

Romans 1:18-25 (NKJV)
18-19 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.
20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

1

Rom 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.
22-23 Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

2

24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,
25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

3

- It is quite common for readers of the book of Romans to assume Paul is now talking about unregenerate humanity in latter half of ch. 1
- Why would Paul do that? How would that reinforce his point that the gospel is powerful to sanctify and unify believers?
- The tendency of his readers would be to dismiss these verses as not applicable, since they have been regenerated through Christ Jesus
- This understanding would merely distract from Paul's overall emphasis in the book

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- Romans is written to believers – those who are children of God
- Rom 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.
- **GOSPEL** and **SALVATION** in v. 16 do not refer to the gospel of grace by faith in Christ Jesus, resulting in initial salvation (regeneration)
 - These words refer to the gospel of soul-salvation, that is, sanctification unto maturity, resulting in kingdom inheritance

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Arlen Chitwood, *Salvation in Romans*:
There is really nothing about salvation by grace through faith in these first seventeen verses. The verses, among related issues, have to do with “the seed of David” (v. 3), declared to be “the Son of God with power [‘sonship’ has to do with rulership]” (v. 4), with “obedience to the faith” (v. 5), with the faith of Christians in Rome being “spoken of throughout the whole world” (v. 8), and with Paul’s expressed desire to go to and proclaim this good news to the Christians in Rome, for a stated purpose — “that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles” (v. 13).”

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- Also, BELIEVE in v. 16 is an active present participle and should be translated *is believing* or *is exercising faith*
 - Something glorious in v. 17
- Rom 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."
- The righteousness of God is revealed IN IT – in what?
 - In this Gospel

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- HOW is God's righteousness revealed?
- Ps 98:1 Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.
- 2 The LORD has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations.
- 3 He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
- 4 Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth; break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.

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- Psalm 98 is millennial and teaches that:
- God's righteousness is revealed when He ascends to the throne during His Messianic reign and He rules in uprightness and justice and peace over all the nations
- When that happens, His salvation will be known to all the nations, and they will sing forth His praise – in fact, all creation will praise Him

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- Ps 98:7 Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it;
- 8 Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the LORD,
- 9 For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity.
- The millennial King will bring His salvation to the entire earth by ruling in righteousness and all creation will worship Him – Glory!

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- What does this have to do with Rom. 1:16-17?
- When believers are living righteously and thereby qualifying as sons to glory to co-rule with Jesus in His coming kingdom, His righteousness is being revealed NOW, even in advance of that day when He will rule in righteousness
 - Because His righteous ones will become His co-regents!
 - They will share in that righteous rule on Earth

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- In other words, the process of soul-salvation, here and now, anticipates crowning and ruling at His judgment bar, which anticipates His salvation of Israel and the nations
- Biblical anticipation = HOPE
- As Rom. 5:2 says, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God"
- When Jesus is glorified, His faithful saints will be glorified with Him!

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Paraphrase of vs. 16-17:

I am not ashamed of the good news of soul-salvation, for it is God's powerful means of sanctifying those who are believing God and living by faith.

When believers are living in this manner, continuing from initial faith to ongoing, sanctifying faith, God's righteousness is made known in this world in advance of His rule over the nations.

Those who are righteous in God's eyes are producing faith-filled works, and they will rule together with Him.

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- That message is what the believers at Rome desperately need, for they are not unified and have divisions in the church, primarily driven by ethnic prejudices
- They need to transcend above their spiritual problems by submitting to Christ and living right
- Given his introduction, Paul is surely not changing his focus from believers in the first half of the chapter (vs. 1-17) to unbelievers in the second half (vs. 18-32)

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- While the principles in the latter half of ch. 1 certainly apply to ALL mankind, Paul's point is that God's wrath is stirred up when believers are living in an unrighteous, ungodly manner

Arlen Chitwood, *Salvation in Romans*:

Romans chapter one has to do with two types of Christians in relation to the gospel ... The division of the chapter into two parts, with respect to two types of Christians, is seen at the end of v. 17, with v. 18 beginning the second part of the chapter.

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- When reading vs. 18-32, we should not have the unbelieving world in view, but primarily Christians who are living in this manner, ourselves included if it applies
- Two types of Christians in view:
 1. Those living righteously and unashamed in vs. 16-17
 2. Those living unrighteously and shamefully in vs. 18-32
- Those in this latter category have exchanged glory for shame

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- Paul uses specific terminology in the text that can only apply to Christians:

Rom 1:28 They did not like to retain God in their knowledge ...

