

ROMANS 1:21-25 "Professing To Be Wise, They Became Fools"

Romans 1:21-25 ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. ²⁵ For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Back in verse 18 Paul begins to contrast the blessed mercy and grace of God extended to the world, which is found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with the wrath of God found in His just punishment for sin.

We saw how men are without excuse for their sin, in light of the fact that God has revealed Himself in His creation. The Psalmist tells us in Psa.19:1 "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and the firmament is declaring the work of His hands."

In fact in verse 20 of our text there is a play on words when Paul says, "His INVISIBLE attributes have been clearly SEEN."

It's kind of like saying that those qualities of an artist who can't be seen, because he lives in a different part of the world, are still clearly seen in his work despite the fact that we don't know him personally.

But to see the artist's work, to love his work, and be thankful for his work, will prompt us to seek the artist himself, whereupon we may seek fellowship with such a person.

The analogy is weak in that an artist can only imitate life whereas God actually creates it. How much more should men love His work and be thankful for His work which is for us.

But it's the thankful part that men have a problem with. People take a lot things for granted to the point where they forget or simply aren't interested where all these good things ultimately come from.

And this is where we pick in our text this morning.

Rom 1:21 "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."

Paul continues the argument from verse 20 that God's invisible attributes are clearly seen and now in verse 21 he declares that men not only see God's handiwork but actually know God, in the sense that they recognize His work.

Does that mean that unbelievers know God as we know God? No! This is why Paul qualifies what it means to know God, in an intimate sense, by saying that they neither honored or glorified Him as God or gave thanks to God, whereas the believer will.

The apostle John touches on this when he writes in his gospel in Joh.1:8-9 "There was the true light (Jesus Christ), which coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him."

They saw Jesus, they touched Him, they listened to Him and even followed Him for a while as long as He was passing out free bread and fish, but they didn't know Him in a faith relationship, whereby they accepted Him as Lord and God and Savior.

And this is what Paul is saying. The world has always known that God created our planet and all the heavens and the stars and universes, but because they weren't interested in seeking this personal God, on God's terms, they created a god on their terms.

This is what verse 25 means when Paul says ... "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen."

Because men did not choose to seek God and love and thank Him, they only know of Him and the fruit of His labor seen in His creation.

Unfortunately, there are real consequences to not seeking after God with a thankful heart. The end of verse 21 says, "their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

The Greek word for futile is *mataioo*, which means to render foolish, whereas the English word for foolish, here in our text, is

actually speaking of that which is unintelligent or ignorant of the truth.

And so to put it in a more literal sense, we would be able to say, 'that their thinking became foolish (or nonsensical), and their ignorant hearts were darkened or had become obscure.'

In other words, the reality of the evidence around them clearly demonstrates that a person of infinite power and magnitude and love is the creator, and yet that truth will not be embraced. Their hearts would not allow them to seek this one true God because of their selfish ambition to place themselves as number one.

In contrast to that, the person who has placed his or her faith in Christ knows this God intimately and loves Him and has a thankful heart which shows itself in desiring to please his Lord.

The psalmist knew God intimately by faith and he declares in Psa 22:23 "You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!"

Jesus tells us of how this intimate relationship with our living God and Creator and Savior works itself out when we do have hearts that desire to honor and glorify and thank our God.

Joh 15:8-12 "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

And of course that love for one another comes directly from loving our God first and foremost with all of our heart, soul and mind. And our ability to love God and others ultimately comes from God first placing His love upon those whom He chooses.

1 John 4:19 ¹⁹ We love, because He first loved us.

But the one who rejects God continues in a world where he has been self-deluded. Not only does he have a darkened heart to the things of God, he has placed himself in a position of thinking

himself to be pretty well off, even though he's on a road to destruction.

Look at verse 22..... "Professing to be wise, they became fools." Sounds like a little boasting going on here in self. 'Yeah, not only do we not need God or His supposed wisdom, we have all the wisdom we need. It wasn't God who put a man on the moon.'

Of course man can't live on the moon, but what's that got to do with wisdom? Man doesn't get it. Like I said last week, people who reject God don't want to be confused with the facts because they've already made up their minds which are directly affected by their darkened hearts.

