

Romans 1:17-32

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[0 : 0 0] We are going to Romans over this winter. If you missed the first one in Romans, do send an email to us and we'll send you the talk and the outline from last week. But our second talk is from Romans chapter 1 verse 18 and 32.

If you say to someone, don't worry, I can save you, they're going to be very grateful, assuming that they're up to their neck in quicksand or they're minutes away from drowning.

But if you say to someone, don't worry, I can save you, and they happen to be sitting next to you at work, doing their own work, minding their own business, the response you'll get will either be a bemused look or it'll be unprintable, won't it?

And in this series, what we learnt last time, is we learnt that the gospel, the good news about Jesus, is the power of God for salvation.

But the question is, what do you need saving from? What do you need saving from? And the answer that the Bible gives to that question is so politically incorrect, so offensive, that many churches refuse to teach it.

[1 : 1 3] But unless we understand it, what we need saving from, the good news of Jesus will seem to be, well, a complete irrelevance. And it will never make any real sense at all.

What the gospel saves us from and rescues us from is stated there in black and white at the beginning of verse 18. Can you see it? For the wrath of God.

God is angry. And we face his judgment. But why is God angry? Why is God angry with us? And how does that anger of God affect us?

And there's three themes that trace the logic of this passage as we follow it through. First of all, divine revelation. God's revelation that God reveals himself.

The starting point of the gospel is that God has revealed himself clearly. And the passage describes all of mankind.

[2 : 1 4] Look at verse 19. Look at verse 19. For what can be known about God is plain to them. Because God has shown it to them.

For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived. So can you see that? The one true God has revealed very plainly and clearly that he is there.

And what he is like. Because verse 21 says, for although they knew God. So there is a sense in which every human being, we all know God.

In the sense we know about him. But how? How has the one true God revealed himself? How am I supposed to know about him? How am I supposed to clearly perceive what he is like?

If God is invisible. Well verse 20. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

[3 : 1 9] The creation speaks of the creator. The order, the design, the beauty of the natural world screams out to you and I that there is an all powerful creator God.

It's got God's fingerprints all over it. So when you look closely at a flower. Or a spider's web. Or the stars on a clear night.

Or the fingernails of a newborn baby. It's got God's fingerprints all over it. The creator God is shouting out, hello. Oi. That's what is going on.

Isaac Newton said, in the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone. Would convince me of God's existence. Chapter 2 of Romans and verse 15.

Let me read that to you. Listen to what it says. It says, They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness.

[4 : 21] And their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. The all powerful creator God has written his law, not just in the Bible.

But the all powerful creator God has written his law on the hearts of all people. And our conscience tells us when we break that law and when we keep it.

And now this knowledge of the one true God, through creation and through conscience, is sometimes called general revelation. And it's very significant. And the consequence of that is stated in verse 20.

Speaking of all of us. Can you see it? How the verse ends? They've been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. None of us. Not one human being can say, I never knew. None of us can say, if only the true God had made himself a bit more obvious, then I would have worshipped him.

[5 : 22] This is saying we all know more than enough about his existence and about his character. And that means that the nomad living out in the middle of the Gobi Desert has got no excuse.

And the native dwelling in the highlands of Papua New Guinea has got no excuse. And the worker on the fourth floor in England Council has got no excuse. And your neighbour has got no excuse. We're not short on evidence. Sometimes people talk about, don't they, the long search for God. As if God has got lost. Or we're hiding.

Well, he's not. And what can be known about the one true God is plain to us because God has made it plain. But how do we, by nature, respond to this knowledge of God?

And secondly, the second theme we see is human rebellion. What is our reaction to the truth of God? Look at verse 18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men and women who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[6 : 32] It's very different, isn't it, to what people commonly think, the common perception. People think, I am the searcher. I am the seeker for truth.

I want to find the truth. But verse 18 of Romans chapter 1 is saying that you are on the run. We're on the run from the truth of God. And actually we suppress it.

We hold it down. And we shut it up. Because it doesn't fit in with the way we want to live our lives. We reject the truth of God. And we also reject the knowledge of God.

Look at verse 21. 21. For although they knew God, they did not honour Him as God or give thanks to Him. It's an astonishing reaction.

God makes us. God makes the wonderful world in which we live. He gives us everything. And how do we respond? Well, we refuse to honour or give thanks to Him.

[7 : 30] Imagine a little girl. She's a little girl who is born into the most loving home imaginable. Her parents are model parents. No sacrifice is too great for the sake of their little girl.

