

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

“Why Ignoring God Won’t Work”
Romans 1:18-32

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Very Important Notice to this Week's Bible Study and Worship Time Leaders:

(For churches where children attend)

This week's study in Romans chapter 1 involves topics that youth and adults need to confront and discuss. However, Godlessness, human perversions, homosexuality, and the list of sins in verses 28-32 may not be topics that the children in your congregation need yet to consider. Therefore, we suggest that the leaders of your church determine how to handle this situation well before the meeting. You may decide to provide an alternative Bible study time (and even worship time) for the children in your group. You may decide to do something else entirely this week for your whole congregation. Perhaps you will choose to use this important session on a different day and focus of meeting when only youth and/or adults are present.

If the inclusion, or not, of children will be an issue this week, perhaps you will choose to use the day for a church picnic with a devotional and singing. Or, you may plan to make the day an opportunity to focus on the Lord's Supper. Finally, you could shift the sessions offered this quarter and move ahead to the following session. Later, then, you could include a special emphasis for Easter, Christmas, or another special time that might fall into your year's schedule.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide

the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. The Worship Time Leader has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bring pencils or pens and paper for each person. (See the suggestion in the Gathering Time comments).

Bible Study Leader:

Worship Time Leader:

Music Sources:

"Bless His Holy Name" *Maranatha Praise Chorus Book*, Extended 3rd Edition, #76
"Amazing Grace"

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***“Why Ignoring God Won’t Work”***

Note for the Gathering Time Leader: In preparation for this week, please read the “Very Important Notice for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship leaders” for this week that is found on page 2. That notice suggests alternative Bible study opportunities for children for this series of youth/adult level themes on sexual and other sins.

Focal Text

Romans 1:18-32

Background Text

Romans 1:18-32

Main Idea

People who reject the knowledge of God that is available to them are without excuse when they receive God’s judgment.

Question to Explore

What harm is there in living one’s own way?

Teaching Aim

To help participants explain why people who reject the knowledge of God are without excuse before God.

Gathering together:

Have someone give each person a piece of paper and a pen or pencil as they enter. When all are seated, ask each one to try to think of and write down the name of any popular song or book that emphasizes the idea of what I want, what I need, what I desire or crave, or any other self-centered or self-serving expression. (If no one can think of one, suggest the following list:

Songs: “I Did It My Way” (Frank Sinatra, singer)
 “We Wish You a Merry Christmas” (“So Bring Us Some Figgie Pudding”)

Books: *Make Way for the King of the Jungle*

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Why Ignoring God Won’t Work –04-10-02-en

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*A Case of Need
Kiss the Girls
Finders Keepers
It's Mine*

First thoughts:

I Did It My Way

After the group has had a moment to think about the books and songs, ask them to share any that seem especially self-centered.

Ask if any of them has ever said or heard anyone say, "It's my life, and I'll live it how I want." Ask if anyone can guess what is usually behind that comment. (probably wanting to do something they know is wrong) Ask, "*Do you think that person believes that there will be consequences for their choices in life? Do they understand the real consequences of getting exactly what they want?*" Explain that today's lesson describes the danger of living life one's own way instead of God's way. People are free to choose their own way, but they are not free to walk their own way without certain consequences.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

“Why Ignoring God Won’t Work”

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Introduction to your personal study:

“Without excuse.” I can imagine the horror of a defendant in court hearing those words coming from a judge immediately after pronouncing the verdict “Guilty.” The context of this passage is absolutely vital to understand Paul’s discussion here. Paul had just pronounced the good news that God would save all those who accept the gospel and

place their faith in Jesus Christ. This demonstrates “the righteousness of God” in saving those who exercise their faith in him (1:16-17). At the end of this section of scripture Paul stated much the same thing, “The righteousness of God through faith in Christ Jesus (is) for all who believe” (3:21-22).

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

Between these two statements of the good news of the gospel, like a prosecuting attorney, Paul laid out his case that indeed “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin” (3:9), “there is no one righteous” (3:10), and “the whole world [is] held accountable to God” (3:19). Before we may truly hear the good news making possible our salvation, we must be convinced in our hearts that we need to be saved in the first place. The passage for this study (1:18-32) concerns specifically pagan lostness, those who were not exposed to the teaching of God’s law. They are “without excuse” before God.

