

Willful

Romans 1:21-24

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A. Suppressed the Truth (v. 21):

1. Though they knew God – The main subject of this passage of scripture is that no one who has an intellectual understanding of nature can look at it and not see that an intelligent being had to have designed it, especially when consideration is given to how it operates each and every day. *“The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good.”* (Psalm 14:1; NASU)

a) The clause although they knew God refers to an original experiential knowledge of God, such as Adam and Eve had both before and after the Fall. How long this knowledge of God continued before it was perverted is not stated, but God was known by people. This fact makes human actions all the more reprehensible. ^[1]

b) *Knew God* – From seeing His revelation in creation (vs. 19-20). The fact that these people were idolaters (vs. 23) and knew God only through the creation order indicates that they were Gentiles. (NASU Study Notes)

2. Though they knew God – There is no question “that which is known about God is evident” (vs. 19-20); because everyone can intellectually see God operating each and every day in and through nature.

a) People’s suppression of the truth is seen in their rejecting the clear evidence of God as the sovereign Creator and their perversion of that knowledge into idolatry. ^[2]

3. Though they knew God – If a person does not go to church or listen to the Word taught, they can still come to a clear understanding that God exists and is sustaining all that is taking place.

4. They did not honor Him – Those who have denied God exists willfully do so because there is no way they can intellectually deny there is no God. Any intelligent person has to respect the existence and function of God.

a) To “glorify God” is to render the appropriate response due to his δόξα, “glory,” the awesome radiance of deity which becomes the visible manifestation of God in theophany and vision and which can only bring home to the individual concerned his finite weakness and corruption (e.g., Exod 24:15–17; cf. 20:18–20; Isa 6:1–5; Ezek 1; see also on 6:4 and 9:4; *TDNT* 2:238–42). So elsewhere in Paul (15:6, 9; 1 Cor 6:20; 2 Cor 9:13; Gal 1:24) and the NT (e.g., Mark 2:12; Luke 23:47; Acts 4:21; 1 Pet 2:12).^[3]

5. They did not honor Him – When people willfully deny God, they purposefully choose not to declare the brilliance of His excellent magnificent nature.

a) *Glory* – God’s unique majesty (Isa. 48:11), which fallen mankind has lost sight of and for which they have substituted deities for their own devising, patterned after various creatures. (NASU Study Notes)

6. Give thanks – These individuals who refuse to acknowledge the excellent manifestation of God in all His power and glory also willfully choose not to worship Him, and if they do, their hearts are not fully surrendered to give Him praise and gratitude for all He is doing.

a) In contrast, here, Paul is obviously thinking more in terms of thanksgiving as a characteristic of a whole life, as the appropriate response of one whose daily experience is shaped by the recognition that he stands in debt to God, that his very life and experience of living is a gift from God (cf. *4 Ezra* 8:60); cf. Kuss. In Paul’s perspective, this attitude of awe (the fear of the Lord) and thankful dependence is how knowledge of God should express itself.^[4]

7. Became futile in their speculations - When God is no longer our point of focus, our thoughts become useless and vile. Without God being our frame of reference, our decisions go down the wrong path and eventually become worthless. Our inward thoughts, when exposed, even lead to arguments or empty conversations.

a) Paul's point is that man's whole ability to respond and function, not least as a rational being, has been damaged; without the illumination and orientation which comes from the proper recognition of God, his whole center is operating in the dark, lacking direction and dissipating itself in what are essentially trifles.^[5]

b) The word rendered "imagination" is mostly used in a bad sense, and here refers to men's proud and restless dissatisfaction with the simple verities regarding God, which are "manifest in them," their cravings after something more satisfactory, and the thoughts, reasonings, or speculations to which these gave rise.^[6]

8. Their foolish – The main point of not having God as a point of reference means these individuals have a lack of understanding and discernment that cause their decision-making to be senseless. They lack the proper insight into what they need to do practically, so they live aimlessly.

a) The word "vain" today means "proud." The Greek word did not have any idea like that. *Mataios* (ΜΑΤΑΙΟΣ) refers to that which is in vain, futile, that which is without result or success. It refers to the unsuccessful attempt to do something or be something. It refers to that which does not measure up to that which it should be.^[7]

9. Foolish hearts were darkened – These individuals' lack of understanding and discernment would stir their inner affections, their entire mental capacity, and their passions to have no reference to who God is. This is why their lives become full of anxiety, and they live dangerously blind to all Satan seeks to do to destroy them and those around them.

