



ZWTF

Sunday, December 8, 2013 Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

ROMANS ^{Part 8}

Chapter 1:18-23

Romans 1:18-23

For God's indignation is being revealed from heaven on all the irreverence and injustice of men who are retaining the truth in injustice, because that which is known of God is apparent among them, for God manifests it to them. For His invisible attributes are described from the creation of the

Romans 1:18 heralds the beginning of what I termed last week, "The Decimation." The Decimation is the indictment against the entire human race. The message is that, left to its own devices, the race goes out of its way to avoid God. Even before the advent of Christ, people rejected Him by failing to recognize Him behind His creation. Even if humanity did bump into Him on the street—or credit Him for the stars—and seek to attain His glory, it would fall miserably short. Paul begins The Decimation in Romans 1:18, and doesn't tire of it until verse twenty of chapter three. The Decimation builds in intensity.

From 1:18 to 2:16 in Romans, Paul addresses the whole world, referred to by him in 2:1 as, "O, man." (This



world, being apprehended by His achievements, besides His imperceptible power and divinity, for them to be defenseless, because, knowing God, not as God do they glorify or thank Him, but vain were they made in their reasonings, and darkened is their unintelligent heart. Alleging themselves to be wise, they are made stupid, and they change the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of an image of a corruptible human being and flying creatures and quadrupeds and reptiles.

is not sexist. The literal rendering is, "O human.") Because the Jews never put themselves in the place of "O human," (the Jews thought they were superhuman, yes, better than the rest of us), Paul calls them out by name in 2:17. Everything from 1:18 until 2:16 *also* applies to the Jews, but since Jews are so inured to their own guilt, Paul wakes them up in 2:1 with a hefty, "Lo! You are being denominated a Jew!" The Zender paraphrase would read, "Oh, so you're a Jew, eh?"

Here is a preview into one of the final notes of the crescendo, in Romans 3:19:

Now we are aware that, whatever the law is saying, it is speaking to those under the law, that every mouth may be barred, and the entire world may become subject to the just verdict of God ...

“That every mouth may be barred.” In a nutshell, this is Paul’s goal: *to shut every mouth*. A symphony is about to begin, and Paul is going to hush the house of all self-occupied noise. No cell phones, no whispering, no humming—nothing.

Have you ever attended a symphony? Minutes before the opening notes, the audience is abuzz as the musicians warm up. There are random violin strains, competing clarinet notes, trombone trills, blurps from the French horns. Then the conductor strides upon the stage. He bows to the audience, turns to his charges, then taps his baton three times upon the music stand. Now comes the hush. Now is when you can hear a pin drop.

This moment is reached, for Paul, at Romans 3:20. The end of the sentence of Romans 3:20 is the end of The Decimation and the beginning of the pin-dropping silence.

Romans 3:21 begins the Symphony.

Paul has silenced the human race, shutting it up long enough for it to hear the opening strains of the accomplishment of God. Now we shall hear what the Almighty has accomplished through His Son, for the sake of all, against the enemies of sin and death.

IT’S SO HARD TO BE QUIET

I know Paul sounds harsh, but it must be this way. People love to hum about their own accomplishments. No one can listen to God when they are pre-occupied talking about and listening to themselves. “See what I have done for you, God.” “See what I have set out to accomplish for you, Father.” “Here is why I am worthy of You, oh Lord.” “I have made You a list of the ways I am different from everyone else, dear God.”

In this section of Romans Paul is saying, “No, you are no different. Your terminus, like everyone else’s, is permanent death. Yes, even you religious people.” What good thing offered by humanity can be called “good” when the best of it falls embarrassingly short of divine perfection? Any good can only be relative.

Israelite pride requires extra swats from the plank of reality, as does every other brand of religious egotism. Religious people, more than anyone else, imagine that because they have assumed God’s name and show up regularly at His purported house, they are a special creation

deserving exemption from The Decimation. It is much harder for Paul to crack the nut of the Pharisee, therefore, than that of the standard-issue sinner.

