free by Grace
Romans
Leader’s Guide
Fall 2012
For years, *Echoes* curriculum has been one of the most widely used resources for African-American churches. Every lesson is easy to use, teacher friendly, strengthens the entire church body with a shared quarterly theme, and is certain to keep your classes engaged with relevant Scriptural content that applies to their everyday lives.

**Features Include:**

- Easy-to-use four-step lessons make teaching a snap
- Bible-based lessons encourage application in real-life situations
- Shared quarterly themes, across all age levels, tie the study of God’s Word together
- ISSL lessons offered to suit the needs of your adult classes
- Flexible and affordable to meet any church budget
- Free weekly downloads through [EchoesDownloaded.com](http://EchoesDownloaded.com) tie into current news stories and topics to take your class deeper into the lesson

**Special Features Include:**

- Quarterly Superintendent’s handbook helps leaders unify their Sunday school
- *African-American Book Review* presented in high school *Blueprint*
- *Highlights in Black History* featured quarterly in teacher’s guides for preschool through adult
- Ministry tips and ideas and quick references assist teachers in each lesson
- Appealing African-American artwork and engaging content for students of all ages
Lesson Overview

Lesson 1: Faith Calls for Perseverance

Toddlers (18-36 months)
Preschool (3 years-Pre-Kindergarten)
Early Elementary (Kindergarten-1st Grade)
Elementary (2nd-3rd Grade)
Upper Elementary (4th-5th Grade)

Middle School (6th-8th Grade)
High School (9th-12th Grade)
Adult – Comprehensive Bible Study (ISSL)
Adult – Understanding the Bible (book-by-book study)

Suggested Material for As Your Students Arrive:

- A cross and something opaque to cover it with, such as a towel or a handkerchief

1 Life Need
Discuss ways that someone’s perseverance was rewarded.

2 Bible Learning
Learn why we need to persevere in believing what we know to be true about Jesus.

Suggested Material:
- Adult Teacher’s Resource Kit:
  - Poster and reproducible sheet—Hebrews: A Definition of Faith

3 Bible Application
Discuss what we can do so we persevere in our faith.

Suggested Material:
- Adult Teacher’s Resource Kit:
  - Reproducible worksheet—Persevering Together
- Two sheets of newsprint, colored markers, adhesive tape

4 Life Response
Make a commitment to persevere in your faith.

Photo: © Shutterstock

Week of September 2

Lesson Scripture:
Hebrews 10:19-31

Lesson Focus:
Together we persevere in faith.

Church/Home Theme:
God Our Creator Calls Us

Perfect for All Ages

With Echoes, you can select curriculum by a specific age level or customize it to provide one solution for all.

Scope & Sequence

Toddler through Early Elementary – 2 Year Cycle
Elementary through High School – 3 Year Cycle
Adult Comprehensive Bible Study – 6 Year Cycle
Adult Understanding the Bible – 8 Year Cycle

To view the complete Scope & Sequence visit www.DavidCCook.com/Echoes

Format

Family-friendly
Classroom model
Printed curriculum
Additional online resources available
God’s Wrath (1:18-23)

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. —Romans 1:18

Since Paul’s primary focus in Romans is salvation through Jesus Christ, he set the stage by pointing to human sin and the subsequent need for redemption. The one who does not sense a problem (sin) will not seek a solution (salvation). Paul began by affirming that God’s wrath was being revealed against the wickedness of all those who suppressed the truth (vs. 18). This is something that is occurring even now, as people continue to believe their own deceptive hearts.

The individuals described in Romans 1 were certainly worthy of God’s wrath, for they suppressed God’s truth. The word “suppress” means “hold down with force.”

Like a ball held under water, however, God’s truth will one day rise explosively to the surface. What
When everyone is done writing, have your students give their names and read their headlines. Explain that Paul began Romans talking about God’s response to the problem of sin.

- **Truthfulness game.** Because the Lord is holy and just, He must deal harshly with the kind of sin that makes light of God’s truth (vs. 18). When that kind of rebellion is left unchecked, it rapidly destroys individuals, families, and societies.

  Supressing truth takes a concerted effort. To demonstrate this, instruct two volunteers to leave the room and find out something that is true about one but not the other—something the class doesn’t already know (for example, that one of them is a coin collector). While they are out of the room, explain to the others that the object of the game is to determine which of the two is telling the truth.

