



### **Romans 1:18-25 (ESV)**

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

### **Romans 1:18-25 (HCSB)**

18 For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, 19 since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse. 21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.

24 Therefore God delivered them over in the cravings of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.

# English Standard Version Bible - *Study Bible*<sup>1</sup>

## Romans 1:18-25

**1:18-3:20** *God's Righteousness in His Wrath against Sinners.* This next main section shows that God's wrath is being righteously revealed against all people, both Gentiles and Jews, since all have sinned and fall short of God's glory ([3:23](#)).

**1:18-32** *The Unrighteousness of the Gentiles.* God's wrath is righteously revealed because people suppress the truth about the one true God and turn to idolatry ([vv. 18-23](#)). The consequence of idolatry is the moral disintegration of human society ([vv. 24-32](#)).

**1:18** The **wrath of God** refers to his personal anger against sin. God's anger is not selfish or arbitrary but represents his holy and loving response to human wickedness. Some have understood God's wrath in impersonal cause-effect terms, but this betrays a deistic worldview rather than a biblical one.

**1:19-20** God's wrath is expressed for good reason since his **power and divine nature** are clearly revealed through the world he has made, and yet he is rejected by all people. These verses show that salvation does not come through "general revelation" (what is known about God through the natural world) since Paul emphasizes the universality of sin and concludes that "no one seeks for God" ([3:11](#)). **things that have been made.** The entire natural world bears witness to God through its beauty, complexity, design, and usefulness. **without excuse.** No one should complain that God has left insufficient evidence of his existence and character; the fault is with those who reject the evidence.

**1:21** The root sin is the failure to value God above all things, so that he is not honored and praised as he should be. Human beings are foolish, not in the sense that they are intellectually deficient but in their rejection of God's lordship over their lives. **They knew God** not in a saving sense, but they knew of his existence and his attributes.

**1:22** Even brilliant people who do not honor God miss the whole purpose of life and are therefore **fools** (cf. [Prov. 1:7, 22; 10:1; 12:15; 14:7; 17:25; 20:3](#)).

**1:23** Idolatry is the fundamental sin. **images.** In addition to the images housed in great temples, Roman families commonly kept representations of individual "house gods" in their homes (examples found at Pompeii are particularly striking). Mediterranean and Near Eastern pagan religion worshiped idols in the form of beasts, or in the likeness of mixed beast/human deities such as the ancient gods of Egypt. Modern "idols" don't look like ancient ones; images served today are often mental rather than metal. But people still devote their lives to, and trust in, many things other than God.

**1:24** Three times Paul says **God gave them up** ([vv. 24, 26, 28](#)). In every instance the giving up to sin is a result of idolatry, the refusal to make God the center and circumference of all existence, so that in practice the creature is exalted over the Creator. Hence, all individual sins are a consequence of the failure to prize and praise God as the giver of every good thing.

**1:25** **exchanged the truth about God for a lie.** Paul implies that all other religions are based on false ideas about the one true God; they are not just "different paths to one God," as some claim.

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1. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 1".

## Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*<sup>2</sup>

### *Romans 1:18-25*

**1:18** All people need the gospel because they are under **God's wrath**, which stems from His holy revulsion to sin. Paul wrote this letter from the Greek city of Corinth—a city full of idolatry and immorality. Mankind originally knew God and fellowshiped with Him ([Gen 3:8a](#)). The history of the world and of the OT reveals a subsequent regression and loss of moral knowledge. Since the garden of Eden, people have been unrighteous, and they have suppressed **the truth**.

**1:19** God as Creator has disclosed Himself in creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims the work of His hands" ([Ps 19:1](#); cp. [Ac 14:15-17](#)). People also have an innate capacity for God as well as a moral conscience. God is at work to show Himself in the world, yet the world is in rebellion against Him.

**1:20** Mankind's problem is not that he doesn't know the truth. The history of the human race discloses a determined effort to oppose the will of God. People are **without excuse** for their idolatry and practical atheism.

**1:21** Because of human willfulness, people's knowledge of God became clouded and their thinking became **darkened**. Without contact with God, the center of man loses contact with reality, misses the purpose of his existence and becomes ungrateful. People are supposed to **glorify Him as God**, but instead find all sorts of created objects to worship. Part of the wrath of God is revealed in humanity's loss of intelligent **thinking**.