At the outset, Paul is on a mission. He will bar every mouth if it takes him the better part of three chapters—and it does. Paul gleans no joy from wielding the accusatory lumber. How could he when he levels himself in the process? The Decimation is for the ultimate good of all. It is a favor to humans. God loves us too much to let us go our own way. Prolonged self-confidence debilitates a person. It’s hard staying afloat atop self-imposed moral challenges. Trying to be as good as God eventually exhausts a person, driving him or her to despair.

The Decimation smarts at first (it’s a shock to discover that one is just like everyone else), but when its work is done, it’s ultimately the most liberating thing one can learn. Finally silenced, one can then appreciate



the sweetest music available to mortals. It is all about the silence. With the physical silence comes silence within one’s soul and spirit. This is the goal of Paul’s verbal knockdown; the goal is only good. It is *not* mad cruelty or heinous insult; it is ultimate kindness.

When the symphony ends (at the end of Romans, chapter 8), one emerges from the hall a different person. One still wants to work and do good, but now the motivation bubbles from a new source. Rather than working and doing from the belief that one is good, inspiration now flows from loving and attending Another. It now flows from setting Christ’s life in front, rather than one’s own. Paradoxically, this gives one’s life greater value, not less. By seeing self confidence decimated, one rises from the ashes better, cleaner and clearer about everything. A true assessment of self is what brings lasting peace. Were there nothing to fill the new void, the void would be intolerable. What takes its place is a person: Jesus Christ.

Now comes the realization that the old humanity has been crucified (Romans 6). The old humanity is the proud, self-confident one. There is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) that has risen from the ash-heap of self to will and work for Another. The body is the same, the mind is the same, the soul is the same. What changes is the realization of how God now sees us. God now considers us as perfect as His Son. This occurred at the death of Christ. We become identified with a new Head of the human race: Christ. As the new Head, Christ not only performed the ultimate good, but He is the image of God and acts on God's behalf. Christ's opinion of us is God's opinion, and vice-versa.

You may think, *But if I so closely associate myself with Christ, then my personal identity becomes lost.* No. One does not become lost in that Other, but rather found. This is the new *humanity*. Christ is the Head of a multi-membered body. Picture headship as an umbrella. There are many people beneath the umbrella of Christ, protected from the elements by a higher, stronger Force. Everyone is still an individual.

The head of the old humanity was Adam; the head of the new humanity is Christ.

Christ is greater than Adam. Adam wrecks you, Christ saves you. With whom would you rather be identified?

MAGNIFICENT PERFORMANCE

Think of the last time you attended a symphony, or any concert performed by professional musicians. Maybe you fancied yourself a piano player. Then you attended the recital of a classic pianist. Initially, you felt demoralized. But then something happened. You became transformed by this other person's music. As the music continued, you fell wholesale into a magnificent performance not your own.

You left the hall pleasantly dazed. All self-delusions had fallen away. For you, it was two hours of bliss. Oddly, perhaps, the realization of another's greatness stirred rather than destroyed your desire to play. You became energized to be the best *you* could be. You knew then that you would never be as good as the master. The pure and perfect greatness of someone other than you, freed you. You would never be *the* best (what a joy to stop striving for it), but you could be the best of what *you* are. This is what the ultimate performer in your field did for you.



Our "field" under discussion is not piano playing, but how to be right before God. Christ is the top of that field. He is the only One Who lived right, and He now represents you before the Majesty. So be quiet and let Him. Or at least be quiet and hear how it was done.

The master pianist has helped you in so many ways. Christ has helped you in ways innumerable.

This paints a powerful portrait of Christ and us. This is what the cross of Calvary is supposed to do for us. It is God's greatest blessing this side of death. This is why Jesus said, "My burden is light." Before witnessing the humiliated Jesus bleeding and dying, we entertain waves of self confidence; perhaps we can please Him after all; perhaps we are not as bad as we think; perhaps now we will strain and sacrifice for Him until we move Him to bless us. After the awful event, we stagger from Golgotha, numb. What we've just witnessed has appalled us. We are stunned to silence. This is the reaction of many after viewing Mel Gibson's, *The Passion of the Christ*. They have become null and void. It is precisely how they are supposed to become, in the aftermath. It is the equivalent of Peter weeping bitterly at having betrayed his Lord. Those emerging from the movie must now know that Jesus Christ gave something they could

not possibly have given. They are designed by God to walk away saying, “God, I give up.” It is the ultimate gift of Calvary. This gift is to be enjoyed now. Start living it. Ideally, those realizing the gift will now live, not to duplicate Christ’s work, but to revel in the spirit of what He accomplished, by the spirit that He imparts.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF GOD

For God’s indignation is being revealed from heaven on all the irreverence and injustice of men who are retaining the truth in injustice, because that which is known of God is apparent among them, for God manifests it to them. For His invisible attributes are described from the creation of the world, being apprehended by His achievements, besides His imperceptible power and divinity, for them to be defenseless.