And in their professing to be WISE, they became FOOLS. Another play on words. The Greek word here for fools is *moraino* which is a form of the Greek word *moros*, which is where we get our English word moron.

Boasting that they've become wise in their own eyes, God declares them to be morons. That's not a very flattering description. Usually when we think of morons the 3 Stooges come to mind. And in one sense that may be moronic behavior to the max.

But, what Paul means to say, and what the Greek intimates, is anything but comical. In our text moronic behavior is behavior which is just the opposite of wise behavior and infers a person lacking in any good judgment as it relates to His Creator.

But it doesn't stop there. Look at verse 23 ... "and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."

Instead of glorying in the glory of God, man has exchanged that glory for something else. Now, when we exchange things we usually like to exchange up.

If you've ever seen the program, "Let's make a deal", (now in re-runs), all of these people who are dressed for the Twilight Zone are jumping up and down waiting for Monty Hall to pick them for the deal of the day.

Invariably, someone is picked and Monty gives them cash or some undisclosed little box to hold on to. He goes to someone else and a few minutes later he'll come back and give that first person the

opportunity to exchange the small box for what's behind door number one, door number two or door number three.

Everybody knows that "big doors" are better than "little boxes". And so they choose one of the big doors. As the curtain goes up they discover they've won a real live Billy goat. And then to torture this person they uncover the small box which has a one carat diamond in it, and the audience sighs in unison.

Everybody hates to exchange down. They always want to exchange up for the best prize. And yet man in his wisdom has "exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four footed animals and crawling creatures." And then man calls that the best. No wonder God categorizes us as morons when we choose so unwisely.

What Paul is doing here in this verse is showing how man has left the one true God and adopted a form or an image. God is substance, a person, One who can be loved and Who loves us.

The exchange rejects the person, God Himself, and embraces an image at best. The Greek word suggests a likeness; statue; profile. It would be like you and me rejecting to love our mate, or a friend or relative, and instead desiring to love their picture or a statue of them.

Again, we begin to see the foolishness of this choice. Pagan cultures would set up these images and bow down to them in worship and depend on the power of an imaginary god who, like the Billy goat behind door number one, is useless.

Today, of course, we're much more sophisticated. Most civilized cultures don't create images for the purpose of worship, we just worship the actual creation. We give the beginnings of creation the fancy name of Evolution and baptize it with the wisdom of people with Ph.D's who, though they profess to be wise, have become fools in believing that matter evolved from nothing.

And from nothing, the universe willed itself into existence, defying the law of logic known as the law of non-contradiction. And since the universe has such a will it stands to reason that New Age beliefs, which aren't so new, hold to such things as the land having a soul, and all animals and living things are in harmony with all other living creatures, to the extent that human beings are no more significant than large-mouth bass.

The common denominator in of all life, with this misguided belief system, is that it happens to share the same time and space; not that a Creator deems it important and that a Creator declares that all things, including man, are created, with man being created in the image and likeness of God.

Jesus Himself say's in Luk 12:6-7 "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

God takes care of all of His creation, but makes it quite clear that man is very special. But, evolution has become the god of science. And when man has been relegated to just another mammal like Flipper, just another part of the creation, it becomes much easier to destroy humans, just as you might destroy a rabid dog.

And so don't think for a moment that the god of science, which has been adopted by many pagan groups, hasn't contributed to the destruction of millions of unborn babies for example, or to the killing of the elderly, known as euthanasia.

Of course Evolution is only one way in which men have exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for that which is earthly.

Of course anything material is earthly. But, simply because it's material doesn't necessarily make it evil.

Money is very material, but money isn't evil. The love of money is. A nice home or car, or nice clothes aren't inherently evil, but the love of such things, to the setting aside of God, is.

To exchange God for wealth; to exchange God for status; to exchange God for pleasure is no different than to "exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling things."

Any attitude resembling that is to profess to be wise, but in reality to be foolish, because it has eternal consequences.

Rom 1:24 "Therefore (Always keep in mind that when you come across a word like therefore in the scriptures it's a giveaway that what comes after the therefore tells us what it's there for.)

“Therefore, (since men have willfully rejected God, were not thankful to Him as Creator, exchanged His glory for their own and thought themselves to be wise in their own eyes), God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.”