  Once the two volunteers have identified something unique about one of them, have them come back into the room and tell you what they’ve determined. Announce to the class, “One of these two is a coin collector” (or whatever the unique quality might be). Then have the class members begin asking questions designed to uncover the truth. By giving brief answers to the questions asked, each volunteer must try to convince the class that he or she is the one of whom the quality is true. After the class has asked four to five questions, have class members vote on which of the two is telling the truth. Then reveal the truth.

- **God has made the truth about Himself obvious to everyone through His creation.** Everyone has the opportunity to know and embrace that truth; therefore, those who reject it will be held responsible (vss. 19, 20).

**WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE NOT HEARD?**

What happens to those who have not heard the Gospel? Would God condemn people for not accepting a message they never received?

Romans 1 makes it clear that God has revealed Himself to all people, regardless of their exposure (or lack of exposure) to the Gospel. Before people suppressed God’s truth, they could see His power in the natural order. According to Paul, they could see His invisible qualities, including His holiness—and the absence of holiness in themselves. Before suppressing the truth, every person could sense his or her “disconnectedness” from the Creator of the universe, and their consequent need for reconciliation.

In rare cases this inner need for redemption has driven people—people who have never heard the Gospel—to acknowledge their sinfulness and to ask for reconciliation with the God who has revealed Himself in nature. Hebrews 11:6 paints this as a starting point—believing in God’s existence. For all who seek Him (Acts 17:27), God will prove Himself a rewarder. Acts 10 and 11 provide a case study of one who sought God sincerely and to whom God revealed Himself savingly in Jesus Christ.

In most cases, however, the inner need for redemption is repressed or ignored, and people seek out substitutes for God. They have sunk so deep that only the special revelation of God—the Bible—can pull them out. For these who are lost, we must continue to preach the Gospel.
Romans 1:24-32

Romans 1:21-25 indicates that these individuals worshiped the creation instead of the Creator. By seeing the intricate design of the universe, they could clearly understand the nature of God. Instead of glorifying God for His power, however, they looked for substitutes. In their foolishness they refused to give thanks to God. Their thinking became futile and their hearts were darkened.

When people turn from God’s truth, their ability to perceive truth becomes impaired. This should motivate us to study and apply the Scriptures (God’s special revelation) on a consistent basis.

Ask Yourself . . . How strong is my commitment to the study of God’s Word?

These individuals turned away from God to create their own deities patterned after various creatures. Notice something of a descending hierarchy: man, birds, animals, and reptiles. These individuals went from bad to worse, creating deities after increasingly weaker creatures.

Serving and worshiping idols yields virtually nothing but alienation from God. Anything we elevate above the Lord can become an idol—money, possessions, success, power, even relationships. Our source of ultimate security and peace should always be God.

This is a Roman statue of a centaur, a mythical half man, half horse. Paul told the Roman church that rebellious people exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like humans and animals.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I place more security in accomplishments, wealth, or people than I do in God?

Condemnation of the Idolater (1:24-32)

Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. —Romans 1:28

Because of their idolatry, God abandoned the Gentiles (or gave them over) to their depravity. Instead of attempting to restrain their wickedness, God simply allowed their sin to run its course. He removed His influence and

Consequences list

What have you come to understand about God through His creation?

Pairs discussion. Those who suppressed the truth refused to give God the respect and thanks that belonged to Him. They trusted in objects that could never provide security, purpose, or meaning (vss. 21-23).

Have your students get together in pairs and discuss the following question.

When people look to something outside of God for security (for example, money, possessions, position, relationships), what fundamental truths are they rejecting?

Possible responses: They are rejecting the truths that God is the only source of true security, and that the feelings of security that the objects of idolatry provide will one day vanish.

Have each pair write out its answers. After a couple of minutes of discussion, ask each pair to read its list aloud.

Section Summary

When people refused to respond to the light of truth, God allowed them to degrade their bodies and minds. They became sexually impure, and among other things, engaged in homosexual activity.

Questions and Activities

(about 11 minutes)

Consequences list. Because of their idolatry, God gave people over to their desires. They became sexually impure, engag-
homosexual activity (vs. 24-27).