God wants to be known, but people generally only want to feel good about themselves. If they can feel good by knowing God, then so be it. God is quite a celebrity. Most humans don’t want to know God’s personality. They don’t care what makes Him tick. All that matters is that He *does* tick, and that He can help them through His major celebrity ticking. They just want to satisfy themselves. What better ally to have than God?

It’s the Norman Vincent Peale brand of Christianity: “God can be a great help to you.” Peale teaches people how to use God to help themselves. So does Joel Osteen. None of these men pine with faces to the ground to know the Majesty. Instead, they seek to build earthly kingdoms with God’s help. They want respectable cars, big houses, beautiful wives, best-selling books. They promote this sickness and call it “spiritual attainment.” Self-confidence is the sickest form of kingdom-building.

The cross has not been reached; it is not even in view.

GOD IS APPARENT

Every person on earth knows there is a God. This is what Paul means when he says, “Knowing God, not as God do they glorify or thank Him.”

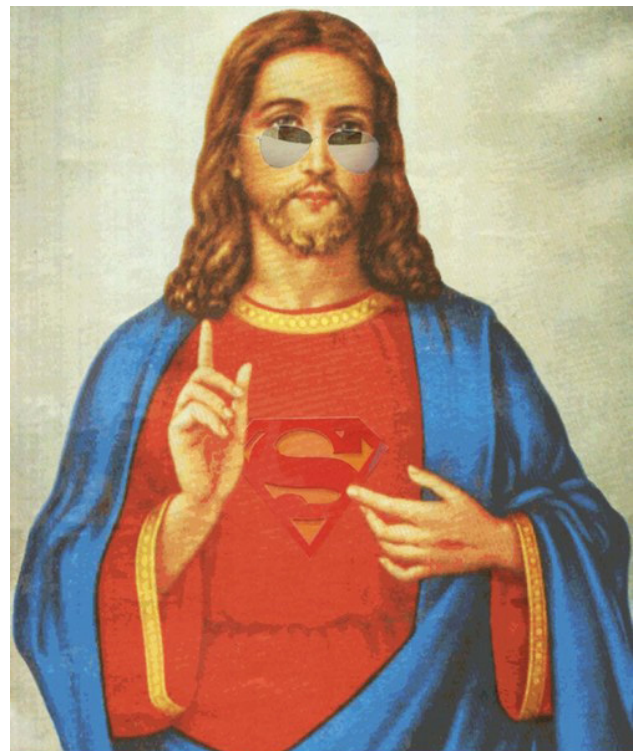
“The irreverence and injustice of humans,” means that humans do not honor Him. Rather, they use Him. God hates this. Left to its own, humanity deserves His indignation for this.

How would you like to become a movie star and have lots of new friends? It works until you discover that the only reason you have new friends is because you are

now rich and famous. Your new friends like to be seen with you; it helps other people see *them* in a better light. You buy all the drinks now. Your friends can now vacation in exotic places on your nickel. It’s trickle-down celebrity. They lyrics of the Styx song, *Too Much Time On my Hands*, say it well, “I’ve got dozens of friends and the fun never ends—that is as long as I’m buying.”

When the buying stops, so does the love.

This is how God must feel. To most people, He is a major celebrity. But when the buying stops, so does the love. Should He stop giving them their soul’s desires, these people are no longer interested. They were never in it for revelation, only stimulation. It’s the doctrine of Peale, Osteen and other like them. God hates it. His indignation sizzles over it. Who needs friends like this? Movie stars retain whatever friends pre-dated their fame, because these friends loved them as nobodies. After the star is rich and famous, he or she must forever question subsequent friends’ motives. It can’t be pleasant.



