

# Romans 1:18–25 "Everyone Worships Idols"

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[ 0 : 00 ] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, we ask that you would continue to send the Holy Spirit upon us with might and power and deep conviction. Your Word today, Father, says tough things about our human condition, tough things about our human condition that if we're honest, we find a bit offensive, more than a bit offensive, especially if we're meant to take it literally.

Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would fall with a gentle but deep power of conviction to open our hearts to receive the truths that you desire us to know this morning about ourselves and about you and about the gospel, and that we might embrace these truths and become, for those of us who are outside of the Christian faith, be saved, and for those of us within the Christian faith, that we might grow in godliness, and for us as a church that we might walk in the beauty of holiness. And I ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior. Amen.

[ 2 : 18 ] Please be seated. So I'm not, uh, I definitely don't want to be alarmist or extremist about this, and I know things can go in all sorts of different directions, but, um, well, it's, it's, uh, it can be hard when you're preaching through a book to, to, to know how to, to break it into sections. Uh, and, uh, and so this part that we're looking at today is actually part of a bigger section, sort of a natural unit that goes from verse 18 to verse 32. I know that's a bit of a boring, nerdish thing. I'm already putting some of you to sleep. Here's the point. In this bigger unit, which I won't look at today, but I will look at next week, is a text that could get me in trouble with Bill C9, if it were to pass as it is written right now.

Uh, not exactly, it's not, on one hand, it might not get me into trouble, but given the direction of court rulings and the way government works, it, it is something that downstream, uh, me preaching on a text like I will next week, the second part of this unit is a text that could get me in trouble, uh, with Bill C9. Uh, but that, I'm not looking at that this week because I'm afraid of looking at it, um, but just, I had to divide the text up because it's very rich and very deep. So, um, so let's look. If you, uh, take your Bibles, uh, those of you who have Bibles, it's, uh, Romans chapter 1, verses 18 to 25. Uh, next week, we'll look at verses 26 to 32. And, uh, I'll just read the whole, it's only eight verses. I'll just read them to give you, uh, to, to refresh your memory about it, and then we'll circle back and, and we'll look at the different parts. And here's how it goes. It's a very, very, very Canadian text. As you know, it's the, uh, probably the theme text for seeker-sensitive services, uh, because it begins, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men and women who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 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. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or mortal woman and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts, um, another, a better, maybe a more literal, the literal translation of the word lust is over-desire. Over-desire. So therefore, God gave them up in the over-desires of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 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. And Christians would say this is the word of the Lord, and we'd respond thanks be to God. Although, to be honest, some of us wonder entirely how much this is the word of the Lord.

Although I do very clearly, just so you know. It's a bit of a shocking text for Christians. I read it slowly to try to bring home to you how shocking it is for Canadians.

And if you're watching online or you're here and you're outside of the Christian faith, you're maybe here as a seeker, you might not know that Christians find it a bit shocking too. And in fact, it's, it's very interesting. Just before this, in Romans 1, 16 to 17, it says, For I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.

[ 6 : 19 ] And the word ashamed there can also be translated as offended. For I'm not offended by the gospel, by what the Bible teaches. And many Canadians, and in fact, even many Christian Canadians, are, are offended by this text.

So just to give you, just as we go into it, here's how you have to begin to understand the text. The way the book of Romans is designed is the first 15 verses, there's a bit of a greeting, a longer greeting than normal in the letter. And then there's a few travel details.

And then it's an unusual book in that in verses 16 and 17, he gives you basically the praesi about what the whole book is about. And then in verse 18, he immediately goes in the direction you're not expecting, but it's actually a reasonable direction if you think about it. From verse 18 of chapter 1 to chapter 3, verse 20, he does what in, I don't know if they still talk about this in business world, he sells the problem. We've been blessed by having very good wardens and council members over the years. And one of the things which is really good about the council members and wardens I've had over the last, I don't know, 10, 15, 20 years, is they're not afraid to disagree with me and tell me that I'm wrong. And this is a great blessing for a congregation because I, in fact, I'm not always correct. Sometimes I'm wrong. But about maybe 90% of the time when they say that I'm wrong, I'm really wrong, move on to the next thing. They have better wisdom. But about 10% of the time, so it doesn't happen very often because they don't actually disagree with me that often.

