



## Romans 1. <sup>18-23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; <sup>19</sup>because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

<sup>20</sup>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: <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

After greeting the Romans and expressing his frustration at not having yet been able to visit them in person (1. <sup>1-15</sup>), Paul launches into his primary thesis: what he sees as the most fundamental human problem (1. <sup>16-3.20</sup>). He succinctly lays out the problem in 3. <sup>9</sup>: “Both Jews and Gentiles... are all under sin.” And, again in 3. <sup>23</sup>, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” It is this truth that Paul begins to establish at 1. <sup>16</sup>.

In this reading, Paul identifies the first and foundational human sin: idolatry. All other sins find their genesis in the sin of idolatry. Idolatry is rather like a virus. It is the disease. All other sins are but symptoms of the disease rather than the disease itself. One can treat the symptoms. But the disease remains.

Idolatry is a complex human phenomenon, requiring more discussion than we have time for in a brief meditation. Paul himself does not explore all its facets, here or elsewhere. In discussing idolatry, Paul emphasizes its error of replacing a perfect God with imperfect ones. These imperfect gods take many forms, but each god is made in the image of creatures rather than the actual creator. Ultimately, gods are made in the image of human beings. Humans become the highest ideal. Humans and the institutions they create take the place of the true and living God in the hearts and minds of mortals. Humans foolishly trust the arm of flesh and the institutions it creates to bring happiness and security. Flawed beings and institutions are allowed to set expectations of what is good and what is evil. All sorts of flawed attitudes and behaviors flow from and are justified through the false and flawed gods and their institutions.

Paul will go on to describe some of the false attitudes and evil behaviors that flow from the worship of flawed gods. But, Paul does not leave us in this state of ignorance. He suggests that there is a way out. And so, after establishing the universality of human sin that flows from incorrect ideas about God, Paul will turn his attention to what he sees as the solution to this fundamental human problem (3. <sup>21-5.21</sup>): Jesus Christ. Jesus is a revelation of God. In him, God’s true nature is revealed. Those who accept Jesus’ revelation find themselves freed from idolatry’s evil attitudes and behaviors. They are forgiven their past dalliances with sin, are shown the higher hopes that God has for humankind both here and in eternity, and are directed and empowered to live such as to achieve Divinity’s high hopes for it.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 28, 2024)*