**1:22** A classic example of human foolishness is found in [Isa 44:9-20](#) where human cleverness ends in stupidity.

**1:23** Many people think that the history of religion developed along an evolutionary model. In this view, humanity originally held animistic beliefs and then progressed to polytheism, to tribal deities, and then to a single creator God. From there we progressed to a vague philosophical monotheism in the Enlightenment, and finally we are now embracing atheism in the age of science. But this is not true to the early history of religion. Instead of starting in polytheism, the Bible says humanity started with knowledge of the one true God and then declined into polytheism as humans were separated from God and fractured from one another. Paul warns that loss of knowledge of the true God resulted in the worship of **images resembling mortal man**. Even in the modern age we have seen dictators worshiped as god, and the Bible says this sin will be repeated climactically in the end times ([2Th 2:3-12](#); [Rev 13:1-18](#)).

**1:24** Because they rejected the truths of God revealed in creation, God punished the Greco-Roman world by delivering them to **the cravings of their hearts**. A similar scenario played out in the life of King Ahab of Israel, who continually rebelled against God ([1Ki 16:29-33](#)). As a judgment, God permitted a lying prophetic spirit to deceive Ahab to his doom ([1Ki 22:22-23](#)). The ancients were enmeshed in polytheistic idolatry, and in their devotions to their false gods they practiced all sorts of immorality.

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2. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., HCSB Study Bible, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 1".

[1:25](#) The loss of the knowledge of God in the mind and heart leads to an exchange of **truth** for a **lie**. Something created is served and worshiped rather than the Creator, and judgment is the result ([Ps 81:12](#); [Ac 7:42](#)).

## NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

### *Romans 1:18-25*

[1:18](#) Why is God angry at sinful people? Because they have substituted the truth about him with a lie ([1:25](#)). They have stifled the truth God naturally reveals to all people in order to believe anything that supports their own self-centered lifestyles. God cannot tolerate sin because his nature is morally perfect. He cannot ignore or condone willful rebellion. God wants to remove the sin and restore the sinner—and he is able to, as long as the sinner does not stubbornly distort or reject the truth. But God shows his anger against those who persist in sinning. Make sure you are not pursuing a lie rather than the true God. Don't suppress the truth about him merely to protect your own lifestyle.

[1:18ff](#) [Romans 1:18-3:20](#) develops Paul's argument that no one can claim by his or her own efforts or merit to be good in God's sight—not the masses, not the Romans, not even the Jews. All people everywhere deserve God's condemnation for their sin.

[1:18-20](#) In these verses, Paul answers a common objection to belief in God: How could a loving God send anyone to hell, especially someone who has never heard about Christ? In fact, says Paul, God has revealed himself plainly in the creation to *all* people. And yet people reject even this basic knowledge of God. Also, all people have an inner sense of what God requires, but they choose not to live up to it. Put another way, people's moral standards are always better than their behavior. If people suppress God's truth in order to live their own way, they have no excuse. They know the truth, and they will have to endure the consequences of ignoring it.

[1:18-20](#) Some people wonder why we need missionaries if people can know about God through nature (the creation). The answer: (1) Although people know that God exists, their wickedness blinds them to the truth. Missionaries sensitively expose their sin and point them to Christ. (2) Although people may believe there is a God, they refuse to commit themselves to him. Missionaries help persuade them by sharing God's Word and by pointing out the dangerous consequences of their actions. (3) Missionaries help the church obey the great commission of our Lord ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#)). (4) Most important, although nature reveals God, people need to be told about Jesus and how, through him, they can have a personal relationship with God.

Knowing that God exists is not enough. People must learn that God is loving and that he sent his Son to demonstrate his love for us ([5:8](#)). They must be shown how to accept God's forgiveness of their sins. (See also [10:14](#), [15](#).)

[1:19](#) Does anyone have an excuse for not believing in God? The Bible answers an emphatic *no*. God has revealed what he is like in and through his creation. Every person, therefore, either accepts or rejects God. Don't be fooled. When the day comes for God to judge your response to him, no excuses will be accepted. Begin today to give your devotion and worship to him.

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3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1892-1893.

**1:20** What kind of God does nature reveal? Nature shows us a God of might, intelligence, and intricate detail; a God of order and beauty; a God who controls powerful forces. That is *general* revelation. Through *special* revelation (the Bible and the coming of Jesus), we learn about God's love and forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. God has graciously given us many sources that we might come to believe in him.

### What Is Faith?

*Faith* is a word with many meanings. It can mean faithfulness ([Matthew 24:45](#)). It can mean absolute trust, as shown by some of the people who came to Jesus for healing ([Luke 7:2-10](#)). It can mean confident hope ([Hebrews 11:1](#)). Or, as James points out, it can even mean a barren belief that does not result in good deeds ([James 2:14-26](#)). What does Paul mean when, in Romans, he speaks of "saving faith"?