Focusing on the Meaning:

1:18-20 – The Wrath of God Revealed

v. 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.” The “**wrath of God**” is the activity of a holy God against anything that seeks to destroy or distort his creation. It is his constant reaction against evil of any form. He refuses to condone or come to terms with sin and evil, and he takes a stand against it now, and he will in the Last Judgment. “**Godlessness**” is activity that is literally “against God.” It is an attempt to get rid of God or to “**suppress the truth by their wickedness,**” seeking to live as if God did not exist.

vv. 19-20 – “Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” But God will not let his truth be suppressed. God has made certain aspects of himself known to all people (“**made it plain to them**”), displaying “**his eternal power and divine nature**” to them through his creation (Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 6:3). All people everywhere can clearly tell that an all-powerful God exists, and if that is the case, then all are responsible to him. These things can be “**clearly seen,**” and “**understood,**” therefore, people are “**without excuse**” before him.

1:21-27 – Sinful Desires and Shameful Lusts

vv. 21-23 – “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.” God has revealed certain aspects of himself to sinful people, hoping that they would respond to him in faith. But even though these sinners **“knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him,”** that is, they rebelled against the truth that God had so graciously revealed to them. They chose instead to close their minds to him, and **“their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”** As such, they could not even recognize that instead of being wise, they actually **“became fools.”** How did their foolishness reveal itself? Instead of worshiping the living and eternal God they instead worshiped idols that they made with their hands (cf. Isaiah 44:9-20; Psalm 115:1-8).

vv. 24-25 – “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.” Because people have rejected God for poor substitutes, God’s judgment is shown by a haunting refrain used three times in this passage, **“God gave them over”** (vv. 24, 26, 28). This does not mean that God gave up on them, but rather he decided to stand back and let people reap the consequences of their own choices. People may reject God, but they must face the consequences of that rejection. First, **“God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.”** Their idolatry led to immorality. They worshiped a false image of God and received a false image of sex. God’s good gift of human sexuality that he intended to be expressed within a loving, committed marriage relationship (Genesis 2:24-25) was turned into something impure and degrading. Instead of worshiping God as the truth, they deliberately decided to worship a lie instead.

vv. 26-27 – “Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.” The tragic result of people’s rejection is that they would become ruled by their **“shameful lusts.”** This is best seen in the shameful activities of lesbian (v. 26) and male homosexual activities (v. 27). Such practices are **“shameful,”** degrading, and dishonourable. They are also **“unnatural”** (literally “against nature”), that is, against God’s created order. Enslaved to the grips of their own sin, these people commit acts that are **“indecent”** or “shameless.” When people have the ability to be ashamed for their actions their conscience is still active. Without the ability to be ashamed and show remorse, they reveal that their conscience has been seared and calloused. People in such a state may gleefully proclaim how free they are, but they are actually to be the most pitied. They are in reality the most enslaved. They are also **“perverted,”** twisted out of their natural shape and bent from the image they were created to be. They have **“received in themselves the due**

penalty for their perversion.” People today may call homosexuality an “alternate lifestyle,” but the Bible clearly describes it as “sexual perversion” (cf. Genesis 19:4-5; Leviticus 20:13; 1 Timothy 1:10; Jude 7). The penalty they have received is their enslavement to such a sinful nature. They desperately need to be set free (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

1:28-32 – A Depraved Mind

vv. 28-32 – “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.” With their minds they rejected God, so God **“gave them over”** to these unfit minds that are hardened, darkened, and cannot think straight. Such a **“depraved mind”** leads people to activities that tear down human community and society. Paul listed twenty-one vices that these pagan sinners committed in the ancient world. This litany of evil attitudes and activities sounds amazingly contemporary. When these are the norm of the day, they reveal that God’s wrath is being poured out against the society.

People do not commit such sin in ignorance. **“They know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death,”** and because they know they are held accountable. Even though they know that they deserve the death penalty from God for doing such things, they disregard that knowledge and **“continue to do these very things.”** And not only do they continue to do them but they actively promote such activity and **“approve of those who practice them.”** Such people stand under God’s judgment and are “without excuse” (v. 20).

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

As you (as the Bible Study teacher/leader) reflect on this session, bear in mind that it is not a lesson unto itself. The claim poised in the title “Why Ignoring God Won’t Work” demands that you present to your class the answer to the problem. After all, the more important claim is, **“Why Listening and Obeying God Will Work”!** After all, obeying God brings to life all the good that is in life: beauty, love, joy, peace, hope, satisfaction, and everything else that God wants for each of us. When you speak to your group, help them to see the wonderful blessing of obedience to God even as you declare the dark side of disobedience.

