

Romans
Message 20
Not Ashamed 07
Rom 1:16-25

- 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.
- 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.
- 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;
- 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.
- 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:
- 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
- 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,
- 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.
- 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:
- 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. KJV

Introduction:

We have been following Paul's reasoning as he has begun to lay out the terrible condition of man apart from God. Please remember that this is fundamental to his case of why he is anxious to preach the gospel to those at Rome, not because they are worse than all others or more lost than people in other location but because they are in the midst of the very epitome of why the Gospel is necessary. The Romans as a culture and as a class are the perfect picture of mankind without God.

But they had come to this place through a long process and in order for mankind to understand the issues surrounding the Gospel, this case must be made clear. We have no doubt but that this is the very same message Paul has preached everywhere. If Paul had written a 'gospel tract' as many have attempted to do over the years, no doubt it would have simply been what he wrote here in the first five chapters of the book of Romans.

Last week we discussed the end of v. 18, how that men suppress or 'hold down' the truth by their unrighteous deeds. Then, we looked at little further at what God has revealed and how wicked it is to refuse to look at what is plainly true, the evil of dealing dishonestly with Truth. V. 20

outlines for us the plain revelation of God that has been given.

In this message we want to pursue the matter a little further and see what we can learn in the next few verses. I did not set out intentionally to write a book but it seems like that is exactly what I am doing.

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

The question that poses itself to the mind here is, “Is Paul referencing a time in human history or a time in the life of every human?”

To answer that we must ask ourselves another question, “Do we know of a time in human history when this sort of a scenario played out?”

I think that we do. There are four stories from the early days of Israel’s history that we should notice. You may recall that Abraham married his half sister (Gen 28:12) and on two different occasions she and Abraham told kings that they were not married but were simply brother and sister. As a result, both Pharaoh and Abimelech took Sarah with the intentions of making her one of their wives. God spoke to each of them and their responses show a remarkable degree of understanding concerning Who God is. That awareness also produced a sense of morality that was long gone from the pagan world in the days of Paul.

Gen 12:14-20

- 14 And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair.
- 15 The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.
- 16 And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels.
- 17 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife.
- 18 And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?
- 19 Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.
- 20 And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had. KJV

Gen 20:1-6

- 1 And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.
- 2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.
- 3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou

- art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.
- 4 But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?
- 5 Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this.
- 6 And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. KJV

Both of these men knew who God is and had respect for morality and the sanctity of marriage. They were certain that God judges those who violate His moral laws.

I bring these up just to show you what happened a few years later in the life of Isaac and Rebecca. Now, they were cousins but they still told Abimelech, maybe a different one, but the circumstances of morality had changed for the worse.

Gen 26:9-10

- 9 And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her.
- 10 And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? one of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us. KJV

So, during the lifetime of Abraham things were changing morally for the worse. We also find Sodom and Gomorrah in that time frame as well, and it appears that they were somewhat unique on the earth, out of the ordinary for the common people of the time.

This may have been at least part of what Paul had in his mind as a time frame.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

He actually used the word from which our word ‘moron’ is derived. “Thinking themselves unusually wise, they became morons.”

It is only fools who claim to be wise. Witness the current crop of politicians in our government and running for office.

Truly wise men are driven to humility because they become aware of the vastness of the things they do not know.

Foolishness and arrogance seem to live together. Almost without exception where you find one you also find the other. And where you find the two of them, wickedness is not far away.

Ps 14:1

- 1 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. KJV

Prov 12:15

15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. KJV

Prov 18:2

2 A fool does not delight in understanding,
But only in revealing his own mind. NASU

Prov 26:12

12 Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him. KJV

Even if a man were wise by comparison with other men, this does not help him in spiritual matters.

1 Cor 1:20-21

20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. KJV

But his presumption of wisdom, this idiocy of assuming one knows something spiritually, led men to the most horrible decision, or set of decisions, that have occurred since Adam decided to sin against God.

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Now, of course, no one, certainly not any collections of idiots and morons on this planet, can actually change the Glory of God. He is Immutable and does not change. Scripture affirms this without reservation.

Some scholars read the word 'changed' as 'exchanged' which may be correct, I am not completely sure. Whatever they did, though, they did it in their own minds and in how they portrayed God to others.

One author suggests that Paul was borrowing language from David in the LXX and he may be right.

Psalm 105 (106) LXX

19 And they made a calf in Choreb, and worshipped the graven image,
20 and they changed their glory into the similitude of a calf that feeds on grass.
21 They forgot God that saved them, who had wrought great deeds in Egypt;
22 wondrous works in the land of Cham and terrible things at the Red Sea.

But this, of course, calls the mind to an earlier time.

Ex 32:1-6

- 1 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.
- 2 And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me.
- 3 And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.
- 4 And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.
- 5 And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD.
- 6 And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.
KJV

Notice that they changed their perception of God but kept even His Special and Holy Name. They changed their worship, even using things in it that God had forbidden less than six weeks before.

Consider the monstrous thing that Aaron did.

He listened to the people concerning what they wanted to worship.

Actually, before that, he had decided not to affirm the God of Moses if challenged.

He had decided that acceptance by men was more important than honoring God properly.

He falsified the issue of worshiping God by claiming that the worship of the calf *was* worshiping God.

If you go back and look at the communication of God directly to the people, from the mountain, you will see that all of them knew better.

Ex 20:21-23

- 21 And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.
- 22 And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.
- 23 Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. KJV

Paul was referencing David while he was referencing Moses but it is certain that this event was on his mind as he wrote to the Romans.

David said the people ‘Changed their glory’ meaning they changed the One Whom they were to glorify for an ox. Here is what one of the commentators said.