Paul’s phrase, “Retaining the truth in injustice” then, means that truth is used for personal gain.

The world’s motives are sick. Fueling the sickness are people like Peale, Robert Schuller (and his Crystal Cathedral circus cronies), Osteen and others. *What’s in it for me?* It’s all they want to know. Mary

made Jesus so happy by sitting at His feet. All she wanted was to listen to Him. She wanted only to know Him. She cared nothing for temporary advantage, Southern California sunshine, crystal, large arenas with theater seating; she cared nothing for “worship services” or soul-moving music. God and Christ love this attitude. God and Christ want to be known. But who wants to know Them?

Even before His Son came to this planet, God’s attributes shone forth in creation. This is how badly He wants to be known: Before there was any such thing as humanity, He splayed heaven with stars and planets as mute witnesses to His majesty.

OTHER KINDS OF STARS, AND SUCH

For His invisible attributes are described from the creation of the world, being apprehended by His achievements, besides His imperceptible power and divinity, for them to be defenseless.

Christians use this passage to damn people to hell. They use this passage illegally to say that people are going to hell because they have no excuse for not knowing Jesus. The argument against the Christian view goes like this: “How can my brother Billy be going to hell for never believing in Jesus Christ? He never

“One cannot look at the Big Dipper and be saved from sin and death.”

even heard about Jesus Christ.” The Christian rebuttal is that no one has an excuse because anyone can see that there is a God by soaking up the marvels of creation: the trees, the planets, the daffodils, the sperm whale, cytoplasm, the double helix.

“Your brother Billy is going to hell,” they say, “because he *did* know there was a God, but did not thank Him as God.”

The flaw with this argument is that salvation comes by believing a declaration of God concerning Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). One cannot look at the Big Dipper—or even marvel at it—and be saved from sin and death. What does the Big Dipper say about Jesus? Nothing. But the Christians contend that an Aborigine in the deepest bush is hell-bound because he “rejected Jesus Christ.” How has he rejected Jesus Christ? By failing to acknowledge the Creator of the stars? By failing to see a Mind behind the mango he eats for lunch? By never looking to heaven in thanks when his boomerang “mi-

raculously” returns every time he throws it? Yet, according to the Christians, *had* the bushman appreciated these things, God would have reckoned the realization as saving faith. But again, salvation has to do with believing in Jesus Christ as one’s Savior. Even the Christians say this. In fact, they insist upon it. So my question is: How can crediting God with the creation of a mango—surely one of His greatest achievements—impart to one a working knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior from sin?

► Aborigine picks mango.

► Aborigine caresses mango.

► Aborigine looks up from mango, gazes into heaven and says, “Amazing. Someone named Jesus Christ must have died on a cross in Jerusalem in accord with the prophets, especially Isaiah, and saved me from eonian death.”

► Bystander says, “How you know that?”

► Aborigine says, “From mango.”

No, not really. It doesn’t work that way. Neither the boomerang, nor the stars, nor the mango can do this. Salvation comes only through a recognition of Jesus Christ, which can come only from a God-given faith in a message that includes Jesus Christ’s accomplishment. A mango can’t do this, and neither can Jupiter. Any other approach to God is doomed. This is Paul’s point. *Everyone* avoids God. (He will be driving to this very statement, unleashed in 3:11—“All avoid Him.”) Even the person who has no knowledge, specifically, about God (a person not as advantaged as the Jew), is doomed because God speaks daily in creation.

Even atheists know this, yet they deny it. Deep down, an atheist’s doubt of the Deity is inexcusable. It’s not even true. There is no person on earth so calloused as to look at creation and not know there is a God. (“*Knowing* God, not as God do they glorify or thank Him.”) No one is *that* calloused, or that stupid. People are calloused and stupid, just not *that* calloused and stupid. This inherent wisdom has to be trained out of a person through human philosophy. This is precisely what happens. It happens on a daily basis in our universities. This is why I distrust and even hate our universities. Philosophy can occlude and fog the innate wisdom testifying to the existence of God, yes, but it can never bury it. It forces one to continually deny it. The truth of God’s existence lies in the breast of everyone. Why do I believe this? Because Paul says that the presence of creation makes everyone defenseless (1:20).

There is a God.