We must be very careful to understand faith as Paul uses the word because he ties faith so closely to salvation. It is *not* something we must do in order to earn salvation—if that were true, then faith would be just one more deed, and Paul clearly states that human deeds can never save us ([Galatians 2:16](#)). Instead, faith is a gift God gives us *because* he is saving us ([Ephesians 2:8](#)). It is God's grace, not our faith, that saves us. In his mercy, however, when he saves us, he gives us faith—a relationship with his Son that helps us become like him. Through the faith he gives us, he carries us from death into life ([John 5:24](#)).

Even in Old Testament times, grace, not deeds, was the basis of salvation. As Hebrews points out, "it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" ([10:4](#)). God intended for his people to look beyond the animal sacrifices to him, but all too often they instead put their confidence in fulfilling the requirements of the law—that is, performing the required sacrifices. When Jesus triumphed over death, he canceled the charges against us and opened the way to the Father ([Colossians 2:12-15](#)). Because he is merciful, he offers us faith. How tragic if we turn faith into a deed and try to develop it on our own! We can never come to God through our own faith any more than his Old Testament people could come through their own sacrifices. Instead, we must accept his gracious offer with thanksgiving and allow him to plant the seed of faith within us.

**1:20** God reveals his divine nature and personal qualities through creation, even though creation's testimony has been distorted by the Fall. Adam's sin resulted in a divine curse upon the whole natural order ([Genesis 3:17-19](#)); thorns and thistles were an immediate result, and natural disasters have been common from Adam's day to ours. In [Romans 8:19-21](#), Paul says that nature itself is eagerly awaiting its own redemption from the effects of sin (see [Revelation 22:3](#)).

**1:21-23** How could intelligent people turn to idolatry? Idolatry begins when people reject what they know about God. Instead of looking to him as the creator and sustainer of life, they see themselves as the center of the universe. They soon invent "gods" that are convenient projections of their own selfish ideas. These gods may be wooden figures, or they may also be goals or things we pursue, such as money, power, or possessions. They may even be misrepresentations of God himself—making God in our image, instead of the reverse. The common denominator is this: Idolaters worship the things God made rather than God himself. Is there anything you feel you can't live without? Is there any priority greater than God? Do you have a dream you would sacrifice everything to realize? Does God take first place in your life? Do you worship God or idols of your own making?

**1:21-32** Paul clearly portrays the inevitable downward spiral into sin. First, people reject God; next, they make up their own ideas of what a god should be and do; then they fall into every kind of wickedness:

greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. Finally, they grow to hate God and encourage others to do so. God does not cause this steady progression toward evil. Rather, when people reject him, he allows them to live as they choose. God gives them over to or permits them to experience the natural consequences of their sin. Once caught in the downward spiral, no one can pull himself or herself out. Sinners must trust Christ alone to deliver them from destruction.

**1:23** When Paul says that people worshiped idols made to look like people or animals instead of worshiping God, he seems to deliberately state people's wickedness in the terms used in the Genesis narrative of Adam's fall (see [Genesis 3:1-24](#)). When people worship the creature instead of the Creator, they lose sight of their own identity as those who are higher than the animals—made in the image of God.

**1:24-32** These people chose to reject God, and God allowed them to do it. God does not usually stop us from making wrong choices. He lets us choose independence from him, even though he knows that in time we will become slaves to our own rebellious lifestyle and lose our freedom not to sin. Does life without God look like freedom to you? Look more closely. There is no worse slavery than slavery to sin.

**1:25** People tend to believe lies that reinforce their own selfish, personal beliefs. Today, more than ever, we need to know what the basis is for our beliefs. With TV, music, movies, and the rest of the media often presenting sinful lifestyles and unwholesome values, we find ourselves constantly bombarded by attitudes and beliefs that are totally opposed to the Bible. Be careful about what influences you use to form your opinions. The Bible is the only standard of truth. Evaluate all other opinions in light of its teachings.

## Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary<sup>4</sup>

### *Romans 1:18-25*

**1:18** As God’s righteousness was revealed (**1:17**), so was his wrath. The flip side of God’s righteousness is his wrath against evil. Certain aspects of human character elicit God’s wrath. It is the response of his holiness to all wickedness and rebellion.