That's a very sobering statement: "God gave them over". Essentially He gives them what they really want. And He gives it to them in excess to their own detriment.

This is often how God will work in the lives of people. And though it may seem harsh, it can actually be an act of grace on God's part even though it's part of His judgment. Because even in judgment it is still designed to expose our evil and turn us away from it.

We read in Pro 1:28-33 "... they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. 29 Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, 30 since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, 31 they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. 32 For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; 33 but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm."

The nation of Israel was judged upon many occasions for their stiff-necked attitude toward God and yet even in judgment God always made a way back to Himself and promised that if they would turn from their wicked ways He would heal them from their spiritual blindness and bring them back into a relationship with Himself.

That's the beauty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for in it is a dual message. Sin results in death, and its ultimate reality is seen in the death it cost the Son of God for the penalty of our sin. But, death doesn't have to be the outcome for us if we will embrace the resurrected Christ who promised to give us life eternal if we would humbly come to Him in faith.

Often we as Christians will look at society and determine that since the morals and the evil practices of this land are so bad that God must be ready to bring judgment.

The truth of the matter is that judgment from God can involve such things as the taking away of morals in our country; no

distinguishing between right and wrong, and an acceptance of sexual impurity so as to make things like, heterosexual promiscuity unblushingly okay, and homosexuality as an alternative life-style.

The judgment on this country is already in place. God says that because men have dishonored Me I will dishonor them with a judgment which will bring shame to men. And yet, the irony of it all is that men don't see it as shame. But, again as verse 18 shows us, "the ungodly suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

The truth is that men have exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the debauchery of sin and they love it. That's why I'm continually amazed that ... "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:8)

Because you see, you and I were no different than those spoken of here in our text. We too sought our own glory, desired to set our own standard, which in essence placed our sin ahead of God's grace.

But God tells us that no one will escape His judgment. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We can do it now in this world as we repent and turn to Christ for the forgiveness of our sin and receive eternal life, or we can reject God, get to the other side, and have no choice but to confess that He is Lord and a just Judge who must punish our sin forever.

Praise God that people still have breath in them before that time when they come to face with their Creator, and that we have the privilege to be used by God to bring them such good news.

But, you know there will always be those who prefer the lie of Satan to the truth of God's word. The lie that it doesn't make any difference what you do before you die as long as you go for the gusto and make the best of this life for yourself. And if you're the least bit noble or altruistic, the best for someone else.

And so verse 25... "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, (and in the process we see that they) worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen."

And if we're earthly minded it only makes sense to worship the things of this world, after all it's this world which we make a god if we don't accept the one true God.

We strive after the things we can see, instead of seeking the invisible God who has clearly shown Himself in His creation and has revealed the light of the world in His Son, and in His revealed written word which speaks of the Word become flesh.

This is why, in contrast to the world, God tells us in 2Co 4:18 ...
"we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

And that's why Paul could continue to tell the Corinthian Christians in 2Co.5:7 "for we walk by faith, not by sight."

And what is faith?

Heb 11:1 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

And it all comes down to this. The God we do not see with physical eyes can be trusted. He is reliable and faithful and He loved us enough that He sent His Son to die for us and then raised Him from the dead three days later.

Some did see that and believed. Thomas was one. But, what did Jesus say to him?

Joh.20:29 "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

"Faith is being SURE of what we hope for and CERTAIN of what we do not see."

If we are certain that Christ has given us life eternal and is vitally concerned for how we walk with Him every day of our lives, then we can be sure that He'll be there for us to fill us and empower us for His service, and that He will never leave us.

He'll be there to the end. He just say's, 'you stay with Me by faith. Persevere. Run the race. Finish the course I've set you on. And when you feel you can't go on, trust Me by faith that I'll pull you up', even as I told Isaiah My prophet.'

Isa 40:30-31 "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

And when we can trust our God with, not only our eternal future, but even our today, we will see Him with spiritual eyes as we fix our gaze upon His greatness and His power and His love in Jesus Christ, who is the Author and finisher of our faith.

Don't ever be tempted to exchange the truth of God for Satan's lies. Stand firm on the Rock of your salvation and you will not be moved.

To God be the glory!