

## **Romans Study**

### **Session 2 - Romans 1:18-32**

Last week we examined a background to the book of Romans and the introduction to the letter. It ended on a high note with Paul proclaiming that he was not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God to save everyone who puts their faith in its message. We saw that the overarching theme of the book of Romans is the gospel of grace. So, based upon this, one might expect that Paul would then launch into a discussion on the gospel next. However, that's not what Paul does. Instead before Paul is going to discuss the gospel, he's going to spend the next two and a half chapters explaining the universal condition of man as sinners. He knew that until people are persuaded of their lost condition and what being "lost" truly means, they will not be concerned about deliverance and salvation. If a person doesn't understand that they are a sinner, they won't care about finding a Savior.

This week Paul is going to discuss the plight of all mankind. He's going to explain, from God's view point, the sweeping, universal condition of man and how he got into that state of being.

Q: When you think of "wrath", what do you think of?

#### **[Romans 1:18-20]**

The trick to interpreting the Bible correctly and honestly is that we have to look at what something meant to those who lived way back in ancient times and then bring that meaning forward to us. When we think about "wrath", this poses some problems.

In the ancient world, those people understood the concept of wrath. The gods they worshiped had human emotions. When angered, they would use their power without restraint in a desire to placate their offended pride or dignity. Wrath, as seen by most ancient people was an angry god having their ego bent out of shape and lashing out at the offenders and any other people in an area until their emotional outburst subsided.

Yet, this isn't at all the picture of God's wrath that is portrayed in the Bible. The wrath of God is motivated by His sense of holiness and justice. The Lord seeks to establish justice through His wrath. His wrath isn't a function of His needing to stroke His fragile ego or prove His dignity.

Now let's fast-forward to our modern culture.

Q: What does our society think about God's wrath? Do you think they have any problems with the idea of God showing wrath? *(Yes, they largely think that God is a God of goodness and love and will not show wrath. But there are those who also feel the wrath of God is God being an "old man" pointing His boney finger at someone and shooting lightning at them for not towing the line.)*

#### **[I Thessalonians 1:9-10]**

#### **[Revelation 6:15-17]**

The wrath of God is a very real thing. As we see in Romans, it is being revealed from heaven progressively throughout human history. In the end times, the wrath of God will be fully revealed and expressed. The word “wrath” means to swell up with violent passion”. When God expresses it, it is a function of His justice against sin, the rebellion against His rightful rule. Notice one thing about this wrath - it is earned.

Q: What two things does our text say God’s wrath is directed against? (*all ungodliness and unrighteousness*)

Ungodliness is a lack of reverence for God that leads to indifference towards God and rebellion against God.

Unrighteousness is the injustice of man relating to other men.

So we see there are two causes for God’s wrath to be revealed dealing with relationships - one is the vertical relationship between man and God and the other is the horizontal relationship between man and other men.

**[Matthew 22:37-40]** - In other words, it is lack of love for God and fellow man that leads to God’s wrath.

Q: The question then, based on the passage is this: we said God’s wrath is an outpouring of His perfect sense of justice. What is just about God pouring out His wrath on mankind? (*Man suppressed the truth of God, He made it evident that He exists and who He is through creation and though they understood something of Him, these people didn’t respond by seeking God or attempting to behave appropriately.*)

Q: What about the people who have never heard about Jesus? Will they suffer God’s wrath on judgment day? Why or why not? (*Yes they will, v.20*)

The word suppress means to hold something down. It could be used of holding down the lid on a pot. One of the many hazing rituals that freshmen, including myself, had to endure in our high school band was the tuba case. A group of upperclassmen would routinely pick up a freshmen and shove him into the tuba case and then put the lid down and sit on it. You could say the freshman was suppressed. In our context, God accused mankind of suppressing or putting the lid on the truth He wanted to share. It is important that in order to suppress something you have to have knowledge of it. The word suppressed would not be used if the people were merely ignorant of God. All are guilty because all have heard. His testimony about Himself is within them.

Q: What are the things which creation reveals about God? (*vv. 19-20*)

So here’s where God’s justice comes into action. People not only knew that there was a God who created everything but also they knew some of the things about this God. Rather than act on those truths, they chose to behave against what they knew about God. Thus, God is just when He reveals His wrath against those who refused to revere Him and rebel against Him and show live unrighteously against their fellow man. It is characteristic of man in his sinful state to know much more about God than he translates into a fitting response to God.

