

Man: Innocent or Guilty?

Good morning! We're continuing our series on the book of Romans I'm calling "Power to Change". We're still in the first chapter. This is the 4th part of this series and I hope to wrap up chapter 1 today.

In the past few weeks, we've been talking about the good news. The good news of God. If there's good news there must be bad news. Usually, they go together. That's why we say, "I have good news and bad news. Which do you want to hear first?" Well, I already gave you the good news. Now, the bad news.

I've entitled this message, "Mankind: Innocent or Guilty". Based on Romans 1:18-32.

Have you attended a courtroom trial before? I have. A few years back. I wasn't on trial, ok? It was a person many of you know, a former member of our church. In the trial, he was accused of a misdemeanor. So, he was the accused and there was an accuser, represented by the prosecutor.

It is this picture which Paul is trying to paint in this first section. The case of this courtroom scene is mankind's guilt or innocence before God. The charge is that man has deliberately rejected God. The prosecutor is Paul, the accused is all of humanity. The charge is that we are all guilty and without excuse. What is the expected verdict when found guilty? Capital punishment which we find in verse 32. So, in this message, we'll look at **the trial of mankind.**

Notice Paul uses a lot of legal terms. He has a legal mind, you see, being very familiar with the laws of the Old Testament. In verse 19, he uses the word "since", verse 20- "for", 21- "for", 24- "therefore", 26- "because", 28- "furthermore". He's building a case against humanity step by step -- exhibit A, exhibit B, etc.

In verse 18, Paul starts off with the wrath of God. “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness”. What is the wrath of God? What is your idea of the wrath of God? Some of us may have in mind of a God who is blowing his top, who is very angry, smoke coming out of his nostrils, and throwing thunderbolts. Or maybe a God who is ready to zap with lightning anyone who transgresses his laws. Let’s look at the

I. The Wrath of God

The word wrath used here in Greek is the word orge. It can also mean anger or indignation. Now, anger is quite different from wrath, right? It’s like baby wrath. Bible translators, however, chose wrath instead of anger to emphasize God’s utter displeasure of sin. Anger just doesn’t quite fit the bill based on Paul’s context. In fact, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his sermon “The Wrath of God Revealed”, offers that God’s wrath is his complete hatred of sin. Complete hatred of sin! I agree. I believe that’s what Paul is trying to express here. God hates sin so much. He turns away from it. Habakkuk 1:13 says, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.”

Let’s take a look at what two basic things that God’s wrath is set on. It says, “against all the godlessness and wickedness of people”.

Godlessness means living as if God doesn't exist. That's not necessarily atheism. It doesn't mean you don't believe in God. Many people believe in God but don't live like He exists. They don't think He makes any difference. That's called secularism today. God's there but it doesn't have anything to do with me. Godlessness means living as though God doesn't exist.

Wickedness means living without any rules. Do your own thing, be your own judge, do unto others before they do unto you. Wickedness means you just don't follow any moral rules. Godlessness is a sin against God. Wickedness is a sin

against man. In the rest of this section, v. 18 is a summary of everything else we're going to look at, we see that Godlessness is seen in v. 19-23, wickedness is in the rest of the passage, v. 24-32.

The last part of v. 18 and verse 19 says, "people... suppress the truth by their wickedness." People know the truth inside them. In fact, each one of us has a conscience that tells us when we do something wrong. This sets us apart from animals. But we suppress the truth about God. We don't acknowledge him. We don't acknowledge our sins. And by suppressing it, we fall into deep trouble in our lives.

If you think about this courtroom scene, Paul says, "Man is guilty. Guilty on two counts of godlessness and three counts of wickedness." Godlessness comes before wickedness. Why? If your vertical relationship is not right, then your horizontal relationship is not right. If you're not right with God, you're going to be out of sorts with other people.

So, Paul says man is guilty of godlessness and God's wrath is against it. Then he lays out his case why.

