

Romans 1 and Total Depravity in Calvinism

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Paul writes in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

"For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed 'from faith to faith.'" This verse is important because it identifies the purpose of the power of the gospel as it is both experienced and then lived out in the life of the new born believer. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to EVERYONE who believes. Believing in the provisions and the promises of God brings salvation to the lost sinner. The gospel of Christ IS the power of God unto salvation. These words are themselves life to those who hear them and believe. (Proverbs 4:22, John 5:63)

In verses 18 and following, Paul focuses his attention on God's wrath on unrighteousness.

Paul writes, "18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. Notice something very interesting. Paul says that the unrighteous "suppress the truth" because "what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them." This presents some very serious problems for the total depravity/inability position and regeneration solution to man's plight as a sinner in need of conversion. First of all, suppressing the truth is a conscious choice made on man's part and one that is made in light of the truth that has been made manifest to them by God Himself. This would serve to support the statement in Genesis 3:22 where God said, "man has become like us 'knowing good and evil'." Total depravity and inability maintains that man has no ability in himself or on his own to "know good" nor to choose good because all good things come from God and apart from His grace being bestowed on the unregenerate, he can only know and choose evil. In Romans 1:18 Paul says man "suppresses the truth that has been made known to him by God Himself."

In regeneration, God gives man a new heart and a new nature that allows him to know the truth and to respond to that truth in repentance and believing faith. This response to the newly regenerated being is irresistible and in fact the only response that he can make. He cannot choose to do otherwise. A serious problem with this concept is highlighted in Romans 1:19. God has made Himself known to men. That is crystal clear in this passage.

One could argue that this is the result of his being created in the image of God. Nowhere in the Bible is it ever said that God stopped making man in His own image. The Bible does say that man now has a sinful nature that is the direct result of Adam's sin in the garden but nothing is ever said that man is no longer made in the image of God. If man does indeed have this created nature and an acquired secondary sinful nature, then it is certainly possible that God has made Himself known through this created nature that every person has and man's acquired or secondary nature "suppresses that truth in unrighteousness." In either case, this passage certainly casts doubt on the total depravity/inability and regeneration process as presented in Reformed Theology.

Continuing, "20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." Paul writes an interesting statement here: "His invisible attributes are 'clearly seen'." That which is invisible is everything but clearly seen. However, with God all things are possible and He has Himself made Himself known to sinful man. That is what the text clearly says.

Once again, this passage is especially problematic for the Calvinistic position on irresistible grace because Paul clearly says the person who has been enlightened by God Himself and understands those things, is without excuse. These men know God but do not glorify Him as God nor are they thankful and they have become "futile in their thoughts." Notice his statement in verse 22, "Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things." Paul says, "they BECOME futile in their thoughts and they BECAME fools." Their spiritual condition is the result of the ramifications of the choices they have made concerning the claims of Christ revealed to them in the gospel. There are consequences to the choices men make! They are not fools BECAUSE of the limitations on their choices; they become fools because of their choices.

Look at verse 23; "they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things." These are the choices these unrighteous men made. Look at verse 24; "24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." THEREFORE, because of what has already taken place, "God gave them up to uncleanness." If they were totally depraved as Calvinism contends, there would be no need for God to "give them up" because the Calvinist truth is God had no plan or provision for the salvation of the non-elect in the first place. This is extremely troubling.

Verses 26 and 27 say, “26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” Again God would not be giving up the guy who had no chance of redemption. The text clearly says that these individuals “received in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” Clearly these individuals are going to face consequences for their choices.

Finally Paul writes in Verse 28: “28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.” Once again there is no need for God to give the unregenerate in the Calvinist scheme over to a debased or depraved mind. If he is already spiritually dead, blind and deaf this passage makes no sense. Understand something, according to verse 32 these men “know the judgment of God” but reject Him all the same and are deserving of death.

The truth is man is responsible in his response to the gospel. He is responsible for what He does with God’s special revelation of Who He is and what it is that He wants to do in a person’s heart as God reaches out to the lost through the power of His Word and the reconciling, convicting work of the Holy Spirit in the unrepentant heart. To continue to refuse the offer of grace to be saved carries with it serious consequences as laid out in these few verses in Romans 1.