



## **“Living in a Romans 1 World”**

**Kevin Presley**

Why does the world seem to be in such a mess? Doesn't it seem like nearly everything is upside down? It appears we've gone from the death of common sense to outright insanity as a society. Have you ever wondered how we got to this point? We can, of course, go back and trace the history of man, noting the rise and fall of nations, religions and cultures, and try to deduce some sort of progression from where man started to where he is today. But really, the Bible explains it in one chapter.

The book of **Romans** has been called “the Constitution of Christianity.” It is a thorough and thrilling outline of God's plan of redemption through the ages. But, in order to unfold God's plan to save us, the apostle Paul first had to show what we needed saving *from*. In **Romans 1**, Paul essentially goes back to the beginning of it all and rehearses what has happened to mankind since the fall of Adam.

**Romans 1:15-25** “So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their

**own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.”**

What a terrible picture Paul paints, but it’s the story of the world’s history. It’s not just the story of a few deranged men who lived long ago; it’s the story of the world, that went its own way from God. Really, since Cain, in only the second generation of humankind, we see departure from Father God. The spiritual sickness of our modern world is diagnosed in this ancient text. We continue to live in a culture like Paul described.

Before Paul could adequately describe the gospel as God’s power to save in his letter to the church at Rome, he first had to show their need for salvation. So, the first three chapters of the Roman letter are devoted to exposing the utter sinfulness of mankind altogether; Jew and Gentile alike are shown to be fallen and in need of the grace of God. In chapter one, after describing the godlessness of the Gentiles, and then in chapter two exposing the hypocrisy of the Jews, his conclusion is seen here:

**Romans 3:10 “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:”**

**Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”**

The Jews were God’s chosen nation. They had a covenant with God and they occupied a unique relationship with the Lord. They were descendants of their faithful father, Abraham, to whom God made that covenant and promise. God had high expectations for His chosen people and He promised to bless them on the condition of their faithfulness.

On the other hand, the Gentiles were those people outside of this covenant, and outside of this chosen lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, mostly consisting of rank heathens and idolaters. Really, beginning with the sons of Adam and Eve, the spiritual separation or delineation of sorts began to occur as righteous Seth was chosen over worldly, wicked Cain. As you trace their genealogies through the first eleven chapters of Genesis, you see a line of faith that spans from Seth all the way through Abraham. This was the seed line through which, ultimately, the promise would come and salvation would finally be offered to the world.

But those who were not of that line are described as “worldly people” who chose wickedness and idolatry over the worship of God. God did not speak to them and He really had no dealings with them as they were outside of the covenant. Paul later described them in this way:

**Ephesians 2:12 “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:”**

By the time the family of Abraham was developed, all other peoples belonged to tribes and nations who did not worship God, but had devised their own gods and religions. They were pagans. This continued until we get the complete picture that Paul draws in **Romans 1**: the godless world of the Gentiles. Given over to sin and idolatry, and living in total darkness. That remained the case even in the pagan culture of the city of Rome, where Paul was writing to the church that was located there. Sinful men outside of Jesus lived in the total darkness that Paul describes of the ancient Gentiles here in our text.

Most of us who are saved come from that lineage. We are mostly Gentile people and our history is not pleasant. However, today, those of us who are in Christ, thanks to the grace of God, have been saved from that and we walk in the light of truth and redemption, forgiven of our sins. But the world outside of

Jesus remains in the darkness that Paul describes in **Romans 1**. We are living in the midst of a “Romans 1” world.

When you read **Romans 1: 18-32**, while you are reading a description of an ancient people, you might as well be reading this morning’s newspaper. This chapter continues to explain why the world is the way it is today. Paul not only describes to us how the world is, but he tells us how it got that way. It is an endless cycle of how men reject God and where that leads them; why mankind is such a mess and why, even today, our world is just upside down. In today’s study, we will notice the progression that Paul describes, the downward spiral of men who were originally created for God’s glory, but came to swim in the cesspool of sin and be abandoned by the God whom they first rejected.

### **I. They rejected the truth they had.**

God did not just cast them aside; rather, they cast God aside. We see that in **verses 18-20**. The Jews had a great advantage over the Gentiles because of their special relationship with God. He had spoken to the Jews through their patriarchs and their prophets. Namely, they had a law from God that came through their leader and prophet, Moses.

