

## **Romans 1:18-23**

*The facilitator invites someone to read the biblical text aloud.*

*When the participants have listened to the biblical text, the facilitator then reads the following short input:*

This passage is part of Paul's larger argument that all human beings are equal before God, both in their sinfulness and also in terms of a loving God's concern for their salvation. Jews and Gentiles stand on an equal footing before a God who has no favourites. In chapter 1 Paul begins by agreeing that the Gentiles are sinners (something his Jewish hearers would agree with), but then goes on in chapter 2 to show that the Jews, who should know better because they have the Law, are just as much sinners as the Gentiles.

*The facilitator invites someone to read Romans 1:18-23 aloud again. Those with different translations are encouraged read their translation aloud as well. The facilitator encourages the participants to try to remember where the versions differ.*

*The facilitator then reads the following input out aloud once or twice, until people have understood it:*

A key theme in this passage seems to be that God reveals something ('the gospel', 'God's righteousness', 'God's eternal power and divine nature') and makes the truth known, but human beings constantly seek to cover up something ('the truth'), to suppress it, to hide the way things really are.

*The facilitator then invites the participants the following set of related questions:*

1. What do you think Paul means by hiding the truth?
2. What is hidden?
3. How do you think it relates to the knowledge of God through creation (vv. 19-20)?

*When the group has responded fully, the facilitator then reads the following input out aloud once or twice, until people have understood it:*

Paul is writing to people in Rome and he sometimes uses ideas well-known to people educated in that culture, based on the teaching of a group of philosophers called Stoics. The Stoics argued that the Word (Logos) of God is what created the material world and remains inside the world, giving it its laws and its ethical framework. Therefore God and God's purpose can be known through studying the world. John's Gospel has a similar idea about the creation of the world by the Word spoken by God (John 1:1-14). So for Paul the world reflects God's 'eternal power and divine nature', visible to all with eyes to see. Paul uses this well-known and widely accepted Stoic idea to challenge the Romans. If God can be known by everyone through nature, why do they refuse to see and acknowledge God?

*The facilitator then invites the participants the following set of related questions:*

4. What does Paul's argument say about the importance of the created world and our relationship to the environment?
5. In what way do you believe that nature reflects the Creator?

*When the group has responded fully, the facilitator or someone else reads the verses 18-19 again, and then reads the following input out aloud once or twice, until people have understood it:*

Here Paul argues that God can be known (at least in part) through the natural world he has created. In some way the world reflects the God who created it. This argument could be seen as making a connection between ‘suppressing the truth’ revealed in what God has created and the ‘wrath of God’ against those who conceal that truth.

*The facilitator then invites the participants the following question:*

6. In what way might the natural disasters which have resulted from the wasteful use of the world's resources somehow be God's ‘built in’ warning signals to human beings against destroying the earth which God created and which makes God known?

*When the group has responded fully, the facilitator reads verses 22-23b: ‘Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images’.*

*The facilitator then invites the participants the following question:*

7. In our world today, what might it mean to ‘exchange the reality’ of a good and beautiful world reflecting God's glory for ‘copies’ or ‘images’ of that glory?

*When the group has responded fully, the facilitator invites the participants to discuss the final question:*

8. What challenges and tasks does this text call Christians to with respect to the environment?