

Romans Chapter 1 (Part 2) - John Karmelich

Title: Paul goes negative! Here's why we should care!

First, I should remind you that Paul's letter to the Romans was written before he was ever there, and it's written to believers. Since Paul was never there, he wanted to lay out "doctrine" to make sure believers in Rome understood what it meant to be a Christian. For example, what does God require of us? Why should one be a Christian to be saved? How do I know I'm saved, despite my sins? Those are some of the questions raised in this letter! I pondered, "Why does he start so negative?" The first 17 verses here explain who Paul is, what he's called to do (be a witness for Jesus) and explain what it means to trust in Jesus for our salvation! From Verse 18 through Chapter 3, Paul goes "negative"! He explains why it is necessary for God will judge the world, why people are eternally punished for rejecting Him plus what one needs to do to be in heaven forever! So, if Paul is writing to believers, "why go negative with a big emphasis on how non-believers act and why do they deserve such harsh treatment?" Now you get why Romans is a tough book to take on and why I wanted two lessons on Chapter 1:

Have you ever stopped to ask, "What about good people from other religions who don't practice any of the sins we read in the 10 Commandments?" What about someone who murdered someone? Wouldn't say a million years in hell be enough? Why does it have to go on forever that way? Some people argue "The punishment doesn't fit the crime that way!" This is the argument Paul lays out in effect to start his case on why one must believe Jesus as God died for every sin we ever commit. As far as the naïve, it is something Paul touches upon and in such cases, I'm convinced in a fair God doing what's fair then!

Now that I've dug myself into a deep theological hole, "time to stop digging and climb out"! Christians are to know this stuff because all of us have our moments when we doubt our faith. It's also to share to non-believers why all "this" is necessary! OK, then enough of the "why is this here", let me discuss the text itself. I left off discussing Verses 16 and 17. Paul states then he's not ashamed of the gospel. He's been beaten close to death, whipped, suffered in lots in prisons and still at this point of his life, he's not ashamed of the Gospel. Paul makes the point the message was first given to Jewish people, then to any non-Jewish person willing to accept that message. (Chronologically speaking.) It is about verification Jesus was Jewish and presented that message to them first. Then we get the quote I stated last time that is from (Old Testament) Habakkuk, "The Just Shall Live by Faith". To me the book of Romans focuses on who are the "Just". I bring it up again here, as the rest of the chapter, all the way till Chapter 3 "goes negative" to explain why the non-saved suffer eternally. It's essential to present it, as part of the Gospel even to believers to understand the necessity of making the choice that we did!

So, does God's wrath only occur when people die? Of course not. There are natural disasters and those who die from sins they commit. (E.g., a murderer killed for that crime!) Paul's point in Verses 18 to 20 is the evidence of God's existence is obvious, (we see how life exists and the impossible probability it's occurring by random chance) but people ignore that evidence because they enjoy life without having to be accountable to God! (Favorite example, the odds of a jet airplane accidentally forming out of a pile of junk is much less likely than the human eye being created by accident!) In other words, people see a world that exists and then never think about the God who created it in the first place. I'm convinced the people who seek God will discover him. What about "close imitations" to the truth, I'll get to that soon! All I'm getting at now is that His existence is obvious by simply thinking about creation!

That leads to Verses 21-23: God built us with a need to worship something. I learned and accepted that many years ago. If you want to see what anyone worships, notice where they spend their spare time or

spare income, and you'll find their god! In ancient times, people made little statues to represent what it is they worshiped. A modern example might be a room of sports memorabilia! The important point is people ignore the God to focus on things that don't matter eternally. There's nothing wrong with having hobbies. The trick is if God says we must get rid of say a favorite hobby we have for Him, could we do that if He says so?

Things go downhill from there! One of my favorite quotes about turning from God, "If you chose to go down that path, it's hard to turn back as the "road is greased""! Paul gives examples of people who turn to homosexuality when the first commandment in the Bible was to be "fruitful and multiply". I want to pause on this for a second: My younger brother's good friend is in a long-term homosexual marriage. I have said for decades he's one of the nicest guys I know! We know each other's views. I treat him with respect as I would any person! The way I view life is, if God said I need to stand on my head every day for say 30 minutes, God's in charge and I'm not. Therefore, if one has a weakness for same sex, one has to stand up to that weakness and ask God to help us fight that urge, as all of us have weaknesses we got to stand up to! Yes, I know the horror stories of people who've given themselves over to lots of sex for different partners and the point Paul is making is when we turn our lives over to our weakness saying it is the "way we were created" and "there's nothing I can do to change that" it symbolizes what Paul says when he said in these verses that God gave them up to their own passions.

Yes, the text gives different examples besides female and male homosexuality. He mentions greed and envy and things most people would consider sinful behavior. One doesn't need a preacher to realize all of that is wrong. One can simply see the consequences of those life choices and go from there!

I should add one of my favorite bible phrases is "And such were some of you" (1st Corinthians 6:11). I just want to say one never knows who will turn from sin at what point in one's life. It is amazing to see people confronted with death, ready to admit the errors of their ways. If that's true, why not wait till the end of one's life to accept Jesus? Because the Christian life is far more joyful than anything else one is going to experience in this world! After living this way most of my life I know that to be true!

OK I got off track, I hate when I do that! I wanted to throw some good news in this tough lesson! This section of the scripture is full of bad news, as Paul wants to show what's going to happen to one's life if one wants to turn from God. In short Paul is saying, "It'll only go from bad to worse!" I realize there's lots of people who live decent lives but never turn to God. I'm not saying every non-believer is so bad, they live a horrible life. What is true is that whatever rewards one receives in this life or punishment is nothing compared to eternity. God makes the rules whether we like them or not! We may think there's no big deal about homosexuals living as they do as "they're not hurting me". I'm well aware many don't care what we preach as they are happy in their "sin". The biggest mistake Christians make is we forget the rule that people don't care what we know until they know we care about their lives! Again, it comes back to the point that God makes the rules, and the question is do we accept what is, or ignore it!

Finally let me answer the "eternal" question. Why get eternity in hell for say just say stealing an apple once in their life let alone murder? The issue isn't how good or bad we are. The issue is God is perfect and He DEMANDS perfection to be with Him forever. Since we can never be perfect, we must accept His perfect substitution in our place. The reason He wants obedience after that is NOT to earn His love but out of gratitude and to be a good witness for Him. That's the key point of the Gospel that Paul gives as he goes through what it takes to be justified in God's eyes. The reason Paul gets so negative is so we grasp the consequences of both our positive as well as our negative choices in life! To quote a famous Christian author, "The gates of hell will be locked from the inside" (C.S. Lewis). He meant many chose to spend eternity in hell for choosing to reject God and their lifestyle on earth showed that!

With that said, the "negativity of rejecting the free gift of Jesus" will continue in the next lesson. That's enough for one week! Thanks for reading! As most of you know, I wrote a more detailed study of this same text some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. Even after many years, it is still a joy to study and teach the Bible. Again, I'm grateful to you for reading this. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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