



(The times are approximate to help you stay on track)

Welcome - (~3 min)

- Welcome everyone and any new people who have joined your group. Be sure the attendance is taken (either pass a check list around or have someone who knows everyone take it)

Opening prayer – (~1 min)

Opening Comments – (~5 min)

- Think for a moment and ask yourself, “when was the last time I heard a teaching of God’s wrath?”
- As you read the passage I’m sure you began to realize that Paul didn’t share the gospel message like we do today.
- The difference being that today we tend to focus attention on the person we are sharing with whereas Paul focuses his attention on God.
- Our approach tends to be people centered while Paul’s approach was God centered.
- He did this so pointedly because he knew what mattered in the final analysis of things.
- He gave the people at Rome what they needed to hear, he wasn’t concerned about making them *feel good*.
- He wasn’t concerned that they had a *meaningful experience* – rather he focused them on what mattered.
- Which is having a *right relationship* with God, he wants them to know the truth that the wrath of God is coming.
- In this passage there are a couple of attributes God exhibits of Himself – an attribute can be defined as a quality and characteristic of God’s person
- For instance, when we talk about God’s glory we could define it as *God’s glory is the sum of His attributes*
- The good news for believers is that some day we will see His glory!
- This passage reveals two of His attributes: **justice** and **love**
- There are two revelations that link these two attributes: *God’s wrath* which is an expression of His *justice*
- The other is *grace*, an expression of His *love*
- You may be wondering why the need to discuss God’s wrath – it’s because God’s wrath shows us why we need His (as the hymn is titled) *Amazing Grace*
- So let’s look at these verses and share with one another what we have learned this week:

Study Lesson Discussion - (~48 min)

(Start time: _____) Aim: **The power of the gospel to save the lost: The descent into darkness.**

Leaders: The text which accompanies these questions is for your information. It is recommended that you read it prior to your meeting. You will determine when and how much information to share with your group. Remember to watch the time so you can complete the assignment. It is more important to go through all the questions than it is to go deeper into a specific question. However, if the Holy Spirit leads

you to spend more time than you expected on a question, then you better do that! Trust Him to help you make up time later in the lesson.

Topic for Day 1: An overview of this week's passage.

Read the entire passage of Romans 1:18-32

- The first day's reading is to give us an overview of what Paul is saying and help us get the scope of the text before getting into it in more detail.
1. (+2 min) **What do you think is Paul's focus in these verses?** (Our aim: The human race's descent into darkness)
 2. (+1 min) **What particular words and phrases did you find Paul repeating?** (God gave them over (3x), exchanged (3x), others)
 3. (+1 min) **Why do you think Paul repeated such words and phrases?** (This was a method for making a point clear to the people, it was used throughout Scripture)

(+1 min) Personal application: What will you apply to your life this week from the sermon?

- Ask a couple of people what they applied from the sermon and what the effect was
- (+2 min) (approx. time = 7 min)

Topic for Day 2: The truth is revealed about God so no one has an excuse.

Read Romans 1:18-20 - *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."*

- Since the term *wickedness* is used in **verse 18**, it would be good to have a definition of "*wickedness*"
 - From Webster Dictionary "Morally very bad; evil; fierce; vicious causing or likely to cause harm, distress, or trouble; going beyond reasonable or predictable limits."
 - Paul uses another word which we don't hear all that often.... the word "*wrath*"
1. (+1 min) **How would you define the word "wrath"?**
 - Note Paul words "*being revealed*" are in the present tense. Meaning this is happening as he writes.
 - God's *wrath* is judging moral evil now, today as in Paul's day and His *wrath* is building up.
 - Some of the things we see in our day are: crack babies, drug abuse, suicide, disease, death (which wasn't God's original intent in Genesis!), AIDS because of promiscuity/perversion, broken homes because of selfish men/women and the list goes on.
 - The consequences of people's sin *is being revealed* all around us and that wickedness is causing God's *wrath* (the Greek word is *orgē*) to build.
 - These things *being revealed* to us in our world are called "*general*" revelations by God.
 - That means they are visible to all people. Nothing is being hidden. We see God's creation and we see human wickedness.
 - Definition of God's *wrath* from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary "The personal manifestation of God's holy, moral character in judgment against sin. Wrath is neither an impersonal process nor is it

