

# Broken Humanity in the Absence of God

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## Romans 1:18-32 (ESV adapted)

<sup>18</sup> For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness/injustice of humans, who by their injustice **suppress the truth**.... <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his **eternal power** and **divine nature**, have been clearly **seen**, since the **creation** of the world, being perceived in the **things that have been made**, so that they may be without excuse. <sup>21</sup> Because, although **they knew God**, they did not **honor him as God** or **give thanks** to him, but **they became futile in their thinking**, and their **senseless hearts** were **darkened**.

<sup>22</sup> Claiming to be **wise**, they became **foolish**:

<sup>23</sup> They exchanged the **glory of the immortal God** for a **likeness** of an **image** of a **mortal human** – and of birds and animals and creeping things! <sup>24</sup> Therefore God handed them over in the desires of their hearts to impurity, for their bodies to be dishonored among themselves.

<sup>25</sup> These are those who exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the **creature** rather than the **Creator**, who is blessed forever! Amen. <sup>26</sup> For this reason God handed them over to passions of dishonor. For both their **women exchanged** the natural relationship for that contrary to nature; <sup>27</sup> and the **men** likewise **letting go of** the natural relations with women were inflamed with desire for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the exchange for their error.

<sup>28</sup> And just as they **did not think fit** to hold **God in their knowledge**, God handed them over to an **unfit mind** to do what ought not to be done:

<sup>29</sup> filled with all **unrighteousness/injustice**, evil, **greed/desire for more**, malice; full of **envy**, murder, **strife**, **deceit**, maliciousness; **gossips**, <sup>30</sup> **slanderers**, haters of God, insolent, haughty, **boastful**, inventors of evil, **disobedient to parents**,

<sup>31</sup> **senseless**, **promise-breakers**, unfeeling, **merciless**.

<sup>32</sup> Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do them but **give approval** to those who practice them.

## Galatians 5:19-21

<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

## Ephesians 2:11-15

<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles ...<sup>12</sup> were separated from the Messiah, ... and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Messiah Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one ... that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, so making peace,

## Psalms 81:8-13

<sup>8</sup> O Israel, if you would but listen to me! | <sup>9</sup> There shall be no strange god among you; | you shall not bow down to a foreign god. | <sup>10</sup> I am the LORD your God, | who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. | <sup>11</sup> But my people did not listen to my voice; | Israel would not submit to me. | <sup>12</sup> So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts. | to follow their own counsels.

## Looking into the Darkness of the Human Mind

Paul is unfolding God's announcement of Good News of what he has done in Jesus, Messiah of Israel and Lord of the world. That event / proclamation is his power to save everyone who trusts it, thus showing his faithful righteousness in keeping his ancient promises.

But the event corresponds to the need. The death of the Messiah, who is God, and his resurrection fit the profound darkness of the human plight. Paul looks at that plight in vv 28-32: humanity's 'unfit mind' produces destructive relationships, alienation from each other, violence, injustice, broken families, worthless promises, finding new ways to hurt. We not only do destructive things, we come to believe that that is normal and good.

This deep brokenness is why God has intervened in Jesus. God's wrath, ultimately seen in judgment, now is the basis for his intervention in Jesus to forgive, heal, reconcile.

## How Life Goes So Wrong

Maybe Paul wants to convince us that with so much wrong God is right to be wrathful. But the situation is more complicated. Paul traces the problem deeper, further back. The vices are only a symptom of a more basic breakdown of human thinking and motivation.

Humans have become disconnected from the basic reality that they are created by God.

They 'suppress the truth' (18). They 'exchange the glory of God for an image of a likeness' (23). They 'exchange the truth of God for a lie' (25). They do 'not think fit to hold God in their knowledge' (28). God doesn't stop being God, but humans grow alienated from the deepest reality of their existence. God gives humans freedom in creation as his own image in the world, but they use the freedom to break their knowledge and relationship with their creator and to break each other. God's wrath is not in punishing them, but handing them over to do what they want (24,26,28). Humans can do wonderful and noble things but they use more energy in selfish harm, large and small.

That great exchange of the truth of our relationship with God for rejection and distortion is the basic human problem. In the gospel God reveals his persistent love for reconciliation.

## Natural and Unnatural Relationships

In order to vividly illustrate this exchange, Paul points his readers to well-known practices of the society around them, in which both women and men (no one is left out) exchange their natural relationships for unnatural. In our day it is very important to read texts like this with historical understanding, since they relate to highly controversial issues today.

Paul is talking about the widely known and approved (but also criticized) practice of married men (with wives kept safely at home) finding sexual stimulation (without danger of children) through relationships with boys or young men (as well as with slaves or prostitutes). Paul is dealing with the vast body of people with opposite-sex attraction who exchanged normal relationships in that day for those against their own nature.

Paul is not talking about the small percentage (3-5%) of people who grow up with a same-sex attraction simply in their nature (without any exchange) that leads them to want romantic, intimate relationships with people the same sex. A fundamental difference.

## Human Unity in Brokenness

Truth is the important thing here. Whatever breaks the truth about God breaks the truth about ourselves and breaks our lives. But 'suppressing the truth' is really something that unites human beings in their brokenness. God breaks in with the Truth of His Love.

[Justin Lee, *Torn*. Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting*. Sally Gary, *Loves God, Likes Girls*. Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*.]