

Asking For A FRIEND? Hard Questions About Faith

(3) "Why Do I Need God?"

HIGHLIGHT: Romans 1:18-32 NLT

H

Below are excerpts from the overall passage for use with the APPLICATION and RESPOND. It will be beneficial for the group to read the whole passage to understand the entire context.

Romans 1 (NLT)

vv. 18-32

18 But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. **19** They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. **20** For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

21 Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. **22** Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. **23** And instead of worshipping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. **25** They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. **26** That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. **27** And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

28 Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. **29** Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. **30** They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. **31** They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. **32** They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.

EXPLAIN

The purpose of this section is to deepen everyone's understanding of the Word.

At the close of his novel, *Blood and Sand*, Blasco Ibáñez described a bull fight in which the bull, after being goaded into madness, turns and catches the matador on his horns, flings him in the air and gores him into bloody insensibility. As the dying matador is carried from the arena, an unearthly roar goes up from the crowd, and the author says, "So we listened to the roar of the only beast there is—humanity." The only beast there is! (from *Horns and Halos*, J. Wallace Hamilton). Current events have shown us just how beastly we are.

Paul writes with great thrill and enthusiasm: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes..." (*Romans 1:16*). He is writing from the vantage point of victory—God's victory. It's the power of God—it is certain, it cannot fail. It is not of man, it is of God! And this salvation is not just to get us into heaven—as wonderful as that will be, but it is also to get heaven into us now. That is what Paul has; that is what I need; that is what only God can do—put the brakes on my selfish living and resurrecting me to the new life of love (see *2 Corinthians 5:14-18*).

Our Scripture—*Romans 1:18-32*—takes a look at life without God.

vv.18-20 Suppression of Truth

The wrath of God (NIV and ESV) is not a welcomed topic for most people. We'd much rather discuss the love of God. Paul helps us understand that God's wrath is not like man's—full of uncontrolled passion, unreasonable outbursts, and self-vindication. Before getting into a description of God's wrath, Paul describes what provokes His wrath. It is sinful, wicked people (ungodliness and unrighteousness [ESV]). Paul was specific in the order of his words. "Ungodliness" always precedes "unrighteousness". Ungodliness ("sinful" NLT) describes one who is irreverent, impious, lacking a respect for the divine. This person is not necessarily an atheist or one without religion or an enemy of God, but someone who slights his duties before God; he has no room (very little at the least) for God in his life. He is "ungodly". Unrighteousness (wicked [NLT]) grows in the soil of ungodliness/godlessness (the sinful heart). "Above all else guard your heart" (*Proverbs 4:23*; see *Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23*). Is God just a convenience to me, a genie in the bottle when I'm in a tough spot? Or, do I love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength? Unrighteousness grows in the soil of godlessness, and the fruit of unrighteousness is suppression of the truth. Stuart Briscoe (*The Communicator's Commentary on Romans*) says that "suppression" was used in secular Greek to describe the helmsman holding the course as his boat battled through the wind and current. Unrighteousness takes on a sheer determination to stand firmly against the truth and to hold rigidly to this opposition of the truth—even though God has made it obvious by the world He created. We have no excuse for not knowing God (see *Psalms 19*). But a conscious decision against Him will suppress all the truth that is out there.

vv.21-22 Rejection of God

Ecclesiastes says that "God has planted eternity in the human heart" (*3:11*). Take that away and you have a God-shaped vacuum. Just as nature does all it can to fill a vacuum, so does the spiritual nature. So, even though they knew God (experienced Him through all the common graces that make this planet livable and beautiful [see *Colossians 1:15-17*]) they wouldn't worship Him or give Him thanks. The void was filled with darkness and confusion. We become utter fools—flavorless, like an egg white; insipid, like salt that has lost its flavor; the inability to have a positive effect on this corrupt world. There are many

today who say that God and Christianity are a poison on the world that should be eliminated. And while it is true that many awful things have been done in the name of Christ, why should Christianity take the blame when it is people who are doing the opposite of what Jesus taught? Sean McDowell (More Than a Carpenter, p. 59) continues this thought like this: “Did Jesus favor burning witches? Did Jesus encourage His followers to torture heretics? [Or pastors to sexually exploit women, or priests to abuse children, or men to make family life miserable under the pretense that ‘the king of the castle is to be served by everyone else’, or Christians to instigate holy wars?] Of course not. Jesus taught the exact opposite” (see *Matthew 5:27-30, 44; 8:3; John 15:13*). People should not call themselves Christ-followers if they are not following His teaching.

vv.23-32 Man’s Substitution for Creation

We begin to see in these verses what the wrath of God looks like. God created man in His own image, and man quickly returned the favor: they traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator Himself, who is worthy of eternal praise (see *Genesis 3:3-7*)! It was not a good trade for Adam and Eve; it will not be a good trade for any of us either. Three times in this passage Paul says that God gave them up... (vv.24, 26, 28 ESV). God gave them over to themselves. That is the wrath of God. Not fire and brimstone; not lightning striking unsuspecting people. Just the absolute right for people to choose their own courses of action and live with the consequences. The catalog of disastrous lives that follow in the wake of choosing anything over God is something with which we have become familiar. That is life without God. Just look at the news, if you dare! The Psalmist asked, “What are mere mortals that You should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?” Then he answers, “...You made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor” (*Psalms 8:4-5*). Drop man out of one end of the sentence and man drops out of the other. If life and Scripture teaches us anything, it is that humanity without God is truly a beast. We’ve been trying it for thousands of years. Maybe we should get smart and try the truth. We need God.

APPLY

A

Be comfortable with some silence as people think back to the sermon or reread the text. Answer honestly. You don’t have to answer every question.

1. What stuck out to you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. How does this text help us to see that all people are worshippers?
3. This text describes what is often called “God’s wrath of abandonment”—He gives people over to “do shameful things” (v. 24), to “their shameful desires” (v. 26), and to “their foolish thinking” (v. 28). How can this text help us to be sober-minded about sin?
4. Reread vv. 28-32. The people who have been abandoned to “foolish thinking” become evangelists to that kind of lifestyle (see v. 32). Why do you think they “encourage others” to also partake in evil?
5. What are some of the consequences of not wanting to know God or abandoning Him?

RESPOND

The purpose of this section is to take action with the truths you're learning. Answer honestly. Find someone who will hold you accountable to living out your response to Scripture.

1. If we speak on things based on our own understanding instead of God's truth (found in Scripture), then we find ourselves in the place where our minds become "dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, [we] instead became utter fools" (vv.21-22). Where have you trusted your own opinion or the world's opinion instead of seeking God's truth?

How has that led you astray?

2. Similar to how the lack of light leads to darkness, our sinfulness, or stated in another way, our ungodliness or lack of following God's design for life, leads us to wickedness. John 3:18-21 says, "18 There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. 19 And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. 20 All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. 21 But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants." What are you afraid to bring into the light?

John 3:16-18 says, "16 For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him."

Knowing this, you can bring your darkness into the light of Jesus. Confess what was written above and let God's light cleanse you.