Paul's point is not that some people will be deemed irreparable for eternity ("damned") because they looked at the stars and failed to recognize His hand. His point is that even the people who don't think they are irreparable for eternity, *are* irreparable for eternity.—apart from Christ. People who already think they're irreparable for eternity are not the problem. These are honest people. They're like the sinner Jesus encountered who beat his breast and said, "Lord, be merciful to me, a lousy sinner." This person, of course, is contrasted with the self-righteous Pharisee congratulating himself for not being like the lousy sinner.



Before the opening strains of The Symphony (that is, Romans 3:21), Paul needs to shut two types of mouths. He needs to shut the proud, worldly mouth, and the proud religious mouth. The proud worldly mouth gets shut by pointing to creation and saying, "You always knew there was a God, but you loved your own wisdom more than His." The religious mouth is shut by saying, "You had more than the stars to look at, you had the Scriptures themselves, and the presence of the Word in your life. But instead of rejoicing in this as a way to sit at God's feet and learn of Him, you used it as a badge of *self* righteousness and lorded your advantage over other people to increase your advantage and credit yourself for salvation, even while claiming it was Jesus. This actually makes you worse than the 'ho-hum-it's-a-planet-with-a-ring-around-it-so-what' atheist guy."

Paul's whole point here is that no one can save himself, especially not the person who *thinks* he can save himself.

OOPS, STUPIDITY

Keeping in mind Paul's goal of shutting every mouth will advance you light years in grasping the first three chapters of this book. Between Romans 1:18 and 3:20, Paul dooms everyone. At 3:21 he delivers them.

Paul sums up the indictment against humanity with this saying: "Alleging themselves to be wise, they are made stupid."

"Stupid." This is Paul's word, not mine. If only these people had realized from the beginning that they were stupid. That's what the stars are supposed to do to you. You're supposed to look at the stars and realize how stupid you are in comparison, as in, "I could not have made those. There must be Someone big up there." This could occur even before the cross of Calvary made you extra-realize how dumb you were. You're supposed to watch the throat of a frog bloat and realize how stupid you are. You're supposed to wonder at the marvel of a puppy's tail wagging, and realize how stupid you are. But no. People are too proud for that. They look at creation and are somehow unimpressed. If they are impressed, they credit it to a Big Bang. (This is not God's name.) So taken are they with their own glory, they're anesthetized to the glory of God. The sun miraculously appears over the eastern horizon every day; a giant, glowing ball of deadly hydrogen stands alone in the middle of nowhere with not a single string attached, keeping us all alive. *Yawn.* All people can think about is, *How can I get to work on time? How can I make more money so that I eventually get my name attached some day to a wing of this building I detest driving to Monday through Friday?*

If only people would become stupid. But no. Because they think they are wise, they become stupider than stupid, which is to say: *stupid.*

UNIVERSITY USA

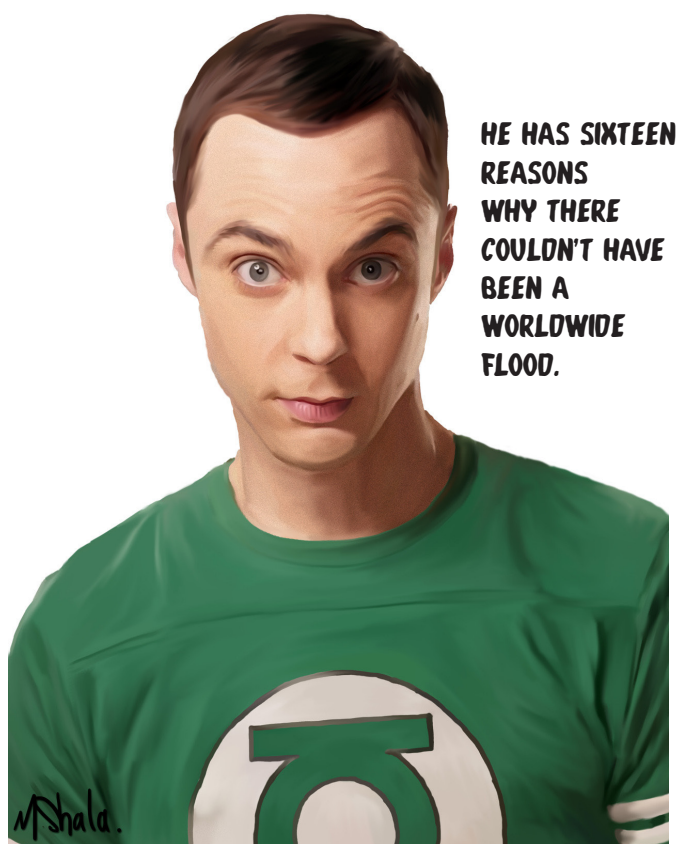
Chances are good that college kids will become philosophers rather than believers. In college classrooms, students learn that God isn't so hot after all. Human wisdom is to be desired over God's wisdom. This is the way of "advanced" education. *Look what humans have done, is the teaching. God is kind of dumb. He has people build big boats, get swallowed by big fish, and then He attempts to save the world by means of a naked, crucified man claiming to be the King of Everything.* The professors at the college are too smart for that, so they wear purple robes and decorate one

