

Romans 1:25 in the Navajo Bible

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[H]áálá Diyin God baa hane' t'áá aaníinii woch'íid bił ałnádadziznil, áko Diyin God ádayiilaagíí bich'í' nidahojiláago bá nidajil'a'. Í'ilaii éi doo daznizin da. Nidi bí éi hool'áágóó baa ha'niih doo! T'áá ákót'ée doo. (Romans 1:25)¹

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator- who is forever praised. Amen. (Romans 1:25)²

Introduction

Romans 1:25 is complex when you read it in Greek. The Navajo translation breaks a very complicated sentence into its parts and makes it readable. And the thought comes through well. The translators have done a nice job with this verse.

If we were to bring the Navajo over into English, it would read approximately as follows: "[F]or they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, since they worshiped and served what God made. The Creator they didn't want. And yet He is praised forever! Amen."

Relationships

Rejection of God

Rejection is something our Creator is familiar with. He has lived with it for a long time. Consider the way things went when the First Man and First Woman sinned, when they were still living in a perfect Eden.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8)

In this verse it says "the man and his wife . . . hid from the LORD God," but doing so must have been unusual. They had never sinned before. Things were different this time. If this is so, what were they like before?

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

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One can easily imagine, and it would be consistent with the verse we have just read, to say that God came to the garden often. What was different on this occasion is not that God came to the garden, but that when He went there He found Adam and Even hiding from Him. He wasn't coming to track them down or condemn them for something. He was coming, as any Father would, to visit His children so they could enjoy each other's company. Imagine going to visit your own children wherever they might live. You pull up at the house and instead of receiving a warm greeting, you find them hiding from you. How would you feel?

God's feelings toward us

This matter of how God feels is a missing element in our Bible study. We read the Bible for what it tells us to do for Him, or for what it says God will do for us, but we don't often think about how God feels in all of this. Does He have feelings too? The proof that He does is that we have feelings. We were made in His image (see Genesis 1:27).

Sometimes we want God to solve a problem for us or give us a blessing. And He's happy to do such things whenever we come to Him, for any reason. But if this is the extent of our relationship with God, something's wrong. If this is all we feel toward Him, do we really want Him, or do we just want His blessings? These are two widely different things.

For His part, God genuinely wants us. He wants us badly enough that He was willing to create a world so we'd have a place to stand. He created air so we'd be able to breathe, and beautiful trees and other plants so we'd have things to eat. But the main point of the exercise was that, when everything was said and done, we would be able to enjoy our companionship. Do you suppose God ever gets lonely? Do you? Then maybe He does too. He genuinely wants to be with us. This is why sin is so very wrong for us and why it's so very unacceptable to Him, i.e., because it breaks the relationship. It separates us from God. This of course is exactly why Satan wants us to sin. His attacks on us are really attacks on God, but he can only hurt God by hurting us. And this in turn is exactly why we should want to overcome the sin in our lives. Because doing this, by His Spirit and in His power, pleases God.

In His relationship with us, God is not trying to get something from us. Why should He? And what is there to get. He gave us everything we have.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'" (Acts 17:24-28)

Our response to God

There's a passage in Jeremiah that says amazing things about God and how generous He is in accepting human service.

"Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. ³ Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 2:2-3)

Here God is reflecting on how rebellious the people living in Jerusalem had been, and He thinks back to an earlier time when their ancestors were just coming out of Egypt. In the exodus the people followed God "through the desert, through a land not sown." What was that experience like?

[T]hey spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" (Numbers 21:5)

On one occasion they almost stoned Moses (Exodus 17:4). On another occasion they wanted to go back to Egypt (Numbers 14:3-4). But they didn't. They followed God "through the desert, through a land not sown." It may be that they were kicking and screaming all the way, but they followed. And God accepted this as service! More than that, He looked back on the whole experience with nostalgia later, because as time went by things got worse. When the Israelites entered Canaan they started worshipping the gods of the Canaanites. When God sent prophets to bring them back to Himself, they killed the prophets He sent. But they would line up at the temple to get His blessings, and expect to receive them. What do you do with people like this? Well, that depends on who you are. If you're another person just as bad as they are, you wipe them out. If you're God, you keep on trying, because God loved them and had a reason for what He was doing that He was determined to carry out.