Rom 1:32 Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death ...

- The Greek word for *knowledge* is *gnosis*
- But the Greek words used for *knowledge* in vs. 28, 32 are *epignosis* (noun) and *epiginosko* (verb)

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- The prefix *epi* changes the meaning from rudimentary knowledge to full, experiential, mature knowledge
- Even unbelievers know right from wrong – but that's not what Paul is talking about here
- In the context of Rom. 1:16-17, he's not talking about those who have mere knowledge (*gnosis*) of the gospel of kingdom inheritance that Paul has been preaching; they also have *epignosis* – full, experiential knowledge of matters of righteousness and sanctification and kingdom inheritance

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- That cannot be said of unbelievers
- 1 Cor 2:14 The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.
- Unbelievers (natural mankind) cannot begin to understand spiritual verities, for they are spiritually dead
 - They don't have the Holy Spirit living within

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- Thus, by the specific Greek words for knowledge that Paul uses in vs. 28 and 32, he can only be speaking about believers –
- Those who had come into full, mature knowledge of the gospel that Paul preached – the good news of soul-salvation (sanctification) unto maturity and the glorious prospect of being rewarded in Christ's coming kingdom with the privilege of serving as His co-rulers
- Sadly, that can't be said about hardly any churches today

20

- Virtually nowhere is the gospel of kingdom inheritance taught in our era, as it was during the early church era
 - I personally believe that is largely due to the dark ages and the Reformation following it
 - Remember the parable of the leaven in the loaf?
- Matt 13:33 Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

21

- That is how the kingdom inheritance message has fared over the course of the church age
- Jesus predicted that it would be choked out by leaven, which is corruption or error – and that is exactly what has happened
- Consequently, very few believers even have familiarity with this teaching (*gnosis*), much less *epignosis*, or full, experiential, mature understanding

22

That prompted Paul to prophesy near the end of his ministry:

2 Tim 3:1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:

2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,

4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

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2 Tim 3:5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- This is an apt description of the church of Jesus Christ, for the most part, in our era
- Notice in v. 5 that believers and churches have a *form of godliness*, but deny its power
- And in v. 7, they are *always learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*

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- The word KNOWLEDGE in v. 7 is *epignosis*
- In fact, regarding the kingdom inheritance message, they do not even have *gnosis*, or basic knowledge
- Notice what God says will be the end of all this:
2 Tim 3:8b-9 These also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

25

- Notice what God says about believers and churches that ignore the importance of sanctification and kingdom inheritance and turn to unrighteous living:
 1. They resist the truth
 2. They have corrupt minds
 3. They are *disapproved* concerning the faith – literally, they are worthless and rejected as a castaway
- The Gr. word translated *disapproved* is usually translated *disqualified* in the NT

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- Those who live in this manner will be disqualified from reward and inheritance and glorification when they meet Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ
- Instead, they will be cast into the darkness outside His ruling realm, which is the New Jerusalem
- And their shame will be manifested to all
- Notice the huge contrast between vs. 17 & 18

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- Rom 1:17 For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith
- Rom 1:18a For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,
- In v. 17 the righteousness of God is revealed in His salvation of those who live righteously
 - In v. 18 the wrath of God is revealed in His judgment of those who live unrighteously

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Why does God reveal His wrath?

Jan Bonda, *The One Purpose of God*:

What would happen if there were no divine wrath? It would mean that God would simply let the people do whatever they wanted with this earth. Evil would continue and death would have the final say – with God's approval. God's wrath signifies that He does not approve; that he does not abandon the earth and all that lives to evil and death. He does not abandon the goal He has for His creation.

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Jan Bonda, *The One Purpose of God (con'd)*:

That divine purpose is all-important. It is the deliverance of His creation from all that attempts to destroy it. God's wrath is an intrinsic part of this deliverance, that is, of His saving righteousness.

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WHY does God reveal His wrath?

