

276 Romans trap? Maybe not!

Many thanks to ‘Ian’, a long-established church leader, who has read my articles over the years but has largely restrained himself when I’ve gone astray! He has recently responded – really helpfully – to a number of my radical ideas.

He’s not impressed by my ‘Roman trap’. It seems I may be mistaken in my reading of Rom 2:1-16.^[272] Ian says that I’m reading it ‘in a literal, wooden translation’ and that ‘It is not addressed to BIJs as such. It is a rhetorical *you*’. In other words, Paul is saying ‘*anyone* who... judges’. Ah, that now makes sense of Tom Wright’s (less-wooden) translation of v.1 (Tom’s italic, my blue):

¹ So *you* have no excuse – *anyone, whoever you are*, who sits in judgement!

Drat! I was sure I was right! So this is *not* a case where ‘they’ (people whose theology I don’t agree with!) are taking a scripture addressed to one group of people and applying it to another. (But I’m unrepentant on other examples such as ‘the wages of sin’ being a misuse of scripture.)

So what *is* Paul on about in Romans 1 & 2? Ian again: ‘Chapter one... is about humanity as a whole and how not worshiping the true God and worshiping idols instead leads to depravity.’ Agreed. And then he explains (I think I’ve got this right...) that while believers are assured of acceptance by God, through Jesus’ death, we will still be judged ‘on the last day’ on the basis of our lives – i.e. it *does* matter how we behave, day to day; we can’t just do what we like. (Tom is strong on this point, too.)

On another topic, Ian said, ‘Romans 1 is not your friend. I think it is possible to argue that most Biblical references to homosexuality are talking about homosexual behaviour on the part of heterosexual persons [but...] What the Romans passage does though is it describes homosexual acts as dishonourable/impure and shameless, depending on your translation.’

While I greatly appreciate Ian’s more generous (but firm) approach to the issue of gay marriage, on this one I’m still unrepentant, sorry.

First, yes, Romans 1 speaks of depravity, but I don’t believe that Paul’s list was ever intended to be a *definition* of what is or isn’t depraved (although that is how those verses have been used). Look at the list! Every action is *obviously* depraved. That’s simply the *starting assumption* in Paul’s mind: gay sex *is* depraved. End of.

That’s echoed by Ian’s comment: ‘It is hard to argue that there were any circumstances in which the apostles would have said gay marriage was OK.’ And I agree... but why?

Am I allowed to ask whether the apostles would have *changed their minds* had they had the benefit of modern knowledge about sexuality, and had they encountered fully committed Christians in loving gay marriages?

Or are we saying that *every* attitude of the apostles towards human behaviour is true and unchallengeable (e.g. check out 1 Cor 11:1-16)?