**“Cause and Result of Unthankfulness. Romans 1:21” The Signs of the Times, 15, 25.**

E. J. Waggoner

**Romans 1:21.**

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruption. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves; who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.” {SITI July 1, 1889, p. 295.196}

In the two preceding articles upon this portion of Scripture, we have seen that the Sabbath, when kept in the way that God designed that it should be kept, is the thing by which we show our knowledge of the true God, and which tends to increase that knowledge, so that it stands as the one great safeguard against idolatry. It follows, then, as has been shown, that the heathen who became so by not glorifying the Creator as God when they knew him, lost that knowledge by departing from his Sabbath. {SITI July 1, 1889, p. 295.197}

There is another expression which should be noticed in this connection. It is the phrase, “neither were thankful.” The apostle states that their darkness and degradation were due to the fact that when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful. Unthankfulness to God tends to the commission of the greatest sins. Let us see how this is. When men do not thank God for his goodness and mercy shown, it is an evidence that they have no just conception of him. No one who realizes the love of God, as shown even in creation alone, can fail to express love and gratitude to the Creator. And this will bring him in still closer relation to God, for God will reveal himself to such an one still more. But when a person does not thank God for life and breath and all things which are enjoyed at his hand, it is an evidence that he does not regard God as the giver of these things. He does not, in fact, glorify God as God. He has separated himself from God by his ingratitude, and is necessarily left to himself and to the commission of all the evils to which human nature is subject. {SITI July 1, 1889, p. 295.198}

Too much importance cannot be attached to the words of the psalmist, “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.” A continual expression of thanks to God is no more than justice demands, for he is continually bestowing blessings. The continual exercise of thankfulness keeps in mind the blessings and their Giver, and thus brings the soul nearer to God. So Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” {SITI July 1, 1889, p. 295.199}

This is not a mere matter for theorizing concerning the heathen, but is a practical question for every Christian. The Christian who does not continually thank God for his mercies in whatever condition he may be, is in a dangerous position. According to the apostle’s words just quoted, no prayer should be offered without thanksgiving; but this does not mean simply thanksgiving for something received in the past. It means thanksgiving for the blessings asked for in the prayer; the giving of thanks for them even before they have been received. Unless this thanksgiving accompanies the petition there can, indeed, be no blessing received; because nothing can be received without faith, and thanksgiving is an indication of the possession of faith. Take the words of Christ, recorded in Mark 11:24: “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Note that the receiving of the things is contingent upon believing that we have them. It is our faith that makes them real to us; but if a person greatly desires a thing and is fully persuaded that he has it, surely thanksgiving to the one who has brought it to him is the most natural thing to follow. But how can he believe that he has it?-Why, he has simply the promise of the Lord, who cannot lie, that if we ask we shall receive. What stronger evidence can be desired? {SITI July 1, 1889, p. 295.200}

Take an illustration of our application of this scripture. Here is a poor man who is in great need of food for his family. After suffering the pangs of hunger for some time he goes to a wealthy farmer who is noted for his generosity, and makes known his want. The man responds at once to this appeal for help, and says to his poor neighbor, “I will give you a sack of flour which stands in my store-house. Take this key, and go and help yourself.” Now what would be the first impulse of that poor man?-Why, it would be to thank his benefactor. What for?-For the flour. But he has not received any yet. No; but his confidence in the man’s word leads him to believe that the flour is his, and he thanks him first, and then goes and gets it. {SITI July 1, 1889, p. 295.201}

Surely the Christian should express no less confidence in the promise of God that he delights to give good things to his children, and will grant grace to help in time of need; and when he has once made his request should accompany that request with thanksgiving that God is so liberal. This is an evidence of faith, with which alone God is pleased; but if the petitioner, after making his request, says, “Now I will wait and see if this is granted; and if it is I will thank God,” he will never offer thanks, for his course is an evidence that his petition was not offered in faith. Surely, then, it is a good thing to give thanks unto God; and since thanksgiving is so absolutely necessary for the Christian, we may well understand how a neglect to thank God for his mercies, leads to forgetfulness of God as the giver of mercies; and finally into all the abominations into which the heathen sank. E. J. W. {SITI July 1, 1889, p. 295.202}

**“Vain in Their Imaginations. Romans 1:21” The Signs of the Times, 15, 26.**

E. J. Waggoner

**Romans 1:21.**

Closely connected with the lack of thankfulness which the heathen manifested, was an exaltation of self. The apostle states that “they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” {SITI July 8, 1889, p. 295.203}

Forgetfulness of God, which is indicated by an unthankful spirit, is necessarily accompanied with an exalted idea of self. In the proportion that men cease to acknowledge God, they take to themselves the honor that should be given to God. Becoming vain in their imaginations, or their reasoning, their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. This is the history of all who have gone into sin, from Satan in Heaven to the last sinner on earth. {SITI July 8, 1889, p. 295.204}

Let us trace the course. In the 18th chapter of Ezekiel there is unmistakable reference made to Satan, in the expression “King of Tyrus.” To none other will the description in verses 12-15 apply. Satan and not the literal king of Tyre was the cherub that covered the throne of God. He, and not the king of Tyre, had been in Eden, the garden of God; he it was who sealed “up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.” Of him it is said, verse 17 “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness.” How this was done is described by the prophet in Isaiah 14:12-14, which reads thus: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” {SITI July 8, 1889, p. 295.205}