another with medals, then teach kids that God lies for a living.

“Alleging themselves to be wise, they are made stupid.”

See how much the robe and medals don't work.

This is also the indictment against Israel, except Israel actually *is* wise in that she obtained and imbibed of the sacred Writings. Like Osteen, Schuller, Peale and others, however, she uses these Writings to enhance her own résumé. John 3:16 becomes, for Israel, an avenue to delicious worldly treasure. This is worse stupidity than the college person who, graduating with honors, thinks he or she has outsmarted God Almighty.



“Vain were they made in their reasonings, and darkened is their unintelligent heart.”

Instead of believing God, college professors and students reason about Him. A professor with a doctorate in b.s. hears about Noah's ark, for instance, and says, “Well, *that* can't be, because ...” and he's got sixteen reasons why there could not have been a worldwide flood, and why a man and his family could not have built a giant boat. God says clearly that it happened (He describes the activity in detail), but the professor (via his many diplomas) says it didn't happen because, “it doesn't make sense,” and so on

and so forth, so that settles it for him.

“You see, it couldn't have been, because ...” and in come the excuses. There are hundreds of them, including the improbability of gathering so many animals; how did Noah insulate the boat; where did all the water come from; we've never seen such a thing—and on it goes. This is reasoning. Reasoning is the opposite of believing. This upsets God. God loves to be believed, not reasoned about. He hates being doubted. Unfortunately for God, humans have diplomas and He doesn't. God never went to the University of Aren't We Something. The University of Aren't We Something trains innate spiritual wisdom right out of a kid. Out it goes down the fleshy corridors of the young brain.

It also costs a lot of money to make this happen.

FINANCIAL ADVICE

I advise you not to send your kids to college. I stick with what I say, even though it may mean saving all your money and taking a Hawaiian vacation with your wife. Why gamble with your children's future? The university is likely to ruin them, spiritually. If they really want to go, be a good parent and let them. Support them. Just let them finance it themselves.

I was blessed in that I could not afford to send any of my kids to college. I told them soon after birth, “If you want to go to college, you will have to earn your way along.” I was more than willing to follow through, since I didn't really want them going anyway. This is not to say I am not proud of my son Paul, who is doing very well at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio. Paul has managed to dodge the philosophy. It may help that it's a Christian college, although the risk here is becoming a religious unbeliever. Paul has dodged this as well. He is a true believer. He's in his junior year, and resisting all attempts at brainwashing. There are good people at this school. Paul concentrates on good grades and throwing baseballs at a high velocity. So there you have it. Even if something bad had happened and Paul became a reasoner-about-Godder, I would niftily dodge responsibility; I raised him in the truth and made him work for the risk of deception. As it turns out, college is a great experience for him. Everyone is different. Thank God I was a humdinger of a dad, is all I can say. I do help Paul financially when I can, but I don't bankroll him. I wouldn't, even if I could.

