

Futile Thinking January 30, 2012

Romans 1:21-32

It is clear that the people know of the existence of God by the creation; God Himself says here that His invisible attributes, His eternal power and His divine nature are seen very clearly in what He has made, no wonder there is such a battle against teaching creation. Here is the answer to the question "what about the heathen who has never heard?" That one, that so called heathen, should be able to discern this knowledge of God by looking at creation. If his observation of the "things that are made" is sincere and honest, then he will seek to know the One who has made it and God promises to reveal Himself to anyone who is seeking Him.

However, if this one decides that a piece of wood make it all or an animal spirit or it evolved then futile or useless thinking begins in his life and his heart is darkened rather than enlightened by the Light of the World.

He will not know the gospel but his seeking should bring him into contact with this knowledge.

Here's how this was described by Isaiah 44:9, 14-20 It is totally absurd isn't it? And Now listen to Isaiah 44:24.

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the One who formed you from the womb, I the LORD, am the Maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself and spreading out the earth all alone

Romans 1:22-24

If Jesus is the way to life, which He said He is and we studied in John, then here God reveals the way of death.

So the first step to idolatry is the refusal to recognize God worship Him, even though He is known, the next step is to fail to thank Him for all He has given to men. Following this there is futile thinking and then as Dr. Barnhouse said, "God allows blindness and darkness to settle on them. They will continue to follow their own ideas to the end. As Proverbs 14:12 says "there is a way that seems right to a man/woman but the end of it is death".

When men refuse to think correctly about God and glorify Him, they will be led to glorification of man. Think about it, if you glorify man in any way, God is then debased or dishonored. However, if you exalt God, as He should be exalted, man then takes his place as a sinner and then that man can find his true exaltation in Jesus Christ. Again quoting Dr. Barnhouse; "man can reach his proper height only after he has reached his proper depth". All this is another way of saying what Jesus said, "Everyone who exalts himself shall be abased and he that humbles himself shall be exalted". Humility is our proper attitude.

Cain and Able are good examples of this principle of what some call the "upside down kingdom". When Adam and Eve sinned and removed themselves from God's Garden, there was placed at the gate an angel or cherubim with a flaming sword, so that they could not get back. The only way back to God's presence was through the way of the shedding of blood. Do you

remember that God clothed them with the skins of animals, so the first shedding of blood to cover the nakedness of sin, is a picture of the cross of Christ. Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Able. Cain decided to not recognize God's way but to go his own way. He did not want to submit himself to God; it goes a long way back doesn't it?

So Cain murdered his brother Able who was obeying God and bringing the sin offering of a lamb. Why did Cain do this? He was the first of many who don't want to hear about blood and crosses. He was going the way that seemed right to him, after all who wants to kill an innocent little lamb, its so gross and bloody. Cain knew God but would not worship God in the way he was commanded. So he brought a basket of fruit and ignored God's command; "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin".

So what does the scripture mean when it talks about "going the way of Cain" in Jude 11? Our culture is full of those who are going the way of Cain; they are doing their own thing. They preach that God is so loving He would never judge anyone and send them to Hell. Glorifying men is the way of Cain, preaching religious traditions and men's ideas instead of what God has said is the way of Cain. Substituting human philosophy for divine revelation is the way of Cain. It is simply knowing God exists and refusing to worship or thank Him as He has revealed we are to do and that leads to all kinds of wrong ideas, futile thinking, the way of Cain.

In Isaiah 55:8, 9 God said "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my way...For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways." Friends, God thinks differently from the way we think. These verses are what lead me forward on my journey to Christ. I remember thinking that the scripture quoting Jesus saying "if you hate your brother it's the same as murder in God's sight". My first reaction to that was, no it isn't, futile thinking. Then it occurred to me that if God said it and He is always right, His standard is different from mine, He must think differently than I do. Well that is certainly an understatement. But it helped me see that I had to realign my thinking to think God's thoughts after Him, not run out in front with my own ideas, futile thinking.

God Himself said "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom". If you understand and believe that, you are on your way to truth. Now understand the fear of the LORD means respect, honor, awe. Quoting again from Dr. Barnhouse, "if you will surrender yourself, utterly to Him in an abandon of love, He will so fill your being that your desire will be to serve Him. Then you will bend your every effort to please Him, and He will reveal Himself to you daily. True wisdom will become your portion and you will daily grow in knowledge of Him".

