

# The Way: Step One

*The Way*

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**Bible Text:** Romans 1:18-32

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So as we turn to Romans chapter one we are going to begin in verse 18. And as we read, understand. This may be one of the most politically incorrect chapters in all of the Bible. Romans chapter one beginning in verse 18.

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.

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.<sup>1</sup>

When we come to Romans chapter one, the introduction of what we know as the way, the beginning of why there would be this thing that we call the Roman Road for the next couple of weeks. This is not a passage of Scripture that is specifically aimed at an actual individual. This is a passage of Scripture that if you read the first part of one says this is to a community. This is to a culture. And so what we have here is we have a discourse in the Word of God showing us where humanity has gone and the result and the consequences of going where they are headed and how to solve the problem.

And so as we begin this journey in the book of Romans, some things that we need to understand and grasp that may to some of you seem elementary, but to our culture seems incredibly odd, unique and the way. The first thing is this. God has revealed himself to humanity. I know that we have people who are searching and desperately wanting to know the things of God. Listen. Today you will learn from the Word of God that he is searching for you more than you are searching for him. It says here that we are without excuse. It says that he has revealed himself. In fact, it says it is clearly done.

How does God reveal himself to us? He does so in a very general manner. And what I mean by general manner, for those of you that have any theological background, we speak of the revelation of God from a general perspective and from a specific perspective. Specifically we would say, the Word of God, that he has given us specific instructions and specific directions to all cultures, all people at all times. But general revelation is this idea that is mentioned in Romans one that for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen. That means that we have the ability to go out at night and to look at the stars and in an awesome wonder realize he is great and big and mighty and we are but small and tiny. We are able to go out into the creation that is around us and see the uniqueness and the variedness of it and say, "What an incredibly creative God we have."

And then were are able to look inside of us and a great theologian of age made this statement, said that within every one of us is a God shaped vacuum that only God can fill. And so the Bible says well this is clear. We ought to be able to see this. So why is it that we live in a world that this a propensity not to understand, not to believe and not to have faith in God? And I believe what happens is we are so good in our humanity at creating obstructions to seeing God in our life.

Now I am a city boy, raised in the city. I still live in the city. I like the city. But understand that when we surround ourselves with concrete and with asphalt and with steel and with cars and smog and all those other things and everything that is around us was, quote, made in a factory or made by a human, we forget that the very hands that made it came from God himself. And so what we do, sometimes it is our education. Sometimes it is our academics. Sometimes it is whatever it may be. We erect these

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 1:18-32.

structures in our life that keep us from seeing who God really is and what he really wants to say to us.

You know there is an old phrase that there are no Atheists in foxholes, because in the line of battle a young man or even in our today a young woman is faced with the reality that they are mortal, faced with the reality that death is immanent for all of us.

Let me share with you some other places where you will not find an Atheist. You will not find an Atheist in a dingy in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. You will not find an Atheist on the side or in a tent on the side of a mountain in the Himalayas. You will not find an Atheist in the middle of the Sahara without a drop of water to drink. Why? Because when we allow ourselves to be exposed to the things of God, it becomes abundantly clear, he is big and we are not. It becomes abundantly clear that he is speaking and we need to hear.

I have had the privilege of traveling in a great portion of this that we know as the world, not nearly as much as I want to see one day, but I have seen a lot. But one of the events that happened in my life that so demonstrates is or so displays it may not seem that significant to you, because it happened in the state of Kansas. You know that state that Dorothy wanted to so badly get back to.

I don't know if you have ever driven all through the night in that part of the country, but we had driven all through the night and we were there on the interstate and the sun had just come up. Now I am from Texas, those of you who don't know. And Texas is a flat place, but it looks like the Rockies compared to Kansas. I just want you to know. We had driven all night long. The sun had just come up. We pulled over to get some gas and to get some food and the way that we were there at the gas station the sun was rising to my back and I was seeing the horizon develop in front of me. And I thought I saw what I thought I saw, but I wasn't quite sure I saw what I saw, so I decided to take a journey.

It is early in the morning. It is an old dusty highway. I walked across that two lane highway. I walked probably 30, 40 years into the field that was across the highway and I saw something that may have been a figment of my imagination, but it was as real then as it is now. I looked all around and do you know what I could see? Nothing. Nothing except this one thing, the curvature of the earth.

Now it may have been a trick played on me by the sun and the light and all those beams doing what they do and you scientists understand that. All I know is this. As I saw the horizon bend over in the curvature I realized that I am a very tiny speck on this thing known as planet earth. And the problem with our humanism is we get too big for our pants. We think we are something. We think we can do anything and we think there is nothing that we cannot conquer. Listen, it says here. God has revealed himself to you. He is big and we are not. He has revealed himself that he is God. It is a general matter in which you have done, but it is a very specific message. In all this stuff... and we can look at the stars and we can look at creation and I love those discussions and even the debates

with those who disagreed with me, but what is the specific message that God wants to speak? Look in verse 18.

