

TEACHER / FACILITATOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

LGBTQ & THE BIBLE – Session 4: Romans and the Nature of Sin

SESSION OVERVIEW (FOR THE FACILITATOR)

Big Idea

Romans—especially Romans 1—is frequently treated as a final, universal judgment on LGBTQ people. This session invites participants to read Romans **as a carefully constructed theological argument**, not a collection of isolated prooftexts.

Rather than asking, “*Who is being condemned?*” this lesson centers on Paul’s deeper concern: **how sin distorts human relationships, how judgment works, and how grace ultimately reframes everything.**

The goal of this session is not to dismiss Scripture, but to read Romans **slowly, contextually, and as Paul intended—leading readers away from condemnation and toward humility, grace, and shared need for mercy.**

TEACHING GOALS

By the end of this session, participants should be able to:

- Understand the rhetorical flow and purpose of Romans 1–3
 - Recognize how Romans 1 functions within Paul’s broader argument
 - Distinguish between descriptive language and prescriptive moral teaching
 - Identify how Romans has been misused as a weapon rather than a mirror
 - Reflect on how Paul ultimately levels the ground for all people before grace
-

TIME GUIDE (Suggested – 60–75 minutes)

- Opening & prayer: 10 minutes
 - Teaching & discussion (three movements): 40–50 minutes
 - Personal reflection & closing prayer: 10–15 minutes
-

OPENING (10 MINUTES)

Opening Question (Icebreaker)

“When you hear the book of *Romans*, what words or ideas immediately come to mind?”



(Allow participants to answer freely—law, sin, grace, judgment, salvation, etc. Do not correct or interpret yet.)

Facilitator Notes

- Many participants associate Romans with authority and finality
 - Some may feel anxiety or defensiveness due to past teaching
 - Establish early that this session focuses on **how Romans works**, not just what verses say
-

Opening Prayer

Invite God to guide the group with humility and wisdom.

Pray for openness to Scripture, courage to examine long-held assumptions, and grace toward one another as difficult texts are explored together.

FOUNDATIONAL CONTEXT (FOR THE FACILITATOR)

Before beginning formal teaching, frame the session with these points:

- Romans is a **letter**, not a rulebook
- Paul is making a **carefully layered argument**, not issuing isolated moral statements
- Romans 1 cannot be understood correctly **without Romans 2 and 3**
- This lesson asks participants to follow Paul's logic **to its conclusion**, not stop where tradition often stops

Reassure participants:

“Taking Scripture seriously sometimes means slowing down instead of jumping to conclusions.”

TEACHING MOVEMENT 1: WHAT ROMANS 1 IS DOING

Key Teaching Point

Romans 1 describes the **downward spiral of humanity when God is reduced to an idea rather than honored as God**.

Facilitator Explanation

Help participants notice:



- Paul begins Romans by addressing **Gentile culture**, not the church
- The language is intentionally intense and familiar to Jewish listeners
- Paul describes a pattern:
 - Idolatry
 - Disordered desires
 - Broken relationships
 - Social and moral collapse

Emphasize:

- Romans 1 is **descriptive**, not a moral checklist
- Paul is naming what happens when humans define good and evil on their own terms
- Same-sex behavior appears **within a broader catalogue**, not as a focal point

Discussion Questions

- What themes stand out in Romans 1 besides sexuality?
- How does this passage describe *systems* rather than isolated individuals?
- Why might Paul be using such strong language at this point in the letter?

Facilitator Notes

- Avoid narrowing the discussion too quickly to one issue
- Keep participants focused on **Paul's rhetorical setup**
- Gently redirect if the conversation turns into debate rather than observation

TEACHING MOVEMENT 2: THE TRAP IN ROMANS 2

Key Teaching Point

Romans 1 sets a **rhetorical trap** that snaps shut in Romans 2—turning judgment back on the reader.

Facilitator Explanation

Guide participants to see:



- Romans 2 opens by addressing “**you who judge**”
- Paul assumes readers will agree with Romans 1—then challenges their certainty
- The argument shifts from “*those people*” to “*you*”

Emphasize:

- Paul’s concern is **self-righteous judgment**, not moral superiority
- The problem is not identifying sin, but **assuming exemption from it**
- Moral certainty becomes the very thing Paul confronts

Discussion Questions

- How does Romans 2 change how we hear Romans 1?
- Why do you think Paul structured the letter this way?
- What dangers arise when Scripture is used to rank people morally?

Facilitator Notes

- This may be an uncomfortable section—allow space for that
- Emphasize humility rather than accusation
- Remind participants this is Paul’s strategy, not a modern agenda

TEACHING MOVEMENT 3: ROMANS’ CONCLUSION—GRACE LEVELS THE GROUND

Key Teaching Point

Paul’s conclusion is not condemnation, but **universal need for grace**.

Facilitator Explanation

Help participants recognize:

- Romans 3 declares that **all have fallen short**
- No group is singled out as uniquely broken
- Righteousness is described as a **gift**, not an achievement

Emphasize:



- Romans dismantles moral hierarchy
 - Sin is a shared human condition, not a weapon
 - Grace—not judgment—is the final word
-

Discussion Questions

- How does Paul’s conclusion reshape how earlier chapters are read?
 - What happens when Romans is read backward—starting with judgment instead of grace?
 - How might this change how Scripture is used in conversations about LGBTQ people?
-

Facilitator Notes

- Keep the focus on theological movement, not political debate
 - Encourage participants to follow Paul’s argument all the way through
 - Affirm that grace does not deny sin—but **redefines how it is addressed**
-

PERSONAL REFLECTION (10 MINUTES)

Invite silence. You may read aloud:

“The purpose of Scripture is not to sort the worthy from the unworthy, but to lead all people to grace.”

Reflection Prompts

- Where have I read Scripture selectively rather than holistically?
- When have I used certainty to avoid self-examination?
- How might grace reshape the way I speak about faith and morality?

(Allow quiet space. Do not rush.)

CLOSING (PRAYER & CHALLENGE)

Closing Prayer

Pray for:

- Humility in reading Scripture



- Courage to resist weaponized interpretations
 - Grace to reflect God’s mercy in how we treat others
-

Optional Take-Home Challenge

Encourage participants to:

- Read Romans 1–3 in one sitting
 - Notice how the argument builds and resolves
 - Ask: *“Where does this text place me—not above others, but alongside them?”*
-

FINAL FACILITATOR REMINDER

This session is not about redefining Scripture—it is about **reading it as Paul intended**.

When Romans is read carefully, it does not divide humanity into clean and unclean.
It brings everyone to the same place:

In need of grace—and invited into it.