God's plan was to send Jesus into our world. Doing this means Jesus had to be born. And being born means He had to have a mother. His mother had to have parents too, and so on back. In other words, Jesus needed ancestors. There's no way God was going to destroy Israel, even though the Jewish people were constantly rebelling against Him and richly deserved anything God might have decided to do to them. He had something in mind that went far beyond what Israel was doing and the sins they were determined to commit.

In the process, God accepted as service what anyone else would have called insurrection. And when we read these things, we call Him stern and harsh! How can anyone possibly think so? Let us not only study what He did, but also why He was driven to do so. It is true that God punished people in the Old Testament, but what did they do to deserve it and how long had they been provoking God in this way? The God of the Old Testament is every bit as kind, and loving, and patient as the God of the New Testament. There's only one God and even if we're thinking of the difference between the Father and the Son, Jesus says, "I and the Father are One" (John 10:20).

Any way you look at it, and wherever you read about Him, we're always dealing with the same God. There's only one to choose from, and Jesus came to show us what He's always been like. So what is the Father like? He's like the Son. What is the Son like? He's like the Father. That's why He uses the term "Son" to describe Himself. We can't separate the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New Testament, nor can we separate the Father from the Son. The relationship between them is such that they are always together in whatever they do. On the cross our sins causes a deep separation between them, and what was the result? It crushed out Jesus' life. Let's not build it into our theology.

Blessings for us

If you're inclined to think that God has rejected you because of your sins, He hasn't. We serve the most amazing God you can imagine! In fact you *can't* imagine how wonderful our God is. You couldn't make up a God like this. After all we've done, He still only wants to bless us and help us, but we can't exclude Him from everything we do and expect Him to give us the blessings we want from a distance. There's a reason for this. The main blessing He wants to give us is Himself. His presence in everything we do is the best blessing He could possibly give. "In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift."³ Now let's work back to our starting point.

Discussion

We were saying that in Paul's day people didn't want the Creator. *Í'ílaii éi doo daznínin da* ("The Creator they didn't want") (Romans 1:25). They wanted to go their own way. We still do. And so God sends some very special messages just before Christ returns in glory. An angel flies in midair,

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. (Rev 14:7)

Worship Him that made. That means worshiping the Creator. And it doesn't just mean that we need to worship the right God instead of the wrong God. All Christians worship the right God. It means we need to worship Him with the fact that He made us especially in view. How do you do that? It's not complicated. The Bible tells us:

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." (Exodus 20:8-11)

³ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 21.

In this commandment, more than any other, we enter a relationship with the Creator. The Sabbath is a memorial of God's creative activity, a reminder that He made us, but it is also an invitation to spend time with Him – to come to know Him, to rest in our knowledge of what He has already done for us (the word "Sabbath" means "rest"), and to establish a personal bond with Him. There is nothing here about getting things from God, or about God getting things from us. Instead it's about knowing God and enjoying His companionship. This is why He made us. And so in this, as in so many other ways, the Sabbath takes us back to first principles.

Conclusion

The Navajo translators captured one particular aspect of Paul's thought exactly when they said, *Í'ilaii éí doo daznínzin da* ("The Creator they didn't want") (Romans 1:25). This sounds terrible, but you don't have to worship idols in order to prefer other things over the Creator. If we refuse to do what God says, ultimately this implies refusing God – keeping Him at arm's length, excluding Him from our lives, going our own way. Instead of settling for this kind of relationship, let us welcome God as our Father. Let us do it gladly and go to the heart of the matter, accepting Him by accepting what He says, and doing it with a humble and obedient heart.