

The Book of Romans – Lesson 2

Romans 1:14- 2:6

58 AD

Last week we closed with Chapter 1, verses 9-13, in which Paul disclosed that he had long had the Roman church in his heart and in his prayers. He closed by stating his intention to visit them soon. Little did he know that it would take almost three years before he arrived, and that when he did come, it was as a prisoner of the government of Rome. We established last time that the origin of this epistle was Corinth. The time was 58 AD, just before Paul's ill-conceived return to Jerusalem. He had hoped to effectively warn them of the judgment that was coming on the Jews if they didn't repent of their rejection of Christ. We will see that same warning to the Jews in Rome in Paul's epistle.

Next, Paul had expanded on his motivation for wanting to come to Rome. Paul said his message of the Gospel was for all the peoples living in Rome. Then he delineated two ways in which the Mediterranean world drew distinctions among people for the purpose of considering some superior and others inferior.

Romans 1:14a **I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks *barbarians*,¹**

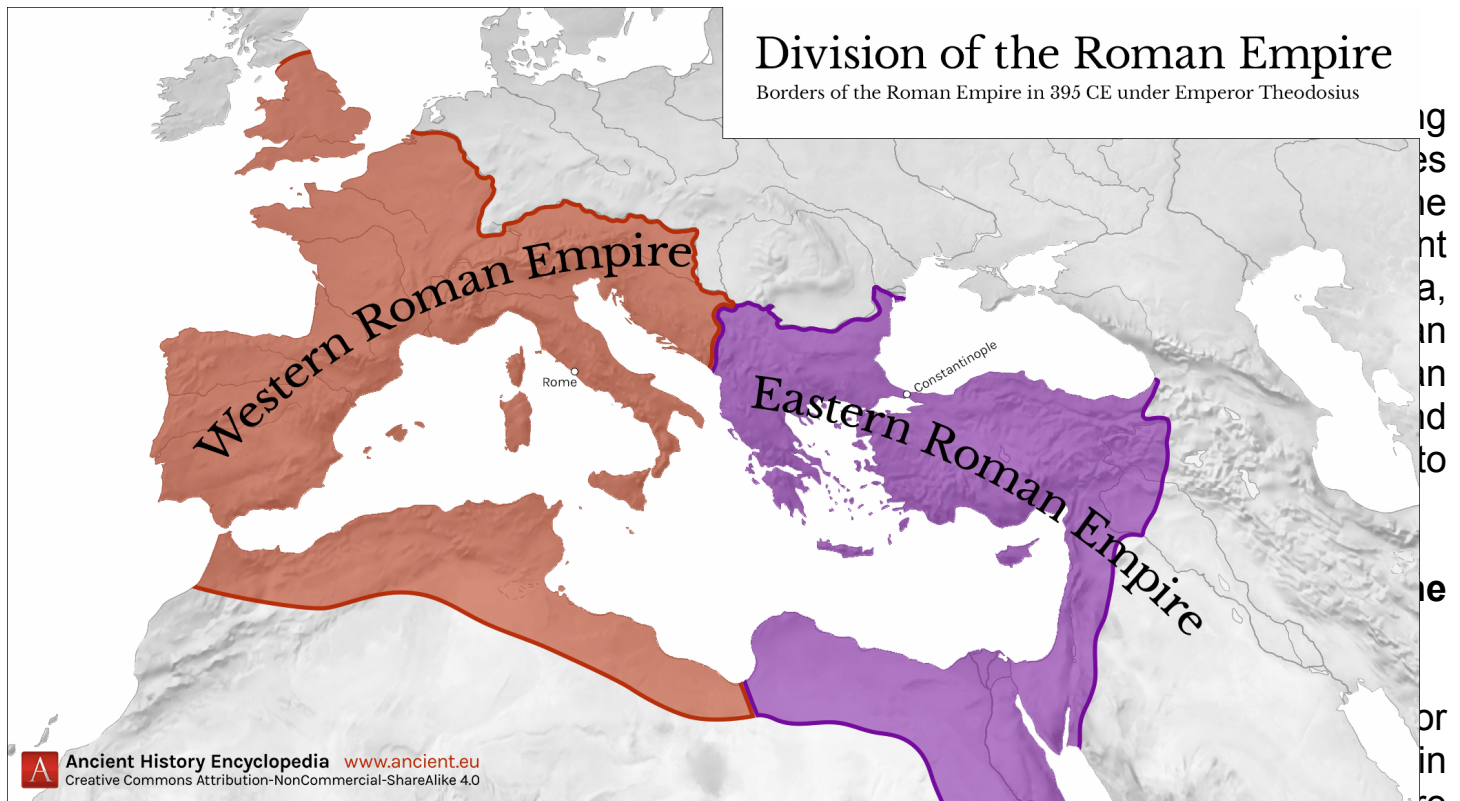
First there were the Greeks (to whom Paul had gone first) and the barbarians who lived or came from beyond the boundaries of the empire and spoke neither Latin nor Greek. The people of the Eastern Empire nearly all spoke Greek which had been imposed on that part of the world 400 years before by Alexander the Great. Even the ruling class from the Western Empire (see map on next page) nearly all learned Greek as children. These people all considered themselves superior because of their culture, organization, discipline, and military strength.