**Romans 3:1-2 “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.”**

So, God had given them a *supernatural revelation* of His will for them. The Gentiles did not have that kind of revelation or relationship to God. But that does not mean that God had not revealed Himself to them. The Gentiles had what we would call the *natural revelation* of God that is given to all men of every age and walk of life. Sometimes the question is posed, *What about people in some remote place who have never heard the gospel or have never seen a Bible?* Well, first of all, someone needs to take the gospel to them, which is the point of gospel evangelism. But still yet, they have God’s *natural revelation*. What I’m talking about is that the existence and the invisible attributes of God are shown by the universe that He created. It’s axiomatic.

**Romans 1: 18 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;”**

That last phrase is a clue. *Who hold the truth in unrighteousness* literally means *to hold back the truth, to hold down or suppress the truth*. What that tells us is that they had the truth, but they suppressed the truth that God had given them. Now, they may not have had as much truth as the Jews. That is, God may not have revealed Himself in the unique way that He Had to His people, the Jews, but they still had a revelation from God and they rejected what revelation they had been given.

**Romans 1:19-20 “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”**

Any person who can behold the majesty and order of the universe, and the intricacy and irreducibly complex web of life that surrounds and fills us should be able to see that such would necessitate a powerful and wise creator, and lead them to seek that Creator. That is then where God’s revealed

will, His word, comes in. Men are inherently bent toward the recognition and worship of God. The wise man, Solomon, indicated this:

**Ecclesiastes 3:11 “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts...”**

When we respond favorably to the revelation of God as it is in creation, we are then able to receive God’s *supernatural revelation*—His word, the gospel—and be saved. But you won’t get to the point of hearing, believing and obeying the gospel if you reject the light that God has given everybody in His creation.

But, of course, the world rejected God’s revelation from the very beginning. Paul goes on:

**Romans 1:21 “because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”**

Man sees the implications of acknowledging God as his Creator: that means God makes the rules. But mankind typically resists that. Man wants to be in control and live as his fleshly desires direct him and not be ruled by God. The psalmist said it like this:

**Psalms 2:1-3 “Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, “Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.”**

In other words, *we don’t want God ruling over us*. Look at God’s response.

**Psalms 2:4-5 “He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure:”**

Look what happens when they reject the truth. There is a consequence. When you reject the truth of God, there is a consequence and Paul will describe it for us.

## II. They replaced the truth with foolishness.

**Romans 1:21-22 “because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools,”**

Since we don’t want God telling us what to do, we have to somehow get rid of God. Well, you can’t physically or literally get rid of God, but you can remove Him from your own heart and your own consciousness. If you remove God from the equation of life, that leaves you with some tough questions to try to answer. Where did the universe come from? After all, from nothing comes nothing. So, how did this all happen? How did we end up here? How did rational, intelligent, emotional, thinking, feeling man come to be?

It’s hard to ignore those questions, so we end up saying that something MUST’VE come from nothing, even though we KNOW that nothing comes from nothing. That is one of the most basic axioms of science, philosophy and so forth: if you start with nothing, you’ll always have nothing. But

because man rejects the idea that there is a transcendent being who was the source of all that is materially, he must turn to this philosophy that out of nothing somehow came something. And out of that something (that somehow, at some time came from nothing), accidentally came life. The most brilliant scientists on earth don't have a clue how to produce life from non-life, yet they will assert the foolish theory as fact that somehow, randomly, by accident, life came from non-life, from material that somehow came to be from nothing. And that life, that accidentally came from something that came from nothing, changed and evolved to *really* become something. All of the varied kinds of life and, ultimately intelligent life that was crowned with the emergence of man. Man, who can map the human genome, split an atom and travel to the moon. You are ridiculed today if you don't accept that unproven theory. I'd rather say what Paul said:

**Romans 1:22 "Professing to be wise, they became fools,"**

This atheistic, humanistic, secular world view is increasingly saturating our society and along with it comes moral confusion and chaos to a degree that perhaps the world has never seen. Today, we can choose what gender we want to pretend to be, we can teach prepubescent elementary school children about all kinds of sexuality, we will protect an animal at all costs but murder unborn babies by the millions...*professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*. That is how we've gotten to where we are now.