irrational and fitful like anger. It is in no way vindictive or malicious. It is holy indignation – God’s anger directed against sin. God’s *wrath* is an expression of His holy love. If God is not a God of *wrath*, His love is no more than a frail, worthless sentimentality; the concept of mercy is meaningless; and the Cross was a cruel and unnecessary experience for His Son.”

- **Ephesians 2:3B** says, “*Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath*”
2. (+2 min) **In your opinion, why don't we hear of "God's wrath" today?**
 - We like hearing about God’s love, grace, and mercy but one must ask, “Aren’t we *suppressing the truth* like the wickedness Paul speaks about (**1:18**), if we don’t include God’s *wrath* in our discussions?”
 - Paul wanted the people to know the full truth – the bad and the good – he knew there were consequences
 3. (+2 min) **What are some reasons Paul gives for God's wrath being justified?**
 - Paul says that God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – are seen clearly in His creation and that is sufficient evidence for people to know that God exist. (**1:20**)
 - Remember that God didn’t just place man in the midst of His creation but in **Genesis 1:26-27** we see that God made man in His own image to have a relationship with Him. But man broke that relationship!
 - The problem is not lacking evidence, but people’s own determination to avoid knowing God!
 - Paul warns that people are *without excuse* **verse 1:20B!**
 4. (+1 min) **In your lifetime, what are some things you have learned about God from nature?**
 - Ask folks to share some of the things they have learned about God from nature.

(+2 min) **Personal application:** What have you learned from these verses today that you can apply to your life?

(+2 min) (approx. time = 10 min)

Topic for Day 3: Humans move into spiritual darkness

Read Romans 1:21-23 “*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.* ²² *Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools* ²³ *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.*”

- Paul has established the fundamental truth that man “knows” there is a God (**1:20**)
 - Paul next begins to describe the downward progression of people as they denied God’s revelations
1. (+1 min) **In what ways did people turn from God?**
 - It began with A/E, they took the same steps in the garden – traded truth for a lie
 - Paul says they neither *glorified Him as God* nor *thanked Him*
 - We see this today all around us, for instance the way people take His name in vain, TV really promotes this and makes it look humorous! That’s an obvious example. What about asking ourselves, “how often do I consider His plan before making my own?”
 2. (+1 min) **What happened to people's thinking when they turned from God?**
 - Their refusal of the truth began moving them into spiritual darkness
 - 1:21 – “*their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*”

- In the Greek language, *fool* means “one guilty of moral folly or wickedness”
 - That is why in the Bible, *fool* is often connected with a denial of the existence of God
 - Paul is making an important point in **1:22!** If *fool* just referred to a weak intellect, it wouldn't be so bad
 - We know that no one can fully know God – but when *fool* includes a moral element, its more serious
 - In actuality Paul is saying that man willfully and wickedly refuses God and His truths! Called *foolishness*
3. (+2 min) **How would you define the term “darkened heart”?**
- Dr. James Boice says, “Darkness is an image, of course. It is the equivalent of Paul’s saying that “*their thinking became futile*” or “*they became fools*” or “*exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles...* since God is the sole source of light, any idea of enlightenment apart from Him that we may think we have are an illusion.”¹
 - So when Paul says their hearts were darkened he means they became void of spiritual discernment, and wisdom
4. (+2 min) **What is the contrast of John 1:4-9 compared to what Paul is writing about in verse 21?**
- Have someone **read John 1:4-9** - “In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. ⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”
 - Note the underlined text.
 - **Verse 21** – “*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*”
 - The next step Paul points out is difficult to understand, people turn to false gods: idol worship, materialism, I'm my own boss, etc..
 - A simple observation could be to see how Satan has worked against God and people's relationship
 - He has convinced people that they can be god!
 - Here's a point to remember: People's futile thinking is the result of refusing to glorify and thank God!