Romans 1:14b **both to the wise *educated* and the foolish *uneducated*.**

Second, there were the educated and the uneducated. The Greek word translated "wise" by the NIV is σοφός {so-fo's}. It is the root word for our word "sophisticated." The Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines the word as meaning "skilled in letters, cultivated, learned." The Greek word translated "foolish" by the NIV is ἀνόητος {ä-no'-ä-tos}. It literally means "without knowledge." I think the best understanding of the phrase is "the educated and the uneducated." Education and learning were much prized in the ancient world. In every part of the Roman Empire most of the members of the ruling class were educated. Those who were not educated were considered foolish or inferior.

1 The Greek word here is βάββαρος {bä'r-bär-os} which was a word applied originally by the Greeks to refer to those who spoke what they considered the uncultured languages. An English equivalent would be "jabberers."

Romans 1:15 **That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.**



Rome. Some of them had lived among the Gentiles of Rome for generations and were proud of the traditions that had set them apart from the Gentiles living around them. Most of them had been taught that, as Jews, they had been chosen by God at birth. Although this view wasn't supported by their own Old Testament, it was the prevailing view among the Jews at that time. They regarded the Gentiles as unclean from birth and only awaiting the inevitable wrath of God.

God had indeed made the people of Israel His special people to bring forth the Messiah who would bring salvation for the whole world. He had also greatly honored the Jews of that day in that it was to them first, that salvation through Jesus Christ had been revealed.

Paul's statement here was that "salvation is for everyone who believes." Furthermore, it was for both Jews and Gentiles. This last statement, "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile", served as the introduction of Paul's subject for the next chapter and a half. Paul here established the principle that is also very important to the true concept of election. That principle is that the power of God for salvation is activated by the personal faith (belief) of the Jew or Gentile in the Gospel of God.

Romans 1:17 **For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."**

From **Habakkuk 2:4** in the Old Testament, Paul pointed out that this was not a new principal. The Gospel of salvation through faith had not changed from the very first. Abraham himself, the great patriarch of the nation Israel, was justified by faith. This Old Testament reference indicates that Paul was directing these early remarks in Romans toward Jews who were familiar with the Old Testament.

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

Paul would make it clear that both Jews and Gentiles had reason to fear God's wrath. This was a shock to the Jews who thought that because they had a great ethical code from the Law and did not worship idols they could not be considered godless and wicked. However, the great wickedness that God truly hated was suppression of the truth! That was the greatest sin of all, and although the Gentiles were guilty of it, the Jews were even more guilty of it. They had denied the Messiah that God had sent to them in spite of all the miracles He had performed, and in spite of all the prophecies He had fulfilled. The wrath of God was against all who suppressed His truth! That was the great sin of mankind! It was turning one's back on God's truth!² Although it worked itself out in different ways, that was the great sin of both the Gentiles and the Jews. This is a theme that runs throughout the Epistle to the Romans.

We might ask: How was God's wrath being revealed? In the end times it will be unmistakable. It will be with destruction and slaughter. But from the time of Adam, through Paul's time until now, God's wrath is manifested in this world by His letting the consequences of sin play itself out. We see it every day in the workings of Satan's world and our lives. It is evidence of His grace, that He lets us see, in this life, while we still have chance to chose for Him, what happens when we depend on our own wisdom and our own way and make a "god" of ourselves.

