



## Scotts Hill Baptist Church

WHY WE NEED THE GOSPEL GOD'S JUDGEMENT ON IMMORALITY • ROMANS 1:18-32 •

### MAIN POINT

Understanding God's Wrath helps us see our need for the gospel and treasure His grace in our lives.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**If someone said, "I have some good news and I have some bad news"., which would you want to hear first? Why?**

The truth is you and I can never fully appreciate the good news until we understand why the good news is actually good news. And we cannot see that until we understand the reality of bad news. The backdrop for the good news of the gospel is the bad news of God's judgment. This week we will take time to understand God's wrath so we can learn to treasure His grace!

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 1:18-20.

**What does Romans 1:18-20 teach us about God and His relationship with mankind?**

**In verse 18, what did mankind do when given "the truth" about God?**

### **What do these verses reveal about the need for the gospel to spread?**

All people need the gospel because they are under God's wrath, which stems from His holy revulsion to sin. Mankind originally knew God and fellowshiped with Him (Gen. 3:8). Since the garden of Eden, people have been unrighteous, and they have suppressed the truth. God is at work to show Himself in the world, yet the world is in rebellion against Him.

### **What in nature hints of God's love and grace? What about His wrath or judgment?**

### **Why did Paul state that people who live in sinful ways are without excuse?**

### **What are the most common excuses people have for not accepting Christ in our country? In other countries? Why are these excuses invalid?**

Because God has revealed Himself through creation, Paul stated that lost people are without excuse. The creation should lead to the reasonable conclusion that there is a Creator. Thus we humans are responsible for our sins and should follow these divine clues to learn more about the eternal God. We all are mandated to live in ways that honor God.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 1:21-23.

### **Which words or phrases in this passage describe the life of someone who refuses to worship God?**

### **According to this passage, what happens when we don't acknowledge God's authority in our lives?**

### **Why do people trade God's truth for the lies of the enemy?**

Paul continued to illustrate the contrasting results of belief and unbelief. Instead of accepting the eternal benefits of the glory of the immortal God, people worshiped images. Images of humans and animals are expressly forbidden throughout the Old Testament because God did not want people to worship anything lower than Him. To have a knowledge of God yet ignore His authority, to trust in one's own thinking rather than God's revealed truth, to trade in God's truth for a lie of the enemy—this is idolatry.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 1:24-25.

**As a consequence for people's failure to accept the truth, how did God respond (vv. 24,26,28)?**

**What two wrong actions did the people take in verse 25?**

**Why would someone worship something created, rather than the Creator?**

The stunning result of the darkness ungodly people embraced was that God delivered them over to what they treasured. God's activity in the world is constant, and He restrains evil and its effects in ways we can only guess. If someone chooses to succumb to the gravity of evil, however, then at some point God will let that person endure the full effects of sin. This act is an expression of God's wrath. Instead of worshiping God appropriately, the people worshiped and served something created. If we neglect to give God His proper place, then we inevitably aim too low.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 1:26-32.

**Describe the downward spiral of sin depicted in Romans 1:18-32. What is God's verdict against humanity's sinful condition?**

**How did the people about whom Paul wrote show they were ignoring God's verdict?**

Paul returned to the idea first proposed in verse 19 that God is knowable. God's just sentence is plainly deserved, and even godless people at some level or at some time know their behavior offends God. The sentence itself is death. Sin results in separation from God, the source of life. Apart from life, the sinner only finds death.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How can the power of the gospel affect the depraved condition of those described in Romans 1:18-32?**

**What hope could you offer one who has spent a lifetime suppressing the knowledge of God and failing to worship Him? Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.**

**In what ways can we be more alert to the sin in our lives and more committed to rejecting sinful ways of living? How can we encourage one another in this pursuit?**

# PRAYER

Close in a time of prayer, thanking God for the revelation of Himself through the created world and for His offer of salvation to everyone. Give your group members some time to offer silent prayers of confession for ways they have turned God's created world into idols they worship over God Himself. Pray that a realistic picture of the guilt of mankind would motivate us to share the hope of the gospel with those who need to hear it.

# COMMENTARY

## | ROMANS 1:18-32

1:18. In stating the theme of the book (Rom. 1:16-17), Paul wrote God has revealed His righteousness. So also God's wrath is revealed in the present. Though God ultimately will dispense wrath and righteousness in the final judgment, these twin expressions of God's nature are present realities. The present tense of is revealed is important in this verse and for what Paul wrote in later verses concerning the results of humanity's sin. Tense in the Greek language indicates not only the time of action, as in English, but also the kind of action. The present tense indicates an action that is ongoing, not necessarily limited to a one-time expression. Wrath is God's constant opposition to sin. His wrath is the natural complement to His righteousness, for righteousness necessitates a strong rejection of sin. The specific object of God's wrath is all godlessness and unrighteousness. The first term indicates an impious life that rejects God. The second term focuses on unjust human relationships. The two terms are related, the second naturally deriving from the first. Our neglect of God makes impossible our rightly relating to one another. The verb in suppress the truth also can be translated "to hinder" or "to hold back." God's truth cannot be changed to fit a cultural whim. However, people can suppress the truth by willful rejection of God.

