

Armagh Baptist Church – 29th January 2012

Studies in the Book of Romans

What is the Gospel? – No.2

(Romans 1:18-32)

“The Problem with you is Sin”

Introduction

We live in a world where people like to live their lives with a total disregard for God. But whenever something goes wrong, they still reserve the right to blame God for it! Either God does exist, or He doesn't. But you can't have it both ways: you can't live life without God, and then blame him when things go wrong – but so many people do!

We live in a world where people believe in a God of **love**, but they cannot accept the fact that He is also a God who is **angry** with sin, and indeed with sinners.

We often hear – **“How could a God of love send anyone to Hell?”** – They cannot imagine a God like that, and so they conclude wrongly that everybody is going to get into Heaven at the end of the day. These are serious matters, which stem from an ignorance of God's Word – and especially of the Book of Romans.

Last week we looked at an introduction to the Gospel in Romans ch.1. Paul said he was 'not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.' (Romans 1:16).

I said that the Gospel means: **Good News** (v.17): *'Righteousness from God.'* But it also involves **Bad News** (v.18): *'The Wrath of God is being revealed.'* So tonight we're going to ask the question,

“Why is God angry with People?”

Has he any right to be angry?

What exactly is the Problem?

The short answer to that is found in Romans 1:18:

'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.'

It is because people are godless and wicked that God is angry.

But it's also that in their wickedness they actually suppress the truth about God, and choose to believe lies about Him instead! That is the real problem!

Tonight we're going to focus on the godless pagan (ch.1:18-32)

Next week we will look at those who are religious, but lost (ch.2)

Over the years people have invented different ways to try to shut God out of their thinking:

1. Agnosticism (vs.19-22)

In their wisdom, many have chosen not to believe in the existence of God. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, they try to convince themselves that God's not there, and that He doesn't matter at all – Such people are Fools, or so the Bible says! (v.22).

(See also Psalm 14:1 *'The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God!'*).

Why is it foolish to be an agnostic? – A deliberate non-believer?

Well if you're an agnostic you have chosen to deny the plain evidence and to believe the opposite instead.

What is the evidence for the existence of God?

(i) **What may be known about God is self-evident when you look at people themselves (v.19).**

- We are fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:13-16).
- God has actually shown this to us – How? – In science and in medicine.
- Yet sometimes, scientists, in their wisdom, are agnostics!
- Did you listen to David Attenborough's 'It's a Wonderful World'?
- Why can they not see the evidence for God? Because they don't want to face up to Christ's rightful claim to be Lord of their lives.
- It's not that there isn't enough evidence, they just don't want to face the logical conclusion of that evidence: That if there is a God who has made us, then He has the right to be Lord of our lives!

(ii) **God's attributes can be clearly seen when you look at Creation. (v.20).**

- **Perfection:** Snowflakes – each a perfect hexagon, uniquely formed.
- **Power.** e.g. Waterfalls, wind, thunder, lightning, earthquakes, etc.
- **Unchangeable.** e.g. Gen.8:22 – *"Shall not cease"* – 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week, 365 ¼ days a year, 4 seasons, year after year.
The cycle of life never stops!
- **Love.** e.g. The love and care mothers show their offspring, etc.
- **Deity.** We need to Let God be God – Allow Him to be unique:
all-powerful, all-present, all-knowing, and all-wise. (v.20)

There is so much evidence that Paul says ***"Men are without excuse!"*** (v.20)

(iii) **God was known from the very beginning. (v.21)**

E.g. Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Enoch, Noah, etc.

- But man has chosen not to glorify God, as God.
- Not to be thankful to God for life, food, breath, etc.

- They have consciously turned their backs on God, even though the evidence for God is staring them in the face!
- Because of this they have become foolish and futile in their thinking, and cut adrift from their anchor. That's where agnosticism takes you.

But Agnosticism doesn't stop there – It actually leads you further – into...