**III. They replaced God with idols of their own making.**

That's the next step in the downward spiral. Listen to Paul again:

**Romans 1:23-25 "And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."**

Do you see what's happened here? Men, by nature it seems, have a propensity to worship. So, if he doesn't worship God, he'll worship something else. Particularly, he doesn't mind worshipping a god that doesn't interfere with his hedonistic lifestyle. I mean, a mute, lifeless idol doesn't tell you whom you can or cannot sleep with or how to live your life. So, man replaces God with other objects of worship. That's how the world became saturated with idolatry. It's as simple as saying that men rejected the true and living God and replaced Him with gods made in man's image. The Bible tells us that man was made in the image of God, but instead, man has made gods in his own image, and today we see a lot of people in supposed Christianity who really are working very hard to try to recreate the TRUE God into their own image.

The timeline of history is littered with the images and idols and gods that men have devised and worshipped at one time or another. Perhaps we are a little more sophisticated today, so our idols don't often consist of statues, although in some cases they yet do. But for the most part, our idols today are a little more subtle: money, possessions, movie stars, athletes, music stars...and the number one idol that men have set up to bow down to is man himself. Theology has been replaced with me-ology. Even in many religious circles, *do what you want, it's all about you, do what makes you happy, the meaning of life is for you to feel fulfilled...*and God is left out in the cold. Can't you see that we live in the midst of a **Romans 1** world? That is how we got here.

#### IV. They received what they desired.

And what man desires is to fulfill all of his own desires. That's where Paul indicates that God gave these people who did not want Him and thus His way, over to the life that they chose.

**Romans 1:26-32** "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

You can see the result of all of this. It's amazing how well Paul describes our modern day. This is the result of the philosophy that began in these people and brought them to the point that they live the kind of lives that Paul describes. Paul lays bare the sad state of affairs in the world today. Men left behind all moral reason and sanity and practiced every manner of wickedness and lasciviousness, even defiling himself by doing that which is against nature itself. The farther he can get away from God, the more he likes it. The more he can turn anything that hearkens unto righteousness, sanity and morality on its head, the more he likes it because he is shaking his fist at God, like the psalmist described and like Paul has already described in **Romans 1**: *We don't want God or His rule in our lives! We want to be in control!*

It is a sad, sad picture in **Romans 1** and it is a picture of the world we are living in even today. There is a terrible, chilling phrase that Paul uses at least three times in this chapter.

**Romans 1:24** "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:"

**Romans 1:26** "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:"

**Romans 1:28** "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;"

That phrase *God gave them up* or *God gave them over* means *God turned them loose*. The verb *to give up* in the Greek means *to hand over, to deliver*. Scholar and commentator Moses Lard says that it means that God ceases to restrain people from evil, and He leaves them alone to do whatever they please without any intervention from Him. That doesn't mean that God approves of it; He simply lets them have what they want as a penalty for their rejection of Him. Another commentator says that God does so in order that they will see the futility of a life turned away from the truth of God. God smote them, in other words, that He might heal them.

But God has provided an answer to all of this madness, and that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the only hope in this world.

**Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”**

When man abandons God and God then lets him go his way, he will destroy himself. And outside of Jesus, there are no answers to the madness of our modern world. There is no politician, no government program, no amount of money, no brilliant utopian scheme that will ever save and redeem the world. Rather, the gospel of Christ *is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.*

We live *in* the world of **Romans 1**, but friend, you don't have to be *of* it. Jesus is the answer. The world is hopelessly lost without Jesus Christ and if you don't know Him as Savior, you need to obey the gospel. He offers to save you today if you'll place your faith in Him, repent of your sins, be willing to confess Him and be baptized into Christ to have your sins washed away. We'd love to hear from you if you'd like to obey the gospel or learn more about His word.

**©2017 BibleWay Media.** All rights reserved.  
BibleWay Media grants permission to copy this material for personal use. Permission is also granted to distribute this transcript as long as it is reproduced in its entirety, used solely for its original purpose of spreading the gospel, and attribution is given to the author and Let the Bible Speak.