(+2 min) **Personal application:** How might you be "spiritual light" to people you come into contact with today?

(+2 min) (approx. time = 10 min)

Topic for Day 4: God gave them over...

Read Romans 1:24-27 - “*Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.* ²⁵ *They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.* ²⁶ *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.* ²⁷ *In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.”*

- **Read Genesis 6:5** “*The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.*”
- God will judge the world again when the evil of mankind reaches its fullness (**Revelation 14:7a** – “*He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come.”*”)

- Our concern should be that we are a lot closer to that fullness than they were in Paul's day!
1. (+2 min) **What phrase is repeated in these verses? Why do you think Paul stated it twice?**
 - The phrase is "*God gave them over*" (2x) – Once again, this was a method for making a point clear to the people, it was used throughout Scripture.
 2. (+1 min) **What happened that caused people to have such sinful desires?**
 - Paul says in **verse 24**, when people rejected God, "*God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts...*" (our addition: and the consequences of those desires)
 - God abandons humans to their *natural result* – Paul describes **the descent into darkness**
 - **24-27** Paul repeats the phrase "*God gave them over*" 2x in this passage.
 - People today would rather believe the lie.
 - Often this is because we have placed our trust in our human abilities.
 - We see this today in society – Life is all about me! What I do is my business!
 - We hear educators in our institutions state there is no absolute truth, in fact, there are no absolutes!
 - To paraphrase Paul, his point is that people practice *natural sins*, and one of the most prominent is *sexual/lustful sins*, they become bored with the *natural* and deviate from it
 - The excitement wanes so they begin looking for new ways to stimulate their jaded lust
 - Understand this clearly, Paul **is** talking about homosexuality and lesbianism but even more depraved and perverse sexual sins.
 - He is also talking about bestiality, which is sex between people and animals.
 - **Daniel 4:28-37** ties in with **Romans 1:29-31**. Nebuchadnezzar was judged by God *with insanity* because Nebuchadnezzar took God's glory for his own.
 - This was the method God used to let Nebuchadnezzar and others know that when people suppress the truth about God there may be severe consequences.
 - This does tie to the comment above about bestiality:
 - In **Daniel 4:32** you can read that Nebuchadnezzar's insanity drove him to "*live with the animals*" and *behave like them*.
 - Paul, in **verses 29-31**, implies this behavior also existed in Rome.
 - Paul has made it clear from these passages that all people have a sense of right and wrong through God's *general* revelation of Himself.
 - However, people refuse to recognize this *knowledge* as Paul points out, and so societies around the world have elected to decide for themselves what their "plumb line for good and evil will be!"
 - Of course God knew people would do this. They have been doing it since the beginning.
 - So again, we see His grace, in that He provides His Holy Word for us to use, in addition to His *general* revelation of Himself, as the plumb line of good and evil.
 - This is His *special* revelation of Himself and we receive its truth with the aid of the Holy Spirit.
 - It is to be used by individuals, families, businesses, governments, communities, and countries.
 - Here are some of the consequences of people's futile thinking: 1) separation from God; 2) bondage by guilt; 3) broken relationships; 4) ashamed, can't accept the light of truth; 5) diseases: AIDS, VD, etc.; 6) innocent people are hurt by the sins of those practicing perversions!
 3. (+5 min) **How do we see these things going on today?** (be careful with this question, this could turn into a bashing session and you as the leader might want to warn the group that we don't want that to happen)

(+1 min) **Personal application: Throughout the day, think of ways you might describe the significance of these verses to someone?** (You might ask if anyone did this and what was the result)

(+2 min) (approx. time = 11 min)