2. Idolatry (vs.22-23)

Man has a basic in-built instinct to worship God. Man needs to worship. He has a soul, a spiritual nature. He has a spiritual appetite that craves for satisfaction. He has to worship something!

But when he turns his back on God he finds that there's a piece missing from the jig-saw of his life. So he sets out to try to fill that space, that empty void in his life, with his own inventions of religion.

Often this expresses itself in idolatry. (v.23)

For example, many primitive tribes worship wooden or stone idols of animals, creatures, trees, mountains or rivers, etc.

But in all religions – even so-called Christianity, there is the tendency to portray God in images, pictures, statues, shrines – things that can be touched, seen, or handled.

But God is not like that! God cannot be touched, seen or handled.

(See Exodus 20:4).

Therefore any religion that uses idols, images or statues is actually keeping people from truly worshipping or experiencing the true God – because God is Spirit and Truth. (John 4:19-24).

Idolatry offends God intensely – It makes him angry.

Read about it in the Old Testament, and see how angry He gets!

But when we get into idolatry, God then lets us go our own way!

– This leads to...

3. Immorality (vs.24-27)

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity...” (v.24a)

Idolatry leads to immorality. (v.25)

They refuse to live their lives the way that God intends, so they end up following the lusts of their hearts, which leads to them dishonouring their bodies among themselves. Man's immorality knows no limits – (it's physical, sensual, sexual, immoral, and it becomes habitual!) a habit they can't break!

This leads to “Shameful lusts” (v.26).

Which includes – Lesbianism (v.26) & Homosexuality (v.27)

Don't be mistaken – God is angry about these things too!

Such people are like ships adrift on an ocean – cut off from any moral reference point – so they end up perverting all that God intended to be good, wholesome and enjoyable – making it something dirty and disgusting instead.

They have distorted God's gift of love and sex which was supposed to be within marriage, between one man and one woman for life. Within these limits such things are good. But outside of these limits they become dangerous, explosive, painful, and they often become unhealthy – even life-threatening...

As v.27b says *“Receiving in themselves the due penalty for their perversion”*. The penalty for sin is death! ‘The wages of sin is death’ (Romans 6:23).

But this could also refer to social diseases, and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS.

(N.B. There are of course innocent victims of AIDS – e.g. when the HIV virus is transmitted through blood transfusions, or when it is transmitted to babies at birth, from mothers who have AIDS. Or what about the wife who has been faithful all her life, but she picks up HIV or AIDS from her husband, because he has been sleeping with prostitutes! These are the innocent victims of the AIDS pandemic, but there are also victims of HIV and AIDS who sadly brought it on themselves by their own sexual behaviour outside of God's boundaries – e.g. when the HIV virus is transmitted through illicit sex).

So agnosticism can lead to idolatry, and idolatry can lead to immorality in the downward spiral of sin. But all these things can then lead to...

4. Atheism (vs.28-32)

Don't these verses describe the world that we live in today?

“Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God...” (v.28)

There is a difference between an agnostic and an atheist:

An Agnostic suspects that God is probably there, but he chooses not to believe in Him. An Atheist goes one step further, and convinces himself that God doesn't exist at all. That there is no such thing as God! e.g. The Communist dictator Enver Hoxha declared that Albania was a God-free zone. They claimed to be the world's first Atheist State. God was banned from there.

But v.28 goes on to say that as a result of rejecting any knowledge of God, their minds become debased: *‘God...gave them over to a depraved mind... (Calvin called it “Total Depravity”) ...to do what ought not to be done.’*

i.e. Every part of their being is affected by sin – their mind, body, thoughts, words, and actions...

- *‘They **do** what ought not to be done.’ (v.28b) (i.e. actions).*

- '*They become **filled** with every kind of wickedness.*' (v.29a) (i.e. in their thoughts).
- '*They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice.*' (v.29b) (i.e. their **words** have become affected by sin).
- '*They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful...*' (v.29v-30) (i.e. they are in **total rebellion** against God)
- '*They invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless and ruthless.*' (vs.30-31) (i.e. they just end up being totally un-God-like).