Paul spoke of actively homosexual men who “received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion” (vs. 27). That application might include sexually transmitted diseases. However, it’s a general principle that sins can have negative consequences for those who commit them.

Draw a vertical line for a two-column chart on a whiteboard or piece of newsprint. At the top of the left column write the word “SIN”; at the top of the right column, write the word “CONSEQUENCE.” On the left side of the line, list some of the sins mentioned in verses 24-32. Ask your students to suggest some of the natural consequences of these sins; then have them get up and write their answers in the second column. When you are finished, your chart might look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIN</th>
<th>CONSEQUENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>heterosexual sin</td>
<td>unwanted pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homosexuality</td>
<td>sexually transmitted diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activity</td>
<td>dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>envy</td>
<td>dissatisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>murder</td>
<td>death penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strife</td>
<td>social unrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deceit</td>
<td>distrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malice</td>
<td>emotional coldness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>greed</td>
<td>financial crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gossip</td>
<td>ruined reputations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slander</td>
<td>friendlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrogance</td>
<td>disorder and chaos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXTRA**

Depending on the translation, Paul characterized homosexual acts as “indecent” or “a perversion” (vs. 27). Yet such acts are widely accepted in our society.

**How would you respond to someone who believes that homosexual activity is not sin?**

- These rebellious people dismissed God and participated in exchange of natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. For this twofold exchange, they received the due penalty for their perversion. Sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis and gonorrhea killed hundreds of thousands of people in ancient cities like Corinth and Rome—wherever these acts were common. Sexually transmitted diseases were as much a problem then as they are today.

Homosexual practice is consistently condemned in Scripture (see Lev. 18:22; I Cor. 6:9, 10; I Tim. 1:9, 10). The only sexual relationship recognized as God-honoring is a heterosexual one within the context of marriage (see Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:4-6).

While engaging in sex within marriage is a gift from God, sexual intercourse outside of, or prior to, marriage is a sin against oneself and God. As Christians we must be careful to guard this area of our lives.

God requires sexual purity of those who would follow Him.

In Romans 1:28 we read for the second time that God “gave them over”—this time to sexual perversion. Unlike the immorality of the cultic prostitutes, these sexual sins were private. Individuals perverted God’s gift of sex in the context of homosexual acts (vss. 26, 27). Men and women exchanged natural relations (between men and women) with unnatural relations (men with men and women with women).

The natural result of exchanging the truth of God for a lie was the penalty for their perversion. Sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis and gonorrhea killed hundreds of thousands of people in ancient cities like Corinth and Rome—wherever these acts were common. Sexually transmitted diseases were as much a problem then as they are today.
The truth of God for a lie was the and women with women). unnatural relations (men with men sexual acts (vss. 26, 27). Men and marriage by engaging in homosexual's gift of sex in the context of were private. Individuals perverted cultic prostitutes, these sexual sins over”—this time to sexual perversion. Unlike the immorality of the one time that God “gave them exclamation with an “Amen.” he burst forth in praise and sealed his of the Creator (vs. 25b). As soon as the exchange of God's truth for a lie (vs. 25a) the gods into doing similar acts, which acts were believed to provoke the hundreds of temple prostitutes who was written, this temple housed sexual impurity. Paul was writing exchange, they received the due consequences, which in this case produce its natural and inevitable allowed their willful rejection to the exchange of natural sexual relations penalty for their perversion. Sexually exchange, they received what they conceived the behavior of these individuals into four kinds of active sin: wickedness (the opposite of righteousness), evil (the profound absence of empathy, shame, and goodness), greed (the relentless urge to acquire more than one needs), and depravity (a constant bent toward immorality).

These four basic kinds of active sin in turn express themselves in specific ways. Those whom God has let go are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God haters; they are insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless (vss. 29-31).

The sinful behavior of these individuals was not due to ignorance of God’s commands (vs. 32). Rather, they sinned despite their knowledge of God, making them all the more responsible. Not only that, but they also applauded these practices in others. Perhaps seeing others do these things filled them with a sense of self-justification. In any case, they received what they deserved—spiritual death.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I guard what goes into my mind?

