

STUDY GUIDE 2 – ‘Confronting the situation’

Read Romans 1:18-32 in the dramatised script (TNIV) and/or in another version.

BREAKING THE GROUND		
(1) What is meant by <i>the wrath of God</i> ? (v18a)		
(2) What has people’s <i>wickedness</i> caused them to do? (18b)		
(3) What has God <i>made clear</i> to people (us)? (19-20)		
(4) How has he <i>made it clear</i> ? (20) ‘ <i>Since</i> ’ can also mean ‘ <i>from</i> ’.		
(4) Why are we <i>without excuse</i> ? (20b)		
(5) How have we responded to God? (21a)		
(6) How has our <i>thinking become futile</i> ? (21b-23)		
(7) What is God’s response to the <i>desires</i> of our <i>hearts</i> ? (24)		
(8) What is the <i>lie</i> that we have <i>exchanged for the truth</i> ? (25)		
(9) Compare the list of human wrongs (vv29-32) with Paul’s examples of the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ in Galatians 5:22-23 (see below.) In column 2 write down the ‘good fruits’ that are (roughly) opposites of the rotten fruit listed in column 1; and (if you dare!) give yourself stars in column 3 for how far your life matches up to each ‘good fruit’ in column 2. <i>3 stars = completely, 2 = quite a lot, 1 = not very much, 0 = not at all.</i>		
BAD FRUIT (Rom 1:29-32)	GOOD FRUIT (Gal 5:22-23)	STARS
evil (29)		
greed (29)		
strife (29)		
malice ... no love (29, 31)		
gossip, slander (29-30)		
disobedience to parents (30)		
no fidelity (31)		
no mercy (31)		
approval of evil (32)		
TOTAL SO FAR >>		
PLUS BONUS STARS FOR...		
boastfulness (30)	humility in self-presentation	
deceit (29)	honesty in self-assessment	
TOTAL OUT OF 30 >>		
Galatians 5:22-23 – ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.’		

HARVESTING THE CROP (A) Read the dialogue overleaf. In what ways is Paul like John the Baptist? Aren’t both of them rather over-exaggerating the situation? Are we a bit like Mandy (or Mike)? For <i>John the Baptist’s preaching</i> see Lk 3:7.	
(B) In 1:25 Paul traces the roots of individual sins to ‘worshipping and serving created things rather than the Creator.’ In <i>Counterfeit Gods</i> Timothy Keller says: ‘Each culture is dominated by its own set of idols.’ What are some of our 21 st century idols?	
(C) In v24 ‘sinful desires of their hearts’ give birth to sexual sins. Are there such things as ‘good desires’? For wider study: Ps 73:25; Ps 119:111-112; Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 3:1.	
(D) Is goodness boring? Was Jesus boring? Do we secretly find church boring?	
(E) Sampling the fruit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there one point from this passage that puts its finger on something lacking in my own life? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there one practical step I could take as a result of studying this section of Romans? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there anything in this section which I could turn into praise or prayer to God? 	

'THE PHONE-IN' by Paul Glass¹

- MIKE You're listening to All Talk Radio on 57.4 FM and I'm your host for the next hour, Mike Savage. We're talking about all that's new and exciting here in the Jordan area and I've got Mandy on the line. So Mandy, what do you want to say?
- MANDY Oh, hello Mike, hello Mum. Actually Mike I wanted to talk about the traffic problem we've got down by Jordan's shore at the moment.
- MIKE Ah yes, I gather it's been pretty crowded down there the past few days.
- MANDY Crowded isn't the word, Mike. You can't move, you can't breathe. It takes an age to get anywhere – it's awful, that's what it is, awful. We used to be a nice quiet community down here. It's a residential area you know.
- MIKE So why the sudden rush to Jordan's beautiful shores, Mandy?
- MANDY Well, it's that man, isn't it? Unkempt weirdo.
- MIKE Whoah, that's pretty strong. Who are we talking about? What's causing all the hassle?
- MANDY Well I don't like to criticise, I mean we were all students once weren't we?
- MIKE Well, not everyone, but I know what you mean.
- MANDY About three weeks ago this bloke calling himself John the Baptist popped out of nowhere. Long hair, wearing the most disgusting set of rags you've ever seen. And as for his diet, well don't even get me started on what I've seen him eating.
- MIKE But I don't see why one harmless hippie is causing traffic gridlock.
- MANDY He's preaching, Mike.
- MIKE Well, that really explains it.
- MANDY No, I mean really powerful. He calls people sinners and vipers and all sorts. Ordinary, decent people who never said boo to a goose.
- MIKE Doesn't sound much of a turn-on to me.
- MANDY And then there's the water.
- MIKE The water?
- MANDY Yeah, he dunks them under the water – says it's to cleanse them of their sin and wickedness.
- MIKE And people are lapping this up?
- MANDY Oh absolutely. There are crowds down here every day. They start turning up early in the morning – queuing up to get a better view.
- MIKE And you're telling me that all he does is tell them how terrible they are then wash them?
- MANDY That's it.
- MIKE Well, I've heard it all now, folks. People flocking to be told how useless they are, getting dipped in river water by some mystery preacher. Just a sign of the times perhaps, or is this the build-up to some greater madness still to come? None of us thinks we're full of sin, do we? Surely we're all just average folks trying to make a living? Why don't you ring in and share your views on 0800 triple six triple three?

