

...The very same things... (Continued)

The very same things is not the long list of actions (sins) before this, but rather the very same things the Gentiles did, i.e. you too worshiped the creature and not the creator. Look at Exodus chapter 32, the people of Israel make a golden calf and worship it while Moses is receiving the ten commandments. Or Judges 2:11, At the death of Joshua, the first thing the people do is **“...worship the Baals and they abandoned the Lord...”** Or in 1 Kings 18, where King Ahab worshiped with the priests of Baal.

You see the Jews of Paul’s time knew their Biblical history. So as Paul begins to tell them about the sin and acts of sin of the Gentiles and then tie those acts and sins to the sin of the Hebrew’ past, Paul shows that humanity has a universal sin. It begins with Adam and Eve wanting to be God (crunch on the apple) to the worship of animals or each other. Human universal sin is a failure to recognize God in favor of ourselves.

Now here is the thing, doesn’t this sound like something we could write today in the 21st century. Our modern ways are always trying to explain God away as a scientific this or a historical anomaly that. Then we pump ourselves up and say look what modern medicine can do? Look what pharmacists have accomplished? Look how our military has kept us safe? Yea us, who needs God?

We are all They. They is us. Our sin that deserves God’s wrath is not an action, or an in-action. Our sin is and always has been that we don’t want a creator God, we want to create ourselves as God.

Now here is where it can get just a little bit bumpy. Recently in the latter part of the 20th century. This passage has been used to prove that God hates homosexuals. Remember the 19th century theology? Using Paul as a sound bite without comprehending the details, can make God seem wrathful at people who act against God. But the whole of humanity has indeed acted against God by refusing to acknowledge God over and over again. When Paul says,

“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...” Romans 1:24

he isn’t saying this sin is the worst unforgivable sin by God. Paul is using his days most outlandish activity to show what happens when God gives you up. But Paul could have just as easily said, Therefore God gave them up and they lied in their hearts. Or they murdered the idea of God in their hearts. Martin Luther writes this: “For God has consigned, that is God has testified through the Word, that all humanity is in disobedience, in sin, in unbelief. God has shown that all have been thus consigned and surrounded by sins, all, namely, the Jews now and the Gentiles previously...(in the Greek it reads “all humanity”), to disobedience, that is, to sin, that God may have mercy upon all...” (Luther’s Works Vol. 25 p. 101). So there is a reason for sin - it’s so God can have mercy. Thanks be to God. Here’s a question, can we be merciful too?

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For Whom Christ Died

A 21st Century Approach to:
The Letter of Paul to the Romans
By: Rev. David L. Stoner



Sin, A Condition, Not An Act

Last week I suggested that: “It is not possible to understand contemporary Christian thought without studying in detail Paul’s Letters.” However, it is possible to ignore Paul and think theologically as if this is the 19th century. This explains some of the gap between the Christian movements going on today. The Evangelical movement has ignored Paul for the most part, in favor of the Hebrew scriptures, primarily Daniel, Genesis and Psalms and from the Christian Scriptures, part of the gospels, Revelation and James. Today’s lesson will look at Paul’s universal understanding of sin and point a direction from the 19th century straight to the 21st century. Hang on tight, this might get a little bumpy.

For Whom Christ Died #2

Human Universal - Sin

Romans 1: 18

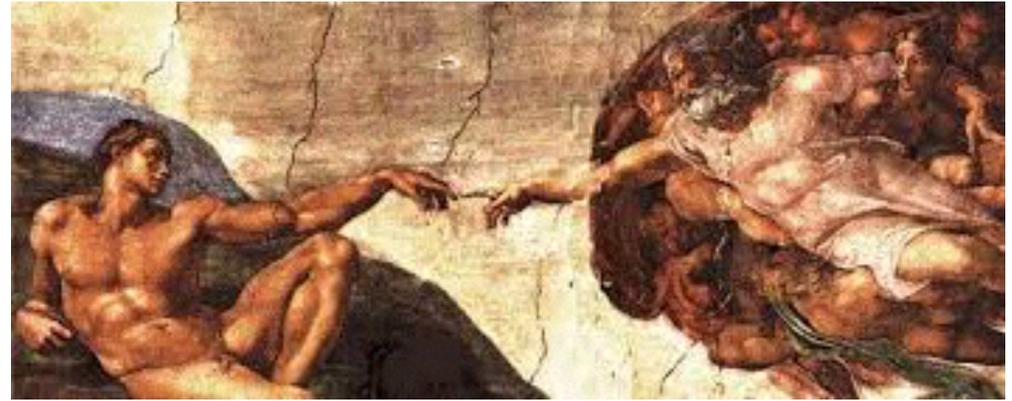
For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

Do you remember the old adage, “The only thing certain in life is death and taxes”? Well, that’s not exactly true. With verse 18, St. Paul begins to lay out his “Legal Brief” for sin as a human condition as opposed to sin as an action. Think about the law from the standpoint of the commandments, Thou shalt not... and then fill in the blank; lie, steal, kill etc. Then we memorize the ten commandments and say we know the law. Thus we say, we know sin. So sin becomes the act of lying, or the act of murder. Then we can say, well I may have lied, but at least I’m not a murderer. Or, I may have stolen from my employer, but at least I haven’t committed adultery. We get accustomed to viewing sin through observing the action, not as a person who is a sinner. And certainly not as a person who is locked into sin and cannot stop sinning. In fact it is almost impossible for us to think of ourselves as sin itself.

Enter, stage left, Paul. The truth that the ungodly and wicked are suppressing is that God is God and we are not. According to Paul, they can’t even claim ignorance because God’s, Godness is evident in all that God has made. Creation itself is proof enough that a power greater than our human selves is out there. The sin of the wicked and ungodly is in not praising and worshipping the God. They suppress the truth, by suggesting that humanity is capable of such greatness.

Now look at those next words:

“Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.



Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam"
The Sistine Chapel, 01 Nov. 1512

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.” (Rom. 1: 22- 25)

They - this is the key word. They, became fools... They, exchanged glory... They, exchanged the truth... They, the Gentiles, are everyone who is not a Jew. They, the rest of humanity, has done this. But how could they not you say? After all the Jews had the patriarchs and the stories and the voice of the prophets and the history of a God who saved them over and over again. What did the Gentiles have? How could they have known of God?

For Paul, the answer is self evident - it is creation itself. They, should have known that God was lurking about and that the greatness of creation was enough to drive them (they) to their knees. But

“They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator...” (vs. 25)

Now Paul has his Jewish audience right where he wants them. Aha, Those Gentile sinners are even worse than we thought. We were going to give them a pass on their lack of worship and just judge their actions, but the Apostle is telling us that the Gentiles should have known better from the start and so they are not just bad people they deserve God’s wrath because God was not worshiped by the Gentiles.

And then Paul writes Chapter Two verse One: **“Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.”**