***The First, First Principles***

Romans 1:18-32

**I. Introduction:**

1. My family and I are so very thankful for this opportunity! We look forward to exploring the possibility of working with you brethren (complement them). **What they would be “getting” in me.**

2. I’ve never been in this situation before, so it took me awhile to decide on which lessons to preach: Should I preach what I consider my best lessons? Or, perhaps what I consider as my smoothest lessons? I finally decided to preach the two lessons I would preach if I had only two opportunities to preach to any group of Christians.

3. I take preaching very seriously and you all obviously do too as you are contemplating selecting a preacher to work with you.

A. Paul told Timothy, *“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”* (1 Tim. 4:16) That places a huge responsibility on anyone who would preach.

B. A good preacher friend of mine once gave me some advice I’ve never forgotten: “a congregation is only as sound as the preaching they demand and are then willing to receive.”

C. So, it is my goal and hope to *“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”* And, I trust you will *“give the more earnest heed”* to the things preached and will *“search the Scriptures…to find out whether these things* [are] *so,”* and then I urge all of us to make the proper application to our lives.

4. .**\*1\* \*2\***The Bible speaks of the *“first principles of the oracles of God”* (Heb. 5:3); *“elementary principles of Christ”* (Heb. 6:1; *“repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment”* (Heb. 6:1-2).

5. These *“first principles,”* are entirely true and valid and most worthy of our study, but there are some *“principles”* that come before these. These are what I’m calling ***“The First, First Principles.”***

A. “The First, First Principles” precede the *“first principles”* talked about in Hebrews.

B. If a person does not understand and appreciate the ***“The First, First Principles”*** (at least to some degree), a person will never truly understand and accept the *“elementary principles of Christ”* (plan of salvation, meaning of water baptism; no instrumental music; appreciation and understanding of the resurrection/judgment; church, e.g., establishment, work, worship, org.; Bible authority, etc., etc.)

C. **\*3\**Concepts*** chart; **\*4-6\***read Romans 1:18-32

**II. Discussion: \*7\***I want to share with you four simple, but profound points from this reading.

1. ***Eternal power and deity***

A. Verse 18: These people did not have a codified law as did the Jewish people (2:14); they did not have the same access to God as the Jews, but nonetheless there was some *truth* that was available to them. They could know some *truth*; what *truth*? ***Truth about God!* 1:19**

B. It was truth about God that was *“manifest in them,”* (NKJ); it was in plain sight, it was staring them right in their faces! NIV: *“God has made it plain to them”*

* This truth is *independent* of divine revelation,
* This truth has been *“shown”* to *“all men”* (past, present, future) by God! God, if you will, has left a ‘calling card’!
* This is truth that can be both *“clearly seen”* (NKJ) and *“understood,”*
* This truth has been available *“since the creation of the world,”*
* This truth is *“understood through what has been made”* (i.e., the created universe and all its wonders),
* This truth is so universal and manifestly evident that those who chose to *ignore* it or *deny* it are *“without excuse”*!
* This truth concerns God’s *“invisible attributes”*: His ***eternal power*** and ***deity!***
* **There is not one shred of doubt; it’s as if there are gigantic neon signs with flood lights and loud speakers! \*8\*Psalm 19:1-3**

C. ***Narrative:***

**\*9\***Looking at the material universe we understand the universal principle that something *cannot* come from nothing. Every *effect* must have a *cause*, therefore, the material universe (*effect*) had a *cause*. That demands there had to be something *prior* to the existence of the material universe.

And, to bring something into existence requires *power*. Therefore there had to be something *prior* to this material existence, prior to this material universe, some *power*. **\*10\***So that *power* had to exist *prior* to the material universe coming into being. Thus, it was a *power* that existed *independent* of *time*, *space* and *matter* (as these are things that belong to the material universe). Therefore, it had to be an *eternal power*. The existence of the material universe testifies to the prior existence of a *power* that is an *eternal power*.