But I'll think about it afterwards driving home and I realize I want to reintroduce the topic, which I generally don't do. And the reason I want to reintroduce the topic is because I realized that I saw a problem in the church that I just thought was so obvious that what I did is I present that when I went to that to talk to the wardens, I just assumed they understood the problem as well and saw it. And so I didn't try to sell them. I just went to the solution. But I realized going home, they didn't see the problem. And so the next time we meet, I sell them the problem. I explain in detail what the problem is. Now it might still be, you know, and after that they go, oh, okay, there's a problem.

Now they still might end up selecting the solution that I thought was the right one, that they'd come up with a better one. But at least they saw the problem. And so what Paul is doing here over the next little bit is he's selling the problem. Why is it that human beings need a salvation that comes from God, that comes with power to save? Why is it that human beings need God to always be just? Why is it that human beings need God to make them right? Like, what is the problem? Why is that the case?

[ 9 : 05 ] And he begins then with this, this shocking turn of events in verse 18. So if you turn to it, we'll just read it again. Chapter 1, verse 18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men and women who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

So just, you know, once again, a bit of a pause. This is a, for Christians, this is a bit of a gut check moment. Will I be offended by this text? Or will I take it as an opportunity to learn about myself and learn about God? Will I be open to learn? Or will I be offended? And so for those of you outside the Christian faith listening to this, I think this text is going to tell you irrefutable, true reasons, two things about the human condition. And it's part of several things in the Bible which just proves that Christianity is true. Its description of human nature is very, very wise and perceptive and clearly, obviously seen in the world. But let's look at what he says again. For the wrath of God is revealed

from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. I'm not going to spend very long on the anger of God right now, other than to say this. What happens here is that people who liked what just was said in verse 17, when it gets worked out in verse 18, they realize they don't like it. And so we're actually sort of caught in a dilemma.

It's a little bit like in the, you know, in the Gospels when Jesus challenges the people who hate him was the, you know, was the testimony of John the Baptist from God or from human beings. And they're all caught because on one hand, if they say from human beings, they'll get in trouble with the crowd.

And they also sort of believe in John the Baptist as a prophet as well. So, but if they believe that, if they say, well, he's a prophet, then he says, well, why don't you believe him? If they, anyway, they can't make up their mind. So he said, I'm not going to answer your question. And so here it is. Earlier last week in verse 17, it says that one of the things about God is that he's unfailingly just and unfailingly good. He never stops being good. He's never in favor of evil. He's never in favor of injustice. He's never in favor of anything which is immoral. He's always good. Always good. And that's a good thing. And we all probably say, yay, God is always good. And now we come to the next thing. And it says, by the way, what that means is that God is going to be properly angry at evil. If you could put up the first point, that would be very helpful. Since God is unfailingly good and just, he will have proper anger at sin and evil. And that just follows from the other thing. So what do you want to have? Do you want to say, well, actually, I think, by the way, sometimes he should be again, he should be in favor of evil and give you, no, no. Is that really a good thing? Is that really what you want from God? Well, if this first part is something we want, this follows from it.

[12:12] But just to touch on some of our fears, I'm not going to try to argue for it. The thing about God is revealed in the Bible is that God is never overwhelmed by anger like we are. And he is never, ever, ever anger driven like we are. But just as I'm going to mention in a moment, some of the things that appear to be going on in Iran, and it should anger us. It should anger us at the terrible evil and injustice that's going on. It's not a sign of moral superiority to be indifferent to some of the evil in the world. It's a sign that we're less than moral and even maybe less than human. And so God is properly angry, angry at the evil and the sin and the injustice that is done in the world.

