



ROMANS ¹⁻⁴
GOD'S GOOD NEWS

STUDY #3

1:18-32



FOR FURTHER READING & EXPLORATION

These notes have not been designed to unearth all the theological and pastoral issues that come out of Romans 1, but rather are geared to help groups wrestle with the text and understand it's big picture.

Firstly, please know that the ministry team are always available to chat. We would love to hear from you.

Secondly, ensure you listen to Sunday's sermon, and also come along to our special evening on Wednesday 10 August, *God's Good News for Diverse Sexuality*. It will take place at 7:30pm here at St James and will feature Sam Wan from Living Faith ministries. The evening will enable us to ask more questions and think about how we can best care for and minister to those experiencing same-sex attraction, be that ourselves personally or others.

Thirdly, here is a (very non-exhaustive) list of recommended resources to help you think Biblically and compassionately through questions regarding human sexuality.

BOOKS

People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just An Issue by Preston Sprinkle.

Preston engages even-handedly with arguments affirming same-sex practise and encourages us to think theologically

A War Of Loves: The Unexpected Story of A Gay Activist by David Bennett

David is an Old Barker boy and powerfully shares his testimony of coming to Christ. David reminds us that God is good and so is his design for our sexuality.

Is God Anti-Gay by Sam Allberry

Sam is a widely acclaimed Bible teacher. He is also a same-sex attracted Christian. He very clearly unpacks the Bible's teaching on sexuality. See also *What God Has to Say About Our Bodies*.

ONLINE

Living Faith Ministries Australia

www.livingfaith.online

The webpage of Sydney based ministry which equips the church to minister to those with diverse sexuality.

Living Out

www.livingout.org

Encouraging stories featuring same-sex attracted Christians looking to live out their sexuality in a God-honouring way.

OVERVIEW - ROMANS 1:18-32

Having introduced the gospel as that which reveals the righteousness of God (1:17), in 1:18-3:20, Paul now shows why such a gospel of righteousness is *necessary* for all humanity. It is necessary because *all* humanity is under God's wrath, and *all* without exception are in need of God's gift of righteousness.

The Righteousness of God's Wrath (1:18-23)

18 Though not in the NIV, the ESV more closely reflects the original Greek by placing the connective *for* at the beginning of verse 18. In other words, the gospel which reveals the righteousness of God is such good news, and so necessary, *because* of the reality of God's wrath which is also being revealed in the world. God's wrath is unlike human anger – it is his just, consistent, settled and holy opposition against human sinfulness. Verse 18 reveals the foundation of human sinfulness – our suppression of the truth of God (cf. v. 25). More than the sinful things we do, at the heart of human sinfulness is a universal rejection of the truth of God.

19-20 And God's wrath against our sinful rejection of him is righteous because we are *all* culpable. Whether living in an Artic tundra, an Amazonian jungle, or an Australian city, verses 19-20 tell us that God has revealed his eternal power and divine nature to all, through what has been created. From the intricacy of cells, to the expanse of galaxies, to the beauty of a sunset, all point toward the power, purpose and orderliness of a Creator (Psalm 19:1-6). 'God has stitched his greatness into the fabric of the human mind so that his majesty is instinctively recognized when one views the created world.'¹ Yet we are *all* culpable, because despite this knowledge, we actively suppress this truth in our hearts and minds.²

21-23 This suppression has found supreme expression in humanity's pursuit of idolatry. We were designed to worship the Creator, but we have turned this instinct towards created things. In so doing, the created order has been *inverted* - we who were made to have dominion over creation (Gen 1:28), have tragically become subservient to it in worship. In the Ancient Near East, these created things were often the idols of pagan religion. Today the lure of man-made religion endures, yet so also do other idols such as wealth (Colossians 3:5). As a result, our faculties of spiritual perception have become blinded. We are dead in sin and God has become imperceptible to us (v 21). This is why we need the light of the gospel to meet us in our sin-induced darkness.