But, there’s more: This *eternal power* possesses the essential characteristics of *deity*. We look at the material universe and know that it has a *cause*: *eternal power*. We see ourselves as a part of the material universe; for we too are material (in body) and not eternal. So then this *eternal power* that could bring into being such wonders as all of the plant and animal life on this planet and, indeed, the entire material universe; must be of a *different classification* (a different order of intelligence) than the things it brings into existence: *deity* (godhead, divinity, divine nature).

**\*11\***It’s the difference between the *Creator* and the *creature*. The difference between the *Creator* and the *creature* is in some ways analogous to the difference between the *potter* and the *clay* (Rom. 9). The *potter* is superior to the clay in terms of both *power* and *intelligence*; so the *clay* cannot argue with the *potter*. All of this is showing us what any of us can know; even the proverbial savage over on that faraway island can know this! Anyone who will take the time to look at the material universe about him and use the powers of observation and deduction God has given him can know there is an *eternal power* and *deity*! Paul also spoke of this in Acts 14:17: *“Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons; filling our hearts with food and gladness.”*

D. So then, this is our 1st, 1st principle: **the existence of *eternal power* and *deity* that *any* man *can* and *should* know.** These are simple facts (I mean simple as in *easily seen*), but they are the most profound facts in the entire universe! These are facts that are easily and clearly *visible* despite the fact they are God’s *“invisible attributes”*!

(1) We cannot yet identify Him as *Jehovah God* of the Bible.

(2) But we can identify that there is a Being who possesses: 1) *eternal power*, and 2) *deity*. He is unlike man since He exists *independent* of *time*, *space* and *matter*. He is also of an entirely different and vastly *superior* classification (or intelligence) than man, He is *deity*!

**\*12\***E. **Application:**

(1) We need to fully appreciate the *superiority* of God vs. man!! Ironically, the more we understand and appreciate the immeasurable superiority of God over man the closer we can get to God (recall ***Concepts*** chart).

(2) Evidence of this superiority can be seen through that which He created:

(a) *The vastness of the universe*:

* The “known” universe is ~93 billion light years in diameter (speed of light ~670 million mph!); contains >100 billion galaxies each with 10 million to a trillion stars each! There are more stars than grains of sand on the earth! Gen. 1:16**\*13, 14\* \*\***According to scientists at the University of Hawaii there are approximately 7.5 X 1018 (7 quintillion, 500 quadrillion; a billion billion) grains of sand on the earth. There are more stars in the universe than grains of sand on the earth; 70 X 1021; 70 thousand, million, million, million (but there are more molecules of H2O in just 20 drops of water!). \*\*God knows exactly how many there are and *“He calls them all by name”* (Psa. 147:4).
* **\*15\***Earth rotates on its axis at 1,037 mph, orbits the sun at ~67,000 mph, solar system orbits the center of the Milky Way galaxy at ~420,000 mph, and our galaxy is whizzing through space at ~2,240,000 mph! Do you feel a bit dizzy?!
* **\*16\***VY Canis Majoris (constellation Canis Major) is the largest known star if; **\*17\***it were our sun its radius would extend past the orbit of Saturn (890,700,000 miles); ~2,100 times the size of our Sun; an airliner would take 205 days to fly around the Sun, but ~1,126 years to fly around VY Canis Majoris!
* **\*\*Now, how big am I?** (puny! Insignificant to the extreme! smaller than a dust mite on a dirty mattress at a cheap motel! Physically I am nothing! And, spiritually I’m totally bankrupt!)

(b) **\*18\****The complexity of the universe*: e.g., complexity of the human body.