B. Became Wise in Their Own Eyes (vs. 22-23):

1. Professing to be wise – These individuals continuously make it a habit to declare with certainty that they have the best course of action for decisions that need to be made. They claim to be skillful experts with a special understanding of the matters at hand.

a) “Wise” is *sophos* (σοφός). Aristotle defined the word as speaking of mental excellence in its highest and fullest sense. ^[8]

b) It is instead that the description of human aspiration for greater knowledge and a position of high regard, which actually results in a decline into disadvantage and a position of low regard, set as it is in aorist terms, is obviously modeled on the account of man’s fall in Gen 3. The emphasis in the fall narratives on “knowledge” invites the use Paul makes of it enabling him to formulate the same emphasis as Gen 3 in terms that a Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish audience would recognize and respond to. Considerable use was made of the Genesis account of man’s fall in Jewish theology of this period (here note *Wisd Sol* 2:23–24; *Jub.* 3.28–32; Adam and Eve; *4 Ezra* 4:30; and particularly *2 Apoc. Bar.* 54.17–19, which uses Adam in a similar piece of polemic; see further on 5:12). ^[9]

2. They became fools - These individuals add no value to life because they are morally worthless, they scorn true knowledge (Psalm 1:1-2), and they relish living wickedly. They can be so foolish they operate in stupidity.

a) The noun *mōros* (μωρός) has the meanings of “dull, sluggish, stupid.” Our word “moron” comes from *mōros* (μωρός). This will give the reader a better understanding of the Greek word translated “became fools.” ^[10]

3. Exchange the glory of the incorruptible God – Instead of embracing the excellent divine nature of God, which cannot be corrupted by erosion or wear and tear but

instead is powerfully revealed through nature, they choose, because of their foolishness, to put their hope in man's ability.

a) The ultimate irony in humanity's refusal to glorify the true God is the insanity or stupidity of idolatry described in Isaiah 44:9–20. Man's refusal to acknowledge and glorify God leads to a downward path: first, worthless thinking; next, moral insensitivity; and then, religious stupidity (seen in idol-worship).^[11]

b) This statement implicates Paul's audience—people who made excuses for why they were exempt from God's wrath (cf. 9:19–20)—in mankind's universal guilt. Mankind rejected the true God (1:21–23) for its own image (see Acts 14:11–13, Lystra; Acts 17, Athens; Acts 19, Ephesus). The source of this data was the Old Testament and Paul's own experience.^[12]

c) "Changed" is *allassō* (ἀλλάσσω), "to change, to cause one thing to cease and another to take its place, to exchange one thing for another." The human race exchanged the glory of God for idols.^[13]

4. For the image in the form of corruptible man – Because mankind indirectly demonstrates similar characteristics to God (man is made in the likeness of God; Genesis 1:26-29), the foolishness of those who believe they are wise causes them to place their confidence in the likeness of God rather than in God Himself, even though they know a man or woman can die, become frail and be nonproductive (Psalm 103:14).

C. Darkened (v. 24):

1. Therefore gave them over/deliver - Because of the willful, purposeful persistence of those who choose to live foolishly, God no longer seeks to convince them to follow Him or to live under His authority. He releases them to be whatever they want to be.