Romans 1:22-23

If you refuse the love offered to you by your Savior Jesus Christ, you will inevitably end up on the road where you will be abandoned by God. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools.

This is apparently God's assessment of human beings who ignore Him and go their own way with their philosophies and religious traditions made up by men.

Just look at what has happened to our young people who have been taught there is no absolute truth, nothing is right or wrong. Whenever the mind of man is substituted for the mind of God there will be tragedy in the spiritual life. Man chooses reason rather than revelation because he

wants to live by sight rather than by faith. The just shall live by faith is what God's Word commands. Therefore the bible is a light for our path.

People are just bound to worship something because people are religious beings. It may be another idea of God, a person, or even the false idea that no God exists. Anyone who rejects the Creator will worship the creature.

Romans 1:24-27

I wish I didn't have to talk about this, but these are the next verses, some the most terrible in the bible and I admit I resisted the Holy Spirit's leading me to teach Romans because I dreaded to face the following, for here we see mankind abandoned by God. The cause of this abandonment is the progressive downward spiral of behaviors that began with failure to acknowledge God and be grateful.

As people spurn God and refuse to repent, they are left to their own desires, and then sin takes over and draws people and nations into a life where there is no sense of right or wrong. As God continues to "turn them over" or abandon them their behavior gets worse. These words are descriptions of the human heart without Christ and but for the grace of God go any of us.

God offers salvation to everyone and if a man or woman will receive that offer, God will place the guilt of all that one's sins on the account of Jesus, then God can accept the sinner without violating His divine holiness.

They changed the truth of God into a lie. The truth of God is that all good things are in God the Father. The lie is that there is something good in man. If a man chooses the lie of human good and exchanges it for the truth of divine good, the man is condemned to turn back to himself.

I do not have to add anything to this, God's attitude toward homosexual behavior is clear. God loves the sinner He hates the sin. For some this sinful behavior is flaunted and every attempt is being made by our government to say it is just fine. That is not God's ways.

For the one caught in this against his will he needs the love and caring of Christian people. There are records of many who have left this lifestyle and were able to function normally.

There is hope for all in the LORD Jesus Christ.

Isn't it clear that the grace of God is amazing that he would enter this human race with all the sin mentioned and lovingly die to save us from our perversions and ourselves?

Romans 1:28-31

Three times we have been told that God abandoned or turned over mankind to himself and to the perversions that grow out of man departing from God. Those abandoned to the lusts of their hearts fell into great and greater depravity. At these last verses we see the fruit of this disobedience. God turned them over to a depraved mind because they did not want to acknowledge God any longer. The idea here is that they thought it through and decided that it was not worthwhile to spend any time thinking about God or the things of God. They had such a high opinion of themselves that they had a low opinion of God.

Unrighteousness is another term for injustice in a judge. It is a word used to describe deceit. It appears that many men want to inflict injustice and wrong on others.

Wickedness, a word for depravity, iniquity, and evil purpose and desire.

Covetousness, greediness. People seem to want more and more, advertizing plays into this sin in the heart of mankind. In Colossians 3:5 God says covetousness is idolatry, it is desiring something more than God. This is like a noxious weed in our gardens with a very deep root.

Maliciousness, ill will, malice and the desire to injure others. Most of the movies I see advertized seem to glorify this.

Full of envy, the dictionary says; "to feel displeasure at the happiness, success or the possession of anything desirable; to regard with discontent another's possession of some superior advantage which one would like to have for oneself" I can't add anything to that.

Murder, taking the life of another. The person who takes another person's life puts himself in the place of God.

Strife, wrangling arguing.

Deceit, to lure or ensnare. Much of business life in the world is carried on deceitfully.

Gossiping, murmuring, whispering arrogant, its all here and it is depressing to see what we are capable of being. Please note friends, that gossiping is in the same list as murder and it is in no way delineated as a lesser sin.

The last five sinful behaviors beginning with disobedient to parents is another way of saying children will be non compliant, from the beginning rebellion against authority has been part of the human race. Have you noticed there is only one of the 10 Commandments which has a promise attached. That is the promise of a long life to those who honor their parents. One commentator wondered whether the early death of so many young people is related to their disobedience and disrespect for their parents.

Romans 1:32

Ordinance of God is another way of saying what God has commanded as right or wrong, God's judgment.

So the human race knows full well that these sins exist in their hearts and they know God hates these sins and must punish them but in spite of that they go on their way.

