

**TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
IHOP BIBLE STUDY**

1a - Romans, "God's wrath." -- with commentary

Romans 1: 18 – 32, "God's Wrath Against Mankind."

The purpose of the Letter to the Romans is to develop a "Model for Living the Awakened/Transformed Life." Today's study is the second section of session one. (Of 27 lessons.)

According to our Study Chart we are studying the first section of our chart called "I believe by Paul." This material is a summary statement of Paul's credo. However, this is lesson 1a to accommodate a more thorough treatment of the following material.

PLEASE NOTE THE PROCESS FOR TODAY'S STUDY SESSION

Today's IHOP Bible Study session was special in many ways. First off, the conversation was lively with lots of give and take with genuine listening to each other. The key question discussed was "Does homosexuality represent a lifestyle or a spiritual/physical idolatry?"

We had two pieces of information to help us in today's conversation. First is the on-line participant's remarks printed below. This point is that Paul was not concerned about a homosexual lifestyle, but rather in the idolatry represented in the misuse of others for selfish ends.

The second piece of information is a long article printed at the end of this lesson. The on-line participant agreed that Paul's main concern is idolatry and not homosexuality. A thorough reading of these 12 paragraphs will help you grasp his argument: 1) The only sin the Bible knows is idolatry; 2) a wonderful illustration of the attempt to dehumanize a woman by using a "food" metaphor. This, the writer uses to demonstrate the idolatry involved.

This writer makes another good point. How do we avoid making Bible Study an indoor sport? Or, how do we allow Paul to address our own lives through his message to the Romans? To this end he suggested a "pedagogical method" to help run this material through our lives. To this end, this is the format I adopted to do a Gut Trip Analysis of this troubling passage. Please read on.

An on-line Participant's Remarks: Some months ago as I was considering the texts regarding homosexuality, I read Romans 1 afresh. The wrath of God described from 1:18 onward is not directed toward believers, rather to those who hold the truth in unrighteousness (my, my, what does that mean?) V. 21 delves into that a bit more for those who refused to recognize the "godhead" in nature (majesty, power, creativity). It appears that Paul pushes more against idolatry in the old pagan sense of erecting idols and worshipping them. Paul's interpretation of the digression of idolatry is that all sorts of unfavorable activities ensue. He doesn't comment about homosexuality within the community of believers here or elsewhere. This may be a puzzling thought to those who wish to think puzzling thoughts. For those who wish to do so, they are able to think positively about gay persons who are Christians.

Pedagogical format for a Gut Trip Analysis of Vss. 1: 18 - 32

1. Characterize a person who does something to alienate others; i.e. school-yard bully.

I spoke of this exercise as “Prayer Form.” After the group caught the direction of the conversation, the illustrations were relevant and poignant.

2. Characterize someone who you know that alienates you; i.e., a person who talks all the time without listening.

As the conversation progress, the conversation turned to promiscuity. I thought for a moment we might be asked to raise our hands if we were guilty. One participant observed that Jesus makes the point that all of us are guilty even if we have lustful thoughts. At this point, the material below provided an example of the idolatry evident through using a “food’ metaphor to describe a woman.

3. What are some of the way you alienate others? With my wife I’m short tempered.

Again, at this point, a couple of obviously self-revealing comments were made to quickly ground the experience of alienation.

4. What is the judgment of God’s Wrath on us?

The IHOP group struggled for a moment with “God’s Wrath.” I feel back on my Gut Trip definition that God’s Wrath is God’s Tough Love. The illustration is that my wife, Beverly, is the wrath of God in my life. This means when I stop being fun to live with, she is willing to love me enough to tell me I need to change my ways. Then, she stands in the gap of my life while I massage my hurt and get my feeling back under control This is God’s love and it is God’s Wrath.

Also, we re-explored my axiom that “The reward for the deed is found in the deed itself.” God only has to love us. We build into our deeds the reward (or punishment).

5. Now, which produces more alimentation: promiscuity or our sexual orientation?

The consensus was that promiscuity does more damage.

The conversation kept raising the question, since our life styles are not a relevant issue, how does this affect our choice to live in ways God’s Word disapproves? Several pros and cons were shared.

One point of the argument is that God can not disapprove of a homosexual life style that honors those involved. One member shared his own family story of an adult child living in a loving homosexual lifestyle.

6. The final question was, What is the Grace of God that transforms our understanding of Justice and Love in Jesus style?

In Gut Trip Analysis, the Grace of God always is a wake up call to surrender our lives again and again into what it means to live humane and thus fully human beings.

Following this “prayer time” we went on to review the following questions.

I. Vs. 1: 18 – 28

A. Vs. 28 to 32: This section is addressed to whom? List them here.

Those with depraved minds, and those filled with every kind of wickedness. Read vss 29 – 31.

B. Vs. 18: What is the “wrath of God?” Identify it in Gut Trip Analysis; i.e., as an experience.

See # 4 above.

C. Vs. 24 – 25: How does this relate to God’s wrath?

Depraved minds earn their own reward by alienating others from them. In this way the “exchange the truth of God for a lie.” Vs. 25.

D. Vs. 26 – 28 In light of today’s study what is the experience here? Does this reflect a lifestyle or a spiritual/physical depravity?

This illustrates the idolatry involved of making objects out of others, the result of which is to experience separation between neighbor, self and God and fail to honor the Great Commandment of Jesus Christ.

