

97 First drone flight – what a view!

After all the preparatory work, I have now taken my first flight up over the Romans mountain range. However, with the drone's limited battery life, I was only able to take in the first five chapters – but the overview was eye-opening, to say the least.

As we already know, Romans is about the gospel in its full expanse and wonder, and the gospel is all about faith: *For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'.* (1:17)

(I prefer to use the word 'trust' because it feels to me more personal – trust in a person. I feel 'faith' can be thought of in a more abstract sense, but I won't argue if you prefer 'faith'.)

If the gospel is all about trust, then what did I see as I looked down on Romans 1–5? What struck me was that it was all about attitude – our attitude to God and our attitude to other people.

From up above, you can see how ch. 1 and ch. 2 are all of a piece, linked by the 'You, therefore' of 2:1, and together it forms a scathing attack on the religiously self-righteous (RSR) who look down on 'those who do such things', i.e. the awful things that 'they' do, as listed in ch. 1.

So while the RSR are concentrating on the bad things (other) people do, Paul slams into them:

How *dare* you judge others! (2:1) That's a totally wrong attitude, which will bring God's wrath down on you (2:5). You think circumcision means you're 'in', but the 'true Jew' (2:29) is the one whose attitude is right.

Hang on though! Isn't chapter 1 is about God's wrath coming down on the ungodly! Actually no, not really. Looking back from God's very severe condemnation of the RSR in ch. 2, the wrath in ch. 1 looks a bit different to me. It seems to me to be saying that those who do *not* have the advantage of the Jews' knowledge of God can still see God in creation. However, if they have the wrong attitude (1:21ff), and don't respect what they *do* see of God, then God will 'give them over' (1:24,26,28). In other words, God allows them to choose the path down which their wrong attitudes will take them – and all sorts of nasty things happen as a result.

So in ch. 1, the wrath is the natural consequence of people's not acknowledging God and not being thankful (1:21), whereas in ch. 2 it's as if God is getting *really* cross with those who have been given a much more intimate knowledge of God, yet *still* have the wrong attitude. They are in a position of great privilege, and are misusing that privilege.

In ch. 1 and 2, Paul has contrasted the Jews and the Gentiles – those with and without privileged access to the knowledge of God (which we could perhaps bring up to date and apply to those brought up as Christians). But then in ch. 3 he points out that, in a way, there's really no difference (3:9ff), we're all under the power of sin because of our wrong attitude to God. And the solution is to trust in the trustworthiness of God. God says he will freely forgive us by his grace (3:24), so we have to believe what God says – attitude again.

Chapter 4 illustrates the importance of having an attitude of trust – Abraham is the supreme example of a trusting (faith-ful) person, and because Abraham trusted God he went off on his

great adventure. It's not about *doing* something to please God – obeying the Law, for example, as that hadn't been invented then – rather, once again, it's about Abraham's attitude of trust in God.

Finally and gloriously, we see in ch. 5 how Adam had the wrong attitude to God whereas Jesus completely, fully and absolutely trusted God – even to death on the cross – and this gave him victory in life. So Jesus shines out as the example of how wonderfully we can live our lives within an attitude of total trust.

So that was my first flight, and now I'm hoping to get some bigger batteries, for a more sustained flight over some of the other chapters of Romans.

Actually, there was something else I noticed by using Lidar (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lidar>). It showed up a tiny detail in high relief (which is what Lidar can do *par excellence*). In the midst of these five chapters (138 verses) dedicated to the importance of *attitude* are two verses about *behaviour*: 1:26,27. From those, it appears that we can say that gay sex is a sin.

Having searched for other verses, the only cross references my Bible offers are to Leviticus, and using verses from Leviticus to guide us ethically is fraught with danger. (For a wicked but tellingly funny commentary on this, see <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2010/08/18/dr-laura-and-leviticus>.)

Wanting to know whether gay sex within a stable, loving, exclusive relationship could be counted as sinful, I looked further and found 1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10 and Jude 1:7. In these, the Greek is translated as 'perversion', so in interpreting those verses, we have to decide what classes as 'perversion' or 'unnatural'.

But even if we disagree on the interpretation of those verses we must obviously continue to love one another. In my view, any feelings of fear or disgust towards other people are totally against the gospel (*mea culpa*). And to say that it's 'clearly sinful' is to be judgemental, because we'd be saying, 'we disagree on the interpretation, but you're wrong'.

It's ironic that the two main verses we have to interpret as regards homosexuality occur right in the middle of Paul's stinging condemnation of religious judgementalism.

The view from the drone has, as I say, been eye-opening to me!

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