

Romans 1.18-32 Collapse of a Culture 014
Ray Mondragon

This is one of the most important passages in all of Scripture, Romans chapter One. Of course God is able, because of His sovereign hand, to control thoughts and work without manipulating our will. Thus the original writers of Scripture received a revelation from God which they could put down on parchment and has been preserved by the Holy Spirit such as we have it today. We believe in the concept of inspiration where God oversees the whole process, and because it is inspired, what Paul wrote to a particular group of Christians in the first century is as if God wrote it last night to you and me so that we have it this morning. Some passages seem more close at hand than others; this one seems as if He wrote it to us in our century.

Paul is talking about the collapse of a culture. One can take it in a broad sense, as if he is writing to all mankind here in the book of Romans. So far we have been looking at a lot of detail in the first 17 verses. Now we are going to do an overview of a whole passage, 1.18-32. This will develop the context of the passage so that you will have an idea of where we are going lesson by lesson—so you don't get lost in the forest for the trees. We usually go sentence by sentence, depending on the length of the sentences.

It deals with the collapse of a culture—pertaining to all of mankind or to an individual that is lost and does not know Jesus Christ. We will see the sequence showing how a person gets totally alienated from God. It is the beginning of Paul's developing, step by step, a provision of what God has provided for all of mankind. In general, mankind rejects what God has offered. So, the culture has basically rejected the Truth and that basically starts the process of degeneration which continues until an individual gets to a place where God takes steps to intervene to deal with the situation.

The Truth is shattered by mankind. We will look at where our country today is failing and what we can look forward to as a culture unless we are able, as believers, to reverse that trend. And that is our task. It almost appears (2017) that the Lord has given us an opportunity to do that—more time to share the gospel with the lost world so that we can do more in terms of turning the culture around. It is very important that we see what God is doing in the world, what He has done in the past and what He can do as He so pleases in His sovereignty.

After the introduction we come to the long portion and main part of the whole book: from verse eighteen through chapter eight. I title it ‘A provision of God’s righteousness’.

I. Introduction	1.1-17
II. Provision of God’s Righteousness	1.18-8.39
A. Condemnation of All	1.18-3.20
B. Justification by Faith	3.21-5.21
C. Sanctification thru the Holy Spirit	6-8
III. Vindication of God’s Righteousness	9-11

We studied that word: Righteousness is a right standing before the ultimate righteous Judge, before God Himself—and He is the one who sets the standards. We will find immediately that we do not have righteousness. In Scripture, such as Isaiah, we find that any righteousness we think we have is as ‘filthy rags’. God has provided His righteousness and this has—or should have—an impact on every aspect of our lives. First he has to demonstrate that *lack of* righteousness, and because we do not have it, we stand **condemned** before a holy God. That is the starting point, in a main part of the whole book, 1.18 through 3.20.

Remember the three parts of the gospel, to present it to someone who does not know Christ: the bad news: all mankind is condemned. Paul is arguing like a lawyer would in a courtroom, presenting a case, showing that we are criminals and we stand condemned. Unless an unbeliever understands their being separated from Christ, they have no interest in what Christ did to solve that issue.

Then, the next thing we need is the good news: Christ has provided everything that we need to have a relationship with God. Paul uses a term from the courts. We say ‘acquittal’, equivalent to the Biblical word **justification**. That is, we need a justification declared by the ultimate judge of the universe. We can stand before God, instead of condemned, we can stand righteous. The right standing is by justification. And that comes, not be going to church, doing good deeds (the humanistic approach)—that doesn’t work. It comes simply by trusting in what Jesus has already done for us when He died on the cross; He took on the condemnation that we deserve and now the judge can look at us and say: Jesus served all of the sentence that was falling on us so that now He can say that Jesus paid the penalty. We can go free, declared righteous, justified. And it came simply by what Jesus did. We try to do something to please God, but there is nothing we can do; it comes by faith.

Once we are justified, there is a life-long pursuit to continue with **sanctification** which means that now, set apart for God, eternity is settled once and for all—and God is looking at Jesus Christ. We never have to worry about eternal consequence of sin. But we are still in a

sinful body and still sin: how do we handle that on a day by day basis? That is called sanctification: how to live a new life with this new standing before God. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit, chapters six through eight. That is the provision of God's righteousness which has its effects in eternity and now it separates the true believer from the unbeliever. We are unique in that sense in our culture.

But then, in the first century, the Jews were asking: 'What about us Jews? We are the people of God, the Old Testament saints, the people who had a relationship with you.' Paul demonstrates that God is righteous and is vindicating His righteousness in setting Israel aside, making it clear that it is only temporary and there will be an ultimate regathering and salvation available for Israel as a nation like in the Old Testament. In fact, in Romans 11, he says that eventually all Israel will be saved. God is not through with the nation of Israel.

So we have the provision of God's righteousness and the vindication of His righteousness. In chapter 12 we read how it relates to particular situations in life. Until the end of the book, he is applying that principle.

