

# The Twin Acts of Reason

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Romans 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.”

## Introduction

In Romans, Paul introduces his readers to the Court-room of God. The theme: *the righteousness of God* introduced by *the unrighteousness of man*. Until or unless man knows he is a sinner, he can't understand or appreciate the gracious activity of God revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. First comes God's moral law and the consequence of condemnation, and then comes God's grace and the salvation which is only found in Christ (John 14:6).

## How have humans responded to God's revelation of Himself in Creation?

The picture that Paul paints of mankind in Romans 1:18-32 is an ugly one. God's judgment against all mankind is not only ugly but unavoidable. In Romans 1:18-32, the Apostle Paul reveals four-stage devolution of man. Let's begin with a brief overview of this downward spiral of sin and death:

**1) Intelligence – Romans 1:18-20.** Human history began with man knowing God but he turned from the truth of God and rejected Him. Through His creation, God revealed Himself as a wise and powerful Creator. The nature and the power of God are clearly seen in the things He has made (Psa. 19:1). Mankind represses, rejects and refuses God's truth by exchanging it for a lie (v. 25). The more we reject God's truth, the more we think and live like the other animals rather than as one created in the image of God.

**2) Ignorance – Romans 1:21-23.** Even though man knew God, he didn't want to know God or honor Him. Instead of being thankful and grateful, he refused to honor God and refused to give Him the glory He so richly deserves. While he used God's gifts, he refused to thank the giver for the gifts. The result of such refusal and rejection is a confused mind and a darkened heart. The once wise man became a fool. Man who was originally made in the image of God is now making gods in his own image. As John Calvin observed, the human heart became an “*idol factory*.”

**3) Indulgence – Romans 1:24-27.** Rejection of the truth always results in idola-

try and idolatry leads to immorality. Man becomes his own god and begins to do whatever he pleases without any appropriate fear of God's coming judgment. Ultimately man abandons God's truth completely and exchanges it for the lie. The lie is that man is his own god and that he should worship and serve himself rather than the Creator. The result of self-deification is self-indulgence in a deadly downward spiral of depravity, sin and death. God's wrath is revealed in the negative consequences of man's sinful actions (Rom. 1:18-32).

**4) Impenitence – Romans 1:28-32.** When man abandons God, God abandons man and when God abandons man, he becomes confused, calloused and impenitent. Instead of repenting of his sin and seeking restoration, man rejected God: his mind became depraved and his heart became darkened and he abandoned himself to sin. Paul lists twenty-four sins which man indulges in, culminating in the perversion of homosexuality. Mankind has become enslaved by sin. Men not only committed sin in open defiance of God but they also encouraged others and applauded them when they sinned.

### **How low can you go?**

1) Man began with the glory of God and he exchanged that glory for worshipping idols. 2) He began with knowing the wisdom and the power of God and he ended up ignorant and confused. 3) He began created in God's image – the apex of God's creation – and he ended up worshipping idols/animals. 4) He began with experiencing genuine joy in the Lord and he ended up only with pleasure in sin for a season.

### **What is God's verdict?**

***They are without excuse! (1:20)*** All humankind stands guilty before the court of a holy God! The consequence of man's sin is guilt or liability to the judgment and punishment of God. All who are charged with unrighteousness are under God's wrath – neither their character nor their conduct is acceptable. Unbelievers are without excuse because they have seen God's eternal power and deity and yet have rejected it. The universal willful rejection of God's salvation is seen throughout the history of mankind. God revealed the truth but man rejected it, resulting in this tragic downward spiral.

Our focus is on Romans 1:21 where the Paul identifies the twin acts of spiritual treason. Our text begins, "*For although they knew God,...*" How did man know God? He knew God as a result of the knowledge derived from the manifestation God had given in the visible creation.

- 1) "They neither glorified him as God" (we glorify God for who He is)
  - 2) "*Nor gave thanks to him,*" (we give thanks to God for what He has done)
- The result: "their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

### **What are these two actions of which Paul speaks?**

The twin acts of treason are the twin sins of: 1) Irreverence – failing to honor God as God. The first sin results in the second sin: 2) Ingratitude – failing to give God the thanks He deserves.

