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*“Sin & Judgment”*

ROMANS 1:18-3:24

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PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

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## BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

Why does evil exist in the world? Why does God allow bad things to happen to “good” people? Does God send people to hell? These and questions like them find their answers in Romans 1-3. Join us as we begin our study of this remarkable letter written by the Apostle Paul. It has changed the lives of countless people and has the power to change yours, too!

## INTRODUCTION

John Calvin said, “When anyone gains a knowledge of [Romans], he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of scripture.”

Martin Luther, who wrote of James that it is a “right strawy epistle” which would be fine if it were burned apparently, felt of Romans that a person could not spend too much of their life reading and reflecting on this letter. Many regard Romans as the principle letter of Paul, the hallmark of his theology, the most expansive and complete explanation of the Gospel.

The book of Romans is directly responsible for some of the most significant movements in church history.

Early church father, Augustine was converted to Christ in 386. As he later told it, his conversion was prompted by hearing a child's voice sing, “Tolle lege, Tolle lege” or “take up and read.” Looking around, he found a copy of scripture and he opened it at random to Romans 13:13–14, “*Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*”

Augustine is best known for his rebuttal against Pelagius. Pelagius argued that we choose to sin, but we have an innate goodness and the capacity to freely choose Jesus. Augustine coined and defended the doctrine of original sin.

Martin Luther was converted around 1513 while wrestling with Romans 1:17. It was in that wrestle that Luther first understood that God's righteousness is *given to* us, not *achieved by* us. “There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [our] merciful God justifies us by faith.”

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was converted in 1738. He and his brother Charles returned to England after a missionary journey in the colonies in America. He wrote of his experience in Georgia, “I went to America to convert the Indians; but, oh, who shall convert me?” Arriving back in England, he described his subsequent conversion experience in his journal, “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.”

I'm told Jonathan Edwards, the Father of the First Great Awakening in America which birthed many of our universities and the American Revolution and reinvigorated godly living in the colonies, was heavily influenced in his conversion by Romans.

Who here hasn't been influenced at least in part by the Romans Road to Salvation? In your conversion, it is almost certainly one of the hallmark verses on that road that has caused you to come to grips with your own sin and the amazing grace of God.

## THE MOST IMPACTFUL LETTER EVER WRITTEN

The reality is Romans has to be one of the most impactful letters ever written and the Lord has used Paul's writing to change the world and change the lives of billions of people. It is with the anticipation and expectation that God will do nothing less for you and me that I invite you to open with me the book of Romans today.

Look around you. Chances are that no matter how long you've been at Wildwood Church, many you see around you have been here less. The Lord has blessed our church with tremendous and diverse growth. We have people coming from all sorts of religious backgrounds – from reformed Baptist to Methodist to Lutheran to Catholic to Presbyterian to none at all. It is for this reason that I feel compelled to devote the next years, Lord willing, to the study of Romans, to set as it were, a Foundation.

Some of you will, like John Wesley, feel your heart warmed for the very first time at the preaching of Romans. You, like he, have served on mission trips, you've volunteered in the church for years, yet soon you will come to realize you have never truly believed the Gospel yourself. That is, until you do.

Others of you will like Augustine, approach this study mired in sexual sin and lust for material gain. You will hear the Lord call you out of darkness and into marvelous light, even if prompted by the voices of singing children "Tolle lege, Tolle lege."

Some will, like Martin Luther, finally be set free from the legalistic pursuit of righteousness. You will finally and fully come to understand that the righteousness by which you are to live is the righteousness that God gives you through faith.

Still others will, like Jonathan Edwards, have your hearts set ablaze for the glory of God and you will feel a renewed zeal for godliness and holiness in your lives. You won't be content to let it be confined to your life, though, and you'll take it out into the world and spark the third or fourth or fifth Great Awakening! Too high of expectations? The Word is powerful, so I'm setting the bar high!

But if I am honest with myself, as much as I hope with all my heart that every one of you will in one way or another be edified and filled with joy and hope and zeal for the Lord through this study, I cannot kid myself. For some will undoubtedly shriek at the doctrines Paul sets before you. Some will hear of the utter depravity of man, or the unconditional election of God, or the call to abstain from judging others over matters of personal conviction and these will not find a warm welcome in your heart.

## THE WORD OF GOD IS POWERFUL

The Word of God is powerful – it divides and it exposes. It bestows life and demands response. It will draw some so close to God they can hardly stand while it causes others to stumble. Come what may, God will be glorified through the faithful preaching of His Word.

Is man innately good? Or totally depraved? Does God send people to hell? Or does He rescue them from it? Is God justified in judging someone who never hears the Gospel? Why does God allow evil to exist and why does He allow bad things to happen to "good" people?

These and questions like them find their answers in the first three chapters of Romans. And don't worry, we're going to come back to Romans 1:1 and work verse-by-verse once we've concluded this five-week overview of the whole book. I want to first set the themes and provide the framework for the letter so that as we work our way through, you always have all five themes in view.

## ROMANS 1:18-25

**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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. 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. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 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.

No one has an excuse. There are no innocent victims, only suppressors of the Truth of God.

All the world and everything in it bears witness to the glory of God. Yet man rejects Him to serve objects of creation instead of the Creator Himself. Turning instead to idolatry – they worship anything their hands can make.

