

The Consequences of Gentile Apostasy (vv. 21-32)

The Formulation of Idolatry (vv. 21-23)

VERSE 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks (διότι γνόντες τὸν θεὸν οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν ἢ ἠὲχαρίστησαν [*conj. dioti* “For even” + *aor.act.part.nom.m.p. ginosko* know + *d.a.w/noun acc.m.s. theos* + *neg ouk* + *conj hos* as + *noun acc.m.s. theos* + *aor.act.ind.3p. doxazo* glorify, honor + *part. e or, neither* + *aor.act.ind.3p. ercharisteo* thank; “give thanks”], **but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened** [ἀλλ’ ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία [*conj alla* but + *aor.pass.ind.3p. mataioomai* be futile; only here + *prep en* + *d.a.w/noun loc.m.p. dialogiomos* reasoning; “speculations” + *pro.gen.m.p. autos* “their” + *conj kai* + *aor.pass.ind.3p. skotizomai* become darkened + *d.a.w/adj.nom.f.s. asunetos* dull; without understanding; foolish + *pro.gen.m.p. autos* + *noun nom.f.s. kardia* heart]).

VERSE 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools (φάσκοντες εἶναι σοφοὶ ἐμωράνθησαν [*pres.act.part.nom.m.p. phasko* claim, allege; “Professing” + *pres.act.infin. eimi* + *adj.nom.m.p. sophos* wise + *aor.pass.ind.3p. moraino* become tasteless; as in *Matt. 5:13* make foolish; here and in *1 Cor. 1:20*]),

VERSE 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 (καὶ ἥλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνοσ φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πετεινῶν καὶ τετραπόδων καὶ ἔρπετῶν [*conj. kai* + *aor.act.ind.3p. allasso* change; exchange; *Acts 6:14*; *1 Cor. 15:51, 52*; *Gal. 4:20*; *Heb. 1:12* + *d.a.w/noun acc.f.s. doxa* glory + *d.a.w/adj.gen.m.s. aphthartos* imperishable, immortal; incorruptible; *1 Cor. 9:25*;

15:52; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:4, 23; 3:4 + noun gen.m.s. *theos* + prep *en* + noun loc.nt.s. *omoioima* likeness; “an image” + noun gen.f.s. *eikon* image; “form”; alternate translation: “in the likeness of an image...” + adj.gen.m.s. *phthartos* perishable, subject to decay; “corruptible”; 1 Cor. 9:25; 15:53, 54; 1 Pet. 1:18, 23 + noun gen.m.s. *anthropos* + conj *kai* + adj.gen.nt.p. *peteinon* bird + conj *kai* + adj.gen.nt.p. *tetrapoun* four-footed animal + conj *kai* + noun gen.nt.p. *herpeton* reptile]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 21-23

1. In these verses Paul succinctly presents the upshot of Gentile repudiation of natural theology—that is, the universal revelation of the all-powerful Creator.
2. The pattern following the Tower of Babel episode, and the dispersion of the many languages into separate societies and nations, was reprobation of that which “was clearly seen” (v. 20).
3. This rendered people everywhere “without excuse”—hence the indictment of Gentile civilization.
4. Here in these verses Paul now addresses what they did with what they logically knew to be true.
5. The post-diluvian civilization devolved into paganism.
6. The pseudo deities were the product of their imagination under demon influence.
7. Heathenism is **not** a primeval religion from which mankind was evolving leading to monotheism.
8. Rather, it is the result of a falling away from the truth about God ascertained by observing the physical creation.
9. All humans reach a state called God-conscious.
10. So the heathen are not heathen because they never knew better, but because they knew and repudiated the Creator.
11. Paul asserts that they knew God but refused to acknowledge Him (v. 21a).
12. He expresses it as: “they did not honor His as God or give thanks.”
13. To honor Him would be that they accepted the implications of natural theology.
14. Had they done so, they would have glorified Him but affirming His divine person and invisible attributes with special emphasis on omnipotence.
15. Following this mass repudiation, Paul presents a description of the ensuing religious degeneracy (v. 21b).
16. The words “they became futile (or vain) in their speculations/imaginings” refers to the formulation of false deities.
17. In other words, they made this up apart from any empirical evidence.
18. This they did, in violation of the logical principle of cause and effect.
19. The question as to how all this come into existence demands a designer with unlimited power and wisdom.
20. Truth rejected leads to speculation regarding the external creation.
21. The corollary to engaging in vain speculations is that “their foolish/stupid heart (sing for collective humanity) was darkened.”

22. We call this the blackout of the soul.
23. When light (truth) is rejected darkness enters the heart.
24. In v. 22 Paul says that “professing to be wise, they became fools.”
25. This is an acute (and succinct) analysis of the pretensions of pagan inventors of evil and their followers in all the nations.
26. V. 23 advances the observation of pagan delusion by informing the reader that there was a deliberate exchange of truth for error.
27. This monstrosity was the product of their negative volition at God-consciousness.
28. They deliberately “exchanged (aor.act.ind.3p. *allasso*) the glory of God (what could be know about the divine essence) of the incorruptible God” for that which is “corruptible” (that is, perishable).
29. The “incorruptible God” is a reference to the divine attribute of immutability (I).
30. Jam. 1:17 “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation of shifting shadow.”
31. They willfully exchanged the incorruptible for the corruptible.
32. Or put another way, they gave up the divine attributes for a ridiculous image from the lower creation.
33. These lifeless images made by human hands were worshipped and served as if they had any positive attributes.
34. Finite creatures subject to physical death were substituted for God’s glory.
35. Images of perishable or corruptible man were set up in elaborate temples along with a priesthood to bind the people in darkness.
36. Not content with the worship of images of men and women, they even worshiped images of “birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures (reptiles and insects).
37. The prophet Isaiah mocked this insanity (Isa. 44:9-20).
38. Idolatry in all its forms is forbidden in the WOG, since no idol can do justice the perfections of deity.