The Revealing of God's Wrath (1:24-32)

25-27 Just as God's righteousness is presently being revealed in the gospel, so too is God's wrath being *presently* revealed in the world. Verses 24, 26 and 28 repeat the phrase *God gave them over*. God's wrath is being revealed in His actively *giving over* of humanity to our sinful desires. In this sense, God's wrath is *present* (in humanity being handed over to our sinful desires) and *future* (it will be poured out on the last day - 2:5; Col 3:6; 1 Thess 1:10). Paul illustrates the present reality of God's wrath with reference to same-sex activity³ in v 26-27. Just as we have *all* inverted God's created order by exchanging the glory of the Creator for the glory of created idols, so too does same-sex activity invert God's created order for human sexuality by exchanging men for women and vice versa. Similarly, just as we have *all* suppressed God's general revelation of his glory in nature, so too does same-sex sin suppress God's general revelation of his design for sexuality in our human nature.

28-32 Same-sex sin is but one example of how God has given humanity over to our desires, which stem from our idolatrous exchange of the glory of God. Paul's lists more examples in v 28-32. Whether in thought, word or deed, none are innocent before such a list. Though not everything humanity does is sinful, there is no part of our humanity untouched by sin. Additionally, verse 32 tells us that our guilt is compounded by our approval of what our God-given consciences know that God disapproves of. Though our consciences may become dulled by forceful personal or societal suppression of God's truth, nonetheless this verse testifies to a God-created order of right and wrong which is knowable to all. Though this picture seems bleak, we must remember that just as God's wrath is being revealed, so is his righteousness in the gospel. As our world darkens in active suppression of God's truth, may we see our sorry state and cry out to God, as the light of the gospel shines even more brightly.

¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 94.

² God's *general* revelation of himself in nature, though enough to make us culpable, is not sufficient to save. It does not reveal, for example, God's love and mercy. For that we need God's *special* revelation of himself found in Scripture, and most pointedly in Christ.

³ In keeping with the passage, same-sex sin is here understood as sexual activity with, or lustful desire for, a member of the same sex. It is distinct from same-sex *attraction*. There will be a variety of reasons as to why we might find ourselves attracted towards others, be they members of the same or opposite sex. A Godly response to this attraction is not to sexualize these desires (in thought or action) and so conflict with God's design for sexual expression in the marriage relationship of man and woman.

GETTING STARTED

1. It's important to acknowledge that there will be some (perhaps even unbeknownst to the group), for whom the prospect of this week's study is daunting. Perhaps this is due to personal experience, the experience of loved ones, or from the difficulty of trying to reconcile differences between the Bible and our culture. Spend a moment praying that God would help the group to be gracious, quick to listen and slow to speak, and open to hear from God in his Word.

INTO THE TEXT

Read Romans 1:18-23

2. Why does Paul move from speaking about the revelation of God's *righteousness* (v. 17) to the revelation of his *wrath* (v. 18)?
3. What is the truth that humanity has suppressed, and why are we *all* culpable?
4. Why is idolatry so foolish? (cf. Jeremiah 2:5, 11 & Psalm 106:19-21)
5. What are some of the created things that our hearts are prone to prize and desire above God?

Read Romans 1:24-32

6. How and when does God bring his wrath upon humanity?
7. Some say that "a life lived without God is a life of freedom and independence". What do these verses say in response?
8. How does the nature of the sexual sin described in v. 26-27 illustrate humanity's rejection of God?
9. How do we know that *all* humanity is in view here, and not just those susceptible to the sexual sin listed in verses 26-27? (Cf. 2:1)

TAKEAWAY

10. Spend a moment reading through verses 24-32. Whether in thought, word or deed, reflect upon where it is in your life that you are guilty of living this way. Spend a moment in quiet confession, then comfort each other with these words from Scripture.

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. ^{2:1} My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. **1 John 1:8-2:2***

11. In our current climate, where might we be most in danger of giving the God-displeasing approval described in verse 32? Whether it be in corporate, educational, family or social settings, share some practical ideas as to how we might be more like Jesus who is full of grace *and* truth? (John 1:14)