Romans 1:29, 30 define for us what is meant by “what ought not to be done” (vs. 28). Paul categorized the behavior of these individuals into four kinds of active sin: wickedness (the opposite of righteousness), evil (the profound absence of empathy, shame, and goodness), greed (the relentless urge to acquire more than one needs), and depravity (a constant bent toward immorality).

In Romans 2:1-11, Paul switched gears and dealt with the Jewish moralist who was in full agreement with Paul in regard to the condemnation of Gentile wickedness, but was unaware of his or her own failure to honor God. Perhaps Paul encountered this attitude when he preached in the synagogues during his missionary trips. His words are deliberately shocking, intended to knock the spiritually arrogant off their pedestals.

The person who condemns the adulterer has entertained lustful thoughts—adultery of the heart. Those who would judge the murderer harbor rage and resentment—a murderous attitude (see Matt. 5:21-28). Though there are obviously degrees of sin, all people have turned away from God and are in a state of condemnation before Him. Though we may be skilled excuse makers, we are all without any adequate excuse (Rom. 2:1).

Ask Yourself . . . What’s my favorite excuse?

Questions and Activities (about 12 minutes)

Paul told those who smugly pointed out the sin of others that they were condemning themselves because they did the same things. Those who pass judgment on others while doing the same things will not escape God's judgment (vss. 1-3).

Why do the sins of others often seem more serious than our own, even if we have done the same things?

Possible response: We often see our own sins in a more gracious light because we usually...
have a long list of reasons why we did the particular thing. We know it was wrong, but we had an excuse. When we see someone else doing the same thing, we assume they’re doing it for more diabolical reasons.

- Paul warned his readers not to see the patience of God as a stamp of His approval on their lives. Rather, they were to respond to God’s goodness by turning away from sin (vs. 4).

**What would happen if God justly punished every sin right as it occurred?**

Possible response: Every infraction of God’s law would instantaneously meet with righteous judgment—physical and spiritual death.

- **Patience boundaries.** The day is coming when God’s patience will end. Those who have remained unrepentant will feel the full force of God’s wrath (vs. 5).
- Ask people to explain the point at which their patience is exhausted. For some, it might be after two or three warnings. For others, it might be when a person keeps repeating a mistake and refuses to make corrections.

**How do you typically express your frustration when your patience runs out?**

- **Statement reaction.** God will give to each person according to what he or she has done. He will reward and punish people appropriately, first the Jew and then the Gentile. God will show no favoritism when He judges (vv. 6-11).

Read the following statement to your students and ask for their reactions.

Paul said that those who did good will inherit heaven and those who do evil will go to hell; therefore, the apostle taught that salvation depends upon works.

**The Separation of Jews from Gentiles**

When the people of Israel were about to enter the promised land, God commanded them to remain separate from their pagan Gentile neighbors (Deut. 7). They were not to make any treaties with them, intermarry with them, or expose themselves to any forms of pagan worship. While separate, however, they were also to serve as a beacon to draw the nations to the living God (Gen. 18:18; Isa. 60:3).

Most of the people of Israel took separation from the Gentiles to an extreme. For instance, it was against Jewish custom to associate with Gentiles in any way (Acts 10:28). Gentiles ate the unclean foods prohibited in the law (Lev. 11); hence, Gentiles were unclean. Mixing with Gentiles rendered a Jew ceremonially unclean, as did entering a Gentile building or handling articles belonging to Gentiles. One was not even to sit at a table with someone who was not a Jew; to do so was to contaminate oneself. These traditions even caused some of the apostles to hesitate in reaching out to the Gentiles with the Gospel (Gal. 2:11-16).

In Christ there are no ethnic distinctions when it comes to salvation or Christian principles. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile—we are all one in Him (3:28).

God’s judgment is based on truth (vs. 2). There is an objective moral standard by which the hearts of all people are measured. That standard is nothing less than the flawless character of God.Appearances count for nothing. (Paul understood that by outward appearances the Jew might have seemed righteous in comparison to Gentiles.) God judges according to a set standard (His own goodness), so in reality both the moralist and the “sinner” stand condemned.

Since the Jews were guilty of doing what they condemned in others, they would not escape God’s judgment (vs. 3). Paul no doubt thought back to his own experience as a Jew. At one time he considered himself righteous because of his law-keeping efforts. On the road to Damascus, he discovered the futility of his thinking.