From this we may learn that becoming vain in his imagination, because of his beauty and wisdom and majesty, he imagined that he had them by his own power, instead of being dependent upon God for them. He aspired to be equal with God, or even above God; but that was an impossibility, and since he persisted in his determination, it necessarily resulted in a total separation between him and God. Instead of being subject to God, he stood in open rebellion; and being in open rebellion against the source of light and knowledge, and goodness and mercy, he necessarily went into darkness, and ignorance, and all evil. Thus his wisdom was corrupted by reason of his brightness. By his vain imagination he separated himself from God, and lost everything. {SITI July 8, 1889, p. 295.206}

It was in the same way that Satan caused our first parents to fall. Coming to Eve, he appealed to her pride, and attempted to make her dissatisfied with God by making it appear that she had not been treated with the consideration due so superior a being as she was. With affected surprise he asked, “Is it true that God has said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” As much as to say, “Is it possible that God would so circumscribe a being of such beauty and power?” and then in reply to Eve’s statement of the prohibition that God had laid upon them, and the penalty for transgression, he replied: “Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods [literally, like God] knowing good and evil.” Virtually he said to her, “God is trying to keep you in ignorance of your wonderful capabilities. You are in reality equal with God, and all that is necessary to make you like him, is to assert your liberty, and throw off the yoke that he has placed upon you. You have in yourself the life, so that you cannot die; and therefore you are in all respects equal with God.” By means of this falsehood he deceived her, and the vain imagination with which he filled her heart caused her to fall. {SITI July 8, 1889, p. 295.207}

Just so it was with the heathen, who, when they knew God, glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations. They arrogated to themselves attributes which belonged to God alone; particularly the quality of immortality. God reveals himself to us as the living God. His great characteristic is the possession of life, and the power to create and give life; but the heathen looked at their own powers, at their intellectual activity, and could not conceive of any being in the universe greater than they were. They could not imagine that such minds as theirs could ever cease to act, and so they concluded that they had an indestructible principle within themselves. Not only that, but having adopted the idea that the soul is naturally immortal, and survives the death of the body, they logically concluded that it existed prior to the existence of the body, virtually making the soul self-existent. {SITI July 8, 1889, p. 295.208}

This being the case, they felt no dependence upon God; for the sole claim which God has upon us is in the fact that he has created us. If we had created ourselves, and could exist without the direct power of God, we would be answerable to nobody but ourselves. Therefore, with their ideas of their immortality, it was most natural for them to conclude that they were their own judges, that they were a law unto themselves, and that the desires and impulses of their own natures were simply a manifestation of the divine Spirit within them. Then followed naturally the result: “They became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God” into the most degraded objects, and gave way to the most abominable, licentious practices. It could not be otherwise. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” “From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.” Mark 7:21, 22. These things are natural to every human heart, and when men in the pride of their hearts had separated themselves from God, and had taken their own impulses as the rule of their life, it invariably followed that they should sink into sin and degradation. {SITI July 8, 1889, p. 295.209}

As to the truthfulness of Paul’s description of the heathen, in the first chapter of Romans, there can be no question. The testimony of ancient heathen writers themselves confirms it. Licentiousness of every description was not only permitted by the law, but was practiced alike by the common people and philosophers, and was even enjoined upon the people as a religious duty. The temples of the heathen were houses of debauchery. The gods which they manufactured for their worship, as Jupiter and Venus, were simply the reflection of their own evil natures; and since they thus deified the lusts of their own hearts, it was inevitable that they should sink into deeper sin. {SITI July 8, 1889, p. 295.210}

They did not at once become fools intellectually. The ancient Greeks and Romans were highly intelligent, even while abominably licentious idolaters. It was indeed their wisdom that caused them to forget God and put themselves in his place. Yet in the course of centuries the effect of continued vice must naturally be to debase the intellect, until we find mankind degenerated even below the level of the brute, both morally and spiritually, and scarcely equal to them intellectually. Yet the word “fools” as used in Romans 1:21, 22 is used in the sense in which it is used by the psalmist when he says, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” There is no such thing, strictly speaking, as an atheist. Everyone believes in a god of some kind, and the infidel who professes to believe in no God at all, makes himself God, and worships himself. {SITI July 8, 1889, p. 295.211}

We often hear it said that the scenes of cruelty and vice that were enacted by the heathen in their worship and in their social life are not possible in this enlightened age; but such persons forget that the civilization of Greece and Rome was fully equal to that of Europe and America, if not superior; yet the people were heathen, and most abominable was their idolatry. But like causes produce like effects. If their unthankful, vain imaginations, because of their great inventions, lifted them up so that they entirely separated themselves from God, and were left to work out the evils that were in their own natures, the same thing will occur now under the same circumstances. The possession of intellectual activity is no safeguard against immortality, when the Giver of that intellect is forgotten. The only guard against the grossest immorality is a humble acknowledgment of God. E. J. W. {SITI July 8, 1889, p. 295.212}