Romans 1:19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

But to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, God had made Himself known. He had made himself known to all people who were willing to acknowledge what is plainly visible.

Romans 1:20 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.

2 2 Thessalonians 2:11b “---those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved”

All of mankind began with a knowledge of the truth, as they were first descended from Adam, and then from Noah and his children. However, besides that, God's power, great wisdom, and faithfulness are clearly seen in the intricate design of the universe, the earth, and all plant and animal life. That design alone testifies that God's character cannot be compared to anything we know. This is what the LORD himself said as recorded in Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:7-9 "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Today, our superior science has revealed how intricate and finely balanced is God's divine design of the universe and of life. It is much more so than we ever imagined in the past. Despite that, much of mankind prefers to ignore the manifest evidence of an intelligence at work in that design and believe that it all came to be by random chance. The problem has never been the lack of evidence of God. It has always been about man's refusal to admit to any supreme authority but himself.

Romans 1: 21 **For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.**

Most of the Gentile peoples had suppressed the truth of the nature of God which had been revealed to them! Instead they imagined "gods" who were greedy, lascivious, and cruel. Or more to the point, like themselves. Once they had made that decision their hearts became darkened and hard. Today, a small minority of unbelievers worship stone idols, or a pantheon of imaginary gods.³ They just worship humans. Sometimes they worship political celebrities like the supposedly sophisticated Germans did with Hitler. Sometimes they worship entertainment celebrities. Most often, they just worship themselves.

Romans 1:22 **Although they claimed to be wise educated, they became fools stupid** 4

Here Paul takes a shot at the wise or educated, who thought they were favored. The Greek word translated "fools" here isn't the same as in verse 14 which meant "uneducated." The Greek word here is μωραίνω {mō-rī'-nō}. It is the word from which we get the English word "moron." I used the more polite translation "stupid" although "moronic" might be closer to the point.

3 The exceptions are the Hindus of India.

4 Indeed this also describes what Adam in the Garden did when he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He thought he would become truly wise. Instead, he substituted his foolishness for God's wisdom.

Romans 1:23 **and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.**

Many “educated” people like the Greeks (whose culture the Romans had adopted) hardened their hearts against the truth, and instead of seeing the glory and immortality of God imagined God as like a flawed and vacillating man, or even an animal.

Romans 1:24 **Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.**

Because of their rejection of Him, God “gave them over” to sins. This is both the wrath of God and the grace of God revealed. Note that this indicates a reluctance on God’s part to overrule their free will. Also note the principal thus revealed:

First comes the rejection of the truth by men. Then comes the hardening of men’s hearts. It is only then that God gives them over to their own willful sins.

Also notice another key concept of Romans being introduced here. Sin was an inevitable result of the lack of a relationship with God and resulted in the perversion of all other relationships that God had designed.

Romans 1:25 **They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.**

Isaiah gives a similar but more detailed assessment of the folly of idol worship:

Isaiah 44:9-20 “All who *form* idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame. Who *forms* a god and casts an idol, which can profit him nothing? He and his kind will be put to shame; craftsmen are nothing but men. Let them all come together and take their stand; they will be brought down to terror and infamy. The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he *forms* an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint. The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. It is man’s fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, ‘Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.’ From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, ‘Save me; you are my god.’ They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.

No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, ‘Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?’ He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, ‘Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?’”

How little things have changed in two thousand years. Men who deny God are desperate to follow any lie, no matter how implausible, which will give them an excuse to ignore the truth. Modern educated men generally scorn peoples who worship statues, but the “things” they worship are even less likely sources of truth than stone idols. Many of them just say “There is no truth!” (Which, in itself, is an assertion of knowing a truth).

Romans 1:26-27 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

If men have rejected the “truth of God,” they are left to follow the “wisdom” of the flesh, which in the end often ends in just satisfying their lust. Mentioned here are the sexual lusts and perversions of homosexuality and lesbianism. Here is God’s wrath revealed. God does not strike these people with lightning or open the earth to swallow them. Instead, because they refuse to acknowledge Him, He allows their free will to function. They follow behaviors which are man’s attempt to provide the happiness, security and contentment that only God can provide. The natural consequences of these behaviors (disease, depression, and despair) are their own punishment.