Perhaps some of these Jewish moralists had misinterpreted God’s kindness and patience as a lack of intent to bring judgment against their sin (vs. 4; see Eccl. 8:11). On the contrary, God’s kindness was intended to lead them to repentance. Though God did not always punish sin immediately, judgment was still coming. The millstone of God’s justice grinds slowly but surely.

**Ask Yourself . . . How has God been patient with me?**

Scripture indicates, however, that there is a time coming when
God’s patience will be exhausted. In Romans 2:5 Paul said the Jews, through self-deception, stubbornness, and impenitence, were inviting divine retribution upon themselves. Their sinful actions and attitudes were building up a reservoir of divine wrath that will one day break forth like a dam under tremendous pressure.

In Romans 2:6-11 we are told that God will judge people according to their works (see I Cor. 3:10-15). He quoted Old Testament Scripture to that effect (Rom. 2:6; see Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12).

A person’s habitual actions indicate the state of his or her heart. Those who habitually engage in good works show their hearts have been regenerated (Rom. 2:7). They understand that the glory, honor, and immortality they seek can only be found in a dynamic and obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. Those who habitually engage in bad deeds demonstrate their alienation from God (vs. 8). Such people are not God-seeking but self-seeking, and thus reject the truth about their sinful condition.

Paul was not saying good works can save a person. The apostle stated later in his letter that no one can be declared righteous by observing the law (see 3:20; Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5). Good works don’t result in salvation; they simply attest to the salvation that has already been received by faith.

Paul’s words apply to all people—both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 2:9, 10). No one is exempt. God’s just recompense is without regard to ethnic background (vs. 11). “First to the Jew” simply means that historically God has dealt with Israel first, and then the rest of the world. All who continue to do evil (indicating their unsaved state) will suffer God’s wrath. All who continue to do good (as evidence of their regenerate hearts) will receive glory, honor, and peace through His Son, Jesus Christ.

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. —Romans 2:12

God’s judgment is based upon how people respond to the revelation they are given. The Jews were given a special revelation of God’s boundaries in the law of Moses. Though the Gentiles did not have a written code of conduct, God enabled them to distinguish between right and wrong. The revelation took the form of an internal law, or what we know as conscience.

Those “who sin apart from the law” are clearly Gentiles (vs. 12). Since the Gentiles were not the recipients of the law, their judgment could not be based on the written code of Moses. God judges people according to the light they have received. Their judgment was based upon the law God had written upon their hearts (see 2:14). They simply attest to the salvation that has already been received by faith.

In Romans 2:13 Paul said that there is a time coming when God will judge people according to their works, by faith.

Lesson 1

Questions and Activities

About 8 minutes

Obedience case study. Gentiles who sin and refuse to repent, even though they do not have the law, will still perish. Jews who have the law and refuse to obey it will likewise be punished. Obedience is what counts, not just knowing what is right and wrong (vss. 12, 13).

Read the following scenario to your students and ask for their responses.

A man was arrested for going sixty-five miles per hour through a residential neighborhood. The police finally stopped him in front of a school building. The man pleaded ignorance because he did not see any speed-limit signs—in fact, none were posted in that area.

If you were the judge in this man’s court case, how would you rule? How does this relate to the final judgment?
Paul explained that the Gentiles had consciences that accused or defended them according to the appropriateness of their actions. They would one day be judged according to how they responded to these promptings of their consciences (vss. 14-16).

Ask your students to list some questionable activities for which there may be no written law but that would negatively affect their consciences. [Possible response: taking office supplies home from work for personal use.]

How can a person’s conscience be desensitized over time?

Following Through
(about 5 minutes)

The problem of personal sin can be discouraging. At every turn it seems we are violating God’s standard. But thanks be to God for sending Christ to free us from the power of sinful habits we are humanly unable to break!

Ask your students to think of an object at home they have been meaning to throw away. Whatever the item, ask them to let that object represent a sinful habit or attitude they wish to overcome. Ask them not to throw that object away until they have asked God to help them make that change and have in fact made the change. Then, as a symbol of their faith in God’s help for sinners, have them throw the object away.

Looking Ahead

Next week’s lesson confirms that all people—Jew and Gentile—stand condemned before God. No one has a spiritual advantage over another; sin is the great equalizer.