The fundamental problem in the world is that created man refuses to worship his or her Creator. John Piper famously once said, “Missions exist because worship doesn’t.”

We may not find pagan idols in the average home, but no doubt people today still worship things they create. Jobs, hobbies, sports, kids, looks, toys, reputations, technologies, education. No one could exhaust the list for as Piper says, “Our hearts are idol factories.”

### ROMANS 1:26-32

**For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 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. 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. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 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.**

Why is there evil in the world? Simple. Man has rejected God. This is nothing new. It’s been true of every generation since Genesis 3.

We need to reckon with the fact that people sin willfully. It’s not ignorance that causes people to sin. Paul makes it clear, every person sins willfully. They suppress the truth. They exchange the truth about God for a lie. They exchange the glory of God to worship idols.

They may not know the God whom they reject, but that in itself is all the evidence you need to conclude that man is totally depraved. For the created object to have no knowledge of, and ascribe no glory to, its creator proves that humanity is hopelessly lost. All of creation obeys Him while man rejects Him.

### ROMANS 2:1-3

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

Paul focuses his attention now on moralists because the temptation might be for some people to sort of cross their arms and lean against the backs of their chairs waiting until Paul’s writing becomes relevant for them, thinking this is only relevant to pagans outside the church.

Just as idolatry is condemned, so is religious hypocrisy. Those who have their pet sins they choose to ignore but condemn other people for their sins, Paul asks, “Do you think you will escape God’s judgment?”

## ROMANS 2:4-5

**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? 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.**

What a sober assessment. There were people who presumed upon the kindness of God in their self-righteous moralism but were in fact storing up the wrath of God for the day of His righteous judgment. God's kindness toward them should have led them to repentance, not religious hypocrisy.

For as Paul says in **2:11**, **God shows no partiality.**

## ROMANS 2:28-29

**For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 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.**

The Lord has always been concerned with the condition of your heart, not merely external behavior.

In **3:1-8** Paul refutes the notion that the Law, the Prophets, the choosing of Israel was all for naught. The fact that Israel rejected her God doesn't nullify God's faithfulness.

## ROMANS 3:9-18

**What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."**

Lest we sugar-coat our true natures, we're utterly hopeless to save ourselves. There is no good in mankind, no fear of God before their eyes. **None is righteous, no not one.**

## ROMANS 3:20

**For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.**

What good was the Law? It reveals just how bad we really are. And that's a good thing because we cannot appreciate the good news until we understand how bad the bad news really is. You and I and every single person who has ever lived have rejected God, lived for self. We have no excuse. We have no rebuttal. We have nothing coming but God's righteous judgment. The righteous by faith will live. But no one is righteous. The Law cannot make us righteous. We are condemned already.

Except, that is, by faith in Jesus Christ!

## ROMANS 3:21-24

**But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,**

There's the good news! All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. No matter how much you have tried to make yourself acceptable to God, your heart is desperately wicked and broken.

Mankind is totally depraved. There is no innate goodness in any man, woman, or child. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All of us in the words of that Great Awakening father Jonathan Edwards, are sinners in the hands of an angry God.

And yet God has made a way for us to be redeemed. While we were yet His enemies, Christ died for us. The godly for the ungodly. Relationship with God can be restored but it is not by might nor by power, nor by effort, nor by works of righteousness. Only by faith in Jesus can you be redeemed.

### A few things to keep in mind as we work through Romans verse-by-verse:

God is a righteous judge. It is right for God, who created us, to judge us in His wrath because we have, everyone of us, rejected our Creator. We have exchanged the truth about God for a lie and we have usurped His glory. We deserve the full cup of His wrath.

Everyone sins because they want to. No one has to force you to sin. It's what you in your flesh naturally want to do. Adam and Eve were not made to sin, they were made to walk in perfect unity with God. But Adam rejected God and *"just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..." Romans 5:12*

"All" in the Greek means...all. All have sinned because we want to sin. Because of that, we deserve God's righteous judgment.

God redeems sinners to deal with our unrighteousness and give us grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We call this justification and it's the theme for next week's overview of Romans 4-5. For as Paul says in *Romans 5:15*, *"...the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many."*

I want to revisit Martin Luther's conversion as I wrap up today. Luther [said](#), "I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath! Thus, I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, 'In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [our] merciful God justifies us by faith...Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates."

### ARE YOU WEARY?

Sinner, have you grown weary of your sin? How about you, moralist? Have you grown weary of your works of self-righteousness? Is there any fear of God before your eyes? Any hunger and thirst for righteousness? I invite you to enter through the doors of paradise freely opened before you. Lay down your sin at the feet of the Savior. Take up His free gift of grace and find peace with our merciful and righteous God as one redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

It is the blood of Jesus poured out for us and his body broken for us that we symbolize in the elements of the Lord's Supper. Do you know Jesus as Savior? Do you submit to Him as Lord? Worship Him as the saint you are, worship Him for He has made you so. He has taken your filthy sin upon Himself and draped you in His righteousness. If you do not know Jesus this way, I invite you to submit to Him even now, right where you are. Or come to me down here and I will gladly help you take that step of faith.

Examine your hearts, sing praise to His name. Let these words sing over your soul today, "I stand redeemed by grace alone!"