- a) In a real sense, the results of God's condemnation of rebellious humanity are nothing more than the natural consequences of suppressing truth, ignoring revelation, and perverting God's glory. However, God did more than simply let nature take its course. God acted to abandon (the thrice-mentioned "gave them over" [vv. 24, 26, 28] is *paredōken*, "abandoned") people to expressions of a corrupt lifestyle that deserved God's wrath and the sentence of death (v. 32).^[14]
2. Lust of their hearts – God releases these individuals from any conviction He may have provided to them so that they now can freely follow any strong, obsessive sexual craving they may have. He releases them to express this through any bodily activity they choose to display it through.
 3. Lust of their hearts – Some people who are not LGBTQIA+ may have wanted to flirt or toy with these identities, but because of their commitment to the knowledge of God, to not just know but to apply it, they could not conform to the world (Romans 12:2). Therefore, God did not turn them over to what could be in their hearts. They would rather say like Paul, "*Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?*" (Romans 7:24; NASU)
 4. Lust of their hearts – By saying lust of the heart, Paul indicates that these individuals possess passions in the deepest crevices of their hearts. This means they are forcefully operating within them so that they feel that this is psychologically who they are. Because by saying "heart", Paul also implies the person's mindset and will. This is why many transgender individuals believe what they are saying. It is vivid evidence that they have been fully released to what was taking place deep down in their hearts.
 5. Lust of their hearts - This lust that is fully released and therefore exposed takes place because foolish hearts were darkened. When a heart gets dark Ephesians 4:17-18, it is because those individuals "*walk, in the futility of their mind.*" This leads them to be no longer able to accept the conviction of God (excluded from the life of God; Ephesians 4:18), which then leads to the foolishness of the heart (ignorance that is in them; Ephesians 4:18) so that it becomes near impossible to convince them to change (hardness of heart; Ephesians 4:18) and they become "callous" (Ephesians 4:19) and then immorality is exposed completely.
 6. To impurity – The lust of the hearts, for those who willfully neglect the knowledge of God, so that their hearts darken, which in turn causes them to become activity obsessed with all forms of sensuality, evil doctrines, and filthiness. This is why the letters

representing the LGBTQIA+ community continue to grow (L-Lesbian, G-Gay, B-Bisexual, T-Transgender, Q-Queer, I-Intersex, A-Asexual; LGBTQIA).

7. That their bodies would be dishonored among them – God made man’s body in a specific manner to execute His purposes (Genesis 1:26-chapter 2). When a person uses their body outside of this purpose, the scripture teaches that it is being used unnaturally (Romans 1:26-27; Jude 7). At salvation, God says He owns our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20), and it is His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:15-16). The only time someone owns our body is in marriage (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). So, when the body is being used outside of God’s purposes and those who do so willfully reject His Word, God teaches that they behave shamefully; way outside of God’s intent.

^[1] Witmer, J. A. (1985). [Romans](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 443). Victor Books.

^[2] Witmer, J. A. (1985). [Romans](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 442–443). Victor Books.

^[3] Dunn, J. D. G. (1988). [Romans 1–8](#) (Vol. 38A, p. 59). Word, Incorporated.

^[4] Dunn, J. D. G. (1988). [Romans 1–8](#) (Vol. 38A, p. 59). Word, Incorporated.

^[5] Dunn, J. D. G. (1988). [Romans 1–8](#) (Vol. 38A, p. 60). Word, Incorporated.

^[6] Brown, D., Fausset, A. R., & Jamieson, R. (n.d.). [A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Acts–Revelation](#): Vol. VI (p. 198). William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited.

^[7] Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 31–32). Eerdmans.

^[8] Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 32–33). Eerdmans.

^[9] Dunn, J. D. G. (1988). [Romans 1–8](#) (Vol. 38A, pp. 60–61). Word, Incorporated.

^[10] Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 32–33). Eerdmans.

^[11] Witmer, J. A. (1985). [Romans](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 443). Victor Books.

^[12] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). [Tyndale concise Bible commentary](#) (p. 529). Tyndale House Publishers.

^[13] Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 2, p. 33). Eerdmans.

^[14] Witmer, J. A. (1985). [Romans](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 443). Victor Books.