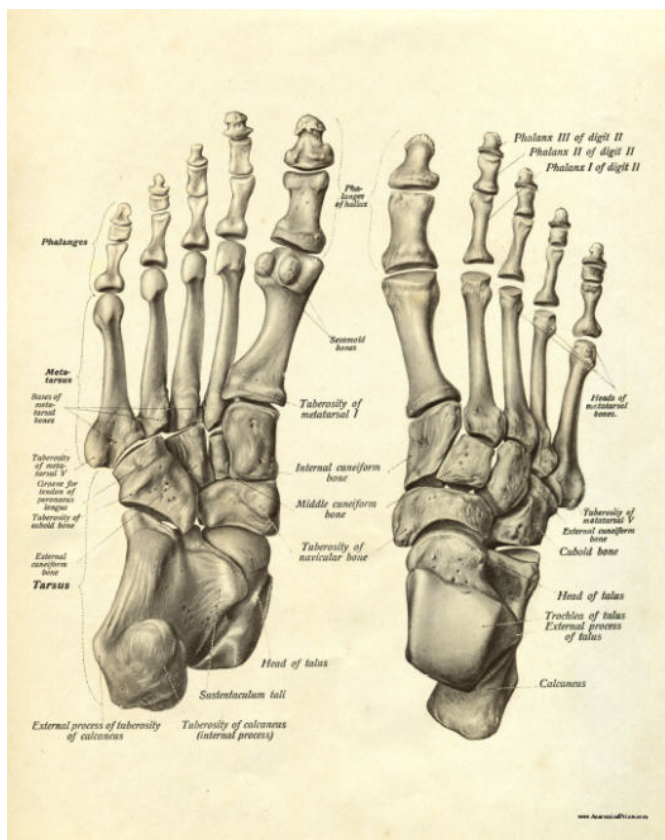
Philosophy is simply too seductive (Colossians 2:8).

ALTERED GLORY

They change the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of an image of a corruptible human being and flying creatures and quadrupeds and reptiles.

This is sheer idolatry. Preempting next week's installment, I will quote verse 25: "They offer divine service to the creature rather than the Creator."

So stupid have people become via so many subtle and diabolical means, that the people think the creature is to be admired above the Creator. Talk about needing your glasses fixed. To them, a Creator does not even exist. Con-



sider the agnostic podiatrist: He attends college to study the human foot. All they care about at the college is this: the human foot. The agnostic learns every tendon, bone, and strand of connecting tissue of the human foot. The human foot is a marvelous creation of God, but this particular agnostic podiatrist never thanks God for it. "Not as God do they glorify or thank Him." To him, it's just a foot. It's a way he can make money, earn society's respect, and attract women on Match.com who insist that their

future mate earn over \$100K. The only thing he thanks God for is that feet regularly grow bunions. He thanks God, not for the human foot, but for the ingrown toenail that keeps his Ferrari running. Very well then. The stupidity is that this agnostic podiatrist worships the created thing rather than the Creator of the thing.

This is so stupid. (Again, Paul's word, not mine.)
 "Not as God do they thank or glorify Him."

The idolatry does not stop with either worshipping feet, various animals, flying creatures, or crawling things. Listen to this: "They change the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of an image of a corruptible human being." This entire phrase is a euphemism for human free will. (Euphemisms usually are longer, word-wise, than the literal fact.) And it isn't much of a euphemism, either.

Free will thanks God in vain. In other words, the thanks is false. I am speaking of the Christian doctrine of human free will. Why thank God for salvation when you base your salvation on the exercise of your sovereign will? You may thank Him with your lips, but your heart is far from Him. Christians have changed the glory of God (part of His glory is the exercise of His sovereign will) into their own magnificent sublimity. They have endowed corruptible human beings with a power that bests God's. God wants and wills to save people, but if people will and want otherwise (to be away from Him, let's say), then the human will trumps the divine. This is rank idolatry. It also *rank*s as idolatry. It is not thanking God as God.

Apart from the symphony of the sacrifice of Christ, these people, too, would be doomed forever. Christian mouths, especially, must be shut. Since they are not shut (the Christians still babble and bark concerning their untrammelled wills), the indignation of God remains. It honestly does. They will yet hear the symphony—just not here. They will hear it several thousand years from now, at the Great White Throne judgment. They will shut up then; you watch and see.

I am getting so tired of living on this planet. I don't belong here.

All will be saved—even Christians—but not until the consummation of the eons (1 Corinthians 15:22-28).

Don't get discouraged. That's *my* job. We're in this together. ■ —MZ