

# The Exchange

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[ 0 : 00 ] Music So open your Bibles, if you have them, to Romans chapter 1.

We are in a series through the book of Romans that we are not speeding through, that we are taking our time to make sure that we don't miss anything in this most important letter of the Apostle Paul.

This letter, more than any other book of the Bible, systematically lays out for us the good news or the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so we're not rushing.

We're taking our time to really understand what the Apostle Paul is teaching us here about the gospel. And so we're still in chapter 1. We have been for a few weeks and we've got this week and probably two more weeks left in this chapter.

And so I want you guys to stand with me. We're going to read this morning verses 18 through 25, but we're going to focus on verses 21 through 25. The Apostle Paul writes, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[ 1 : 17 ] For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore, God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forever.

Amen. Father, take your word now and apply it to our hearts. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat. One of the words that we throw around a lot here at Church of the Cross is the word glory.

We talk about glory all the time. In fact, our mission statement as a church is that we exist to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ. And so we're all about glory.

[ 2 : 42 ] Talk about it all the time. There's scarcely a sermon that I preach that I don't mention the glory of God or the glory of Christ. And glory sometimes falls into that category of what you might call Christianese.

We have these words that we use over and over all of the time to describe what we believe or to talk about the things that we believe or to talk about the things that we value as followers of Christ.

And yet sometimes to outsiders, those words are vague. They don't make a whole lot of sense. And sometimes even to those of us within the church, we use words frequently that we really, if somebody were to press us to define them, we probably couldn't do it.

I've found myself doing that all the time because I read a lot. I mean, I read a whole lot. I read books and articles I find online. I read everything I can get my hands on. I love to read.

In fact, typically, if you go out to my house on a day when we're not ready for you to come, if we're ready for you, then we hide things. Okay? But if you come on a day when we're not ready, you'll find stacks of books just anywhere.

[ 3 : 49 ] You might find a couple of books on the desk in the kitchen. You might find a couple in the dining room. You'll certainly find them in every bathroom of our house. You'll find them on my nightstand. And then my office is covered in books because I'm just a reader.

But one of the consequences of being a reader is that a lot of times you read certain words and you never stop to think about how to define those words.

You've just read them enough times and seen them in the context of enough stories or sentences and those sorts of things that you know how the word is supposed to be used in a sentence. You can use it correctly in a sentence, but if somebody were to press me for a lot of the words that I read and understand all the time, if you were to press me for a definition on some of them, I'd probably fumble around and not really be able to give it to you.

That, I think, is what happens a lot with us when it comes to words that we use to describe what we believe. We see them in the Bible oftentimes. We hear them from preachers.

We read about them in Bible studies. But if somebody pressed you and said, what does glory mean? Not how is it used in the Bible. Don't use it in a sentence, but define the word glory, that might be a little bit hard for us.

[ 4 : 59 ] And because glory is at the center of this passage and the center of our lives as a church, I want to start this morning by just giving you a basic definition of what I mean when I use the word glory and what I think the Apostle Paul means when he uses the word glory.

It means essentially, glory refers to the beauty and majesty and power of God. But not just referring to it, but also the value and worth of the beauty, majesty and power of God.

So that when we say that we glorify someone or we glorify something, we are recognizing and we are declaring or proclaiming the glory, the worth and value of God's power, might and majesty.

That's what we're doing. So if I say to you, we're gathered here this morning to glorify God in song. What are we going to do? We're going to sing.

We're going to declare God's beauty and majesty and power, His worth and value. That's what we mean when we talk about the glory of God and glorifying God.

[ 6 : 12 ] It's not a complicated concept, but it's one that we've got to have firmly fixed in our minds when we come to passages like this one. Because we saw last week that God is revealing Himself in all of nature.

That God is actively showing the world who He is constantly through all of the things that He has made. In fact, I want you to take a look here at verse 20.

It says that His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

And then if you back up to verse 19, those things that have been made, they are showing us who God is because it says God has shown it to them. So God is actively revealing Himself to us through the created world.

That's why the psalmist says that the heavens declare the glory of God. What does that mean? Stars, the moon, the sun, they're not actively doing anything themselves.

[ 7 : 20 ] So when the psalmist says that the heavens, the sky is proclaiming the glory of God, what the psalmist means is what Paul says here, that God, through the things that He has made, is revealing to us His beauty, His majesty, His might, His power, and the great worth and value that those things have in and of themselves.

All of those things have been made known to us. In fact, when the Apostle Paul says that His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived in the created world, what he means is God is showing us His glory.

But then he comes to a conclusion at the end of verse 20 that might seem odd. God is showing His glory and because of that, he says, therefore, or so, they, human beings, are without excuse.

We don't have an excuse because God is revealing His glory to us in all the things that He has made. How does that leave us without an excuse?

What's the logical connection between God revealing Himself through the created world and showing us His glory and then us being left as guilty, pitiful sinners with no excuse before Him?