* Guyton’s *Textbook of Medical Physiology* (*homeostasis*: infinitely complex control systems of the body to maintain a constant internal environment; more complex than the cockpit of a 747 or the control room of a nuclear power plant).
* Human body consists of ~100 trillion cells. Every cell is a self-contained biochemical factory with a myriad of sub-cellular organs for its function. The average cell is about 10-6 meters (micrometer) thick, a human hair is 1,000 time wider! If lined up side-by-side these 100 trillion cells would encircle the earth 200 times!
* Physiology of vision: involves >40 complex biomolecules interacting in picoseconds (10-12; time it takes light to travel the width of a human hair!) biochemicals🡪electrical nerve impulses (137 million nerve endings)🡪brain🡪vision! Takes place millions of times per second, day-in and day-out!

(3) These facts about the material universe, about the creation, about ourselves reveals and demonstrates the vast *superiority* of the *Creator* over His *creation*!

(a) Critical for us to recognize, appreciate, and meditate upon God’s *superiority* and our *inferiority*!

(b) Impossible to move on to *“elementary principles of Christ”* and to understand, appreciate and apply them without establishing this first, first principle!

(c) An understanding of God’s *superiority* and our *inferiority* is the most important principle of all! Everything else depends upon it! ***Concepts*** chart

**\*19\***2. ***Obligations***: second first, first principle

A. These two simple truths (simple as in easily seen, yet very profound) impose upon us *obligations*. That’s what Paul said (v. 20): *“So that they are without excuse, because when they knew God they:*

**\*20\***(1) *did not glorify Him as God* (they refused to recognize the position of the *Creator*, they refused to look up, they treated God as someone on their own level, or even lower; they created a god in their own image; when it is the other way around.); and Paul goes on:

(2) *nor were they thankful,*

(3) *but became futile in their thoughts*

(4) *and their foolish hearts were darkened*

(5) *professing to be wise*

(6) *they became fools*

B. ***Narrative:***

If we take the time to examine the facts we can discern that an *eternal power* that is on a different level than us exists! This *eternal power* is of a vastly different nature, substance and intelligence than man (He is *deity*). This *eternal power* that is *deity* is vastly *above* and *superior* to us (Creator vs. creature, potter vs. clay). He is so *powerful* and *intelligent* that He possesses the ability to summon and order this vast and complex material universe into existence from nothing!

**\*21\***This truth necessarily creates two *obligations*:

(1) We *look up* to God and are both *awed* and *bowed* in His presence; i.e., V. 21: *“glorify Him as God.”*

(2) But not only must we look up and recognize God’s *superiority*, His *eternal power* and *deity* (potter vs. clay), but we also have the *obligation* to recognize our *complete* and *total dependence* upon that *eternal power* and *deity*.

A man should be thankful to anyone on whom he has a degree of dependence (e.g., parents, teachers, etc.). And, we are totally dependent upon our *Creator* for absolutely everything! Thus, we should be awed and bowed in the presence of our *Creator*, recognizing our *complete* and total *dependence* upon Him; recognizing our obligation to *glorify* God and to be *thankful*!

But what was the case then, and what is the case now? Rom 1:21: *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.* They allowed themselves to be swept away with their own reasonings, to be puffed up by pride in their own knowledge and wisdom (or lack thereof!); therefore their *“foolish hearts were darkened.”* (Darwinism: A Theory in Crisis; *suppress the truth in unrighteousness*): **\*22\***

*“There are only two possible explanations as to how life arose: Spontaneous generation arising to evolution or a supernatural creative act of God…There is no other possibility. Spontaneous generation was scientifically disproved 120 years ago by Louis Pasteur and others, but that just leaves us with only one other possibility…that life came as a supernatural act of creation by God, \*\*but I can’t accept that philosophy because I do not want to believe in God. Therefore I choose to believe in that which I know is scientifically impossible, spontaneous generation leading to evolution.”*  (p. 46 of *Darwin’s Demise;* Dr. George Wald, professor emeritus of neurobiology at Harvard University received the Nobel Prize in 1967 for his work in the biology of vision.)