“For the wrath of God is revealed.”<sup>2</sup>

Look at verse 32 at the end of this passage.

“Who knowing the judgment of God...”<sup>3</sup>

When God is speaking to us, when God is communicating his greatness and our smallness, his infiniteness and our finiteness, what he is trying to show us—and is the message of Romans is that every one of us is headed the wrong way. Every one of us is headed down the wrong path and where we are headed in our sinful nature, where we are headed in our own devices, we are headed toward the wrath of God. We are headed toward the judgment of God. And if you read the Bible all the way through, when you get to chapter 20, do you know what you discover in verses 11 through 15? There is a throne and there on that throne is whom we know as the Lord Jesus Christ and it says all of the dad, both small and great stoop before him. And it says the books of the works were open and the book of life and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was condemned to what we know as the lake of fire and the Bible says this is the second death.

Why would God want to get our attention? Why would he want to speak so clearly to us? What is the message? Because, folks, we are in a mess. And we have invented all these different paths of life and said, “Why don’t you take this one and why don’t you take that one and what about this one? And that one looks ok.”

And he is like oh, stop. There is a way. In fact, that way Jesus Christ said that he was the way, he was the truth and he was the life. And no one comes to the Father but by him. In Acts chapter four it says, “Neither is there salvation in any other, but the man Christ Jesus.” And in 1 Timothy 2:5 it says there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. This specific message that materialized with the birth of Jesus, with the sinless life, death on the cross, resurrection, what we know as Easter Sunday, that very specific message shows us that we desperately need to heed his message. We desperately need to go his way because our way gets us wrath and judgment. God has revealed himself to you. God has revealed himself to me. The question is: Have we been paying attention? Because most of us pay a lot more attention to other humans that we do the Lord himself.

Which brings up the second point. How has humanity responded to God? The first thing that humanity as a whole has done is done their absolute best to ignore God, to ignore him, to act as if he is not there, to pretend they don’t see what they see.

I love what it says in verse 20. These things are clearly seen.

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:18.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 1:32.

You know, the picture I get is in my own home and I am just as guilty as this of my boys. I am just a bigger version of my boys. When you ask one of our children to go and find something it is literally 18 inches in front of them. They are staring at it and go, "Where is it?"

Ladies, your husbands do the same thing. I don't know what it is. It is something in our genetic code. But it says that it is absolutely clearly seen. And what happens is we begin to ignore the things of God and what happens there is a byproduct is we began to create what I call an alternative reality. If we can create our little world however we like our world to look so that it has nothing to do with the things of God, then I can... listen. I can become my own god. I can make my own decisions. I can determine my own precepts, my own commandments and this becomes the life that I endorse. And so what happens is we begin an alternative reality, because we forsake the true reality that God says he is trying to show us truth and righteousness.

Now let me give you some blatant examples that I think all of us will understand. When an individual, when a human being desires to put an alternative substance in their body so that they can get a feeling, so that they can have a buzz so that they can, listen, just get away, do you know what has taken place? It is an alternative reality. I want to pretend that this world doesn't exist. I want to pretend that troubles aren't there. I want to pretend all this thing is isn't there. So I can with a little help of some other entities, I can create a false reality, a false understanding. And I can go get in my little pretend world for a brief amount of time.

But do you know what I have discovered, that when the buzz is gone, whatever that buzz comes from, the world stretches up and slaps you back in the face and says, "Here I am. You have got to deal with it."

So what do we do? We become cyclical and we go do something else so we don't that to do it.

Let me give you some more relevant, not necessarily relevant, more contemporary illustrations. You and I live in a world today that is absolutely obsessed with technology. And our technology has allowed us to create an alternative reality. Those of you who may not be technologically savvy, you can go online on the internet and you can have an avatar. It is a fancy word for you can have your own life in the internet that doesn't match anything to your real life on planet earth. You can go in and you can create characters and you can play games and you can do this thing called Facebook and act like you have got 1000 friends when you don't. You can do those things. Those aren't you friends. Those are people listening to gossip. That is what that is.

Nonetheless, it is an alternative reality that we so desire to get in. Why? Because when we get in it, we can forget the pains of real life. We can forget the hopelessness of real life and we can pretend.

And do you know what I have learned about whether it is substance or whether it is an obsession with technology? Here is what I have discovered in talking to people time and time again, really what it is, is we just want to be in control. We just want to be able to determine the results. We want to be able to dictate the outcomes.