If you have not yet put your trust in the blood of the Savior shed to purchase your pardon, then flee to the love of God before His wrath is forced to break upon you. 2 Corinthians 6:2 "Now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation". If you are a believer in Christ trusting Him for salvation, remember the root of this sin is still in you. Becoming a believer gives you the ability to say no, you have the ability by the grace of God and the help of the Holy Spirit to

triumph over these sins. Go to God daily for pardon and cleansing and you will win over the natural tendency to sin. Renew your mind daily with the Word of God.

As I have prepared this lesson I have again been powerfully struck by the exceeding sinfulness of the human heart and the abundant grace and mercy of God. Just think of a story or movie where the villain is nasty and as the story moves along, he gets worse and more vicious, reprobate. He seems to actually enjoy inflicting sorrow and pain on his victim and you can't wait until he is caught and gets what's coming to him. You can't think of any punishment that would be too awful for what he deserves. This is mankind in God's eyes and so what did God do about this vile person? He knew His punishment would be too terrible because of the wrath He had stored up against evil man so HE sent His Son to take the punishment. Does this sound remotely like anything you could imagine doing?

Does this fit the scripture "eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has for him."

Suppose you say; I am not that bad, maybe I lie occasionally, little white lies that is, yes, I gossip but that's so normal, I wish I had a new car like my neighbor, but why wouldn't I? Basically I am a good person, I have never murdered anyone.

Skipping ahead to Romans 3:23 God said; "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God". Since I am always looking for lists I see two problems here; we have sinned and we have fallen short of the glory of God. Now notice it doesn't say most people have sinned, it says all. When I see all in my bible I circle it in red because it is significant to tell me how many. So all have sinned. That word in the Greek means "missing the mark". From archery, more familiar in Paul's time than ours, it means literally shooting at a target and missing it. It applies here; God set a standard of righteousness, the 10 Commandments and we have fallen short of that target, furthermore we can never satisfy the demands of God. That is why He gave us the 10 Commandments, so we can see that we cannot in our own strength obey. No matter how good you are on your own, it is not enough. No matter how good a swimmer Michael Phelps is if the standard is swimming across the ocean, he cannot do it, the standard is too high.

What about falling short of the glory of God?

The Greek word DOXA, glory, to understand the value of something, to value it correctly. Falling short is in the present tense so it is something happening now. The glory of God, said Donald Barnhouse is the wonderful being of God; His Names of Love and Justice, His acts of kindness and judgment; His praise and His perfection. It is the splendor that surrounds Him that makes the cherubim hide their faces.

The inner glory of God has an outward manifestation. The Greek word DOXA was also used to translate the Hebrew word SHEKINAH, which gives the word glory a second meaning because that Hebrew word means "splendor" and "brightness". This is the cloud that is surrounding Him, not a cloud as we see it but light and luminosity. This meaning, SHEKINAH, was symbolized by a "cloud" throughout the Old Testament. We are falling short of this constantly. No man on earth is attaining the perfection required to fellowship with God in heaven.

Paul has shown us the results when God abandons people to pursue their evil desires. He shows us that each person receives the penalty themselves and that final penalty is death or separation from God.

How many are aware of this death penalty?

I am constantly amazed by my friends, who are my age, not very young, who never seem to consider that they will die. As the Psalmist said; teach me to number my days correctly so that I may have a heart of wisdom.

So many people never give a thought to God or how they have offended Him, they don't care. Do you remember the hymn?

Years I lived in vanity and pride, caring not my Lord was crucified, knowing not it was for me He died on Calvary. This characterizes a large percentage of the population.

People have a conscience and they know when they do wrong, they just ignore it, they don't really care if its something they really want to do. They turn their back on God without realizing they are facing the death penalty, they sin and encourage others to join them.

Knowledge of God is accessible to you and to me, if we turn our back, go our own way, they we are worshipping something or someone of our own making. As I said earlier, there is a way that seems right to men but the end of it is death.

Next week we will consider chapter two of Romans, and the picture is still grim but we will learn from it and know that "all scripture is inspired by God and valuable for teaching".

Remember that Paul is writing to a mixed audience of Gentiles and Jews. Romans 1 is addressed the Gentiles who give God no thought. But Romans 2 is addressed to the Jews, religious and self-righteous, a condition just as dangerous and outright lawlessness.

Good bye for today and may God richly bless you. I leave you with this old hymn;
Just as I am without one plea but that my God has died for me, O Lamb of God I come I come.