And the other two bits, the unrighteousness and ungodly, which sound almost like, if you listen to it again, verse 18, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men and women. It almost sounds like a punchline that a comedian would make on Saturday Night Live. You know, are you being ungodly and unrighteous? And the crowd laughs because it's so square and uncool. But actually, it's a flip side, once again, of something that most people think is pretty wise. So earlier on in the service, and I've talked to even those outside the Christian faith, and they often think this is actually a pretty reasonable... I mean, they might not believe in God, but they think it's a pretty reasonable and interesting way that Christian moral teaching goes, is that Jesus says, Jesus has asked, what are the two greatest commandments? And the response is, you know, the two great commandments are these. You should love... You know, the great commandment is this. You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength. And the second is like onto it. You should love your neighbor as yourself. And people say, that's actually pretty cool. Well, ungodliness and unrighteousness is what happens when we deny these two great commandments. That's actually literally what it means. So ungodliness means when you deny the first commandment, and you say, I'm not going to serve or honor God or acknowledge God, I'm going to deny him, I'm going to suppress him, I'm going to live as if he doesn't exist. That's violating the first great commandment. And the second one, unrighteousness, is violating the second one of loving your neighbor as yourself. And as the Bible will go on to reveal, you can't break the second commandment without also breaking the first, because God has designed a moral universe. And so if I lie to Morris, I'm not just lying to Morris, I'm also lying against God. I'm not just doing something wrong against Morris, I'm doing something wrong against Morris and God. Because all of the horizontal sins always contain a vertical... So all of a sudden you see, that which sort of looks really unreasonable, we're sort of caught, because we actually like the idea of the great commandments, and we like the idea that God is always just, we just don't like the consequence. But that doesn't mean that there's something with the Bible, it means there's something wrong with us and our desires, and our thinking. Now, George, it's still a bit of an odd text.

Like, look at it, George, again, it says, Like, what does that mean? Well, just listen on what he goes on and says.

Verse 19, And that can also literally be translated that in the day of judgment, they will have no defense.

[16:05] They will have no defense. Because they have suppressed the truth. This Bible text is saying something which, of course, modern social science and psychology and psychiatry have learned far, far later, which is that we are not just brains on sticks, but we are connected. Our will, our moral, our affections, our desires, our creativity, our mind have interconnections. And so that if we do something which is wrong, there's also an act of suppression there, not only against the truth, but against God. And on one level, it's saying nothing that's particularly shocking. But what is shocking is this idea that, well, that that the knowledge of God is sort of obvious.

Here's the thing to start to enter into in this text. I was reading one news report this morning that came out of the Middle East.

And Israeli intelligence has estimated that in the last 48 hours, the last 48 hours, the Iranian regime has killed 30,000 protesters. 30,000 protesters. Now, obviously, we don't know if that's correct. It might be an exaggeration. In fact, here, all good people should be hoping and praying that that's a huge exaggeration. Right? We should, that's, that should be our prayer. We hope they've really exaggerated that, that it's not true.

But 30,000, that is very evil. And should both make us angry and break our heart.

[17:56] And, um, and here's what the book of Romans is saying about suppressing the truth and about what's plain and obvious to them, which is very countercultural to Canadians. For us as Canadians, one of the most standard things that people will say to me as to why they don't believe in any God whatsoever, whether they're at best an agnostic, but maybe an atheist, is, uh, uh, or even maybe just as they're apatheists, they're apathetic about the whole thing, is they say to me, George, look at the world, and you see all of the evil in the world.

In all of this evil in the world, it must mean that God does not exist. And the book of Romans is going to challenge us, as it just did with this text, and say, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

You're not observing the world the correct way. What you should see when you look at the world, and you see if it in fact is true, and we hope and pray that it isn't, that the Iranian regime has killed 30,000 of its citizens in 48 hours.

And then we look at all the other evil which is going on in the world, and we'd say, boy, you can't look at this world and not come to the conclusion that we are under the judgment of God.

And that every single human being is under God's judgment, that no one by themselves are close to him, that we're all by nature far from him. And Romans said that's actually the wise question to ask and observation to make when you look at the evil in the world, that we are obviously under the judgment of God.

[19:34] And so that's, if you could put up the second point, this big idea is that you suppress your knowledge of God, and that's what becomes a little bit more complicated for people.

So, you know, I've shared before how over my first 10 or 12 years of being a Christian, I had about five or six or seven or whatever times when I came very close to walking away from the Christian faith because I had intellectual and heart problems with the Christian faith.

Some of them were around the problem of evil, and there's a variety of other ones that I had. And in every case, one of the things that brought me back and kept me in the faith was that just is if Jesus rose from the dead, Christianity is true.