Romans 1:28 Furthermore, 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.

The principal of verse 24 is repeated. First there is a rejection of the knowledge of God. After that comes a hardening of the heart. That, in its turn, eventually results in all other kinds of corrupted and depraved behavior.

Romans 1:29-31 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 are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

In our day, we can learn by looking at the recent historical examples of National Socialism (the Nazis) and Marxism (the Communists). Both philosophies denied the existence of God, and both produced the inevitable result. They produced the slaughter of millions in an orgy of hatred

and wickedness that we can hardly comprehend. Yet, in our country today, we find academic humanism in our schools promoting atheism as a way to a better world.

Denying God not only results in the destruction of nations, but it also results in the destruction of individuals in their relationships with parents, spouses, friends, and society in general.

Romans 1:32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

This passage said that people intuitively understand that these sins are death. But they continue in them and even wind up promoting them. Without God, they are caught in a trap they can't escape. The more they struggle in their own power to get out, the more securely they are trapped. Since they can't escape their sins, they deal with them by justifying them.

Romans 2:1 You, therefore, 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.

Paul had established the fact that God's wrath was being revealed against the Gentiles for rejecting the truth (Romans 1:18, 25). The manifestation of that wrath was that God surrendered them to their sin and its consequences. When Paul said here "you, therefore, have no excuse" he was addressing the Jews (Romans 2:17). Who were the Jews judging? The pagan Gentiles! But if they condemned the Gentiles, they had to condemn themselves. Why?

Romans 2:2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

Why was God's wrath against the Gentiles? It was because they had rejected the revealed truth of God in creation! The Jews were happy to scorn and judge the Gentile pagans for their overt sins that were merely the fruit of the root sin of rejecting that truth. But the Jews were guilty of the same thing. Only, they were guilty of rejecting a higher and more precious truth of God, the revealed truth of the redemption of the world through Jesus Christ! The same Jesus Christ who was manifestly revealed in their own Law and by their own Scriptures.

During Paul's travels he always went first to the synagogues where he nearly always met a strong resistance to the truth. The one place he didn't was Berea. About them Luke said:

Acts 17:11 "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Romans 2:3 **So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?**

The 1st Century Jew's rejection of the truth did lead them toward different types of sins than the Gentiles. They were more "polite" sins, more "cultured" sins. They were pride, greed and arrogance. They did not recognize that in fact, both they and the Gentiles, were both in the grip of the same root sin, rejection of God's truth.

Romans 2: 4 **Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?**

This was written 28 years after the Jews had not only rejected their Messiah, but crucified Him. Paul appreciated the tolerance and patience of God in holding off the judgment of the Jews for that act, but he knew the time of judgment was coming. It took place 12 years after he wrote this.

Also, note that in this verse Paul spoke of God's leading to repentance and man's stubbornness in rejecting it! This is totally contradictory to the Calvinistic idea of irresistible grace, which teaches that when God leads toward repentance one cannot resist! Evidently, one can, and can treat it with contempt.

Romans 2:5-6 **But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done."5**

This wasn't speaking of the Final Judgment at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15). This was speaking of the national judgment that was coming on the Jews. Perhaps the Jews were saying, "It's been nearly thirty years since we crucified that 'false Messiah' named Jesus and nothing has happened to us. If he had been the Messiah, God would have judged us by now!" Yet in a short few years they would see a chain of events that would result in the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the deaths of at least 1,250,000 Jews (by Josephus' account). That didn't include at least 100,000 that were made slaves. In 1 Thessalonians 2:16 Paul had spoken of "the wrath of God coming on the Jews at last." At that time he was writing from Corinth on his first visit. He had just been in Thessalonica and Berea before coming to Corinth where the Jews had violently opposed him. When they tried to oppose him in Corinth, the Jewish leaders were in fact the ones who were beaten by the local populace. Acts 18:12-17. This gives weight to the argument that it was the temporal wrath of God that Paul was talking about in this passage in Romans.

5 Proverbs 24:12 *"If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?"*