N.B. Notice that all sins are mixed into this list together – gossiping, envy, disobeying parents - is all in there with murder! – That is what this world has forgotten about - and many Christians too – that sin, is sin, is sin! (Rom.3:23).

But according to v.32 they have become so warped in their thinking that even though they know what God thinks of their behaviour – that He has judged them worthy of death because of these things - sadly rather than mending their ways, they go further – they continue to do these things – **AND** – they approve of, or praise those, who do such things!

Isn't that the world we live in today – a world of reverse discrimination; a world of political correctness. Where we as Christians are supposedly not allowed to speak out against such behaviour, otherwise it can be seen as a hate crime!

- Morality has been turned on its head. Good is bad; bad is good!
- If you were in school today, and you were BAD - that's good, it's cool to be 'bad'!
- But if you're too GOOD – that would be bad – that's not cool!

This is why God is angry with people. People who have turned His standards on their head! He's offended and angry with their sin and their total disregard for Him and His ways. God is just. He has to be true to Himself. He is holy, and so He must punish anything that is unholy, 'sin', by death. (Romans 6:23).

Conclusion

But maybe you're saying, "Hold on a wee minute! We're not like that! That doesn't describe me at all! Surely Paul has got a wee bit carried away here!"

Well if you think like that, then maybe you're a wee bit out of touch with the world that we live in today!

I think this passage *perfectly* describes many people in our world today. Listen to the news. Read the papers! Talk to some of our young people at school or college – that's the sort of mentality they have to face day in and day out! It might not describe you, or too many of *your* friends, but sadly it does describe a fair section of our society today.

So what about the rest of us, those of us who haven't stooped so low, who haven't sinned in these ways - are we alright the way we are?

Well in Romans 1:16 Paul said this Gospel was 'for the Jew first and also for the Gentile' – so he said this Gospel was for two different types of people.

Well, no self-respecting Jew would ever have lived in the way that Paul has just described. But this was how the vast majority of Gentile pagan people were living in the 1st Century – it was a lot like the ungodly society of today.

So what about the Jewish type of people that Paul's Gospel was also for?
i.e. The upright, good-living, religious type of person.

Were they good enough the way they were? Or were they sinners too?

Well we'll see what God has to say about that next time in Romans ch.2.

But for tonight, in general, we can say that the problem with the people in our world today is SIN. It's only a small three letter word. It's played down these days, laughed about, or treated lightly. Some Christians are even trying to remove it from our vocabulary because they think it is meaningless to the man in the street. But if God calls it sin, then we must call it sin too. We must never play it down or underestimate how serious it is in God's sight, and we must always remember that sin was so serious to God that He sent His Only Son to die on the cross because of our sins, and for our sins, so that through the shedding of his blood as an atoning sacrifice for sin we could be forgiven and cleansed from our sins. That is getting to the heart of what the Gospel is.

Without a proper understanding of the seriousness of sin – the Bad News, we will never fully understand the Gospel – How good the Good News is, that God has dealt with our sins, once and for all, in Christ, at the cross!

So that's what Paul has to say about the Ungodly Pagan Sinner.

We'll see what he has to say about Respectable Sinners next time in ch. 2.

If you are an ungodly pagan, living your life without God, doing your own thing, going your own way, getting up to all sorts, then the Problem with you is: SIN. That's why God is angry with you. That's why the wrath of God is hanging over you. The Good News is that the wrath of God that you deserved for your sin hung over Jesus while he was hanging on that cross. He took the wrath of God for your sins, He took the punishment that you deserved for your sins, He paid the price for your sins, and now you can go free – and be forgiven.

Because, yes, God is **angry** with you because of your sin.

But in Christ, God **loves** you, despite your sin.

He has found a way to punish your sin in Christ, while at the same time, extending his love and forgiveness to you through Christ. He offers you mercy, and forgiveness, if only you will come to Christ, by faith, tonight.