Like, I don't know, maybe know the answer to this question, but Christianity is true if Jesus rose from the dead, and that there will be a good answer. A second thing is connected to this text, is I just kept being stuck by the obvious design in the world, and I just couldn't believe that it happened by chance.

And actually, in the third thing, which I don't talk about as much, is that the line by Dostoevsky just seemed to me, in the Brothers Karamazov, just seemed to me to be unmistakably true, that if God is dead, everything is permissible.

[20:53] If God is dead, everything is permissible. And I just couldn't believe that that is correct. It is wrong to kill 30,000 of your citizens to stay in power.

Period. That means God must not be dead. But this text says that it's obvious to people that by the things that they're made that God exists.

And this seems like a controversial claim. So I just want to give two examples, one from science fiction and one from horror movies. Because I obviously spend lots of time reading very intellectual things and watching very intellectual movies.

And the first one would be in a scientific movie, imagine a science fiction movie. Imagine that in a couple of years' time, they finally are able to land, human beings are able to land on Mars.

And when they land on Mars, they sort of go on a bit of an exploration. And they come upon what seems to be an alien space station. And in fact, to their great surprise, it even has something like technology that we have, is that they actually are able to, they press a button on the door and the door opens.

[ 22 : 11 ] And they're able to go inside. And first of all, that the door opens shows that it has some power. And as soon as they go inside, some type of light comes on. And it's very obvious that it's an alien space station.

Now, if in the movie they said, isn't this amazing that by accident this appears, develops on Mars? I wonder what dust storms and solar storms and earthquakes created this.

Well, I mean, that wouldn't even happen. It's obviously just too ridiculous for words. In fact, the whole movie would be a bit of a detective work from looking at the alien space station to come up with some conclusions about what the aliens were like.

At the dawn of evolutionary theory, the cell was basically just viewed as something very, not much more complicated than just a blob of almost like gel. And those of you, many of you know science vastly more than me.

But in the years that have followed, it becomes more and more obvious every year. The unbelievable complexity of just a single cell. The many parts that make it up.

[ 23 : 23 ] They even have like machines and engines almost that do things within it. It's a very, very complicated system. And so every year as science develops, it becomes more and more possible to think that that could just happen by chance under a rock in a primordial sludge.

It's far more complicated than find an alien spaceship. And every reasonable person in the world would go from the space, sorry, the space station to trying to figure out what aliens were like from what they have made.

And we are surrounded by things that are made. Obviously with design. Just one final one. One of the delights that people, I don't like horror movies by the way.

I think I get too scared. I don't mind tense ones sometimes like zombie things and stuff like that.

Those are sort of more like thrillers. But, you know, one of the things I think that people like about, well, one of the things they like about zombie movies is that people in the zombie movies keep doing dumb things.

And so we feel smart. But one of the things that people like about horror movies is that people do dumb things. And so we feel smart. Like, don't go in the room. Don't split up.

[ 24 : 39 ] Like, you know, the certain common things that they do, right? And we feel very smart about it. So if, in fact, they walk into a room and it's a cold day and there's like steam on the window and they see written on the window in the steam, I am coming to kill you.

And if you looked at it and the two people said, wow, isn't it pretty amazing that the way that steam forms on that window almost comes that type of design? Like, that's pretty cool, isn't it?

You'd be going, how dumb are you? It's obviously written by somebody and they're going to come and kill you. Nobody would take that simple little message to just be the chance development of steam or frost on a coal window.

And yet the amount of information in a strand of DNA is vastly, vastly, vastly more complicated and more detailed than that.

We live in a world where the truth about God is suppressed. Now, by the way, one of the things you need to understand as this continues to go on is that one of the things which is really unique about the Bible is that it's not othering.

[ 25 : 57 ] It's not saying, look at all those woke people. Look at all those MAGA people. Look at all those suburban single household dwellers.

Look at all those fentanyl addicts. And look at how they're alike. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's not how the text is written. It's talking about all human beings.