We will see how Paul establishes the guilt of all, standing guilty before God. The heart of the unbeliever resists that at all cost. So Paul goes into detail to explain it and make it clear at least intellectually; and in general that message is going to be rejected—just as we did until we realized we had a need for Jesus Christ.

I. Introduction	1.1-17
II. Provision of God's Righteousness	1.18-8.39
A. Condemnation of All	1.18-3.20
1. Guilt of Humanity	1.18-32
2. Guilt of the Jews	2.1-3.8
3. Guilt of All Mankind	3.9-20

First he deals with humanity in general. Then the Jews will object: 'We are special, God's people'. But Paul will demonstrate their guilt as well, and if both Jews and gentiles stand guilty, that shows the guilt of all mankind, 3.9-20. That is the context of our passage and we must not lose site of it.

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1. Guilt of Humanity	1.18-32
a. Rejection of God	1.18-23

In chart form,



1.18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

In Ephesians Paul says that we are dead in sin, cannot do anything to change. This puts us under the wrath of God, condemned. Then he gives the reasons for it. Again, he argues as though in a courtroom, standing before the Judge of the universe.

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a. Rejection of God	1.18-23
1) Revelation and Reason for God's Wrath	1.18-19
a) Revelation of God's Wrath	1.18

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a) Revelation of God's Wrath	1.18
b) Reason for God's Wrath	1.19



Then, having established that we are under wrath, he gives us the rendering of God's wrath, 24-32. It is in the present tense, now—you can see the wrath of God today, look at our culture and see that His wrath is poured out on our culture, in a present tense sense. In verse 24 we can translate it to say He has *given over* our culture, repeating it in verses 26 and 28. When people fall into addiction, etc, into unbreakable bonds of sin and degeneration there is nothing that man can do. He just lets people go the way that sin will take them with its destructive path—an entire culture can fall into that downward spiral.

As long as there are believers there is an opportunity for a culture to turn around—that is our job. Looking historically at what happened to Israel; God gave them several hundred years and as they degenerated He intervened. The Babylonian invasion of 586 BC took them captive. Before the Genesis flood there was also a total cultural collapse, depraved, and God saved only eight people. Over and over there is this cycle of sin. Before the end of the church age there will be a similar thing before the believers are taken out. This passage describes the later stages of a culture.



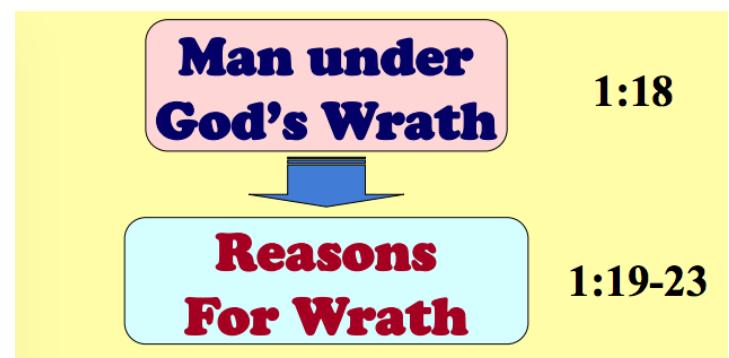
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| a. Rejection of God | 1.18-23 |
| 1) Revelation & Reason for God's Wrath | 1.18-19 |
| a) Revelation of God's Wrath | 1.18 |

First of all, in verse eighteen, we have the revelation of God's wrath.

1.18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

His wrath is revealed from *heaven*; you cannot figure it out scientifically. It takes a revelation and this passage tells what God is doing in every culture in the world. It is showing the condemnation against *all ungodliness*, that is, anything that is against God. And against the unrighteousness of man—any not in the proper standing before God. The masses of our culture stand in that situation and God is against that. He describes the nature of the sinful heart that suppresses the truth in unrighteousness. We cannot escape unless we know Christ.

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| a) Revelation of God's Wrath | 1.18 |
| b) Reason for God's Wrath | 1.19 |



He continues with the reasons for His wrath.

1.19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

He starts with the word *because* and gives reasons which continue all the way through verse 23. Note the words *known* and *evident*; He has made Himself known to every person who has lived on the planet—

from Adam on--and will continue doing it until the last person is born. It is not a lack of knowledge; we will study how He does it so that everyone has an opportunity. It is evident to all as He has made Himself known.



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 - a. Rejection of God 1.18-23
 - 1) Revelation & Reason for God's Wrath 1.18-19
 - 2) Revelation & Rejection of God 1.20-21

Next, in 20 ad 21, he tell us more about the revelation but also what man does with that revelation. The nature of the human heart is to suppress that truth, we deny it, we substitute other things for it.

1.20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

For, he continues logically, since the creation of the world, since Adam and Eve (all of humanity is in view here), before there were Jews: His invisible attributes, i.e., something of His nature, His eternal power, specifically—look at the Milky Way: there are 100 billion suns in it, and a 100 billion galaxies in the universe; we cannot even conceive of the power of God. That shows to any scientist that has been taught in any manner at all that God has the power because he is the creator of the

entire universe, all the galaxies. His power is evident; every time you see the sun shining, you see the power of God.