Romans 2:12-16

The conscience bears witness to the law written on the hearts of Gentiles. The conscience is that inner faculty that evaluates actions and thoughts. The conscience can either accuse or excuse a person’s behavior. Of course, the Holy Spirit plays a major role in this inner dialogue. The Christian who is filled with God’s Spirit will be able to rightly distinguish between true and false accusations or rationalizations.

Ask Yourself . . . What have my thoughts been doing recently—accusing or defending?

God will judge all of humanity (Jews and Gentiles); the agent of His judgment will be Jesus Christ; and His evaluation will focus on secrets of people’s hearts (vs. 16). Sometimes people do good things that are actually rooted in selfish intentions. Other times people may appear guilty of a wrongdoing when there was no bad intention. Sometimes people internalize blame for the sins of others. On the great day, all that is hidden will be revealed—there will be no second-guessing when it comes to motives. God’s judgment will be impartial, perfect, and absolutely just.
Paul began his Letter to the Romans by affirming his apostleship and his special commission to further the Gospel. This Gospel centers on the person of Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human, whom God the Father raised from the dead.

Paul’s appointed ministry from Jesus Christ was to the Gentiles, including the Romans. And just as Paul was called to be an apostle, so believers in Rome were called to belong to Jesus Christ and to follow Him wholeheartedly.

Paul desired to visit the Christians in Rome. He desired not only to bring spiritual blessing to them but also to benefit from their spiritual gifts. Paul understood the importance of mutual encouragement.

Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ because it represented the power of God that made salvation possible. That salvation is available to all who believe, first to the Jew, then for the Gentile. The righteousness of God, received only by faith, is revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

God’s Wrath (1:18-23)

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The individuals described in Romans 1 were certainly worthy of God’s wrath, for they suppressed God’s truth. The word “suppress” means “hold down with force.”

Like a ball held under water, however, God’s truth will one day rise explosively to the surface. What
is the truth these individuals suppressed? The character of God and His invisible qualities revealed in creation.

God’s eternal power and divine nature are demonstrated through what He has made (vss. 19, 20). This is known as natural revelation because God uses the created order to disclose a part of Himself. Special revelation, in contrast, is the disclosure of God’s character through the written words of Scripture.

God is an invisible spirit (see John 4:24; Col. 1:15). Though the physical eye cannot see Him, His existence is reflected in what He has made.

Because God has disclosed Himself in creation, all people stand condemned before God. The condemnation of those who suppress God’s truth is justified because ignoring the revelation of God in creation is indefensible.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE NOT HEARD?

What happens to those who have not heard the Gospel? Would God condemn people for not accepting a message they never received?

Romans 1 makes it clear that God has revealed Himself to all people, regardless of their exposure (or lack of exposure) to the Gospel. Before people suppressed God’s truth, they could see His power in the natural order. According to Paul, they could see His invisible qualities, including His holiness—and the absence of holiness in themselves. Before suppressing the truth, every person could sense his or her “disconnectedness” from the Creator of the universe, and their consequent need for reconciliation.

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This is a Roman statue of a centaur, a mythical half man, half horse. Paul told the Roman church that rebellious people exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like humans and animals.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I place more security in accomplishments, wealth, or people than I do in God?

Condemnation of the Idolater (1:24-32)

Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. —Romans 1:28

Because of their idolatry, God abandoned the Gentiles (or gave them over) to their depravity. Instead of attempting to restrain their wickedness, God simply allowed their sin to run its course. He removed His influence and
allowed their willful rejection to produce its natural and inevitable consequences, which in this case were deadly.

What did God give the Gentiles over to? Verse 24 indicates it was sexual impurity. Paul was writing from Corinth, the location of Aphrodite’s temple. At the time Romans was written, this temple housed hundreds of temple prostitutes who were used sexually as an act of worship to false gods. These degrading acts were believed to provoke the gods into doing similar acts, which resulted in increased crops and larger families. Such religious prostitution was common in Roman culture. In this way these pagans exchanged the truth of God for a lie (vs. 25a)

The exchange of God’s truth for lies involved an exchange in worship. People served the creation instead of the Creator (vs. 25b). As soon as Paul wrote this and recognized the utter falsehood of this substitution, he burst forth in praise and sealed his exclamation with an “Amen.”