**Significantly:** It is by the reception of these truths (independent of revelation) that we prepare ourselves to accept revelation. If we fail to receive these first, first principles there can be no *light*, the *foolish heart* is *darkened*. A man that does not (to some degree) accept and understand God’s *eternal power* and *deity* without revelation, is totally unprepared and unable to accept and understand His *will* through revelation! The *foolish heart* is *darkened*!

Failing to accept these first, first principles with the capacity God has given us to see the created universe and deduce the existence of His *eternal power* and *deity* makes us *fools* and leave us ill-prepared to *accept* revelation. A man that won’t take this first, first step, if you will, is a “fool”!

They refused to look up and *enthrone* God and to be *thankful*; instead they reached up and sought to bring God down to the level of man as something created (parallels today!). This is the *inevitable* result of *refusing* to know God. The *inevitable* result of denying or ignoring that which God has shown us; that which He has made *clearly* *visible*, *clearly knowable, clearly understandable*! It is the *inevitable* result of failing to take the first, first step we can take with the capacity we are given and it shuts forever from man a knowledge of that which he cannot know except by faith in the revelation of Almighty God!

**\*23\***Failure to take these steps we can take with the reasoning ability given us and the evidence made manifest, we must walk in *darkness*; ***we must stew in our own juice***; we must reap the consequences of our own foolishness! While we vaunteth ourselves up and puff ourselves up and say how wise we are; we are forever doomed to walk in *darkness*. We become subject to the *judicial wrath* of God, that’s what happened to these people when they failed to recognize God’s *eternal power* and *deity* and be *thankful*. Paul speaks of their miserable doom three times: *“…God…gave them up* (v. 24) *… God gave them up* (v. 26) *…God gave them over”* (v. 28). What a pitiful condition!

It is a terrible thing to contemplate and accept that among God’s created beings as they populate the earth today, the vast, vast majority of those beings are in this unenviable state. They have refused to recognize what they, by their own powers of observation, can recognize, thus, they are incapable of taking any further positive steps. More than that this is not something that is simply the consequence of their own failure, not simply that, but the *judicial wrath* of God is pronounced against the man that fails to *look up* to Him and see what is manifest and recognize his *dependence* upon Him. ***God gave them up! God gave them up! God gave them over!*** They got what was coming to them! They reaped the harvest of their own foolish and darkened hearts!

***What an ugly picture!*** Paul paints a picture that is almost embarrassing to read to a mixed audience. It’s a picture of both the ancient world **and** the modern world. It is the fruit of denying the existence of an *eternal power* and *deity*. It is the fruit of refusing to be *thankful* for all the blessings of life. ***We live in a world cursed by this fruit.*** It is all about us, it is not done in a corner, it is done openly, it is flaunted about and cast right into the face of Almighty God! (Google “Folsom Street Fair”!!) So, we need to be reading these verses; reading them to an audience still willing to listen. We need to start thinking every day about the consequences of refusing/failing to know God and of being thankful. We haven’t even got to the point of talking about Jehovah God! We haven’t even gotten to the point of revelation. We’re talking about just recognizing the existence of God and our dependence upon Him. We haven’t even gotten to the love of God as expressed in the love of His Son.

I fear many who claim to be Christians do not even know God in this first sense. For example, they turn to various ideas of theistic evolution to escape the fact that there is an *eternal power*, a *deity*, to whom they are subject and upon whom they are dependent. When this one safeguard is taken away from man he is left to his own devices…God gives up on them! ***God gave them up, God gave them up, God gave them over!*** Oh! What a pitiful thing this is! Vv. 24-32 reads like the roll call of a damned and cursed generation! Why? They refused to know God! First principle? My oh, my, this ***is*** the first, first principle!