Now what we are talking about is technically called “natural revelation” or “general revelation”. We don’t know anything about God and cannot know anything about God unless He chooses to reveal it to us. The word reveal means to take the cover off something - like when an artist takes the cover off a new statue he’s created. Natural revelation is the revelation available to all people throughout all history. As we read these verses, we can find four different truths about natural revelation:

- 1) It is clear testimony to mankind. (v.19 - evident)
- 2) Mankind understood this testimony that creation gave about God (*v.19 - evident within them - God made it evident/plain*)
- 3) It is a constant testimony that is always present for anyone to see
- 4) Natural revelation is limited in its testimony about God. It only reveals certain aspects of God. It does not give specifics.
- 5) Natural revelation is always negative in its results. In other words, once you receive this testimony about God, you are condemned. (*Why didn’t you act upon it if you knew it?*)

Q: Are there any questions before moving on? This is the foundation of tonight’s study. Everything else is built upon this set of truths.

Q: Before reading the next section we need to talk about idolatry. What is idolatry? (*putting anything in God’s place of supremacy in our lives*)

Mankind was designed by God to understand that he is a created being. We know that we did not give life to ourselves. We have a need to worship our creator. Idolatry is when we fill our hearts with what we want to worship rather than what God has revealed we need to be worshiping - Him.

### **[Romans 1:21-25]**

Man failed to act on the knowledge God conveyed to them.

Q: According to v.21, what are the correct and acceptable responses to knowing about God? (*giving honor to God and thanksgiving*)

Q: We understand what thanksgiving is but what does it mean to honor God? (*to bring glory to another, to make someone else shine or look good. To honor someone is to act in a way that makes the other person shine for what they’ve done for you.*)

Suppressing the truth about God doesn’t glorify Him. As a result the sinful became futile in their speculations. Futile means vain or foolish and is often a metaphor for idolatry. This goes well with speculations which means imaginations or way of reasoning. So because they weren’t giving God thanks or glory, they had to come up with something to fill the void of something greater than themselves in their hearts and thus they invented idols. This substitution of idols for God led to even more problems such as their hearts being darkened. (At the end of the chapter we are going to see just a few of the sins related to a darkened heart.)

Q: What does v. 23 describe? (*idolatry*)

Q: What are the two things man made into idols according to this verse? (*man then animals - sinful man will worship himself and anything in nature before he worships God.*)

Q: What did God do in response to man exchanging the glory of God for idols? (*v. 24 - God gave them over to the impurity of their hearts*)

What is important to note here is that this process mentioned here of man falling into greater sin is not simple cause and effect. This isn't God setting up the dominos and mankind pushing one down and then they all fall down. God is actively involved in the process. God giving someone over to their lusts is God's judgment upon them for idolatry.

In the Greek, the word "gave" in v.24 is in the aorist tense. the aorist tense indicates an action that happened in the past but is continuing to happen now and will continue to happen indefinitely. It is the way sin operates and as long as men are in the world, they will continue follow this pattern of living, until their lives are confronted by conviction. The word denotes that God has actively taken His protective hands off of them and left them to live as their flesh desires. These people had already deserted God willfully and now He is handing the reigns of their lives over to their further self-condemnation and self-destruction.

**[I Timothy 4:1-2]** - This is another view of the conscience of a sinful man being seared as with a branding iron so that it no longer remains tender or sensitive to God's Spirit at work around it. This is what is being described in Romans.

This portion of the passage teaches us something else - the worth of religion. Religion is not a good or beneficial part of our lives. Religion is seeking after God on our own terms - working to please a god on our own merits and efforts. The problem is that religion will keep a person so busy that they will not have the time or energy to seek the real God. They will miss God and continue to live in the darkness of their hearts.

Then Paul finishes this segment by stating that God's glory remains even if it goes unacknowledged by man. Paul just couldn't keep from bringing up the glory of God which sinful man has refused to acknowledge. Next Paul gives a crystal clear example of God giving people over to power of their lusts.

**[Romans 1: 26-27]**

The word "degrading" means vile, shameful or dishonorable. So here God is giving sinful people over to their sinful passions that are shameful and vile.

Q: What sin is Paul referring to in this passage? (*homosexuality*)

Remember, idolatry leads to immorality and in this illustration - sexual immorality. Before going any farther in this illustration, we need to go back in time to understand the ancient Jewish and Greek cultures. They were extremely different in terms of sexuality.