In verse 26 we read for the second time that God “gave them over”—this time to sexual perversion. Unlike the immorality of the cultic prostitutes, these sexual sins were private. Individuals perverted God’s gift of sex in the context of marriage by engaging in homosexual acts (vss. 26, 27). Men and women exchanged natural relations (between men and women) with unnatural relations (men with men and women with women).

The natural result of exchanging the truth of God for a lie was the exchange of natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. For this twofold exchange, they received the due penalty for their perversion. Sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis and gonorrhea killed hundreds of thousands of people in ancient cities like Corinth and Rome—wherever these acts were common. Sexually transmitted diseases were as much a problem then as they are today.

Homosexual practice is consistently condemned in Scripture (see Lev. 18:22; I Cor. 6:9, 10; I Tim. 1:9, 10). The only sexual relationship recognized as God-honoring is a heterosexual one within the context of marriage (see Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:4-6).

While engaging in sex within marriage is a gift from God, sexual intercourse outside of, or prior to, marriage is a sin against oneself and God. As Christians we must be careful to guard this area of our lives. God requires sexual purity of those who would follow Him.

In Romans 1:28 we read for the third time that God “gave them over”—this time to a depraved mind. These Gentiles put God’s reasonable boundaries out of their minds, and God responded by abandoning them to warped thinking. Out of this mind-set comes all kinds of evil deeds. From this we can see that the intent in the mind always precedes the sinful act (see Mark 7:20-23). As Christians we are commanded to take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ (see II Cor. 10:5). We accomplish this by guarding what goes
into our minds (see Phil. 4:8) and by testing the truthfulness of our thoughts by comparing them with the Word of God.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I guard what goes into my mind?

Romans 1:29, 30 define for us what is meant by “what ought not to be done” (vs. 28). Paul categorized the behavior of these individuals into four kinds of active sin: wickedness (the opposite of righteousness), evil (the profound absence of empathy, shame, and goodness), greed (the relentless urge to acquire more than one needs), and depravity (a constant bent toward immorality).

These four basic kinds of active sin in turn express themselves in specific ways. Those whom God has let go are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God haters; they are insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless (vss. 29-31).

The sinful behavior of these individuals was not due to ignorance of God’s commands (vs. 32). Rather, they sinned despite their knowledge of God, making them all the more responsible. Not only that, but they also applauded these practices in others. Perhaps seeing others do these things filled them with a sense of self-justification. In any case, they received what they deserved—spiritual death.

C Condemnation of the Moralist
(2:1-11)

You . . . have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

—Romans 2:1

In Romans 2:1-11, Paul switched gears and dealt with the Jewish moralist who was in full agreement with Paul in regard to the condemnation of Gentile wickedness, but was unaware of his or her own failure to honor God. Perhaps Paul encountered this attitude when he preached in the synagogues during his missionary trips. His words are deliberately shocking, intended to knock the spiritually arrogant off their pedestals.

The person who condemns the adulterer has entertained lustful thoughts—adultery of the heart. Those who would judge the murderer harbor rage and resentment—a murderous attitude (see Matt. 5:21-28). Though there are obviously degrees of sin, all people have turned away from God and are in a state of condemnation before Him. Though we may be skilled excuse makers, we are all without any adequate excuse (Rom. 2:1).

Ask Yourself . . . What’s my favorite excuse?
12 Lesson 1

THE SEPARATION OF JEWS FROM GENTILES

When the people of Israel were about to enter the promised land, God commanded them to remain separate from their pagan Gentile neighbors (Deut. 7). They were not to make any treaties with them, intermarry with them, or expose themselves to any forms of pagan worship. While separate, however, they were also to serve as a beacon to draw the nations to the living God (Gen. 18:18; Isa. 60:3).

Most of the people of Israel took separation from the Gentiles to an extreme. For instance, it was against Jewish custom to associate with Gentiles in any way (Acts 10:28). Gentiles ate the unclean foods prohibited in the law (Lev. 11); hence, Gentiles were unclean. Mixing with Gentiles rendered a Jew ceremonially unclean, as did entering a Gentile building or handling articles belonging to Gentiles. One was not even to sit at a table with someone who was not a Jew; to do so was to contaminate oneself. These traditions even caused some of the apostles to hesitate in reaching out to the Gentiles with the Gospel (Gal. 2:11-16).