They do everything for her. Those endless sleepless nights. As a baby. Feeding and changing and pampering. And the little girl becomes a toddler. And then a child.

And then one day their little girl comes home. But she's now aged 13. And she says to her parents, I've got something to say to you. They sit down at the dinner table. And she says, I don't owe you anything.

She says, I don't care what you've done for me. I didn't ask you to do it for me. You don't own me. I am not going to submit to your rules. I will keep living in your house until I'm 18.

But then I'm off. But I want you to leave me alone. And for the next five years, that girl lives her own life. In that house. She eats the meals that are cooked for her.

[8 : 27] She sleeps in the bed that is made for her. But at mealtime, she just sits there in silence. And she won't even speak to her parents. She just blanks them and ignores them. And when she comes in, she walks past them without a word, with music blaring through the earphones of her iPhone.

Verse 21. For although they knew God, they did not honour Him. As God all give thanks to Him. Verse 28.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge Him. That is how we all treat the one true God. The God who made you.

The God who has given you everything. You live in the house of His world. You take all the good gifts that He has given you to enjoy. But you treat Him like an ungrateful, defiant, rebellious teenager treats her parents.

No honour. No thanks. No acknowledgement. But tragically, it is not just a phase, is it, that you go through for a few years. The greatest shock is still to come.

[9 : 34] Because the great rejection that Romans 1 talks about leads to the great exchange. Having rejected the one true God, we put other things in His place.

Having refused to worship Him, we don't worship nothing, if I could put it like that. We worship anything but Him. Look at verse 23. And we exchange the glory of the immortal God, the never-dying God, the living God, for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Look at verse 25. Because they exchange the truth about God for a lie. That's what people choose. And worship and serve the creature rather than the creature who is blessed forever.

Amen. And that is what is going on when people bow down and worship statues and images that they have made. But it's also what goes on when people put money as their central ambition.

When a person puts themselves at the centre of the universe with an attitude of no one has got the right to tell me how to live and how to behave. In the world's eyes, idolatry is wise and sophisticated and enlightened.

[10 : 52] When somebody invests all their hopes and all their dreams in a relationship with another person, what's going on there? They are replacing the creator with a creative thing.

It's the great exchange. When we hear that people have made a little idol or a little god, most of us think, how primitive, don't we?

How naive that is. But do you see that we all have little gods that we worship? Our image, our looks, our reputation, our results.

We exchange the truth of God for a lie. We worship the created instead of the creator. This is a description of humanity. And it's utter stupidity.

What could be more foolish to exchange worshipping the one true God for something that he has created? But we think idolatry is wise.

[11 : 58] We think in this country idolatry is sophisticated. Look at verse 22. Claiming to be wise, they became fools. They exchange the glory of an immortal god for images.

Claiming to be wise, just try it when you're back in the office and you want people to think you're cool or sophisticated. But when you do that, tell them about your plans to earn lots of money and your next holiday where you dream of going.

Tell them about clothes, tell them about music, tell them about how wonderful your family is. Tell them about the good you want to do. Maybe you'd love to be an entrepreneur and you can't wait to get out of this place.

Tell them about how spiritual you are. People will listen. Because in the world's eyes, idolatry is wise and sophisticated. Can you see that?

And enlightened. But in the office, when you talk about the one true God and how in the person of Jesus Christ he's come to rescue you, well if you do that, people get embarrassed and they make fun of you and they think you're a fool.

[13 : 07] Romans 1 tells us all idolatry is folly. It's an expression of having rejected the one true God. Having claimed to become wise, they became fools.

At the end of verse 21, they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. The world religions, the pursuit of money and career, of investing all your hopes in a relationship, all these are a sign of our rejection of God.

of the one true creator we know is there. And we know that we should be worshipping. What are they? They're an attempt, aren't they, to fill the void that has been left by our rejection of God.

And that is why it is perfectly fair and right to hold us accountable for our worship of false gods. Just think back to that rebellious teenager. Do you remember her? She's defiantly rejected her parents and their love for her.

She refuses to acknowledge them. But what does she do? Well, we know what teenagers like that do. They put other things in place, don't they?

[14 : 16] In their place. She goes out partying and she gets drunk every night. She starts taking drugs. She finds someone else that she can look up to and give her advice. She may find an older man who mistreats her and she becomes dependent upon him.

She must fill and she must achieve the aching voyage that has been left by turning her back on her parents. It's a picture of mankind in rebellion.

Why is any of this a problem? What's the big deal with doing that? Well, the big deal is because of the last theme in this passage and that is divine judgment. That God is very angry and God expresses that anger in judgment.

