God express their condition?

8. How might we try to earn our own righteousness?

Analysing the Passage

“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven” (1:18) seems to indicate that through the Gospel, God reveals His intolerance of sin. God also uses man’s own conscience and nature to reveal Himself to all men.

Hold in 1:18 is the same Greek word translated withholdeth and letteth in 2 Thessalonians. Those who “hold the truth in unrighteousness” prevent or hinder the spreading of the truth.

Professing in 1:22 means “to assert” and likely refers to the Greek and Roman philosophers of the day who thought themselves wise, but were generally ungodly men. Though great and wise in the eyes of society, they fell far short of being true, godly, wise men. Thus, they “became fools” and descended to great depths of sin. Their wisdom could not save them.

Those who reject God’s truth, instead of letting God’s creation reveal Himself to them, make His creation their gods instead of worshiping the Creator.

Reprobate in 1:28 has the thought of “rejected” or “worthless.” When men persist in sin and make a deliberate choice to disregard God’s call, God allows them to continue in their sin. They are useless in God’s kingdom; they are devoid of sound judgment.

Commit (1:32; 2:2) means “to perform repeatedly or habitually.” These references contain the only two times that commit has this meaning in the New Testament.

Principles and Applications

A Degenerate Course

1. Rejection of truth is a personal choice (1:18). God has given a conscience to every responsible human. He has given every one of us the power to choose and reason. God created man as a free moral agent, fully capable of discerning and choosing. We cannot rightly blame anyone else for our choices. We will be held personally accountable for our acceptance or rejection of the truth.

2. God makes Himself known through creation so that all are without excuse (1:19~20). The marvels of creation are close to us each day. The birds each sing their particular songs, the bumblebee flies even though scientifically it should not be able to, the sun comes up at a predictable time each morning, and the moon goes through its phases. Who can explain how the earth and all the heavenly bodies are hanged upon nothing (Job 26:7),

yet they never collide? Only those who deliberately defy God, doubt and try to disprove that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists.

3. Though often corrupted, man's innate desire to worship a supreme being is proof of God's claim on his life (1:21-23). Every one of us worships something. Whether openly declared or secretly done, everyone has some person, thing, or being to which their foremost affection and devotion is given. Some openly worship Satan. Others believe that man is the supreme authority, and consequently worship themselves. Others worship a revered past or present leader.

4. Deliberate denial of God and continual rejection of truth will result in a reprobate mind (1:28, 32). God has given every person the power to choose. When man repeatedly chooses to use his powers in defiance of God, God eventually deprives man of the ability to use those powers. In doing so, God is not overriding man's will but rather He is allowing man to continue on the course he has chosen to go.

An Inexcusable Condition

5. God's judgment is certain, according to truth, and will be rendered according to every man's deeds (2:1-3, 6). In this world where wicked men seem to have the upper hand, this truth may seem unbelievable. As Christians, the eye of faith assures us that God will do as He has promised. To the ungodly, this thought brings fear, and they attempt to drown it by drunkenness and riotous living. God's all-seeing eye misses nothing. Every unrepented of sin will be punished. According as man responded to the truth, so will he be judged.

6. Repentance is necessary to relieve man's guilt (2:4-6). To be guilty is a miserable condition. It is "the goodness of God" (2:4) that convicts man through his conscience in order to bring him to repentance. Repentance then leads to a restored relationship with God, and eternal life instead of eternal damnation.

The Universal Condemnation

7. "There is none righteous, no, not one" (3:9-11). Man is not generally good, neither is he getting better and better. "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; . . . our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isaiah 64:6). Through the sin of Adam and Eve, the curse of sin has passed upon all man. Without God's cleansing power at work in our hearts, we are like the world of Noah's day: "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

8. Possessing no fear of God makes one guilty before Him (3:13-18).

Blatant disregard for God and His Word does not change who God is. The standard God has set remains the same whether or not man chooses to fear Him. Those who choose to not fear God now will surely fear Him at the Judgment.

Important Teachings

1. Rejection of truth is a personal choice (1:18).
2. God makes Himself known through creation so that all are without excuse (1:19-20).
3. Though often corrupted, man's innate desire to worship a supreme being is proof of God's claim on his life (1:21-23).
4. Deliberate denial of God and continual rejection of truth will result in a reprobate mind (1:28, 32).
5. God's judgment is certain, according to truth, and will be rendered according to every man's deeds (2:1-3, 6).
6. Repentance is necessary to relieve man's guilt (2:4-6).
7. "There is none righteous, no, not one" (3:9-11).
8. Possessing no fear of God makes one guilty before Him (3:13-18).

Answers to Questions

1. What is meant by "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven" in 1:18? God has revealed Himself to man through the Scriptures. This revelation includes God's holiness and intolerance for sin. There could certainly be a future aspect as well, but this phrase does seem to have more of a present aspect. God does at times reveal His wrath through natural disasters or through other means of causing calamity to fall upon the wicked.

2. How does creation reveal God to man?

The evidences of God in creation and nature are far too numerous to mention here. Many species of birds sing their songs, and some migrate thousands of miles every year. The earth is the precise distance from the sun that it needs to be so that the earth is neither too hot nor too cold. The earth, the sun, the planets, and the stars are all suspended on space—hung on nothing! Weather—snowstorms, thunderstorms, hurricanes, tornadoes, the water cycle, the carbon cycle—all these things man is powerless to stop or sustain.

3. How might we be guilty of worshiping something other than God?

While most of us would not literally bow down to idols or openly worship Satan, we can easily have misplaced affection. How much confidence do we have in our own abilities? If we manifest pride and overconfidence in

our abilities and accomplishments, we are subtly worshiping ourselves. Other places of misplaced affection might be a vehicle, a leader we look up to, or a hobby. The overemphasis on animal rights and preserving the environment are evidences that man is worshiping the creature instead of the Creator.

4. How is God good in bringing man to repentance?

The process of man coming to repentance is not a pleasant one, and it may seem that a loving God would not cause man such misery. But in reality, God leads man to repentance because of His great love for him. He is not willing that any should perish; therefore, He brings conviction through the conscience so that man can be saved from eternal damnation.

5. How can we free ourselves of guilt?

Of ourselves, we cannot. Yet God will not do it without a move on our part. First, we must recognize our need. Second, we need to act upon that knowledge by repenting of our sins and making confession to God, and to others if necessary. Third, we must daily crucify the flesh. When we do these things, we can live guilt free.

6. List Bible references that show the depravity of man.

Psalms 14: "There is none that doeth good." Romans 3:10: "There is none righteous, no, not one." Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

7. How do those who have no fear of God express their condition?

They are not afraid to lie to get their own way. Their language is full of cursing. They harbor bitter thoughts against many that they feel have wronged them. They delight in another's downfall, and even take another's life. They disrespect and defy the laws of the land and individuals in the government.

8. How might we try to earn our own righteousness?

We can fall prey to the idea that our own good works will outweigh our bad deeds. Perhaps we have wronged someone, and we do not want to confess it. Instead, we do many nice deeds to make up for the wrong we did. We might use the same kind of reasoning with God.

Summarizing the Lesson

Man without God is in a lost, hopeless state. The natural course of travel is the broad road. Most people are traveling this "easy" road. As God's people, we can easily divert onto this road because our sinful nature pulls us in that direction. Only through repentance and confession of sin can man be reconciled to God.