[ 8 : 36 ] What is the connection? You can't see the connection until you get to verses 21-25 and he begins to systematically lay out. How do we go from God revealing His glory in the world to us as sinners without an excuse before Him?

Take a look at what he says. Verse 21 begins by referencing back to this revelation of God about Himself in creation. He says, for although they knew God or having known God, we know God.

We see God revealed in the creation. That's the point. Even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him. And then if you move down to verse 22, it says, claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

So we know God. That's what Paul is telling us throughout this chapter. He's revealing Himself to us. But we have all universally not responded rightly to the glory of God revealed in all of creation.

Because glorifying God always involves two aspects. There is first of all recognizing the glory of God. Recognizing His beauty and His majesty and His might and His power.

[ 9 : 57 ] Just seeing it. Recognizing it. Knowing that it's there. But then there's responding to it. So we see and we recognize the glory of God through the created world.

But then we are called upon to respond rightly to the glory of God revealed in creation. And that's where we have failed. That's where we end up without an excuse.

Because, he says, even though we know, so at some level, we all, to a certain degree, recognize the glory of God in creation.

Even though we know that, we do not respond rightly to the glory of God. So, at our best, at our absolute best as fallen human beings, we only go half the distance to giving God the glory that He deserves.

We recognize, we see, and yet we do not respond rightly. He says that they did not honor Him as God. That is, recognize His glory, His majesty, His power.

[ 11 : 00 ] Did not recognize Him, did not honor Him as God, or give thanks to Him. And then, He says, that they made an exchange.

Verse 23 says, that they exchanged the glory of God for images. But then, He uses the same word, or a similar word, in verse 25, where He says that we exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator.

Can you see the two aspects of glorifying God present in those? When He says that we exchange the glory of God for images, and when He says we worship and bow down to these images, He is saying we don't respond rightly to God's revelation of Himself.

The only appropriate response to the glory of God is worship. That's the only appropriate response. to find in Him all that satisfies the longings of our hearts and to ascribe to Him His own worth and value and dignity.

That's the only appropriate response to the revelation of God's glory. And we haven't responded in that way because instead we worship other things. but then oftentimes we don't even make it to halfway.

[ 12 : 29 ] We don't even, although God has revealed Himself to us through the created order, and although all of us universally possess an innate knowledge of God's revelation of Himself, yet we exchange that recognition of the glory of God and instead we embrace a lie.

So there is on the one hand, there is the exchanging of worship of God for false worship, a failed response to the revelation of God's glory, but then there is, even before that, there is the exchange of the truth about God, the exchange of the knowledge that we have for a lie.

So that we don't, on our own, apart from God's saving grace, we don't even make it halfway to giving to God the glory that He deserves to recognizing and responding to His beauty and majesty.

We have exchanged the glory of God and the truth about God for lies and false substitutes. We don't relate to this idea of exchanging things very well because we don't live in a barter society, a trade and barter society.

For the most part we don't. But in the ancient world, everything was trade and barter. Even when they had money, even when they had coins, printed money like that, pressed money, it was still based upon a barter system because the value of a silver coin, whether you're talking about the Roman world or the world of the Old Testament, the value of a silver coin was the value of the amount of silver in it.

[ 14 : 06 ] That's why they would use scales at the market. You take your gold or your copper or your silver coins and you weigh them out and you determine what the actual value of those is. So that in the ancient world, even if you're using, say, a denarius or a drachma or some other ancient coin, even when you're using some coin, you're still bartering.

You're still trading one good that's worth this much for another good that's worth something. But oftentimes, they didn't even use coins. You know, so a shepherd might trade some of his sheep for a large catch of fish that a fisherman has made and they might just trade and barter.

We don't live in that kind of society anymore. Our money that we use doesn't have a whole lot of intrinsic value behind it. I mean, a dollar bill, estimates that I've read have varied quite a bit, but I've seen a lot of estimates that the actual worth of a dollar bill, whether it's a one dollar bill or a hundred dollar bill, it doesn't matter.

It's, you know, eight or nine cents is the paper that it's printed on, which is actually made out of cotton. You've probably got more cotton in your average pair of jeans than there are in a large stack of dollar bills and so technically, your jeans are worth more than the money in the wallet inside of your back pocket of your jeans.

That never occurs to us because we don't live in a trade and barter society unless you go to buy a car. If you go to buy a car, then you'll trade and barter. You'll take your old junker, it's about to die, you know your two days from it just being on the side of the road, so you take it to the car dealership to trade it in and you hope they don't notice that you're only two days from it just dying on the side of the road and you begin to barter with them.

[ 15 : 39 ] You barter about how much they want to give you for your car and how much you want to pay for the car that you're going to get from them. That's really the only situation on a regular basis that we barter and trade.

But in the ancient world, they did this all the time. And they understood that you trade things that are of equal value. If you trade something that's of far lesser value and you know it and you hide that, then you're a thief in the ancient world.

But here, there can be nothing that measures. There can be nothing that compares to the worth and value of God Himself.