You know, several years ago I had an individual walk in my office. And this rarely happens in my life where a man comes in without his wife wanting to talk about a marriage that has gone south. Usually it is both of them together or just the woman. Rarely does a man come on. Secondly, not only did he come in to talk with me about his marriage that was in dire straights, but he said something that you will rarely hear from anybody, much less a man. He said, "Jeff," he said, "My wife is messed up." He said, "My marriage is messed up and it is 100 percent my fault."

Now understand. I realize that it is a give and a take and it is a mutual partnership and there are issues on both sides. But he literally said, "She had nothing to do with it. It is all mine."

I sat back and said, "I have got to hear this. What have you done?" Because I thought I had heard everything. And here is what I heard. I heard of a man married with teenagers who got up before anybody else did in the home so that he could get to work. He worked all day at a very high stress, high level job. All day he spent finding out that he was wrong, misguided or was out of control. When he would get home in the middle of the day it would be right around what we call supper or dinner time. He would come home. He would drop his briefcase. He would casually say hello to his wife or his kids if they were there and then he would go and he would lock himself in his study at home and he would play video games until midnight, battle games, combat games, war games. You all are thinking he was looking at other stuff. No. And he said, "I don't have a relationship with my wife anymore. My kids don't even know me." He said, "I sometimes go days without seeing my family."

And I asked him. I said, "Why do you do this? What allows you to get in this world?" He said, "Because when I am there, the real world doesn't hurt anymore."

And so what he does is he has allowed himself to form this alternative reality so that he doesn't have to deal with the realities of this thing called life.

So how do we respond to God? We ignore him by getting into our own little world that has everything to do with us and nothing to do with him.

But then there is this other issue is we create our own image of God. As you turn in this passage of Scripture, particularly beginning in verse 25 it says that here instead of doing it the way God designed us to do, instead of a husband and a wife in this thing called marriage, it says in Romans chapter one that in this community, in this culture, the women were with the women and the men were with the men. I don't thin in light of our cultural information based that we have to day, I don't have to explore that much

anymore. But what you use here is an extreme example of how when we get away from the things of God in our life, we would rather create the God we are satisfied with than be satisfied with who God made us to be. And so what we do is we fall into this trap of not being in the image of God, but putting God in our image.

In the very beginning of the Bible chapter one it says that man and woman, male and female they were created in the image of God. And then this thing called sin showed up and when Adam and Eve fell, we have been in a mess every since. And as you take a journey all throughout the Scripture, men, women, couples, communities, kingdoms, all of them have strayed from the things of God. And do you know what they are all guilty of? Putting up high places, putting up false idols. And when you read this passage of Scripture it says in verse 23 that they changed the image of God into corruptible things like birds and beasts. And you look at that and you think of cultures that we may want to label primitive. And I have heard people, particularly in the western civilizations say this. How could people take a rock and bow down and worship it?

Can I give you the perspective of people in the East? How could a woman get with a woman? It doesn't make any sense. Why? Because look at what it says. It is just not natural. It just doesn't work that way. And I don't need to explore all the biology and all the physiology that goes behind that, but can we just come into agreement that you take a step back and go, "It doesn't even work."

But {?} no, no, no. This is the way we want our life to be. This is what we want to advocate. This is what we want to support. And so therefore what happens is we say this is a way that we want our life and we become our god and we create him in our image. That is how we have responded.

Which brings me to my last point. What are the results of our response to God? When God its trying to get our attention, when God is {?} saying, "Hey, I love you enough to send my Son for you on Calvary." And when we ignore him and when we create our own worlds that are separate from him, what does that result? Let me tell you the first thing that results in. It results in absolute confusion. You know, the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14:33 that God is not the author of confusion.

Well, go back up to these verses beginning inv verse 25.

"Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator."<sup>4</sup>

Verse 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."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 1:25.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 1:26.

And then it says that they began to burn and lust one toward another.

I want to give you a challenge, because I know this is a subject matter that is hotly debated in our culture and world wide today. Go back and read Romans chapter one. Read it over and over and over. And the message isn't going to change at all. But what you are going to see if you read it over and over and over again is you are going to begin to see a tone or a mood that is coming out where you almost get the attitude from the Spirit of God through the apostle Paul that God is saying, "They have just become utterly confused." They don't know what is up. And they don't know what is down. They don't even know the basics of how we got here. They don't even get it. It is almost like there is this utter confusion. And we live in a world today where everybody is confused. Is this the way? Is that the way? Is that person right? Is this person right?

But this confusion leads to my final point. It leads to chaos. Do you know what chaos is by definition? Chaos is when behavior or attitudes or actions lead to detrimental results in your life, in somebody else's. I want you to look at what happens in verse 29. Beginning in verse 29 through 31 there are 23 things that are listed as the result of a society that is confused about the things of God. When a group of people cannot understand the very basic things that God wants to speak to us and we need to listen, when a group or a society of people says, "We want to go against the things of God," what can you expect for that culture or that society to begin to look like? Allow me to read you tomorrow's headlines.

"Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers..."<sup>6</sup>

Folks, do you realize that there is nothing in this list, nothing at all in this list that is positive. There is nothing in this list that says, "Wow, I want to be a part of that."

Inventors of evil. And those of you like myself get excited when that one phrase says, "Disobedient to parents." Absolutely. Do you know why? It is a mark of confusion. When people are confused on who is in charge, disobedience will take place. Inventors of evil. When we are confused on who sets the rules, evil naturally transpires. And what happens out of our confusion is a world filled with chaos.

Allow me to illustrate this for you, because I have had the privilege of traveling to most of our major metropolitan cities here in the US and even some overseas. I know that you engineers are incredibly more intelligent than I am. But allow me to speak on behalf of the non engineers in the room. I know there is a purpose and I know there is a reason and you know what you are doing, but when you get to a downtown major metropolitan area, those one way streets really mess us up. I just want you to know, because we spend our whole life saying, "Do I go right or do I go left." And all of the sudden you get to downtown and you don't have a choice. You either go right or you go based on what the sign says. And I would be willing to say that every one of us who has had the privilege of driving an automobile in a major metropolitan area has fallen into this scenario where

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 1:29.



you look up after turning on the road and all of the sudden all the headlights are coming towards you. You have all been there, right? It is a frightening experience. And you realize all the sudden this isn't the way the road was designed. I didn't know it, but I am in a mess.

And so what happens is because we are confused on how we should go, where we should go and what path we should take, what happens when one car goes down a one way street the wrong way. Utter chaos. The honking of the horns, the swerving.

I remember some years ago, many years ago I had a group of fellow students in the car with me and unbeknownst to me we went the wrong way down a one way street. And because there was a group of college students in the car, it was a long time before we realized we were on the wrong way. Why? Because it took a long time for another car to come our way. What was the first thing we said? Well, they are going the wrong way.

Listen to me clearly. Is that not what our culture says to the message of Jesus Christ. Our culture has said, "Well, they must be going the wrong way, because the perspective of the one in the car is completely different than the perspective of those who actually read the sign.

And so when you get on the road and you are going the wrong way, here is what you discover. As soon as you start interacting with other cars, honking of horns, waving of arms, swerving, it is utter chaos, right?

So let me transfer that illustration to our world today. When the message of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, when what we see in specific in an illustration in Romans one when a lifestyle is proclaimed of that which is biblical versus that which in our world is unfortunately accepted, let me tell you what we hear in our culture, that those who are traveling the way and those who have the manual of life will... because they are saying things to me, that is just the message of hate. That is just bigotry.

Can I be honest with you? When I am traveling down a one way road and someone is coming the wrong way and I honk at them it is not because I hate them. I don't want to die. It is not because I hate them. It is I don't want them hurt. It is not that I hate them. It is just I don't want there to be a massive wreck at the next intersection when lives collide in two directions God never meant them to go. And so the message is not a message of hate. Listen. When Jesus went to the cross he didn't hang on the cross and say, "I hate you, sinners." He didn't hang on the cross and say, "I am a bigot. My way is the only..."

Do you know what he said, he said, "For God..." I know he didn't actually say it on the cross, "For God so loved the world."

Do you know what? If I am traveling down a one way road and I see somebody coming the wrong way and I completely ignore it, don't reference it and just say, "You know what? So be it." That is the message of hate. Because I don't care what happens to them. But when I try to get their attention, go hello. But here is the problem. Inside the car you

have got people saying, “But we are happy. We like it inside of our car. Everybody in our car is... why can’t you all just be happy or just let us pave our own way?”

God is not the author of confusion. Verse 18, the wrath of God, verse 23, the judgment of God. And what we need to come to an understanding is the message of salvation that we are sinners and that Jesus came to save us that is not a message of hate. That is not a message of condemnation toward the world. That is a message that for God so loved the world that whoever you are and whatever you are doing in life that is against the ways of God, he loves you enough to say, “Stop and turn around.”

I have unfortunately been on the wrong way of a one way street in more metropolitan areas than I would like to confess, but I have. And I have discovered that when you realize your life is going the wrong way there is only one thing to do to protect yourself and to protect those around you. Stop the direction of the vehicle and turn around. And it is at that point where confusion will cease, chaos will cease and the blessings of God can begin. And that is exactly what happens when a person comes to know Jesus as their Savior. They realize they are headed the wrong way. The Bible calls this sin. We are going to talk more about that next week. And when they realize that they are in sin and they realize they have gone against the things of God, they stop where they are. The Bible calls it repentance. They turn around and say, “Jesus, head me in the right direction.”

That is the message that the apostle Paul when he was Saul called the way. That is the message that two chapters later would be called the message of Christianity and that is the message of the Word of God for us today.