And, His *divine nature*: there had to be a God bigger than the universe with power, wisdom and knowledge to know how to make a universe work. Every man has some sense of that, enough because all of this has been *clearly seen*. This is an observational word; this is what scientists do: they observe the natural realm. *Being understood*: another word relating to knowing; they understand it enough. This is 'general' revelation.

Man has a realization that God exists, something of His nature, His eternal power and an understanding of Him. And it is adequate because it says at the end that it is *understood*. It is general revelation; you see it everywhere on earth. Besides this, God made it *evident within them* (verse 19); something tells them that there has to be a God.

So there is no such thing as an atheist. An 'atheist' is someone who has suppressed the truth so much (and done another thing we mention later) such that he has convinced himself that there is no God. He has received a revelation sometime in his life, maybe as a child, that is evident within him.

1.20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.



And, as a result of that *they* (all mankind, all who suppress the truth, all people, even we believers—but we have broken out of it in Christ) *are without excuse*. No one is going to be able to have a defense. It is a legal

term. No one will be able to stand up in eternity when we stand before God and say, ‘Well God, I went to church...helped the poor...did more good things than evil things,’ none of that is going to stand up. We will not have a defense. We stand before a holy God condemned unless we trust in Jesus Christ. This is the ‘bad’ news.

If someone is in a place where he has only this general revelation, but responds, then God will send him someone to give him ‘special’ revelation because the only way is in Jesus Christ.

1.21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Some rejected the truth, rejected God, only knowing him in a general way, but *did not honor Him*.



This brought them to wrong conclusions with their futile speculations. They came to the conclusion: ‘Oh, isn’t evolution wonderful? We just need more time for everything to continue to evolve.’ But the unbelieving mind is futile in its speculation and their ‘foolish heart was darkened.’ They were not able to see reality, not able to see spiritual things, however brilliant they were with whatever education, but with limited knowledge when it comes to eternity their hearts were darkened and foolish. So they rationalized everything:

1.21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.



In verses 21-23 we have the results of this. Man cannot live without ‘religion’. He has to replace God with something else.

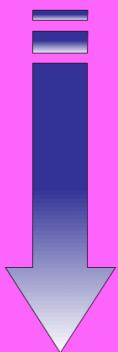
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| 1) Revelation & Reason for God’s Wrath | 1.18-19 |
| 2) Revelation & Rejection of God | 1.20-21 |
| 3) Results & Replacement of God | 1.22-23 |

So they end up becoming *fools*.

1.22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

We call that ‘Reprobation’, that is, now they are reprobate, totally out of sequence with reference to God.

REVELATION



Realization -	19-20
Responsibility -	20
Rejection -	21
Rationalization -	21
Reprobation -	22

Then, in verse 23, the replacement, exchanging the glory of God, the God that created all things with eternal power and great invisible attributes, incorruptible, unchangeable God—for an *image*. All unbelievers are idolators, not bowing down to a figure that they created, but anything that replaces the one true God, worshipping it. In our culture we replace Him with ourselves; we are the center of the universe, everything revolves around ‘me’. That is idolatry. In primitive cultures they actually bow down to images; we might worship money, success, spouse or children. We exchange the glory of God for something less than God.

1.22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

This is the progression: rationalizing we degrade to reprobation and finally replace God with something else—could even be with church.

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b. Rendering of God's Wrath	1.24-32

The last part, then, is God’s rendering of wrath, verses 24-32.

Here is the conclusion. He has made the legal arguments and now the Judge is going to act. One way he acts through history, over time, is that He *gave them over*. The Greek word is the same in all three of these verses. He gave them over to these things. He lets them go into whatever sin they are preoccupied with: success, self-centeredness or whatever becomes the center and goal in their life. This is the sense of His outpouring of wrath: He lets them destroy themselves.

1.24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them

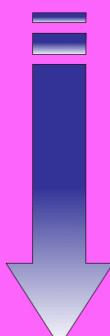
He repeats it—and here talks about homosexuality which is an end product of God allowing the culture to have this ‘freedom’, rather than intervening with, for example, revival.

1.26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

And then again in verse 28, with the same word *gave them over* and a long list, to the end of the chapter, of sinful behaviors.

1.28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

REVELATION



Realization -	19-20
Responsibility -	20
Rejection -	21
Rationalization -	21
Reprobation -	22
Replacement -	23



Another way to look at the reasons for wrath: rejection, rebellious reasoning, ruinous religion of some sort, even worship of self, all of which leads to righteous rejection of mankind, the outpouring of His wrath.

Romans 1:18-32

Reasons for Wrath:

Reject Revelation —>

Rebellious Reasoning —>

Ruinous Religion —>

Righteous Rejection of man by God

We are the salt of the earth in a dying culture!!! We have the answer and the only answer that can change the culture, and that is through the gospel message.