Why is God angry with sin? Because **sinful, wicked people** have pushed **the truth away from themselves**, substituting the truth about him with a fantasy of their own imagination (**1:25**). They have suppressed the truth God naturally reveals to everyone in order to believe anything that supports their own self-centered lifestyles. Once humans have abandoned God, it will not take long for the effects to be felt in their relationships with each other.

God cannot tolerate sin because his nature is morally perfect. He cannot ignore or condone such willful rebellion. He wants to remove the sin and restore the sinner, but the sinner must not distort or reject the truth. **But God shows his anger from heaven** against those who persist in sinning.

While we do not have many idol-worshiping religions in our neighborhoods, we do find those who suppress the truth about God. These people

- replace God with the worship of success, property, and wealth,
- demote God by elevating their own homespun philosophies, and
- ignore God by devoting themselves to family, leisure, and career—rejecting his claim on their lives.

**1:19-20** The **truth about God** has been clearly revealed by God. The clues to God’s existence and character have traditionally been called general revelation. God could have kept humans in ignorance about himself. But he chose to reveal himself, generally in nature and specifically through the Scriptures and Jesus Christ. Because God has made certain facts about himself **known instinctively**, people will someday have to give an account before God of why they chose to ignore his existence and his character.

But how could a loving God send anyone to hell, especially someone who has never heard the Good News of Jesus? In fact, says Paul, **people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made**—therefore, **they can clearly see his invisible qualities**. Also, everyone has an inner sense of what God requires, but they choose not to live up to it. Put another way, people’s moral standards are always better than their behavior. If people suppress God’s truth in order to live their own way, they have **no excuse**. They know the truth, and they will have to endure the consequences of ignoring it.

The paradox can’t be missed—all people can “clearly see” God’s “invisible qualities.” How? God created the world with natural processes, with cause and effect. In the same way that observing a painting leads a person to conclude that there is an artist, so to observe the tremendous creation is to conclude that there is a supreme Creator, one with eternal power and divinity. This is part of the truth that unsaved people are suppressing.

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4. Barton B. Bruce et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 578-580.

One look at creation in all its splendor tells people that a mighty power made this world—but not just an abstract, impersonal force; rather, a personal God ([Psalm 19:1-4](#)). Thus, creation shows both God’s eternal power and his divine nature. Indeed, nature reveals a God of might, intelligence, intricate detail, order, beauty, and power; a God who controls powerful forces. God’s qualities are revealed through creation ([Acts 14:17](#)), although creation’s testimony has been distorted by the Fall. Adam’s sin resulted in a divine curse upon the whole natural order ([Genesis 3:17-19](#)), thorns and thistles were an immediate result, and natural disasters have been common from Adam’s day to ours. Nature itself is eagerly awaiting its own redemption from the effects of sin ([8:19-21](#); [Revelation 22:3](#)).

Then why do we need missionaries if people can know about God through nature (the creation)?

- Although people know that God exists, they suppress that truth by their wickedness and thus deny him. Missionaries can point out their error.
- Although people may believe there is a God, they refuse to commit themselves to him. Missionaries can help persuade them.
- Missionaries can convince people who reject God of the dangerous consequences of their actions.
- Though nature reveals God, people need to be told about Jesus and how through him they can have a personal relationship with God.
- Missionaries are needed to help the church obey the great commission of our Lord ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)).

Knowing that God exists is not enough. People must learn that God is loving. They must understand what he did to show that love to us. They must be shown how to accept his forgiveness of their sins. (See also [10:14-15](#).)

**[1:21](#)** People’s denial of their own awareness of God is what left them without excuse. When Paul says that **they knew God**, he is not describing a knowledge that could save them but a knowledge that simply recognized God’s existence. He was describing an awareness of God, that, if not suppressed, would be nurtured by God. But since human beings have, in fact, suppressed the truth about God, the following calamities ensued: (1) **they wouldn’t worship him as God**; (2) they couldn’t **give thanks**; (3) in the void, **they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like**; and (4) in the end **their minds became dark and confused**.

When people refuse to recognize God as Creator, they will also fail to glorify or thank him for his gifts—food, clothing, shelter, even life itself. When they neglect God, they open the door to evil. To omit what is good inevitably leads to committing what is evil. Ingratitude may seem like a small thing, but it begins the downward spiral into depravity. To forget to thank God for all he is and all he has done reveals a dangerous self-centeredness. This causes futile thinking and planning, darkness, pride, blindness, and finally total departure from God that bursts into a flood of sin.