RIGHT THROUGH ROMANS 'Confronting the situation' (1:18-32)

2

This week's section is deliberately painted in the darkest tones, in order to bring God's solution in Jesus Christ into the clearest possible relief. Paul is drawing on the OT prophetic tradition which culminated in John the Baptist. First the black background, then the jewel of grace.

1:18-25. How the human race has gone wrong (a). **18** *Is revealed* picks up the same phrase in v17. Just as we wouldn't have known about the 'right way' God has provided back to himself, unless God himself had shown it to us by his written and spoken word, so we wouldn't know about his personal displeasure at sin and the certainty of his final judgment. *The wrath of God.* Stott defines this as God's 'holy hostility to evil, his refusal to condone it or come to terms with it, his just judgment upon it.' *Suppress the truth.* All sin is against conscience; but the voice of conscience can itself be drowned. **20** *Since the creation of the world.* Or, 'from the createdness of the world.' Both the existence and the character of the natural world point to its origin from a power outside itself. Arguments from normal reasoning ('matter and mind cannot produce themselves from nothing') and scientific discovery (the 'fine-tuning' of the universe) pose a challenge to atheists. *Without excuse.* Paul now develops the theory of human responsibility. Sin is against knowledge, because it stems from a proud refusal to give God his rightful acknowledgement as Lord. **21-23** *Their thinking became futile.* Paul isn't saying that all human ideas are wrong, far from it – but that our supposed 'wisdom' in explaining away God result in a distorted or even ludicrous picture of his divine glory. **24** *God gave them over.* God hasn't 'given up' the human race (he is still trying to win us back) but he has allowed our wrong thinking to develop its logical consequences. One of these is unrestrained sexual desire; this is just one example of what the Bible elsewhere calls 'idolatry', which Paul defines in **25** as putting creatures (things or people) on a divine pedestal that properly belongs only to God himself (Exod 20:3-4).

1:26-27 How sexual relations have gone wrong (c). Paul may be drawing a parallel between Rome and the 'cities of the plain' (Gen 19) which came under God's judgment for illicit sexual relationships. Writers such as Suetonius, Tacitus and Juvenal document the scene in early Imperial Rome, particularly during the reign of Nero. *Natural sexual relations.* The Christian church, like the Jewish community, has always based its sexual ethic on the creation ordinance of monogamous union between a man and a woman (Gen 1:27, 2:24). God's people may be called to stand out against the pressures of a permissive society. In dealing with matters of sexual purity at Corinth in 1 Cor 5-6, Paul makes it clear that the church has a pastoral duty of care and evangelism toward all members of society, and that each of us is responsible to the Lord for how we honour him with our bodies. *Due penalty.* Paul does not specify what this is.

1:28-32 Examples of the dark side of humanity (b). **28** *God gave them over.* See on 24. Morality follows theology: if our conception of God is distorted, our behaviour will be too. **29-31** In the torrent of examples that follows (reflecting Paul's legal and rhetorical training), we are not to suppose that all human beings everywhere are like this all the time. A glance at the daily newspapers, however, confirms that the darker side of human life is still with us, despite the material progress made since Paul's day. A society where the Christian faith is or has been predominant may be relatively free of these evils. Even so, *arrogance* and *boastfulness* (**30**) may be features of a moralistic and judgmental church. All of us are here somewhere. **32** *Although they know.* 'How can God judge someone who has never heard of Christ?' Paul's thesis is that through creation (God's power), conscience (human awareness of right and wrong) and consequences (the darkness that comes from rejecting the light) there is sufficient knowledge of God's standards, quite apart from the revelation of scripture and the incarnation. *Deserve death.* When the Bible speaks of death as a penalty for sin, it is spiritual death (eternal exclusion from God's holy and life-giving presence) that is normally indicated. See Gen 2:17; Jn 3:16.

¹ From Paul S Glass *Dramatic Dialogues (Companion to the Revised Common Lectionary 9*, Epworth, 2003)