The two obligations of reverence and gratitude embrace the whole cycle of man's duty towards God. Here is the bottom line: Man is an incurably religious being and if he refuses to give God His rightful place in his life then man will put something or someone else in God's place. If man doesn't give God the preeminence that is rightfully His, then man will give the preeminence to an idol – a false god. In other words, man has to create a substitute god. And this is easy because, "*the human heart is an idol factory*" (John Calvin). Let us separately consider each of these twin acts of high spiritual treason:

### **I. Irreverence – (Failing to acknowledge God for who He is)**

**What is reverence?** Reverence is an attitude of proper **subjection** of a creature to His Creator. When we revere (fear) God, we give him the respect that He deserves in light of who He is. In one sense, reverence is recognizing reality. In another sense it involves submission to the Master. A person who reveres (fears) God, takes God and His Word seriously and acts accordingly. Our reverence for God is evidenced in both our humble attitude and our obedient actions.

**What is irreverence?** Irreverence involves a serious lack of respect for God,

- failing to take His Word seriously,
- failing to submit to His Will and
- failing to respect His representatives – God-given authority.

An irreverent person is self-centered rather than Christ-centered.

An irreverent person is denying reality and therefore living in an unreal world.

An irreverent person is rebellious, refusing to submit to God's authority.

### **How important is it to glorify God? (1 Cor. 10:31)**

The Westminster Catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer: "*Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*" The glory of God is the highest motive and end of which man is capable. There is no greater motivation or purpose for living!

**What does it mean to glorify God as God?** It does not mean that we augment or add to His glory; we merely ascribe to God the glory that belongs to Him as God and reveal that glory. It means that we give to Him in thought, affection and devotion the place of preeminence in our lives and in the universe.

**What does it mean to fail to glorify God as God?** Human beings refuse to acknowledge what they know at some level to be true. God expects everyone to come to the conclusion that He exists and is their wise and powerful Creator. People who refuse to glorify God refuse to give Him His rightful place in their lives. They refuse to praise, honor and magnify God by their lives and lips. Not to glorify God as God is not to glorify God at all! Man's refusal to glorify God as God is as unacceptable to God as the suppression of the truth (Rom. 1:18).

The Christian doctrine of sin is all here in a nutshell. While the names may change over time, sin is essentially the same. It begins by dethroning God from His

rightful place in our lives and setting an idol in God's place. Once we try and please someone instead of the one true God we're on a downhill road – a downward spiral. **How far down the road of reprobation will we go before we come to our senses – to our right mind?**

Paul never says here that God will send people to hell for their sins. He says something far worse; "*God gave them up*" (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). He just took His hand away and let them do as they pleased. He let them create their own hell on earth, living in a world they preferred separated from the life of God.

To mistake and/or to take for a god anything less than the One true God and Creator of the universe is to take the fatal and final wrong turn in life. *How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?* (Heb. 2:3).

What is your God and how would you know?

Whatever you can't live without..... is your god.

Whatever takes first place in your life..... is your god.

Whatever you try and please first and most..is your god.

Whatever you sacrifice everything for..... is your god.

Heathenism is not a primal religion from which we arise but it's the result of rejecting God's revelation. This sin describes the origin of the degeneration and degradation which is epitomized in pagan idolatry.

### **What does sin involve?**

Sin involves:

- 1) A false start (a lack of love and loyalty to God)
- 2) A wrong road (the way of sin is broad and leads to destruction) and
- 3) A missed goal (coming short of the glory of God).

Sin takes you: 1) to a place you don't want to go, 2) to do something you don't want to do and 3) keeps you there longer than you want to stay.

## **II. Ingratitude – (Failure to acknowledge God for what He has done)**

The sin of irreverence naturally leads to the sin of ingratitude. All people are capable of being thankful. The Bible teaches that every good and perfect gift comes from God and that everything that God does is worthy of our trust.