Talking about all human beings. We suppress the truth about God. Now, the second big thing about this text is it says something which is very, very, very un-Canadian.





human beings are like that we were designed in a sense to have Adam and Eve like pieces of iron connected to God and the life of God the magnetism of God flew through it and it's as if when Adam and Eve decided to rebel against God as if they just talked to each other and said hey listen we're filled with magnetism look at the other things that are holding to us we can hold things together we don't need to be with God so let's separate from God and they don't realize that when they separated from God they no longer were magnetic but God didn't allow them to completely and utterly fall apart but held them together to some extent to some extent and it's because of God's common grace that our suppressing of the truth is not complete and total that our our serving of idols is not complete and total that God restrains this because we don't live in a mechanistic and deterministic universe but we live in a God-drenched God-supported

God-inhabited universe and so those things are not allowed by God to completely and utterly to completely and utterly overwhelm us they are restrained and part of what God's punishment is sometimes for us is to weaken the restraint for us so why does he do this it's because if we are to hear this knowledge and we say after hearing about it I look at the world and I'm obviously under God's judgment I come aware of my own evil and idolatry I'm always under God I'm obviously under God's judgment I have suppressed the truth about him I am obviously under God's judgment but there is this hope of common grace and maybe if there is common grace there is saving grace and my heart is tuned to call out to God God I cannot make myself right with you Lord in your mercy may there be a power and a means that comes from you that I can receive unworthy as I am that can make me right with you not my own ability

I cannot do this I am dependent upon you to act and we understand this we understand how good it is to hear that I am not ashamed of the gospel Romans 1 16 why?

it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes and that means not just being made right with God but learning to become more like God and eventually being glorified with God it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the pagan for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith and as we talked about and we'll talk about more that something comes from God he always is righteous and just and he provides a means in this power for us to be made right with God if you could put up the fifth point you need to be saved very briefly just three very brief carry home points for us obviously the first one is if you haven't given your life to God there's no better time than right now to call out on him and say Jesus

I really need you to save me Father I need you to save me please save me Jesus please be my Savior and Lord I give myself to you whatever the language is to call out to God and for those of us who know Jesus three very quick things the first one is that God wants you to learn humbly this truth about our potent our constant desire to suppress the truth isn't a means to say that we should despair and that we can never know we also understand that God's common grace means that God wants us to learn humbly he wants us to learn the truth he wants us to know him he just wants us to be humble to be humble in our judgments to listen to others to be open to being proven wrong he wants us to learn humbly but he wants us to learn and secondly that if you could that was hopefully put that up clearly God wants us to learn humbly secondly be repentance and obedience clarifies your mind and heart a lot of times the best way to move forward is to say

[ 42 : 05 ] I was wrong I was wrong I was mistaken or just to say you know I lied I betrayed you and that's partly the whole Christian community about how you manage that with God and how you say that to other people without making things further down that's why you need small groups and mentors and people that you can discuss these things with about how to make amendment but that's the way towards clarifying that the inside of you is filled with light and one final thing is this point C we're going to see that after the gospel the bad news and the good news is described one of the very first things one of the very first truths of the book of Romans is in chapter 12 verse 1 where he says he says this he says this

I appeal to you therefore brothers and sisters by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God what is good and acceptable and purpose perfect pray for the renewing of your mind that as you know the gospel and as you know the bible he will renew your mind because we do not walk through this life alone we have his dear presence to cheer and to guide we have the comfort and the presence of the Holy Spirit we have a father who desires and longs to hear our prayer and

he longs to hear you and me pray Lord renew my mind Lord renew my mind invite you to stand bow our heads in prayer

Father my hope and prayer is that those who are here and those watching online have even if at first we were a bit offended by the bluntness of your word that we are no longer offended that we hear your truth and it's it's blunt and it takes us aback but that as we think about it and pray about it and as our hearts are open to it we realize it's all true and that these are truths that you have spoken to us not to humiliate us not to shame us not to lead us to despair but that we might have hope that we might live freely that we might truly start to know more truly and more beautifully and more clearly that we might live with more freedom that we might live with hope so Father we thank you for the gospel and power of God for salvation for all who believes and we thank you for the whole counsel of God and we ask Father that Jesus will become so real to us and so real in terms of what he has done for us that more and more and more our lives might be characterized by keeping the first and great commandment that we will love you with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and the second that is like unto it that we will love our neighbors as ourselves and we ask this in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen as you Thank you.