Firstly, he expresses that anger in the present. Can you see verse 18? For the wrath of God is revealed, present tense, from heaven. We live in a world that is experiencing God's anger in judgment even now.

But in what way? Well, the clue is in the repetition. Three times in this passage if you look down you have the phrase God gave them up. For God gave them up.

[15:31] Look at verse 24. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts. Look at verse 26. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.

Look at verse 28. God gave them up to a debased mind. The word here is a picture of handing someone over to someone else. Handing them over to someone else.

Someone else's power and authority. Jesus says in the Gospels his disciples will be given up to the synagogues and the prisons. Jesus was given up to be crucified.

It's the same phrase. God's present judgment here and now is to give people up. To hand them over to the power of a godless lifestyle.

And so he gives us up to our wrongdoing and it's controlling power in our lives. And in society the power of a godless lifestyle. It grips us. It's one of the reasons why the world is in such a mess.

[16:35] It is the areas Paul says this happens in our broad ranging. Look at sorry look at verse 24.

There's three areas in particular. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves.

Sexual freedom people say is a sign that we've come of age isn't it? That we're a mature society. We've got away from the kind of old liberated idea of one woman and one man in a covenant of marriage that sex is for the covenant of marriage between a man and a wife in a covenant relationship.

We've got away from that. And so to be sexually liberated is a sign according to our world that we are wise and that we're liberated. But Romans 1 God's word says very differently doesn't it?

That being enslaved to sexual immorality is in fact a judgement of God on our world. Look at verse 26. For this reason God gave them up dishonourable passions for their women experienced natural relations for those that are contrary to nature and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

[18:06] Again we have to say don't we that homosexual practice amongst men and amongst women is seen in our society as a sign of liberation of a culture that is maturing isn't that what we're told?

And at last people are free to be themselves love is love so goes the slogan but according to God's word it's saying no it's another sign of God's judgement in the world that people abandon natural relationships and they are inflamed in lust for their same sex and they express that lust in sexual relationships that are against nature now do notice with me the third giving over in verse 28 broadens this out massively look at verse 28 and since they did not see fit to acknowledge what God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done and then notice what Paul says they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness evil covetous malice full of envy murder strife deceit maliciousness gossip slanderous haters of God insolent haughty boastful inventors of evil disobedient parents foolish faithless heartless ruthless you might be sitting there this lunchtime and you might think well I slipped through the net

I've not sinned sexually but I want you to see that the last paragraph the net catches us all this catalogue of sin blows apart there are categories of sin murder is mentioned in the same breath as anger and the same breath as gossip and greed and disobeying your parents that is saying we are all enslaved to wrongdoing and we are all under its power and if someone denies that say well ok try for a week try it try for a week not to envy anyone try not to look at anyone with their success or their looks or their brains try not to envy them or try not to lust how long can you keep a clean sheet but notice verse 32 says they don't want to verse 32 though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them and we see that particularly in the area of sex don't we that not only is sexual immorality particularly homosexuality practice but now it is championed we see Romans 1 lived out

before our very eyes you look at the difference in generations isn't it that gay pride it's Romans 1 it is aggressively promoted as being the right lifestyle and God's judgment in the present is handing us over to the power of a godless lifestyle but this judgment in the present is nothing compared to what lies ahead

God's present judgment is like a faint tremor and rumble of a distant earthquake but in the future we will find ourselves at the epicenter let me read to you what it says from chapter 2 and verse 5 of Romans but because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's right up judgment will be revealed you store up wrath for yourself it's not a great plan to have is it although God's wrath is revealed in the present day the great day of God's wrath is still to come the day on which his righteous judgment will be revealed in all its full and final terror chapter 2 and verse 16 that day when God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus and what will the penalty be what we all know verse 32 we know that the penalty will be death the penalty will be death do you see that those who practice such things deserve to die die in what sense well physical death in the present that is part of death but the ultimate death according to the Bible is that second death it is that everlasting death it is the sting of death it is separation this is death

Adam is separated from God in Genesis 3 when he commits sin and so this speaks of death as a separation from God for all eternity another part of the Bible is called hell it is called everlasting destruction it is being shut away from the kind and gracious and loving presence of the Lord forever and so can you see why there is such wonderful news that the gospel is the power of God for salvation and that the gospel is God's solution to the problem of the wrath of God and it is the only solution and that is why the gospel about Jesus Christ is such fantastic news it is fantastic news that we need to accept for ourselves and that we need to keep on believing and we must never ever be ashamed to tell other people about it let's pray