1:19-20. Paul continues his opening statement with a summary since. The word here is a combination of two common conjunctions: *dia* (on account of) and *hoti* (because). It has the sense of "in as much as" or "in light of the fact that." Therefore, "in light of the fact that God has made knowledge about himself plain to everyone," Paul says, he is justified in exercising his wrath toward humankind for suppressing that knowledge. That which God has made known to humanity is His eternal power and divine nature. That is the external part of His self-revelation. But in addition to demonstrating externally, God has even caused man to understand internally what is seen externally. So both externally and internally, God has provided sufficient insight through His creation—remember, Paul is

discussing the Gentiles, those who have no special revelation from God as did the Jews—for humans to know He exists, and sufficient internal motivation to understand that what they are seeing is the handiwork of God.

1:21. Idolatry is worship, and at the heart of worship is the attribution of glory. When people “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (v. 23), they moved into idolatry. It is for the exchange of glory that God’s wrath is revealed. The Hebrew word for glory, *kabod*, means “weight.” The glory of God is the measure of the weight, or worthiness, or value of God. Worship, or “worthship,” was to be ascribed only to Him because nothing had more glory or value than God. Because the glory of the Lord was matchless, to give worship to anything else would be to suggest a comparison between the object worshiped and God. In light of God’s infinite worth (glory), no earthly comparison can do justice to the offense generated by giving worship to any thing or any person besides God.

Only two categories of “entities” exist in the biblical universe: Creator and created. And these two are separated by an infinite gulf of worth, or glory. Granted, of all the created things, man has more weight (worth, glory) than all the rest of creation (Ps. 8:3-9, esp. v. 5). But even so, the glory of man is not the same as the glory of the One who made man (Ps. 8:1). Humankind’s rightful place, in all its appropriate glory among the creation, is looking “up” into the face of the Creator, ascribing ultimate glory to Him. When a human being looks “horizontally” at another human, or “down” (on the scale of glory) to a plant or animal, he is worshiping something that has no more—indeed less—worth than he or she does.

1:22-23. This exchange of glory is the theft of glory in no uncertain terms, and could not be more “foolish” (v. 21). Humans began ascribing “worthship” to other humans, or to birds and animals and reptiles, when “their foolish hearts were darkened” (v. 21). Literally, they became fools and became idolaters. Idolatry is a sign of moral and spiritual depravity (the baseline of foolishness), a sign of the rejection of the glory and prominence of God. For such foolishness the wrath of God is revealed, Paul says. The glory of God is the “heaviest” thing in the universe. To assign, through worship, the glory of the Creator to a part of the creation is to turn moral and spiritual sensitivity upside down. And such upsetting of the spiritual order of things has dreadful repercussions.

So far, Paul has said that the wrath of God is revealed against humanity in light of the suppression of truth about God. When people act as if they do not know the truth about God, then their hearts become increasingly dark and they move to idolatry. And because

idols cannot speak or write, and there is no revelation to govern the people, idolatry always results in immorality. The sin of the human race is getting ever more specific: first, the suppression of truth. Then, the specific sin of idolatry. Now, Paul will catalog the specific sins that characterize the lives of those who suppress the truth about God and exchange His glory for the glory of a part of the creation.

1:24-25. Because they rejected the truths of God revealed in creation, God punished humankind by delivering them to the cravings of their hearts. The loss of the knowledge of God in the mind and heart leads to an exchange of truth for a lie. Something created is served and worshiped rather than the Creator, and judgment is the result (Ps. 81:12; Acts 7:42).

1:26-27. Paul moves to the most graphic evidence of the complete inversion of the spiritual and therefore moral compass of the human species. It is not just sexual immorality to which God has given them over, it is sexual inversion and perversion. Homosexuality was rampant in the Roman Empire, and represented perhaps the greatest offense to Jewish sensibilities. As Jewish and Gentile believers in the church in Rome looked around their society, they would have seen homosexuality practiced and encouraged at every turn. It seems that Paul has chosen homosexuality as the lowest point of sinful expression because of its complete reversal of God's natural order. It indicates a total throwing off of the revealed will and design of God. Paul's last words in verse 27—received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion—are the most frightful of all. What is the penalty? Is that penalty delivered culturally as well as individually? When any person is washed, sanctified, and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (v. 11), then they are freed, at least eternally, from the penalty for their perversion.

1:28-32. Finally, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind. Knowledge is retained in the mind, and sinful humankind has decided it is not worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. This must refer to thoughts about God, the function of the conscience, the mental evaluations that even a pagan goes through about who and where God is and how one may know Him. When people do not pursue these God-given internal and external evidences (see Eccl. 3:11; Acts 17:23-31), they gradually develop minds characterized continually by depravity—as in the days of Noah (Gen. 6:5). It is characteristic of a depraved mind to reverse the importance of everything, including evil and its origin.

Paul, writing to those who undoubtedly knew of his past as a persecutor of Christian believers, concludes with what must have been a difficult thing to write. He points out that those who act with depraved indifference are worthy of death—and know they deserve to die (Rom. 6:23). Yet they continue. And not only do they continue in the same acts, but also approve of those who practice them (1:32). Paul concludes this section with a point to which he adds a counterpoint beginning with 2:1. Those who sin and approve others who do are obviously guilty and deserving of the wrath of God.