Rom 1:23

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. KJV

And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man - that is, they exchanged the one for the other. The expression is taken from Ps 106:20, (and in the words of the Septuagint) They exchanged God for man-the incorruptible for the corruptible; nay, Him who is the essence and fountain of all that is glorious, for a mere inanimate image, fashioned after the likeness of perishable man. The allusion here is doubtless to the Greek worship, and the apostle may have had in his eye those exquisite chisellings of the human form which lay so profusely beneath and around him as he stood on Mars' hill, and "beheld their devotions," or 'the objects of their worship' (see the note at Acts 17:29). But, as if that had not been a deep enough degradation of the living God, there was found 'a lower deep' still. (from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft)

There may not be any crime in all of time and space that is worse than assaulting the Honor of the Living God by holding up, either physically or mentally, a misrepresentation of Him and calling that misrepresentation ‘God.’

Think about what the Israelites at Horeb were doing, which was only a picture of what humanity has done over and over for thousands of years.

That Wondrous Deity Who had just recently communicated with them directly was, at the very moment of their crime revealing glorious truths to Moses *for them*, they had traded for a golden image of an ox that they had all purchased with treasure and wealth taken from the Egyptians. That Terrible Deity from whom they had fled at the sound of His Voice, they were actively offending and that deliberately.

3000 men would die that day for the insult against God.

Notice the verse again and see the care with which Paul mentioned the Lord.

“...And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God...”

Even as he spoke of Him in this context he took care to honor Him.

Aarons’s failure to hold God in his mind and to represent Him to the people as Infinitely Holy led to a failure which cost many wives their husbands and many children their fathers.

Many in Christendom today (using the term very loosely) have never even been taught the concept of the Holiness of God much less the Sacredness of His Worship.

It appears from the flow of thought that Paul is following that to blatantly and willfully disrespect and dishonor God - to hold a false representation up and says "this is God" - sets in motion an inevitable series of consequences that are as predictable as the sunset.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

When the sun sets, darkness comes. There is no need for another body to rise in the sky and shine 'darkness' on the earth or pump 'anti-light' into the world. The darkness is automatic. When we turn the lights off at night, we don't have to go outside and get tubs of 'darkness' to bring inside, it is the natural consequence of having no light source.

In the same way and in the same pattern, when a human or group of humans refuse the revelation that God has given, turning from the obvious light that He has granted, there enters the soul a spiritual darkness so profound that a person or community will literally adopt insanity and call it 'enlightenment' and 'wisdom.'

Have you ever looked around at our world and asked yourself, "what is wrong with these people?" Well, now you know.

One who has refused the light of God and adopted false images of Him as Deity or denied Him altogether really cannot tell see the value of wisdom or the idiocy of foolishness. It simply does not register because they set in motion events that cannot be reversed except by the mercy of God.

They have turned out the light in their own souls and darkness has moved in. Unfortunately for man, the event can only be remedied by a return to God in Repentance and Faith. "How much can the Glory of God be changed in one's mind without it becoming critical, without the darkness taking over?"

On the one hand, it is a foolish question but many people are quite loose in their answer to it.

It is similar to asking, "How much poison would you like in your coffee?" A little might not hurt. On the other hand, there are poisons so powerful that even a trace of it will cause instant death... or a long and protracted, agonizing death with no possibility of remedy or survival.

So, how much would you like?

You don't want any, you say?

There is no poison so dangerous as the dishonoring of God, so how much impurity would you like in your Worship?

“Oh, a little will not hurt,” they say. But I do not trust anyone who would say that.

I want my worship of God to be pure, holy, biblical and acceptable to Him.

I don't want a golden calf dressed up and paraded out with the name tag “Jehovah” around his neck, what about you?

Precision is a priority.

Distorting the Image or our Concept of God is literally the most dangerous thing in the world.

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

There is something interesting about this verse. The verbs themselves tell a story. The first three, ‘knew,’ ‘glorified,’ and ‘gave thanks’ are active, definitive verbs. The men *did* those things.

But the last two, ‘became vain,’ and ‘was darkened’ are passive. Something else was operating on them creating the absence of wisdom and inability to discern the nature of God nor the importance of His Laws.

One translation says they “became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were (further) darkened.”

They turned out the lights themselves. The consequences were automatic... and then God acted.

“...Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness...”

Some of you, like me, have been there. Let me ask you (and you don't need to answer out loud), which would you choose if only these two options were available to you right now, go back to that awful place or die where you sit?

I think your answer would be the same as mine. I would truly rather die than go back and I have told the Lord that often.

Isa 8:13

13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. KJV

1 Peter 3:14-16

14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

- 16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. KJV

To 'sanctify the Lord' is to hold Him in the greatest reverence possible, to view Him in His Greatness, His Omnipotence, His Holiness, and His Wrath concerning sin.

It is to "Hallow" His Name, respect Him, devote yourself to Him, obey Him, know Him, abide in Him.

It is to cling to Him in Repentance, Faith, and Love with all of your being and never be drawn into corrupt thinking concerning Him or receive a false image of Him, even if it is being presented by the High Priest (Aaron) or an angel from heaven, not even if the apostle Paul himself rises from the dead to bring you that false image.

Ps 48:1-2

- 1 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.
2 Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. KJV

Ps 145:3-21

- 3 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.
4 One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.
5 I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.
6 And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness.
7 They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness.
8 The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.
9 The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.
10 All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee.
11 They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power;
12 To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.
13 Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.
14 The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.
15 The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season.
16 Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.
17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.
18 The LORD is high unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.
19 He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.
20 The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy.

21 My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever. KJV