

# Romans 1:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

## Analysis

**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.**

Paul traces the devolution from knowledge to idolatry. Dioti gnontes ton theon ouch hōs theon edoxasan (διότι γνόντες τὸν θεὸν οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν, 'because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God'). Gnontes (γνόντες, knowing) is an aorist participle—they possessed real knowledge of God. Yet ouch hōs theon edoxasan (they did not glorify Him as God)—they refused to honor, worship, or acknowledge Him. Ἐ εὐχαριστήσαν (ἢ ἡὐχαρίστησαν, nor were thankful) adds ingratitude to irreverence. Worship and gratitude are the proper human responses to the Creator; their absence is cosmic treason.

The consequence: alla emataiōthēsan en tois dialogismois autōn (ἀλλὰ ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν, 'but they became futile in their thoughts'). Emataiōthēsan (became futile/vain) echoes the Old Testament condemnation of idolatry as empty, worthless (Jeremiah 2:5). Dialogismois (διαλογισμός, reasonings/speculations) indicates intellectual pride and autonomy. The result: kai eskotisthē hē asynetos autōn kardia (καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνητος αὐτῶν καρδία, 'and their foolish heart was darkened'). Eskotisthē (was darkened) is passive—God gave them over to darkness as judicial consequence. Asynetos

(ἄσύνετος, foolish/without understanding) heart signifies moral and spiritual blindness.

## Historical Context

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This describes the trajectory from monotheism to polytheism seen in Genesis 3-11 and throughout human history. Ancient Near Eastern peoples likely began with knowledge of one God but descended into pantheons of deities. Greek philosophy sought truth but often led to skepticism or elaborate mythologies. Roman religion was state-sponsored idolatry. Paul shows that intellectual sophistication without God leads to profound folly. This pattern repeats in post-Christian Western culture's descent into relativism, nihilism, and neo-paganism.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

## Study Questions

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1. How does refusing to glorify and thank God lead to 'futile thinking' (διαλογισμοί) and a 'darkened heart' (σκοτίζω καρδία)?
2. What are modern equivalents of idolatry that involve intellectual pride and autonomy from God?
3. Where in your life do you need to move from knowing about God to glorifying and thanking Him?

## Interlinear Text

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διότι γνόντες τὸν θεὸν οὐχ ὥς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν  
**Because** **that when they knew** <sup>G3588</sup> **God** **him not** **as** **God** **they glorified**  
G1360 G1097 G2316 G3756 G5613 G2316 G1392

ἢ εὐχαρίστησαν ἀλλ' ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς  
**neither** **were thankful** **but** **became vain** **in** <sup>G3588</sup>  
G2228 G2168 G235 G3154 G1722

διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν  
**imaginations** **their** **and** **was darkened** <sup>G3588</sup> **foolish** **their**  
G1261 G846 G2532 G4654 G801 G846

καρδία  
**heart**  
G2588

## Additional Cross-References

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**Jeremiah 2:5** (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?

**2 Kings 17:15** (Parallel theme): And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them.

**Psalms 50:23** (References God): Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

**2 Timothy 3:2** (Parallel theme): For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

**Revelation 14:7** (Glory): Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

**Revelation 15:4** (Parallel theme): Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

**Psalms 81:12** (Parallel theme): So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.

**1 Peter 2:9** (Darkness): But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

**John 3:19** (Darkness): And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

**Jeremiah 16:19** (Parallel theme): O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit.