

Biblical Notes — Romans 1:18-23

18-23 – For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, [19] because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. [20] For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. [21] For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. [22] Professing to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (18).

Αποκαλύπτεται γάρ ὥργὴ Θεοῦ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν καὶ ἀδικίαν ἀνθρώπων τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ κατεχόντων, 1.9 διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὁ θεὸς γάρ αὐτοῖς ἐφανέρωσεν. 20. τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα καθορᾶται, ἡ τε ἀίδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θειότης, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους, 21. διότι γνόντες τὸν Θεὸν οὐχ ὡς Θεὸν ἐδόξασαν ἡ ηύχαριστησαν, ἀλλὰ ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία. 22. φάσκοντες εἶναι σοφοὶ ἐμωράνθησαν, 23. καὶ ἥλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου Θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνος φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πετεινῶν καὶ τετραπόδων καὶ ἐρπετῶν.

"All men know and hence believe that God exists. The relational evidence is so plain that nobody can avoid holding the conviction that God exists, even though they may never explicitly assent to this belief. We are justified in ascribing such a belief to men on the basis of their observed behavior in reasoning (e.g., relying on the uniformity of nature), in morals (e.g., holding to ethical absolutes in some fashion), and in emotion (e.g., fearing death). Nevertheless, all men are motivated in unrighteousness and by fear of judgment to ignore, hide, and disavow any belief in the living and true God (either through atheism or false religiosity). By misconstruing and rationalizing the relevant, inescapable evidence around them ("suppressing it"), men bring themselves to believe about themselves that they do not believe in God, even though that second-order belief is false. Sinners can purposely engage in this kind of activity, for they also deceive themselves about their motivation in handling the evidence as they do and about their real intentions, which are not noble or rational at all. Thereby they "go to sleep" (as it were), forgetting their God. Because the evidence is clear, and because the suppression of the truth is intentional, we can properly conclude that all men are "without excuse" and bear full responsibility for their sins of mind, speech, and conduct. Given the elaboration of self-deception offered here, we can better appreciate what Paul says in Romans 1, namely, that "knowing God," all men "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." And we can assert non-paradoxically that unbelievers culpably deceive themselves about their Maker."

— Greg Bahnsen, The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception in Presuppositional Apologetics (Westminster Theological Journal LVII, 1995), 1-31.

"Perhaps Romans 1:18-23 remains the most important passage on this issue in the Scripture. This passage demonstrates the human need for a relational epistemology if he is to avoid epistemological futility." — Jonathan A. Daniel, The Presuppositional Hermeneutic: An Argument for Interpreting and Preaching the Bible with Authority. PhD dissertation presented to the Faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019, 20.

"In Paul's mind, this section on the Jews does not move on to the next logical development, but it actually develops the logical implications of these truths for the Jews. For Paul, Romans 1:18-23 has universal significance, and it should not be limited to the Gentiles."

— Jonathan A. Daniel, The Presuppositional Hermeneutic: An Argument for Interpreting and Preaching the Bible with Authority. PhD dissertation presented to the Faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019, 32.

"Aquinas interpreted Romans 1:18ff as indicating men could come to know about God's existence by their natural powers of reasoning. Van Til, on the other hand, says that men already know God and use their rational capacities to suppress this knowledge."

— Turner, Van Til and Romans 1:18-21, 56n36.