In Christ there are no ethnic distinctions when it comes to salvation or Christian principles. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile—we are all one in Him (3:28).

God’s judgment is based on truth (vs. 2). There is an objective moral standard by which the hearts of all people are measured. That standard is nothing less than the flawless character of God.Appearances count for nothing. (Paul understood that by outward appearances the Jew might have seemed righteous in comparison to Gentiles.) God judges according to a set standard (His own goodness), so in reality both the moralist and the “sinner” stand condemned.

Since the Jews were guilty of doing what they condemned in others, they would not escape God’s judgment (vs. 3). Paul no doubt thought back to his own experience as a Jew. At one time he considered himself righteous because of his law-keeping efforts. On the road to Damascus, he discovered the futility of his thinking.

Perhaps some of these Jewish moralists had misinterpreted God’s kindness and patience as a lack of intent to bring judgment against their sin (vs. 4; see Eccl. 8:11). On the contrary, God’s kindness was intended to lead them to repentance. Though God did not always punish sin immediately, judgment was still coming. The millstone of God’s justice grinds slowly but surely.

Ask Yourself . . . How has God been patient with me?

Scripture indicates, however, that there is a time coming when
God’s patience will be exhausted. In Romans 2:5 Paul said the Jews, through self-deception, stubbornness, and impenitence, were inviting divine retribution upon themselves. Their sinful actions and attitudes were building up a reservoir of divine wrath that will one day break forth like a dam under tremendous pressure.

In Romans 2:6-11 we are told that God will judge people according to their works (see I Cor. 3:10-15). He quoted Old Testament Scripture to that effect (Rom. 2:6; see Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12).

A person’s habitual actions indicate the state of his or her heart. Those who habitually engage in good works show their hearts have been regenerated (Rom. 2:7). They understand that the glory, honor, and immortality they seek can only be found in a dynamic and obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. Those who habitually engage in bad deeds demonstrate their alienation from God (vs. 8). Such people are not God-seeking but self-seeking, and thus reject the truth about their sinful condition.

Paul was not saying good works can save a person. The apostle stated later in his letter that no one can be declared righteous by observing the law (see 3:20; Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5). Good works don’t result in salvation; they simply attest to the salvation that has already been received by faith.

Paul’s words apply to all people—both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 2:9, 10). No one is exempt. God’s just recompense is without regard to ethnic background (vs. 11). “First to the Jew” simply means that historically God has dealt with Israel first, and then the rest of the world. All who continue to do evil (indicating their unsaved state) will suffer God’s wrath. All who continue to do good (as evidence of their regenerate hearts) will receive glory, honor, and peace through His Son, Jesus Christ.
Romans 2:12-16

based upon the natural impulse of
their hearts (vss. 14, 15).

Those “who sin under the law”
clearly were Jews (vs. 12). Because
the Jews sinned under the law, they
were judged according to the law of
Moses. They heard and understood
the law and were expected to heed
it. Of course, since no Jew had suc-
cceeded in keeping the whole law, all
were ultimately condemned.

Reciting the Mosaic law was a
regular part of synagogue worship,
so the Jews consistently heard it (vs.
13a). Becoming righteous, however,
did not come from merely hearing
the law read. As was true with the
ancient Jews, we are challenged to
be doers, not just hearers, of God’s
Word (see Jas. 1:22).

Again, Romans 2:13b is not saying
that salvation comes by good works
and obeying the law. Rather, salva-
tion comes by faith and is consist-
tently evidenced by good works and
acts of righteousness.

Ask Yourself . . . How do my actions
demonstrate my faith?

Verses 14 and 15 are a parentheti-
cal statement by Paul, interrupting
the train of thought between verses
13 and 16. The backdrop to these
verses is that the Gentiles were
looked down upon by the Jews
because they did not have the
Mosaic law. But Paul pointed out
that there were Gentiles who did the
things spoken of in the law, reveal-
ing that its requirements were writ-
ten on their hearts.

This doesn’t mean the Gentiles
fulfilled every aspect of the law.
Rather, it refers to things they did,

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Lesson 1
ADULT UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

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