For Personal Reflection:

1. What have I learned from this study?

2. **What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**

3. **What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

“Why Ignoring God Won’t Work”

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Romans 1:18-32

Background Text

Romans 1:18-32

Main Idea

People who reject the knowledge of God that is available to them are without excuse when they receive God’s judgment.

Question to Explore

What harm is there in living one’s own way?

Teaching Aim

To help participants explain why people who reject the knowledge of God are without excuse before God.

Connect with Life:

Ask the group: “When the doctor diagnoses your cancer and tells you the bad news, is he your enemy or your friend?” Explain that before the doctor can give you the good news (“We have a treatment that can heal you”) you must be willing to hear the bad news that you have cancer.

Ask: “Is finding out the truth of your situation good news or bad news?” Explain that finding out the truth of our sin is actually “good news.” Now something can be done about it.

Guide the Study:

Be prepared to bring a **brief** summary (5 minutes, maximum) of the information found in the “**Introduction**” and “**Background**” section of the teacher’s material. Explain that over the next couple of chapters in Romans Paul unpacks the bad news that “**there is no one righteous**” (3:10) and “**the whole world is held accountable to God**” (3:19). Since people are sinners and need a Saviour, that makes the gospel of Jesus Christ “**good news**” indeed.

Explain: As we look at the sinful life of all mankind as expressed by Paul, we must understand a few things about sin. First, sin, is expressed in the bad things that we do. We often refer to those as “sinful acts”. However, the ultimate definition of sin is to be less than God expects us to be. The Greek word most frequently used in the original writing of the New Testament that we translate into the word “sin” – was a military term used to explain that an archer, when shooting an arrow toward a target, missed the mark or the arrow fell short of its intended target. Therefore, sin is, by definition, living a life that falls short of what God expects us to be and do.

Second, we humans tend to view sin in categories. We think of sinful acts as being unimportant, bad, horrible, or, perhaps, even unforgivable. We also think of some sins as ethical failures (less perverse) and others as moral failures (more perverse). Some sinful acts seem to us to be spectacular while others may seem too boring to even discuss. This categorizing of sinful acts is mostly out of our own thinking. While it is true that the Bible does emphasize some sinful acts more than others, it also teaches that sin is sin. Any of the 21 sinful acts listed by Paul along with all others cause all men and all women to fall short of God’s perfection and God’s perfect plan for our lives. Ultimately, our separation from God comes from any sin. Redemption remains the same from any sin.

1. Living your own way will bring on the wrath of God (v. 18).

Have someone read verse 18.

Ask: “What does Paul mean by ‘the wrath of God’?” Be prepared to help them with the definition.

Continue the discussion with, “We usually think of God’s wrath as being found in the Old Testament, does it belong here in the New Testament?” (It belongs because God’s holiness must always take a stand against evil)

Ask: “According to this verse, who receives God’s wrath?” (godless and wicked people) Explain that the word “godlessness” literally means “against God.”

Ask: “How do these people ‘suppress the truth’?” (by living as if God didn’t exist)

2. Living your own way reveals a heart in willful rebellion against God (vv. 19-23).

Have someone read verses 19-23. Have the group listen for words and phrases that describe how people are “without excuse.” (“plain to them,” “clearly seen,” “being understood,” “they knew God,” “without excuse”)

Ask: “What ‘invisible qualities’ about God would be plain to all people?” (an all-powerful God exists)

Ask: “If this is ‘plain,’ ‘clearly seen,’ and ‘understood,’ then why don’t more people choose to worship the true and living God?”

Ask: “Do such people who reject God have any excuse before him for their actions?”

Ask: “According to verse 21, what kind of response does God seek from people?” (glory, thanks) “What has been their response instead?” (became fools, idolatry)

Ask: “What kind of man-made idols might people in our society worship today?” (wealth, power, etc.)

3. Living your own way will always bring awful consequences (vv. 24-32).

Read aloud verses 24-32 to the group, emphasizing the repeated phrase, “God gave them over.” Ask them to listen for what phrase occurs over and over in this passage.

Ask: “Does the phrase ‘God gave them over’ mean that God gave up on them?” (No, it means that God stood back and let them receive the rightful consequences for their choice of rejecting him.)

Describe that sometimes the worst thing someone could ever receive is what he/she wished for – especially if he/she wished that God would leave him/her alone.