II. Why mankind is guilty of godlessness.

Verse 19 says, "Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them." There are two things about God's revelation. God's revealed himself to man and

1. It's unmistakable. It's plain to see. He's talking about nature and creation. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God." The late astronaut John Glenn went up and circled the earth three times. John Glenn was a Christian. In an interview, he said, "To Look Out at Creation and Not Believe in God Is Impossible". God is revealed in nature. It's unmistakable.

2. It's universal. Verse 20 says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen,

being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse." The evidence is overwhelming. All of creation points to the fact that there is a God. Whether you're in Europe, Africa, Asia, America... everybody can look up and see the same stars, the world around them. Whether you're educated or under educated it's obvious, unmistakable, universal.

What does creation teach us about God?

a. **His power is eternal.** "... his eternal power..." Look at the world and all the solar system -- somebody designed that. You don't have a design without a designer. You don't have a creation without a creator. It just happened by accident? That's like saying I could take this watch off, take it apart, put it in a paper bag and shake it up and it would turn into a watch automatically. The odds on that happening are better than the odds of creation happening by accident. Paul says God has the power to create and as Jesus says his father is still working. Creation didn't happen by chance. God's power is eternal.

b. **His existence.** v. 20 "...and divine nature..." What he's saying is that anyone with a power to create must be God. He cannot be man. He cannot be a machine. Only God can create. Do you remember the poem "Only God Can Make a Tree" by Joyce Kilmer? I think that is taught in elementary. At least in the Philippines when I was growing up. I don't know here. At present I don't think so with the kind of godless culture we have now.

Notice what mankind does about this revelation of God through creation. This is where Paul starts building his case against humanity. Mankind has taken this revelation of God and does two things. He says there are a **couple of ways humanity rejects God.**

v. 21 "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him."

a. We refuse to give God his glory.

Instead, we give glory to ourselves. Examples are the teaching of the theory of evolution and the Big Bang Theory. Scientists proudly claim “We’ve discovered how life on earth began. We’ve discovered how the universe was formed.” We believe in our ability to answer man’s eternal questions. Note, however, that these teachings are not established facts. These are just theories. But we are good in explaining things away rather than accepting that there’s a God behind all the mysteries in the world. We refuse to give God his glory.

b. We refuse to give thanks.

Ingratitude is an offense to God. Why? No matter how smart or how dumb you are anybody can be grateful. The savage in the wilderness who knows nothing of culture can be grateful. But Paul says, we refuse to give thanks. Ungratefulness is ungodliness. Does it hurt you when you do something for somebody, and they don't express thanks? God says, "I've created all of this and you're so ungrateful!"

This reminds me of the ten lepers that Jesus healed one day. Only one came back to thank Him for it. That's about typical. about one tenth of the people are grateful. The other nine tenths are ungrateful. Psychologists says that gratitude is the healthiest emotion you can have.

c. Man replaces the truth.

v. 22-23 says, “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and animals and reptiles.” And in verse 25, it says the same thing in different words, “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.” When we replace God with something else in our lives it's called idolatry—making an idol. There's a god-shaped vacuum in every one of our lives and when we take God out of our lives something is going to

fill it—a person, a thing, an ideal. It becomes an idol and we create our own little gods.

There are two kinds of idolatry: crude idolatry and cultured idolatry. Crude idolatry is when people create and worship images made of stones or wood or whatever and kiss them and worship them. Meanwhile, cultured idolatry are not usually images of wood and stone. But we idolize them anyway. Like wealth, success, physical beauty, pleasure, fame, sports. Or they could be made of metal and plastic or some kind of material—cars, houses, nice clothes, etc. Anything that becomes number one in your life becomes your God.

Way back in the Old Testament, God warns against this. It's the first two commands in the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:3-4 "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt make no graven images." Nothing should take the place of God in our lives.