For the Jew, sex was something reserved between a husband and wife only. Any form of sexual gratification outside the bonds of marriage was vile, shameful and sin. In the Old Testament it homosexuality was forbidden and considered sinful as well as a plethora of other forms of sexual gratification.

**[Leviticus 18:22-25, Leviticus 20: 13]** - This was the behavior of the nations the Lord drove out of the Promised Land and so He didn't want His children to follow in their sins.

However, the ancient Greek mindset towards sex was quite different. Homosexuality was not only permitted and accepted but also advocated. Men having sex with young boys was a custom that was also in general acceptance in that society (and in a large portion of the ancient world). The Greeks saw no shame in such behavior. The older men were "mentoring" the young boys in the ways of homosexuality. *(By the way, did anyone see the news last week where the UN wants to decriminalize sex with children? It's amazing how similar our society today is becoming like the atrocities of the Gentile ancient world.)*

The Jewish position on sex and that of the ancient Greeks were polar opposites. Into this Paul makes his point on what the Christian view on homosexuality is.

**[I Corinthians 6:9-10]**

**[I Timothy 1:10]**

It is important to understand that man is not seen as a victim in this passage but rather a being which sees, thinks and acts according to his own will. Sin comes from the mind of man thus perverting man's judgment on what is righteous and unrighteous.

Why Paul uses this illustration on homosexuality is because it is so crystal clear. God created man and woman. He did this for a reason so that they could fulfill His command to be fruitful and multiply over the face of the earth. (Genesis 1:28, Genesis 9:1, 7) It was the very first commandment given by God to humanity. Two men cannot reproduce and neither can two women. (The Lord created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.) Thus, a homosexual union is clearly against God's natural intent for men and women. People today ask, "Who does it harm? If both parties are consenting adults, who cares?" God does! They are living far below God's intent for creating them and giving them life as they will not be able to fulfill God's will for their lives - to be fruitful. The word "nature" means the natural order ordained by God. It is a clear violation of the created order. This is why Paul is using the illustration of one, single sin here because it is so evidently sinful.

Q: According to the passage, what is the punishment for homosexuality? *(V. 27 - receiving in their person the due penalty of their error. The phrase "due penalty" is an ongoing obligation to pay the penalty which nature will extract.)*

Our society is quickly becoming similar to the ancient Greek world in this regard. The devil never gets tired of destroying societies with the homosexual sin card. As believers we need to keep in mind that homosexuality is not the only sin in the world neither is it the unforgivable sin nor is it the worst sin mentioned in the Bible. Paul gave this as an illustration here because it

was one that need very little explanation - it was self-evident to anyone whose mind isn't depraved that homosexuality is sinful and that there is a built in penalty within the sin. Our responsibility is to love everyone, including all sinners, so that they will come to know Christ. We should not single out the gay or lesbian sinner over the drunkard or liar or greedy man.

Paul finishes this passage with a section that gives us a good look at what suppressing the truth yields. What is interesting is that it is God's right to judge mankind. However, man has usurped God's right and sat in judgment over God and dismissed Him from their lives. This section is a description of the phrase in v.21 "foolish heart was darkened". This is the reward of idolatry.

### **[Romans 1:28-32]**

Most of these words are self-explanatory but a few need special attention.

1) depraved - vile, shameful, reprobate. The word pictures an old abandoned, crumbling building inhabited only by wild animals. It is now far from what it was built to do. This life is now the life far from God and His original purpose for giving that life.

2) v. 29 - being filled - stuffed full, the unrighteous behavior is not just passing or occasional but all the time - they stuff their lives with unrighteousness.

3) insolent - is a person who hates another person and shows that hatred by spiteful actions and insults

Q: Which of these sins do you find most troubling?

While not every sinner will display each and every sin listed here, this is a smattering of those sins which are particularly heinous and contemptible. The problem is that this is picture of who everyone is before they come to Christ. All are sinners in one form or fashion. While my sin may not be homosexuality it may be gossip, gluttony or arrogance. (I may not worship the golden calf but do I worship the golden arches?) It doesn't matter what the sin is, they are all going to receive God's wrath in full in due time.

This is all caused by self-worship. If the knowledge of God's power and deity was sufficient to obligate man to worship God with gratitude for His benefits, the knowledge of righteousness, innate to man's very being, was sufficient to remind him that the price of disobedience was death. Yet, this knowledge did not deter these people from their sinful ways. In fact, they were guilty of a crowning offense by applauding those who practiced these various behaviors and encouraged others to revolt against God as well.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?

**Next reading will be Romans 2**