Topic for Day 5: Humans spiritual darkness becomes complete

Read Romans 1:28-32 "Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

- Paul gives the third "God gave them over" – this is what mankind does when God abandons him
 - We all have the potential to do these things – Paul says its because man's minds are *depraved*
 - This simply means we can't think logically, even though we think we are
 - We have lost contact with the powerful, divine Creator!
 - We live in a world where what is often stated as "truth" often is not and we often realize that over time
1. (+2 min) **Paul mentioned a "darkened" heart in verse 21, now he speaks of a "depraved" mind (v. 28), what do you think is the difference?**
 - **Read 1:21** "For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."
 - Warren Wiersbe states, "Man the worshipper became man the philosopher, but his empty wisdom only revealed his *foolishness.*"²
 - So our *foolish hearts* were darkened so that our *wisdom* was *foolishness* in God's sight
 - **Read 1:28** "Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done."
 - So what Paul is expressing here is that the first phase of the descent into darkness was the result of *foolishness* and now people move into a deeper sinful condition.
 - Dr. James Boice notes, "...the *depraved* mind about which Paul is writing is not just any sinful mind – he has earlier talked about the generally foolish minds and generally darkened hearts of human beings – but about the specifically *depraved mind* created by continuing down this awful path for a lifetime. At the end is a mind not merely foolish or in error, but totally *depraved*. It is a mind so *depraved* that it begins to think that what is bad is actually good and that what is good is actually bad."³
 2. (+3 min) **List some indicators that some people have been filled with wickedness today.**
 - Be careful here, but just have people speak out some indicators.
 3. (+1 min) **What truth does Paul state in verse 32 that people suppress because they want to pursue their desires?**
 - **Read 1:32** "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death (the truth stated), they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them" (continued descent into darkness!)

- Just take a look at our laws: abortion ok, same sex marriage ok, breaking of marriage vows by disillusion ok, pornography is being slipped into TV commercials, children's awareness of sex at very young ages is being introduced by our public schools, and the list goes on
- As sin is being swept under the carpet, the things that people would *normally* say are wrong are now being perceived as right and visa versa.
- No wonder God's *wrath* is still upon us!
- We are no different today than in Paul's day! It seems we haven't improved as much as we like to think.
- So Paul has shown that when God's *wrath* is upon us, we are in a very dangerous and hopeless situation
- One might very well ask, "Is there no hope?"
- We must continue in our study of Romans to see God's answer to that question.

(+2 min) **Personal application: How has the gospel message gained meaning for you as you finished this passage of Romans?**

(+2 min) (approx. time = 10)

Closing Comments – (~2 min)

- Many people think these verses are too difficult to even think about.
- But Paul's theme in Romans is to explain the gospel.
- His purpose in Romans 1:18-32, is to explain why the gospel is necessary.
- We need to understand the "bad news" before we can appreciate the "good news".
- We need to grasp the seriousness of the problem before we can see the need for a solution.
- As a simple illustration, if we have cancer we want the doctor to give us an accurate diagnosis. Hearing that we have cancer is hard and painful, but we need to understand our situation correctly before we will be ready to hear about the treatment.
- Some have said that Paul is a judgmental person.
- Quite the opposite is true, he is preparing those in Rome, and us today, for the greatest news one can imagine
- So that all believers will be able to say with confidence, the words of Paul in Romans 1:16A – "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*"
- People would never create anything like the gospel, but God has! – Obviously, we are not like Him!
- He is *holy, righteous, truth, love, grace, sinless* – He **is not** *wicked, depraved, evil, envious, foolish, faithless, or ruthless* or any of the other words Paul has used in these verses (e.g. vss. 29-31).
- We will see in the weeks to come that the gospel message is open to **all people**.
- We, as a church family, need to pray every day that anyone in our family that has not received the truth of this gospel in their hearts will do so during this study of Romans. Pray every day for that to happen.

Closing Prayers – (~1 min)

¹ Dr. James Montgomery Boice, "An Expository Commentary: Romans Volume 1," pp. 175, ISBN 0-8010-6579-8

² Warren Weirsbach, "The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament Volume 1," pp. 518

³ See reference 1 – this quote is from page 182.