From the article below:

The only sin the Bible knows is the sin of idolatry. But don’t trivialize the notion of idolatry by making it manageable, reducing idolatry to devotion, to naïveté, silly customs of worshipping dolls, statues, and other idiotic notions. Rather, read “image” in place of “idolatry.” Image is the modern word for idolatry. Intuitively, moderns know that images exist in our minds and in the cultural milieu, or spiritual environment in which we live, move and have our being.

The grounding for an understanding of the way “image” is used here is my experience of living in the Chicago Ghetto where the Blacks and Afro-Americans had a poor, depressing self image. It was only after the campaign to instill the notion they were a great black people did their operating self image change. When their image changed, they began to live with self-respect.

II. Vs. 29 – 32: Why are those on this list worthy of death (vs. 32)? What’s going on here?

The IHOPers did not get around to discussing this question. My answer is that the things that separate, or alienate, us from each other, self and God are forms of death. Human Beings are created to bring praise to Perfect At-One-Ment. When we fail in this task we are living the death experience.

All right, talk to me.

Another on-line participant’s remarks:

On a recent trip to Baja Mexico, Rosarito to be exact, in shop after shop, store by store and booth by booth, I saw the pictures of two cultural heroes – Jesus and Che!
--- We have here, two figures, symbolic of hope in the midst of social oppression obviously operating in the overarching, archetypical regions of the minds and spirits of individuals, but shared as emblems of corporate hope.

--- We have here two spiritual energies consoling people who are troubled, disturbed by social unfairness and injustice with the promise of another world, a real world in the midst of this world and not a fantasy otherworld never to be known in this real world.

--- We have here, two human faces of the divine reality in the midst of this world; the mysterious power human’s sense after as the truth about life!

This mysterious power drives the human community to structure commerce, civility and personal integrity in the pursuit life, liberty and happiness (read fulfillment). And this mysterious power, as the Hebrews early on figured, ultimately frustrates the clever among us who use our cleverness to co-opt the structures of commerce, civility and personal integrity for own privy, private gain and special-ness because this, in fact, is the sin that condemns us to the hell of our own making!

The only sin the Bible knows is the sin of idolatry. But don’t trivialize the notion of idolatry by making it manageable, reducing idolatry to devotion to naïve, silly customs of worshipping dolls, statues and other idiotic notions. Rather, read “image” in place of “idolatry.” Image is the modern word for idolatry. Intuitively, moderns know that images exist in our minds and in the cultural milieu, or spiritual environment in which we live, move and have our being.

I have to go through this exercise to read Romans. I know that ordinarily we understand what we read out of what we bring to it, out of the context or understanding we bring. If there is no way to bring new eyes to study, what we bring to study determines what we read into it.

My question: What can we bring to study Romans so that rather than our study becoming an indoor sport for those who are not interested in basketball and need something to make us feel important, like serious study, that will allow the spirit of Paul and the gospel to study our life and times? This would have the effect of hearing a transcendent word of judgment upon us and our ways and the grace to believe in the spirit bringing a new future through the transformation of our understanding of commerce, civility and personal integrity, or, if you will, justice and love Jesus style!

For starters, bracket verses 26 and 27 of chapter one, which tend to privatize the focus and distract from the comprehensiveness of what goes before and after it. Also, it might be interesting to ponder these verses as a matter of Paul's personal struggle with demonic energies of his own personality. At other places he enigmatically refers to his "thorn in the flesh." The specificity of these verses seems to be Paul's entryway into more comprehensive maladies – "injustice, mischief, rapacity and malice. . ." etc.

Pedagogically, an exercise to discover each person's own "obsession" that serves as their personal or individual entryway into the more comprehensive alienation that operates to introduce separation among us and all people, would be an interesting exercise. (Italics mine: wes) I think Paul himself would be more concerned with promiscuity than with sexual orientation, with objectifying the human subject or the non-objective, which is a form of personal idolatry.

In a recent conversation, a good friend said he'd been told he related to women as sex objects. He shared that this troubled him. He said, "I enjoy women. I like the way they move and the way they move me. I like the shape of their bodies, their soft hair, and the sparkle in their eyes. I want to share love and affection with them. What does it mean to treat women as sex objects, anyway?" I said, "I'm not sure, but maybe we could discover a comparison that might help understand it. For instance, what if you looked at another person as a food object? You'd say things like, 'Man, I'd like to have some of those ribs,' or, 'wouldn't that make a delicious rump roast,' or, 'I'd like to taste that sausage,' or, 'I bet that'd taste like chicken.' Now, that'd be to make a food object out of a living 'subject.' Put a person in the food chain and you objectify that person as food. I think that to consider a person as a thing for sexual pleasure and not a living breathing subject or being who exists in a whole complexity of relationships and constellation of needs, would be to make them a sex object. It would be to set aside the complexities of a living being and oversimplify a relationship with that person for the momentary relief or pleasure of a sexual encounter." He said, "I think I just got a headache." And I said, "Bet you've heard that before, haven't you."

Ever wonder why Romans seems to be a starting point for religious revolutionary movements? Think Paul, think Martin Luther, think John Wesley, think Karl Barth, think Martin Luther King, Jr., think IHOP Bible Study! On second thought, you might want to think of promoting this study simply as the latest "indoor sport."

Bill, once again, you moved me into a stream of consciousness dissertation that needs much meditation, contemplation and prayer behind it. But, take it for what it is and be kind, as you usually are.