So Paul, in this court room case, gives the bad news: mankind is guilty of godlessness, trying to live without God in their lives and he states the reasons why. That is his first argument why mankind stands condemned before a holy God. And he presents evidence. Then, he states his second argument about mankind's guilt. He states that mankind is guilty of wickedness as well. As I mentioned earlier, wickedness is man's sin against another man. And he proceeds by presenting his evidences. Let's look now at

III. Why mankind is guilty of wickedness.

First, notice an important phrase Paul uses in the second half of this chapter: "God gave them over". It's used in v. 24, "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts." v. 26 "God gave them over to shameful lusts." v. 28 "God gave them over to a depraved mind." This is an important phrase when we understand Paul building this courtroom case. It literally means God handed these people over. What does it mean when God gives somebody over.

First, what does it not mean? It doesn't mean these people can't be saved. It doesn't mean that there's no hope for them. It doesn't mean that God quits loving them.

Let me explain it like this: Let's say you have a 19-year old teenage son. He's making a mess of his life. He's into cocaine and all kinds of other drugs. He's into alcohol and comes home drunk and vomits on your living room floor. He's living a wild licentious life, no morality. You come to your son one day and say, "You're 19, already past the legal age of 18. I can't run your life anymore. But if you're going to continue to stay at home you've got to follow the rules. If you can't follow the rules, you're going to have to move out. You're not going to wreck our life too." Your son walks out. And sadly, what you do is you give him over to the lifestyle that he wants to live. Do you want to do it? No. Are you glad to do it? No. But you've given him free choice. He's old enough to make choices on his own. You give him over.

The prodigal son is about this. You know the story of the prodigal son whose father let him go to live his own life until he came to his senses. The father did not force him to stay, but said "I'm going to let you go." God has to do the same thing with us.

What does it mean when God gives people over? It means He allows people to reap the results of their own choices. He lets you have what you think you want. You asked for it, you got it. You could go out and make a mess of your life and God will not stop you. Because He's given you a free will. He won't stop you. When we get ourselves in a mess, God doesn't bail us out. We reap what we sow. God doesn't have to send fire and brimstone on most of us, because the effects of living without God brings its own problems and destruction. That's why the world is in a decaying state right now. There are crimes, school killings, wars, sexual diseases, financial mess, because people put other things first before God.

Now, Paul presents evidence why mankind is guilty of wickedness.

a. Immoral Passions

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.” (v. 24)

It sounds like the sexual revolution. Immorality is prevalent today. In 2017, the CDC said that over half of US teens have had sexual intercourse by age 18. Then there are those who are living in or cohabiting before marriage. A study shows that 65% of couples who get married every year live together at some point before the marriage occurs. And there are those who get caught in adultery.

b. Illicit relations

“Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.” (v. 26)

The Roman Christians didn't need any explanation for this. They were living in a corrupt city called Rome. Perversion was everywhere. There were prostitutes, adulterers, homosexuals. They were using their bodies in unnatural ways, women having sex with women, men having sex with men.

v. 27 “In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.”

Paul says God allows people to be involved in immoral passions and indecent perversions in which they receive in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Sometimes it's a hell on earth. They don't worry about a hell in the future; it's hell on earth because of the guilt and the problems. Immoral passions, indecent perversions and irrational practices.

3. Indecent Behavior.

v. 28 “Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do

what ought not to be done.” Here he’s talking about a corrupted mind. People do things that are irrational, things that shouldn't be done.

There are 21 different types of sins cataloged here in verses 29-31, “They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.”

J. Vernon McGee calls this section "sinerama" – Cinerama with an S.

You see, it all starts in the mind. The way you think affects the way you act. There are people who are evil, greedy, malice, gossips, slanderers, insolent, arrogant, senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. In Rome, when Paul wrote this, if a man didn't like something that his slave did he could kill him on the spot. The owner had the right. In the Roman Empire, babies were so unvalued they could throw them out on the street. Secular historians say there could be 30-40 babies out on the street just because they’re unwanted. Heartless! We have that today. Abortion. We are not as modern and civilized as we think.

Paul has presented an airtight case. And now we come to

IV. The Verdict

The verdict is “Guilty as charged!” Mankind has no excuse as Paul correctly says in verse 20. What is the sentence? Verse 32, our last verse, says “Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do such things but approve of those who practice it.”