God isn't the author of evil and everything works for good if we love God (Rom. 8:28). Therefore, we should give thanks for all things in all circumstances, for this is God's will for His children. Gratitude is the memory and homage of the heart rendered to God for His goodness and grace.

Whether we realize it or not, we're truly blessed in ways we may never even know. May God help you to see His goodness and grace in your life. Examples:

1) If you can read you are more blessed than over 2 billion people in the world that can't read at all.

2) If you can hold someone's hand, hug them or even touch them on the shoulder,

you are blessed because you can offer God's healing touch.

3) If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.

4) If your parents are still married and alive, you are very rare, especially in the United States.

5) If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

6) If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world.

7) If you attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than almost three billion people in the world.

8) If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 20 million people around the world.

9) If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million who won't survive the week.

10) If you are feeling blessed, thank God. Repay the blessings bestowed on you and do something for others. A blessing cannot be kept. If it stops with you, then the blessing will disappear. The blessing will only keep working if it is continuously passed around. If you are a recipient of a blessing, keep the blessing working by being the source of blessing to others. (Author unknown)

Irreverence is failing to recognize God for who He is.

Ingratitude is failing to recognize God for what He does.

Since nature abhors a vacuum, man's unwillingness to be grateful to God results in the sin of ingratitude. The sin of ingratitude has far reaching consequences on our thoughts, attitudes and actions.

### **What is the alternative to an attitude of gratitude?**

We develop an ungrateful spirit with an entitlement mentality. Instead of thanking God for His goodness we come to expect it and take it for granted or worse yet, fail to acknowledge that God is the source of all our blessings. But it doesn't stop there, it gets worse.

### **What are the results of ingratitude?**

An ungrateful heart can lead to a cold, hard and insensitive heart. Such a person is incapable of having a healthy relationship with God, himself or others. A spiritually and emotionally healthy individual is a thankful person with a grateful attitude.

### **III. What Is the Result of the Twin Acts of Treason?**

Irreverence and Ingratitude result in Rationalism – using our reason and not God's revelation as the final authority of faith and conduct. Proverbs 14:12 says, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*" God is

clear in 1 Corinthians 1:21 that “*the world through its wisdom did not know God.*”

Why? 1 Corinthians 1:29, “so that no one may boast before him.” Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Rationalism – empty reasoning fills men with intellectual pride; professing to be wise they become fools. On one hand, man has an insistent need to recognize some power above and beyond himself. On the other hand, man refuses to give God the place of supremacy in his life that He deserves. The Result is idolatry or false worship. We will worship something – the only question is **who or what?**

The abandonment of God in favor of inferior objects of worship results in self-deification – the worship of the unholy trinity: Me, Myself and I – or even worse.

### **Where shall we look for the center of sin?**

The real locus of sin is replacing God with the ego on the throne of our lives.

The real source of sin is failing to give to God His rightful place on the throne of our lives. Whenever we prefer our desires to God’s will, whether we realize it or not, we are in serious trouble.

The mind of man is not a religious vacuum; if there’s an absence of the truth, there’s always the presence of the false. When we reject God we lose our ability to accurately perceive reality. When our reason is separated from the light of God’s truth, we become confused in our thinking. Worthless, vain or empty thoughts quickly bring about worthless, vain or empty objects of worship.

Failure to honor God as God is the fountain head which leads to: confused and unrealistic thinking, moral irresponsibility and willful disregard of the will of God resulting in sinful actions and attitudes.

1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Rejecting God’s wisdom and love turns man into a fool. What is a fool? 1) A fool in Scripture is a person who willfully makes moral decisions that are contrary to God’s wise and loving Word. 2) A fool is a practical atheist who refuses to take God into account. 3) A fool is one bereft of reverence for God. The fear of God or the reverence for God is the beginning of wisdom – living in a way that pleases God and is best for us.

Do you believe that it is worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God? In Romans 1:28, Paul says that sinful humanity, “...did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God...”

Do you believe that it is worth a man’s while to seek after God? Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it’s impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” To please God we must believe it is worth our while to seek after Him!

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