1. Because men suppress the truth

Rom 1:18-19 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

- *suppress* = to hold down or withhold
- They hold down the truth – which, in the context of v. 17, is God’s righteousness – by living unrighteously

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- The believers at Rome have all received the same gospel of kingdom inheritance

- Based on the usage of the word *epignosis*, it seems they have all lived it for a time also

- But while some have continued on the pathway of sanctification unto inheritance, others have “spun out” and defected from the faith

- The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches have apparently lured them away, and they have gone down the slippery slope

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- That could happen to any believer who does not persevere in righteousness
- As a result, the church at Rome is full of disunity and division
- Most likely that happened slowly, over time
- Most believers don’t wake up one day, deciding to rebel against God
- It comes after a little sin here and a little sin there – left unchecked – and exposure to sinfulness and worldly philosophies

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- In time, zeal for the Lord fades and sinning becomes a way of life
- And God is angry – here’s why:
- The truth of God’s righteousness is not being made known to the world through the lives of these believers
- They are now living in a fleshly, carnal manner, displeasing the Lord

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- Think about your own life
- If you are not living righteously, as God commands, then you are suppressing truth, His truth
- You are withholding the verity of God’s righteousness to the world
- And you will incur His wrath

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WHY does God reveal His wrath?

2. Because men do not glorify God

- The word *glory* is used 16X in Romans, and the words *glorify* and *glorified* another 5X, so the concept of glory is important to Paul’s thesis

Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

36

Rom 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.

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

37

- All of mankind can intuitively see in this beautiful world and universe that there is a God – and they can see that He is extremely powerful
- God's general revelation of Himself in creation gives man no excuse for not living righteously
- All the more so for believers who know the truth of God's Word

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- The downward spiral begins by becoming unthankful (v. 21)
- Having a gratitude-attitude is so critical
- It demonstrates that all we have – physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, material – indeed, EVERYTHING! has been given to us by our gracious God
- A thankful heart and mind recognize that truth and show a debt of gratitude

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- But when a believer becomes unthankful, the companion sin of complaining enters in and initial steps have been taken down path of further sinfulness and not glorifying God
- Then the thinking becomes futile (empty, vain, foolish) – and the heart grows dark
- Though they might consider themselves as wise, they actually become fools (v. 22)
- Somewhere along the line an exchange occurs (v. 23) – they trade-off worshipping and glorifying God for worshipping and glorifying other things

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- For pagans, it may be actual idols or statues that represent their gods and goddesses
- For believers, it could be one or more things that replace God as primary in their lives
- It could be a focus on retirement or pleasure or travel or hobbies or sports or cars or real estate or _____ (fill in the blank)
- If believers remain on that pathway and do not confess their ungratefulness as sin, they remove themselves from the narrow way of discipleship, and their sinning grows worse

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- They enter the downward spiral of defeat that ends in negative reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ
- The bottom line: Because of man's sinfulness God is not being glorified in the world
- While this is the case for all mankind, it is exponentially true when believers are not glorifying Him, as these Christians in Rome
- The exchange they make is tragic

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- Ironically, they exchange God's glory and the prospect of glorification at the coming Judgment Seat for self-glory NOW, via unrighteous behavior that ends in miserable failure and SHAME, both now and at the JSC

Phil 3:18-19 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

43

- HOW does God reveal His wrath?
- Notice in each of the three ways given, that His wrath is revealed in the form of temporal judgment
- There is no mention of Hell or lake of fire here
- This is how God judges NOW, and Paul's primary application is to believers

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HOW does God reveal His wrath?

1. By turning them over to uncleanness

Rom. 1:24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,

- *Uncleanness* is moral impurity
- These believers have started down the path of defiling their bodies with sexual sins
- The downward spiral is now in full force
- It only gets worse from this point forward

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Rom 1:25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

- The exchange has led them to replace truth with error, the lies of the enemy
- This is how Christians are deceived into thinking they are okay spiritually when, in reality, they are a mess
- They are believing error, even with respect to their own lifestyle
- What a terrible tragedy!

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HOW does God reveal His wrath?

2. By turning them over to vile passions

Rom 1:26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

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- The Greek word translated *vile* (v. 26) means *dishonorable* and *shameful* – in fact, it is also translated that way in other places in the NT
- A Greek synonym for *vile* is also used in v. 27, translated *shameful*
- These words are used in contradistinction to the ones living righteously and producing faith-filled works
- According to v. 16, they are NOT ASHAMED because they are glorifying God and have not succumbed to uncleanness or vile passions

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How low can a sinning believer go?

