

How can intelligent people turn to idolatry? ... (The Greeks and the Romans were very smart people. Our Western culture owes so much to them. Yet... their society paid homage to marble statues that were everywhere. ... This and several more questions like it... will be answered by today's text in Romans. ... But having now called this question to your mind... let me go ahead and give you the answer that we will see in our verses.

Idolatry begins when people reject what they know about God. ... Instead of looking to Him as the Creator and sustainer of life... they see themselves as the center of the universe. ... They soon invent gods that are convenient projections of their own selfish plans and decrees. ... These gods may be wooden or marble figures... or they may be things we desire — such as money... power... comfort... or our intellect ... They may even be misrepresentations of God himself — a result of making God in their image... instead of the reverse... (God making us in His image.) ... The common denominator is this: Idolaters worship the things God made - rather than God Himself.

Now here is another question that we will see answered. *Why do bad things happen to good people...?* ... (I briefly spoke of this last week. Today... I will say a bit more.) ... The answer to this is very simple. BECAUSE – “*God gave them over...*” ... This horrible phrase is in today's passage... and it will echo three more times before Romans chapter one closes.

Mankind has rejected God... and He has therefore “*given them over*” to experience what they think they want - trying to live without Him. ... But in

“*giving them over*”... God allows the decline of humanity. ... Evolution simply is not true... Folks! **Devolution** is!

There is no such thing as man moving upward. These verses contradict the theory of evolution. Man is not improving physically... morally... intellectually... (and especially not) spiritually. The pull is downward.

Of course... this contradicts all the writings of philosophy and religion that start with man in a very primitive condition (as a caveman... with very little intellectual qualities)... and move him up intellectually... and begin moving him toward God. ... This is absolute error. Man is moving away from God.

Before Patti and I were married... and I would visit her (at her mom and dad’s house)... I admired a statue that her mom displayed on a book case. ... Years ago... to my delight... she gave it to me... and here it is! I keep it on my bookcase in my office.

For those of you in the back... and can not see it very well... this is a monkey sitting thoughtfully on a pile of books. One of them is titled “Darwinism.” ... The monkey is holding a human skull and contemplating.

This statue came with a poem (titled “Darwin’s Mistake”) that my mother-in-law had framed. Listen to how it reads:

Three monkeys sat in a coconut tree
Discussing things, as they’re said to be.
Said one to the others: “Now listen you two,
There’s a certain rumor that can’t be true,
That man descended from our noble race.
That very idea is such a disgrace.

No monkey ever deserted his wife,
Starve her babies, or take unborn life.

And another thing you'll never see –
A monk build a fence around a coconut tree,
And let many coconuts all go to waste,
Forbidding other monks a simple little taste.

If I put a fence around this (here) tree,
Starvation would force you to steal from me.
And here's another thing a Monk wont do –
Go out at night and guzzle down a few.
Or use a gun or a club or a knife,
To take some other monkey's life.
Yes, man **descended** – the ornery cuss,
But brother, he didn't descend from us!

Our passage today (and next week) makes it clear that man has descended into quite a downward spiral! The description of our descent (actually) began in last week's verses... and since it would do us some good to review... I will start there... and then go to our passage for today.

Romans 1:18-20

Here in verses 18-20... Paul has explained the fearful state of men and women... as exposed to the wrath of Almighty God... and he has explained why this is our condition. ... We are objects of God's wrath because we have rejected the knowledge of God... (which all persons possess as a result of God's extensive disclosure of himself in the works of nature.) ... People do not know God – because they do not **WANT** to know Him. ... What kind of a fool will look at a beautiful painting of the ocean and conclude that there is no artist? - Only one who **actively** chooses not to believe it.

Have you ever been in a swimming pool with an inflated beachball...? Trying to keep the ball below the surface of the water takes a lot of purposeful effort. It is a struggle to do so. The inflated ball wants to shoot up out of the water like a rocket. ... That is the idea expressed in verse 18... of how man actively tries to suppress the truth of what CAN be known about God... simply by looking at creation.

Evolutionists actively try to suppress the truth like this. Let me give you one little fact that renders the theory of evolution completely useless... but it is actively suppressed. After more than 100 years of ACTIVE searching... and billions of dollars spent... there has never been found in the fossil record A SINGLE transitional form... of one specie in the process of evolving into another specie.

Folks this is a HUGE argument against the theory of evolution! You see... in order for evolution to be true... there would have to be JUST AS MANY transitional species in the fossil records... as there are completed species. We have thousands upon thousands of fossil species – but NOT ONE transition form. And this – in spite of the INTENSE effort (a desperate search) that has been going on for nearly 150 years to find just one (out of what needs to be thousands upon thousands – if evolution is true.) Modern Science suppresses truth (Folks)!

I am grateful for all the comforts of life that the advancement of science has brought us. I enjoy our technologies and medicines. But science is such a poor substitute for Christian truth. AND - It has some rather large cracks in its foundation.

