

## 18th September 2016—'Without excuse' Studies in Romans 1:18-32

The backdrop to the good news of God's grace in Jesus (Romans 1:1-17) is a world in rebellion against God. This is what Paul now explores, though note the important link between last week's passage and this: it is *precisely because* of the righteousness of God being revealed (v.17) and the existence of a redeemed community (such as the one here in Rome) that we realise how tragic is the world around i.e. it doesn't need to be like this! Paul's main thesis is that God's wrath which will be revealed at the Last Judgment (1 Thess. 1:10) is already being seen at work. It is God's wrath against a suppression of the truth (about God.) v.19. This suppression is seen in the way that, since creation, God's existence and power are available for all to see and yet this has been ignored. Thus all people (Gentile and Jew) are without excuse (v.20).

### 1. A fatal exchange – the essence of human sin.

Three times the language of 'exchange' is used v.23, 25, 26. The heart of human sin is that we have 'exchanged' the glory of the immortal God' for images...' The fatal exchange is that instead of allowing God to be God, Lord over all, we have put ourselves and creaturely things centre stage. This is the essence of idolatry and it seems Paul had Psalm 106:20 clearly in mind (the story of the golden calf) and maybe behind that, the story of the Fall in Genesis 3.

### 2. A frightening non-intervention – how God's wrath is at work.

At the end of time God will bring judgment in a massive intervention in human history. But paradoxically, *now* God's wrath happens by a deliberate non-intervention - God giving us over to our desires. This phrase also occurs three times 24, 26, 28. The really frightening thing is not falling *into* the hands of God but falling *out* of the hands of God! In the Scriptures there is a strong link between idolatry and sexual immorality and Paul goes on to illustrate this principle with regard to same-sex erotic practice. Paul is not highlighting this as if it is the worst form of sin (look at the long list in v.28-31). Rather Paul sees 'unnatural sexual relations' (i.e. against the original creation intention) as symbolising a much wider malaise.

This is not how it has to be! The Gospel has power to break this cycle! Christ has taken God's wrath on himself in the cross and offers us a new life and a renewed mind with God in his rightful place at the very centre.



## Home Group Study Notes

### Read Romans 1:18-32

1. Paul's analysis of what is going on in the world is very different from most media commentators. He sees, in everyday life, the wrath of God at work. Divine wrath is not like our human emotion (as if God has fits of rage). So what do you understand to be the wrath of God?
2. God's wrath, at heart, is directed against a suppression of the truth about God (v.18-21). Where do we see that happening in the world around us?
3. In what sense is it true that everyone is without excuse before God (v.20)?
4. Re read v.21. A mark of that 'suppression of truth' is that people do not give thanks to God. What does this say about the importance of praise and worship?
5. The sermon talked about a 'fatal exchange'. Re-read v.23, 25, 26. What is the essence of this exchange? Read **Psalm 106:20** with its reference to the Golden Calf as background. It also takes our minds back to Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve 'exchanged the truth about God for a lie' (of the serpent).
6. What does it mean that God '**gave them over**' to sin (v.24, 26, 28). What do you make of the comment that it is actually more fearful to fall 'out of the hands of God' than 'into the hands of God'.
7. The issue of same-sex erotic behaviour is just one way Paul illustrates a much more widespread moral malaise (v.26-27). How can we treat the issue with the moral seriousness it deserves whilst not making it out to be 'the worst of sins?' (n.b 'Natural' and 'unnatural' does not refer to what we consider natural but refers to God's original creation design).
8. List all the ways you can think why the Gospel is the answer to the picture Paul paints here of the pagan fallen world. Note in particular how Romans 12:1-12 is the Christian answer to futile and darkened minds (v.21). Spend time **in prayer** thanking God and so celebrating, not suppressing, the truth!