How can we hope to reach out to the world with the gospel of Christ, with a definition of the church, with an explanation of baptism, with all of these other *“first principles,”* (all of which are right, true and necessary). How can we reach out to a world with those things when they have not accepted this first, first principle?! How can we expect Christians who do not properly appreciate these most basic first, first principles to respect Bible authority? To truly present their bodies as *“a living sacrifice.”*

**\*24\***3. ***Significance of sin***

**\*25\***A. What is sin? It is transgression of law certainly, but what law? There’s no codified law under consideration here. We haven’t gotten to that yet. People here did not have the law of Moses (Ch. 2).

B. But we know they had some law because of the sins to which God gave them up. Paul is talking about sin in its most basic sense, he is talking about a first, first principle again! (The law of which he speaks existed from creation and was passed down orally through the patriarchs.)

C. He is pointing out that sin is against God! All sin is against God! That’s where we must start when we discuss sin. We must start the discussion of sin with the idea that the existence of God implies law. We’ve not gotten to Jehovah God or His revelation; we’re just at the most basic and fundamental level. The existence of an *eternal power* and *deity* implies law; it implies there are obligations the *Creator* places upon the creation (potter vs. clay). As intelligent beings made in the image of God; as free moral agents we are free to accept or reject this law.

D. **Sin is against God.** We all know that is true, but the implications and application we often miss (stealing something from me). You recognize you’ve done me an injustice so you want to make it right; give it back all fixed up, in good shape. You’ve done me an injustice and you’re going to make it up to me with all the sorrow you can express, but you haven’t even touched the first point that needs consideration. Because to this point you’re *only* thinking of what you’ve done to me. Oh, you say “I’ve done society an injustice!” Yes, you’ve done society an injustice too. And, for that matter if you were apprehended as a thief you’d be charged with a crime and have to appear before the courts to answer for your transgression against society.

**\*26\***E. But so far we haven’t even mentioned the real wrong. What is the real wrong? What is the basic sin here? At the first it really doesn’t have anything to do with me. It doesn’t have anything to do with society in general, not at first. It has to do with the fact that your Maker, a benevolent, loving *Creator* who gave you the blessings of this universe and opened to you all the wonders of the day (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, air, Acts 14:17) has been forgotten; you’ve lived in such a way as to be contrary to His will and wish concerning you; you’ve failed to recognize your *obligation* to God.

F. That’s the first, first principle about sin! Sin is against God! Yet that is the point most people tend to overlook! We have allowed ourselves to accept the social concept of sin; it’s against the best interest of society; it’s against law and order; it’s a social problem, not a spiritual problem. But we are overlooking the fact that all these things are secondary; the first thing we must consider is that we’ve sinned against God. In our teaching and preaching about sin we need to constantly press into the hearts of our listeners that whenever our life is contrary to the wishes of the Creator this is sin! This is law in its most basic sense. (Lk. 15 when the prodigal came to himself and saw himself as he really was, he said, Luke 15:18, 21 *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.”*)

G. When you sin is that what comes to your mind first? Or do you think in terms of the social consequences? Have we accepted the humanistic and social concept of God and refuse to fully recognize His *eternal power* and *deity*? Have we refused to see that all law originates from the Creator? Have we accepted that law is not only an infraction against society, but first it is against Almighty God! Almighty God in heaven I have sinned against *YOU*; that’s the problem we must address first!

4. ***Remedy for sin***

A. Once sin comes into its proper perspective; the remedy for sin then may take its proper place. How can man appreciate as a remedy for sin something that comes from Almighty God when he sees sin simply as something that has to do with man and stops right there? If that’s your concept of sin you don’t need a savior, you need a lawyer!

B. How can man appreciate the fact that someone from a higher source, someone high above him and all created beings must say, “This is the remedy. This is the only way out.” It is impossible when we only think in terms of the social concept of sin. In terms of how can I make it up to the fellow from whom I stole the car. Talk about first principles! We haven’t touched the border of the garment of first principles until we’ve gotten this point across!