Ask: “According to verse 24, what did ‘the sinful desires of their hearts’ lead to?” (sexual impurity, degrading their bodies)

Ask: “Who created sex in the first place?” (God, cf. Genesis 2:24-25)

Ask: “What is God’s plan for a person’s sexual needs to be met?” (a loving and committed marriage relationship)

Ask: “What has sin turned sex into today?”

Ask: “What are some modern expressions of sexuality that are impure and degrading?” (pornography, extra-marital sex, throwaway relationships, etc.)

State that verses 26-27 describes homosexuality as an evidence of God's wrath on sinful people. They are now held captive to their "shameful lusts" (v. 26).

Ask: "What words in these two verses does the Bible use to describe homosexual activity?" (shameful, unnatural, indecent, perverted) Be prepared to define any of these terms.

State, "Society today may call homosexuality an 'alternate lifestyle', but what does the Bible call it?" ("perversion")

Ask: "Does the Bible give any evidence that homosexuality might ever be a good thing or condoned in God's eyes?" (absolutely not)

Have someone read verses 28-32 again, and have the group count how many "sinful vices" Paul listed as evidences that people are ruled by a depraved mind. (twenty-one)

Ask: "With these kinds of attitudes and actions running rampant in society, what will happen to society?" (it will fall apart)

Ask: "Is that is what is happening to our society today? What then does that mean about our society?" (it is suffering God's wrath)

Ask: "According to verse 32, what does God's 'righteous decree' state?" (those who do such things deserve death)

State: "Indeed, people are 'without excuse' before a righteous and holy God."

Discuss that this is the "bad news." People are sinful and deserve God's punishment of death.





State: "So we don't end this Bible study on such a negative note, let's see what God's grace can do with people who live such openly sinful lives." Have the group turn to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Read these verses for them, and have them listen for God's word of grace that people caught in such sin can be saved out of it.

State "All people have a sinful past, and this passage shows that God's grace can crash into anyone's life, no matter how sinful, and offer them a new life through Jesus Christ."

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Have the group bring their own applications from this passage by asking them the following questions. “In light of what we have learned today from God’s word,

-  What am I supposed to believe?
-  What am I supposed to do?
-  Is there a promise I need to claim?
-  Is there an example I need to follow? Or avoid?”

Close in prayer.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

“Why Ignoring God Won’t Work” **Romans 1:18-32**

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Review verbally among yourselves the questions given at the end of your Bible study.

Then ask:

In light of what we have learned today from God’s word:

- 1. *What am I supposed to believe?***
- 2. *What am I supposed to do?***
- 3. *Is there a promise I need to claim?***
- 4. *Is there an example I need to follow? Or avoid?***

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***“Why Ignoring God Won’t Work”*****Romans 1:18-32**

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Beginning the Service:

Read or have someone find this passage, stand, and read it:

***“Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;
who healeth all thy diseases;
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;
who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.”***

(Psalm 103:2-4 KJV)

Sing **“Bless His Holy Name”**. *Maranatha Praise Chorus Book*, Extended 3rd Edition, #76

Offering:

Our offering today comes from a thankful heart for God’s gracious revealing of himself to us in ways we have been able to understand and accept. We pray today for those who struggle to believe. Help them in their unbelief.

Praying for the World:

Pray today for governments who are making decisions who impact various groups within society. May our leadership have wisdom beyond their own capacity for wisdom. And may we, as citizens, have hearts and minds that are most of all concerned for our fellow man.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Grace Greater than All our Sin

Introduction:

Canadians are proud of a heritage of tolerance, of fair treatment for all, of appreciation for various cultures. Canada has done an outstanding job of providing good health care for all. Canadians are glad to be known as peacekeepers.

A ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada has made it possible for same-sex marriages to take place. That ruling is being challenged by various groups. No religious group or person is required to perform a marriage ceremony between two persons of the same sex if it is against their value system. Nonetheless, for many Canadians, the Christian stance against same sex marriage is a selfish and narrow-minded view. As one person stated in an interview by a local newspaper: "It's just the fair thing to allow same sex couples the privileges of heterosexual couples."

Certainly Canada is not the only country that has moved to a highly tolerant view of homosexuality. In fact, public opinion is so strongly in favour of this tolerance that any other view is seen as unfair, unkind, and unloving.

Christians who seriously try to live out their faith in a winsome, appealing way have difficulty making a case for their understanding of Scripture. Most Christians have friends or family members who have chosen a homosexual lifestyle. Balancing their love for these friends with a commitment to Biblical truth often poses difficult dilemmas.

These dilemmas are complicated by the fact that all Christians are not in agreement about how Biblical passages should be interpreted. Some Christian groups feel that the Biblical admonitions against homosexuality were peculiar to the social system of Bible times and do not apply in today's more broadminded societies. Others feel that the larger, all encompassing understanding of the love of God for all mankind is more important than specific admonitions against homosexuality.

The Romans passage, which begins with verse 18 of chapter 1, may help us to understand how to deal with this issue and the larger question of sinfulness and alienation from God.

1. God's eternal power and divine nature are revealed to people in every age and every society (Romans 1:20).

This powerful concept seems almost impossible for us to understand in the light of the masses of people in the world today who have never heard of the God of the Bible or of Jesus as Saviour. This passage is not designed as a statement from which Christians can assume some kind of superiority. It is Paul's statement that every man has some understanding of God's invisible qualities and that each one is responsible for his/her response to that understanding.

This writer spent several long minutes this day watching the news of the earthquake off the coast of Indonesia. The resulting tsunami waves affected all of the countries along the Indian Ocean and today's conservative estimate of deaths is far over 200,000. Whole villages have been washed away. Besides the overwhelming sadness of the pain and suffering is the sadness that comes in knowing that most of those affected have never had the opportunity to hear the message of Jesus' love.

Yet the Romans 1 passage indicates that "***what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them since the creation of the world***" (v. 19). Whatever response each person has made to the understanding of God that he/she received is what will be judged in eternity.

2. Although all people have some understanding of God, most have neither glorified him as God nor have given thanks to him.

This godlessness or living life without God brings consequences. With every choice to live for self rather than for God, we become less capable of having an open heart to divine direction. Finally, God leaves us to live out our sinful desires.

Probably every parent has dealt with the pain of punishing a child who deliberately disobeyed. Many times the punishment exists within the action itself. The child who fails to put away his new bicycle as instructed must live with the reality of a stolen bicycle. The child who doesn't get around to doing homework must accept the lower report card grade. The child who takes a small toy at the dollar store may face the embarrassment of the sounding of a warning signal as he leaves the store or he/she may have to return the toy accompanied by a parent at a later time. Parents long to save their children the pain of living with the consequences of their disobedient action, but to do so would jeopardize the developing character of their child.

God, too, longs to save His children from the pain that disobedient actions will eventually bring. But He must give them over to the sinful desires of their hearts if they are to truly be free to make choices.

3. People everywhere continue to make sinful choices.

One of the choices being made today is that of homosexual relationships. While most thinking Christians would not agree with the angry and unloving expressions that have sometimes characterized the treatment of homosexuals in the past, the Romans passage clearly states that same sex relationships are unnatural. Family relationships are impacted at every level. Parents are grieved; siblings may be alienated. Children must make major adjustments at every stage of development. While these same issues may exist in traditional heterosexual marriages, the potential for pain is heightened in same-sex unions.

4. Even we Christians often fail to make right choices.

Before we focus too closely on one problem which Paul addresses, let us look at the many others that he lists.

“Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decrees that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them.”

(Romans 1:28-32)

What a wretched list of sins. And how all inclusive it is. Each one of us finds himself/herself mentioned. Maybe we are not murderers, but we are arrogant and boastful. We gossip. *We invent ways of doing evil.*

What a difficult passage of Scripture this Romans passage would be if it were not prefaced with Paul’s words “I am 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)

Few hymns are more universally known and loved in English than *Amazing Grace*. It was written by John Newton who lived from 1725-1807. Newton had been a slave trader until his miraculous conversion. The hymn speaks of the amazing grace that saved a wretch like John Newton. Amazing grace is what Paul is speaking about in Romans 1:19 when he says, “since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them”. It is only God’s amazing grace that permits us to understand how God is at work in the world and in our lives. Newton says that this grace “saved a wretch like me”. That kind of wretched sinner was described in all of the verses of Romans 1:26-32. It is a list that includes us all. No one sin alienates us from God more than another. But God’s grace – the power of God for the salvation of everyone is just that. God’s grace is for all.

Call to Commitment:

Prayerfully consider your attitudes toward the sins discussed in today's passage. Do you consciously or unconsciously have a hierarchy of "really bad sins" and "not so bad" sins. Can you leave the convicting of sin in others to the work of the Holy Spirit? Are you willing for the Holy Spirit to convict you of sin as well?

Concluding the Service:

Sing "**Amazing Grace**" prayerfully and with commitment.