**[1:22](#)** Without answers based on the reality of God, people seek heroes among those who claim **to be wise** and will boldly say there are no answers. Under such circumstances, it is seen as a sign of sophistication and intelligence to refuse to acknowledge God’s existence. But by biblical definition, people who refuse to believe in God are **utter fools** ([Psalm 14:1](#)). The evidence of God’s existence is so plain and clear that to ignore it is totally foolish.

To some people, statements like these by Paul appear to be intolerant of other religions and views. The objection is often voiced in a question: “Well, after all, the point is that people are naturally somewhat religious; so isn’t the most important thing not what religion you follow, but that you follow

some religion?” The fallacy behind the question is that it still assumes that man is at the center, not God. The emphasis is not on believing what is true but on believing. Paul was speaking in a world that was inundated with gods. He would have been horrified to think that anyone would understand him to be saying that a little religion is a good thing! To Paul, even a lot of religion was bad if it was not true.

**1:23** Whether they claim it or not, people are religious beings. By their very nature, they are bound to worship and serve something beyond themselves. It may be another idea of God, a person, a thing, or even some false notion that no God exists. Anyone who rejects the Creator will end up worshiping the creature. And how foolish that they turn their backs on the **glorious, ever-living God** in order to worship **idols**—things created by humans. Because they were created by humans, they owe their existence to humans. This places people in control of their own gods.

How can intelligent people turn to idolatry? Idolatry begins when people reject what they know about God. Instead of looking to him as the Creator and sustainer of life, they see themselves as the center of the universe. They soon invent gods that are convenient projections of their own selfish plans and decrees. These gods may be wooden figures, or they may be things we desire—such as money, power, or comfort. They may even be misrepresentations of God himself—a result of making God in their image, instead of the reverse. The common denominator is this: Idolaters worship the things God made rather than God himself.

**1:24** God left those who spurned him to their own desires. Without his guidance, they degenerated into ruinous moral practices. This rush into sinful patterns can be seen in societies as well as in individuals. When people and nations refuse to repent, sin takes over and draws people into a life where there is no sense of right and wrong. Without God’s remedy, his righteousness, the end is destruction.

Here Paul introduces the subject of sexual impurity. He returns to it in [verses 26](#) and [27](#). The context indicates that he is referring in part to cultic prostitution and the fertility cults that made use of temple prostitutes in their rites. Throughout history, paganism has shown a remarkable capacity for substituting the pursuit of sexual pleasure for the pursuit of holiness. Rejection of God is often accompanied by deification of sex or reproduction. Because people ignored their innate awareness of godly restraints, personal desire became the standard of behavior. Paul did not hesitate to point out the devastating effects of sin on the most personal aspects of human life. Without God’s righteousness, wrong rules.

**1:25** Just as people exchanged the glory of God for lackluster images ([1:23](#)), they also traded **what they knew was the truth about God** for **lies**. These people have completely turned their back on God and replaced him with **things** that they then **worshiped**. Although many may refuse to acknowledge God’s existence, that doesn’t change the truth of his existence and the fact that he will indeed be **praised forever**. God’s worthiness to be praised is not affected by human beings’ rebellion or their poor choices. God will be praised forever, though there are many who, by their deliberate exchange of truth for lies, will not be present to participate.

# Study and Discussion Questions



## God's Wrath Against Mankind – Romans 1:18-25

Topics: [Evil](#), [Hardheartedness](#), [Homosexuality](#), [Immorality](#), [Self-centeredness](#), [Separation](#), [Sex](#), [Sin](#), [Stubbornness](#), [Thankfulness](#), [Truth](#), [Unbelievers](#), [World](#)

### Open It

1. If God were to deliver a "state of the world" speech for all of us to hear, what do you think He would say?

### Explore It

2. What is God's response to the people who ignore and disobey Him? ([1:18](#))
3. How does God reveal Himself to people? ([1:19-20](#))
4. What makes all people accountable to God? ([1:20](#))
5. What is the primary problem people have in their relationship with God? ([1:21](#))
6. What happens to the hearts and minds of people who reject God? ([1:21-22](#))
7. When people deny God, what do they often put in His place? ([1:21-23](#))

### Get It

8. What is the real barrier between us and God?
9. How can God hold us responsible for breaking His laws?
10. How do people today suppress the truth about God?
11. In what ways is our thinking futile and our mind darkened?
12. What examples can you list of how we worship created things rather than the Creator?

### Apply It

13. In what ways can you lessen your dependence on the things you are tempted to "worship" and serve more than God?