- Christians can commit any imaginable sin!
- Don't ever arrogantly suggest you would never stoop to a certain level
- God warns: 1 Cor 10:12 Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.
- Notice in vs. 26-27 these believers who have chosen the downward spiral of sin and have exchanged glory for shame are now committing the sin of homosexuality

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- Homosexuality is sexual sin between those of the same gender – whether female with female or male with male

- Because God has given these sinning people – in this case, children of God – over to their own way, they are now pursuing the next step down on the spiral, *vile passions*

- Homosexuality is not natural – that's obvious to reasonable people whose thoughts haven't become futile or their hearts darkened

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- God made us male and female – thus, biologically, male pronouns are he/him, while female pronouns are she/her
- When mankind descends down the spiral, he turns everything upside down, perverting sexual relations and destroying the family –
- Our culture is now being bombarded with the depravity of transgenderism, as many are now trying to transform their bodies into the opposite gender – and this wave of transgenderism is being aggressively pushed on young children

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- These sins now pervade the church and Christianity

- What a horrible thing, for anyone (especially a child of God) to be given over to vile passions by God

- Of course, that does NOT mean God pushes vile passions on people – God forbid!

- It simply means He lets them have their way

- He removes His hand of grace – and that is HOW he judges in this present age

- The result is self-destruction

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- Christians should never show hatred toward homosexuals or transgenders
- Rather, we should show them Christ-like love
- That in no way means we condone their sin, or accept their lifestyle as valid, but we genuinely love them as a human being made in the image of God, whom God loves
- If they are unregenerate, they need salvation in the initial sense; if they are believers, they need to repent and return to fellowship with the Lord, who will abundantly pardon

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HOW does God reveal His wrath?

3. By turning them over to a debased mind

Rom 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

- This word *debased* also used in 2 Tim. 3:8, where it is translated *disapproved*

- It means “worthless and rejected as a castaway”

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- These believers are considered castaways by God so that when they meet Him at the JSC, they will face the punishment of the unfaithful servant in the parable of the talents

Matt 25:30 And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- *Outer darkness* is not Hell, as so many think; it is the darkness outside Christ's bright, ruling Messianic ruling realm
- Castaways are those believers who have the ongoing sins in their lives listed in vs. 29-31

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WHY does God reveal His wrath?

3. Because men continue in horrible sins
Rom 1:29-31 being filled with all unrighteousness ...

- sexual immorality – having sexual relations with someone to whom you are not married – multitudes of Christians live in this manner – incidentally, the Greek word translated immorality is *porneia*, from which we get our English word *pornography* (which is included with this sin)

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- wickedness – all sort of depravity
- covetousness – greed, wanting what you don't have
- maliciousness – ill-will; desire to injure
- envy – jealousy
- murder – unlawful killing, including abortion, suicide
- strife – contention
- deceit – trickery or flattery
- evil-mindedness – meanness or mischievousness
- whisperers – gossiping
- backbiters – slander

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- haters of God – impious and God-forsaking
- violent – insolent and injurious; spiteful
- proud – arrogant and condescending
- boasters -- braggardly
- inventors of evil things – instigating bad/evil
- disobedient to parents – refusal to obey parental authority
- undiscerning – lacking understanding and discernment
- untrustworthy – dishonest; lacking integrity
- unloving – without natural affection
- unforgiving – implacable and bitter
- unmerciful – merciless

58

- Notice what Paul adds at the end:
Rom 1:32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.
- The believers at Rome know (*epignosis*) that what they are doing is deserving of death at the hand of God in judgment; nevertheless, they continue in these things, and they find gratification that others are doing the same – camaraderie in evil?

59

- Three times in 1:18-32 Paul emphasizes that God reveals His wrath by giving over those who are continuing in sin to their own ways
- He removes His hand of grace and lets them wallow in sin, because that's what they - to choose
- Were it not for God's grace, any one of us could end up like those in Romans 1

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- Perhaps YOU are continuing in sin of some sort
- You can be sure that you are spiraling downward, whether you realize it or not
- If you have one or more of these sins in your life, confess them immediately as sin before God and repent, turning away from those sins completely, looking to Jesus for victory going forward
- He will abundantly pardon and bestow His grace

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- Otherwise, you will continue to spiral downward, exchanging glory for shame, and that will translate into negative reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ
- There is much at stake!
- Get right with God today and start living righteously so that you might hear “Well done, good and faithful servant”

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Take heed to the warnings of Scripture:

Rev 16:15 Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.

1 John 2:28 Little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

Don't exchange glory for shame!

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