The death sentence has been handed down from God. Mankind has earned God’s ire and wrath. Mankind is doomed forever and is separated from him for eternity.

Now, the sad thing is that although we know inside of us that we deserve death, we don’t stop doing such things. Instead, we’re happy seeing others do it.

We think if we can get more people doing it, it will be more acceptable for us. The Greek word is applaud. Rather than be ashamed it says people approve of it. They applaud evil. You don't think today that people are entertained by watching evil, do you? Nobody would be entertained by watching violence and senseless perversion! This sounds like a soap opera. We even give Academy awards for movies that promote sexual promiscuity and violence. Movies that totally produce a lifestyle contrary to the will of God.

This is the most depressing passage in the entire Bible. Paul doesn't pull any punches. He gives a bleak picture. He says the opposite of evolution is taking place. Man isn't getting better, he's getting worse. When God put man in the Garden of Eden everything was perfect and since then it's been downhill. It's getting worse.

Now, I can't leave you here on this depressing note. Because there is good news. Let's go to Romans 5. Is there any hope? Verse 8-9, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"

Paul paints this bleak picture to say later that we don't have to suffer the penalty from all of this because we're saved from all of that. There may be some of you who are struggling with a habit in your life, an area of sin you don't know how to get rid of, a lifestyle that you don't like but keep falling into the same sin. 1 Cor. 6:9-11 says, "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

If we stop there it would be pretty depressing. That's the bad news. Here's the good news. The next verse says, "And that is what some of you were. But you

were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” The church is not for perfect people. It's for sinners. If you are a perfect person, please do not come back to this church anymore. It is a hospital for sinners. Paul says, "...such were some of you..." How would you like to be a member of the Corinthian church with all these people in it.

God says no person is hopeless. It doesn't matter how low you go. It doesn't say God gave them up. Some people think that's what that means. It says "God gave them over..." That means he allowed them to reap the results of their own sin. When you hit bottom, you oftentimes get wise and realize that's not the way to live. Many of you could give a testimony to that you didn't become a Christian until you hit bottom and realized you couldn't do it on your own.

This is the most depressing passage in the Bible. It's happening all around us—murders, wars, violence, immorality, child abuse, molestations, abortions, adulteries, homosexuality, etc. But the good news is that the good news does keep getting better because the bad news keeps getting worse. We can thank God for the good news and His grace. Paul switches his role from prosecutor to attorney for the defense. He starts showing what we have in Christ and how we won't be judges, how we can be forgiven, start over, and have a clean slate. Because Christ bore the full weight of God's wrath, we now enjoy the full blessing of God's mercy.

Because Christ bore the full weight of God's wrath, we now enjoy the full blessing of God's mercy. If you are a Christian and you are living with a guilt complex because you think God hates you, how little you understand of the cross of Christ. He loves you and is merciful towards you. His wrath has been turned away.

For those who reject Christ, there is nowhere else to turn. By that I simply mean the gift of Christ is so great, his sacrifice so magnificent, his death so awesome in its benefits, that if you decide to go someplace else, what you will find is there is no place else to go. If you turn from the cross and go back into the world, or if you think you can do it on your own and save yourself, if you turn from Jesus Christ, you will discover there is no place else to go. There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

Some 220 years ago there was a man in England by the name of William Cowper. A man of nervous disposition, he often struggled with bouts of severe depression. At one point in his life he became extremely depressed and fearful that he was under the wrath of God. "I flung myself into a chair by the window and there saw the Bible on the table by the chair. I opened it up and my eyes fell on Romans 3:25, which says of Christ, 'Whom God has made a propitiation through faith in his blood.'" These are his words: "Then and there, I realized what Christ's blood had accomplished and I realized the effects of his atonement for me. I realized God was willing to justify me and then and there I trusted Jesus Christ and a great burden was lifted from my soul." Since then, William Cowper has written 68 hymns some of which we have sung.