C. As the prodigal, we must recognize that because of sin we are without God we are ‘given up,’ ‘given up,’ ‘given over’ to a reprobate mind…fools who fail to accept what is evident all about us! Fools puffed up in our own pride allowing ourselves to measure sin in terms of society rather than in terms of rebellion against our Creator…fools incapable of appreciating the real meaning of the sacrifice of Almighty God’s son for us! How can we appreciate His sacrifice if our concept of God, sin and obligations are limited? How can the *“first principles”* (of the gospel) mean anything to us if we are blind to these “first, first principles”?

**\*27\***D. As we consider the remedy for sin we must remember:

(a) Our smallness, our absolute spiritual bankruptcy, our total and complete dependence upon God for the remedy; we are enemies of God! Rom. 5:10 We are enemies of the *eternal power* and *deity* of which Paul speaks! Talk about fear! 2 Cor. 5:10-11

(b) The supreme value of God’s gift! We must contemplate that the very *eternal power* and *deity* who always has been and always will be; this *eternal power* and *deity* who, through the power of His word, spoke us and the material universe into existence is one and the same as He who emptied Himself and took on the form of a man, who lived a life just like us with all of its temptations, trials, frustrations, and disappointments; who humbled Himself even to the point of unjustly dying the death of a criminal to provide the only remedy for sin! That is *the* first, first principle! Jn. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-18; Heb. 11:3

“This is such an important doctrine (i.e., Jesus is Creator, cvt) of the New Testament that it is remarkable how rarely it is emphasized in modern evangelicalism.” (Henry Morris)

**Rom. 5:8-10:** *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

(c) **Spectrum:** dust mite on the cheap hotel’s dirty mattress--------🡪supreme focal point of God’s love; He so intensely desires our fellowship that He was willing to die to make us *“joint heirs with Christ”*! Rom. 8:17 Surely indeed, He is the pearl of great price!

**III. Conclusion:**

**\*28\*Matt 13:45-46:** *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

1. From this brief reading in Romans chapter 1 I’ve given you four simple, but profound points to consider.

2. Without God there is nothing! Without God there is no hope! Without God there is only dismal darkness! May God help us to receive in our hearts that which He has so bountifully provided for us!

In part, based on an audio sermon by Robert F. Turner (*They Knew Not God*).

**Notes:**

Somewhere add Psa. 8:3 and make the point that God’s creation of the stars is to demonstrate to man His eternal power and deity.

***Types of Idolatry***

1) Worship Jehovah with idols; e.g., golden calf at Mt. Sinai

2) Worship false gods; e.g., Baal worship of Jezebel or Tammuz worship in Ezek. 8:19

3) Worshiping the creature rather than the Creator; sun worship in Ezek. 8:15-16; Romans 1

Figure of Christ in Revelation with many eyes (Rev. 5:6) **Jesus had to die to satisfy God’s justice** (cf. Rom. 3:26)

Psa. 89:14: Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne;

What is man that God is so mindful of us! Heb. 2:6; Psa. 8:4-8

**Knowledge of Jesus as Creator should help us in every situation we face in life!**

1. Obedience to the gospel
2. Growth to maturity as a Christian
3. Treatment of brethren & others
4. Managing our wealth (or lack thereof)
5. Our humility
6. Respect for Bible authority
7. Concern for the souls of other men
8. Confidence of divine aid in times of need

Rom 1:23: and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man — and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

**Baby Jesus in the manger at Xmas time**

1. Helpless Jesus on the cross (Catholic)
2. Jesus is my good buddy
3. Doting grandfather view
4. Eager bellhop

**Jesus’ humility** (Phil. 2:5-8)

1. Lived as a man and felt/experienced all we feel/experience
2. No A/C
3. No ice
4. No Trump Tower penthouse apartment
5. Head cold, diarrhea
6. No modern conveniences
7. 12 legions of angels (Matt. 26:53); Song: Ten Thousand Angels (#580)
8. Constantly derided, opposed, castigated, etc.
9. Kangaroo court
10. Endured suffering beyond measure w/scourging
11. Endured the most painful, ignominious death imaginable