Our modern age of Science began with the “Age of Enlightenment”... which sought to usher humanity away from superstition... and into the light of reason. ... The Enlightenment placed a wall of separation between science and faith. Anything supernatural was placed in the category of “unreasonable.” ... Empiricism became the new Lord. (Only what you can taste... touch... see... smell... hear... or logically conclude – is real.) In short... it was a decision to reject the invisible (or intangible) in favor of the visible (or tangible)... at least until it could be proved through proper human reasoning... or fit into a rational theory.

Every truth must submit to an objective analysis of data... and unbiased evaluation. However... this is NOT what science itself does. The scientific model is neither objective or unbiased. If our nation’s Covid-19 crisis has any silver lining at all... it is that it has shown the world how faulty the supposed scientific model really is! ... Listen! - Science is neither objective or unbiased. (Especially when politicians try to use it.) But (truthfully) it never was.

Let’s remove the veil right now... from this overly appraised ideal of our society. (Modern Science all begins with a prejudiced decision – a predisposition that is extremely biased.) Here it is: It starts with the premise that anything which cannot be tested... scientifically observed... or submitted to human reasoning - must be placed in the category of “unreal” - instead of “real.” (REPEAT)

(LISTEN!) Rejecting the reality of God — presumably because He will not submit to scientific examination... (or to put it a different way... rejecting God... because He cannot be “proved” through science’s predisposed

conclusions and limited rules... which foolishly suppresses Creation's evidence)... is not the result of objective analysis of data and unbiased evaluation of theories. ... Today's model of science is a purposeful choice to ignore some evidence and a pre-decision to accept (by faith) that: anything which cannot be tested... scientifically observed... or pass the test of human biased thinking - must be placed in the category of "unreal" instead of "real." ... The scientific model requires just as much faith as Christian belief does (if not more) ! Despite what our culture's "Priests of Science" would have us believe... Modern Science is a "faith" that has definite bias and also involves active suppression of truth.

What we see happening is that mankind has attempted to enthrone human reasoning – and dethrone Divine revelation. A willful rejection of God... led to a vacuum... by which the glorification of the human intellect... has rushed to inadequately replace. Man worships his own ideas. It is a false worship. It is part of our downward spiral.

So here is the point of this rather lengthy introduction: "God gave them over" and man is moving away from God. Am I suggesting that we should have nothing at all to do with Science...? No! (Please don't misunderstand me!) What I am saying is that Modern Science is not society's ideal. It is not the highest standard of truth. God is! ... For all the good that it has brought us... Modern Science has become part of mankind's devolution (man worshipping his own ideas) ... and we do not need to yield Scripture's authority to it. (Now let's turn to today's passage in Romans.)

Romans 1:21-25

Take a look at the phrasing found in verse 21... “*they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him...*” Have you ever thought about how intertwined the two concepts of honoring and being thankful are...? I don’t think that it is possible to truly honor someone... without being grateful for them. The honor would only be lip-service (totally fake!) Being thankful is at the core of truly honoring someone else. All sorts of awards are given to people – all the time... trophies... badges... certificates... wall plaques – but do they truly honor?

If you have been in my office... perhaps you have noticed a golden key to the city of Los Banos that I have framed and hanging on my wall. It is there more as a joke than anything else. I laugh with it about insincere awards.

One day the mayor of Los Banos came to our church and presented me with this golden key to the city. ... Now... as a young boy... my dad was the mayor of the town that I grew up in... so I know how much of an honor a golden key to the city can be – to the right recipient... and where there is sincere gratitude behind it. ... But you see... an election was coming up and I think it was a political statement to show that he favored church people in his community.

Deserved gratitude bestows real honor! ... Gratitude and true honor go hand-in-hand. Mankind did not honor God – and were not thankful.

Ingratitude... (not giving proper thanks to God)... might seem like such a small thing. **BUT IT ISN’T!** (Listen!) Unless you have been thanking God for all He has done in your life – every day – YOU ARE IN GREATER DANGER THAN YOU MAY REALIZE. ... (Why do I say that?) –

Because ingratitude is the departure point... to our moving away from God. Ingratitude is where we begin to devolve.

When we are not thankful to God... we become unsettled. We have unruly emotions... fears set in... which leads to all sorts of doubt... which produces a lack of commitment... followed by a lack of spiritual growth... and then the allowance of sin after sin.

The man or woman of faith... is one who diligently gives thanks.

Unbelief... (on-the-other-hand) has a short and ungrateful memory.

(I hope that you hear me now)... If we do not discipline ourselves to regularly thank God for His many blessings... we inevitably will move from faith to doubt... and from there to a possible downward spiral of sins.

Both Testaments of Scripture emphasize the importance of our showing thankfulness.

When the Israelites left Egypt on their 40 year journey to the Promised Land... they were the recipients of many great and wonderful blessings. ... They had been miraculously delivered out of slavery with a mighty showing of God's power. Then God gave His people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. Exodus 12:36 reveals how the Egyptians simply gave them so much gold... silver... and articles of clothing things as they left... that it describes it as "plunder." ... When Pharaoh chased after them with his army... the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry ground... but the Egyptians all drowned. And then of course... God gave them a pillar of fire to protect them... guide them... and give them warmth.

If ever there was a people who should have fervently given thanks to God... it was this large group of Israelites! But they were not thankful. ...

They had asked God for their freedom. Then when they received it... not being to their liking... they wanted to lynch God's leader (Moses) and go back to Egypt. ... When they were given food to survive out in the desert – every single day – they complained. They wanted a different diet. No matter what God did... there was something else that they wanted.

Ingratitude only leads in one direction (Folks!) ... It led the Israelites to rebel – just as it will lead you and I to the same end. (LISTEN!)

Cantankerous Christians (who are in every church)... show that they have gone down this path. Oh! How many wonderful believers (who once had a vital faith that ministered to others) no longer do... because ingratitude took them downward (instead of up) ! They stopped thanking God on a regular basis.

Paul (here in Romans chapter one – and elsewhere) treats ingratitude as a serious sin. Jesus was (as well) bothered by it.

When Jesus healed the ten lepers... only one of them came back... after showing himself to the priests... and thanked Jesus. Jesus asked,

Luke 17:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Jesus seemed to be bothered by the others' ingratitude. ... We can go on and on... with many different passages in both the Old and the New Testaments... which clearly show the importance of showing our thankfulness to God. By taking each of these... and the context of our passage today... the point I am making... is that thankfulness is a mark of

those who truly know God. Negativity... cantankerous... and ingratitude (by contrast) is the mark of those who repress the truth about Him.

Do you know who the greatest saint in the world is...? It *isn't* the one who prays most eloquently and consistently. It is not the one who sacrificially gives large amounts of money... or who fasts every week. No. It is the believing Christian who is always thankful to God... who has a heart that is always ready to praise God – even if prayer doesn't seem to be answered... or who faces tough challenges in life.

Please try to imagine with me what a worship service would be like... if everyone truly honored God. If we all worshipped God with specific things that we are grateful for... do you think it would transform our worship (and our very lives)...? [P A U S E]

Can we do what I am about to suggest... by way of specific application... this week Folks...? Every night... before you wander off to sleep... ask God to draw your attention back to the evidences of His grace that He gave you throughout the day... and then thank Him for each and every one. Try it for one week... and see what happens to your spiritual life.

Romans 1:22-23

An empty mind and soul is like a vacuum. It will not remain empty for very long. Mankind is a religious being. So when men's hearts and minds are emptied of God... men have to fill their hearts and thoughts with something else. ... They have to have some other god... some other *guiding light* (or *principle*) to give purpose and meaning and direction to their lives. ... They have to replace God with something else. ... They have to have something

— some standard... some law... some rule... some person... some god—
by which they can guide their lives.

Humanity has a stubborn habit of looking to the gift... rather than the Giver... for fulfillment. ... For example... the ancient Egyptians thrived in the fertile Nile delta region... because the river overflowed its banks each year and revitalized the soil. (what a gift!) ... They also enjoyed and understood the vital role of the sun in growing the crops. ... But rather than thanking the Giver of the river... and the sun... they worshiped those gifts (the sun and the river.) ... They invented elaborate myths and personalities for the river and the sun. ... Then they presumed to bribe these objects of creation with sacrifices... supposing they possessed the power to give or take life.

But this tragic scene is just as ludicrously repeated in our own day... just with different replacements for God (in other words... different idols.) God is rejected... as people think they are too wise for God... too intelligent to believe the fables of the Bible... too capable to need a crutch and can look to self... They believe themselves to be too resourceful NOT to create their own world and future... too reasonable and rational NOT to create their own standards and laws to control life. In short – they make themselves into an idol.

I believe that it was Voltaire who made the profound statement: “God made man in His Own image – and man returned the favor. Voltaire was not trying to substantiate Scripture. In fact... he said it in derisive sarcasm.

But what he cleverly said... is what the Apostle Paul wrote centuries before him... as truth.

Romans 1:24-25

These people chose to reject God... and God allowed them to do it. ... God does not usually stop us from making wrong choices. ... He lets us choose independence from Him... even though He knows that in time we will become slaves to our own rebellious lifestyle... and lose our freedom **not to sin**. ... Does life without God look like freedom to you? Look more closely. There is no worse slavery than slavery to sin.

Sin *always* lies. This needs to be remembered. Sin entices... claiming to bring pleasure and stimulation and happiness... but in reality it destroys a person's... body... values... mind... friends... life... hope... profession... family... future.

... .. [P A U S E]

Why do bad things happen to good people...? Because “*God gave them over!*”

Galatians 6:7 (ESV)

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

What about us...? How shall we escape... if we ignore Him and remain unthankful...?

Unbelievers have no excuse...

...and (Christian!) neither do you and I !