There is nothing that you can place on the scales that will weigh out and measure up equal to the glory of God on the other side of the scales. There is nothing.

You don't have anything that is worth refusing to worship God over it. Not your children. Not your grandchildren. Not everything that you own. Not your life itself.

[ 16 : 39 ] You don't have anything and there's nothing that anybody in the world can offer you that would make it worth exchanging and trading the glory of God for that thing.

And yet, the history of humanity is that we do that all the time. We trade the most valuable thing in the universe for things that are worthless in comparison.

We do it all the time. We make this exchange on a daily basis. In fact, the downward descent of humanity began with this kind of exchange in Genesis.

In Genesis chapter 2, the serpent approached Eve and he told her that you can eat this apple. It's not going to kill you. This fruit. It's not an apple.

You can eat this fruit. It's not going to kill you. In fact, you'll become like God. Exchange your obedience to God's command in for the opportunity to become like God.

[ 17 : 43 ] A lie on its surface. And yet, she exchanged obeying God and glorifying God by obeying His command.

She exchanged that for the mere possibility of having her eyes open and becoming like Him. A futile exchange. Adam and Eve exchanged the glory of God for a worthless piece of fruit that they were commanded not to eat.

And that's the history of humanity. We see it happening again and I think the Apostle Paul means for us to see a reference to the life of Israel, of ancient Israel in the Old Testament.

When Paul uses this language of exchanging the glory of God, he's recalling to mind language of the Old Testament. Hold your place there in Romans. I want you to turn over all the way in your Old Testament to Psalm 106.

Psalm 106 references back to an event that occurred in the history of Israel. After Israel had left Egypt, after Moses had led them out of Egypt and across the Red Sea and God had performed all sorts of miracles for them, God called Moses to go up onto Mount Sinai where he would receive the Ten Commandments.

[ 19 : 01 ] But while Moses was on the mountain communing with God and receiving His law, the people disobeyed, they became frustrated and impatient, and they crafted for themselves an idol, a golden calf.

And they began to worship and bow down to the idol. And Psalm 106 refers back to that event in verse 19 and it says this, They made a calf in Horeb and worshipped a metal image.

Now note verse 20. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. They exchanged God's glory.

And then notice what it says in verse 21. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt. They didn't respond to God rightly because they gave their worship over to an image that they had created.

And then they went even beyond that and they did not even recognize God in all of the acts of salvation that He had done in revealing His glory to them as they came out of Egypt. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, who had manifested His glory in Egypt.

[ 20 : 12 ] They forgot about Him. This is the pattern of humanity. We want to pursue something else. Whatever it may be.

Here it's a golden calf. It's bowing down. It's the security they feel from having an actual physical object in front of them instead of a God they can't see. For us, it's a thousand other things.

So you begin by giving over to something or someone else what only belongs to God. In this case, their worship. But then in order to justify that position, then you have to erase God from your memory.

To avoid the overwhelming guilt that would come along with such an act, you've got to forget about God, His greatness, His majesty, His worth, and His value.

You have to. It's the pattern that sticks. It's the pattern that remains throughout. And that's in fact exactly what Paul says we have done.

[ 21 : 19 ] Back to Romans 1. Verse 22. It says that they claimed to be wise, but they became fools.

Verse 25, they exchanged the truth about God. But then I think most telling is verse 21 where it says that they became futile or vain in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

You see, this is the normal course of events. This is how it works. We don't give God the glory that He deserves and so then we need to excuse ourselves in some way from not giving Him the glory that He deserves.

And so, then we begin to reject the truth about God or to at least downplay the truth, to hide the truth, to push the truth away from the forefront of our minds so that we can feel better about our refusal to honor and glorify Him.

That's what we do all the time. And we wouldn't accept this kind of thing in any other area of life. I mean, if you're in your backyard and you want a better view of the sky and you have a couple of old just ugly gnarled up trees in your backyard and you decide like Mike did this weekend you're going to cut down a couple of trees don't destroy your neighbor's fence in the process or even a couple of boards but if you decide you're going to knock down some trees and you go and you cut them down and you do that because there's something better beyond those ugly trees.

[ 22 : 54 ] Beautiful view of the sky. Maybe there's something even better behind your backyard. I just have a canal behind mine that's not worth seeing. But maybe you've got a lake or maybe you've got the beach and so you're going to move these ugly old trees out of your way and you're going to exchange your view of these ugly trees for the view that you have out there that's better.

Everybody understands that but if you didn't have an ugly old gnarled tree in your backyard and you had a great massive redwood like they have in northern California one of those huge sequoia trees I was going to say sycamore that's a bible tree not a northern California tree if you have one of those huge just massive trees that are hundreds of years old and you think I really I cannot see the lake out there from my bedroom window and you cut down the tree no one would be sympathetic to you cutting down that tree no one would think well that I mean that makes sense they couldn't see it they just got rid of it no one because it's an exchange of one of the great wonders of nature one of the more beautiful things that we can see in the world for just a common everyday view of the rest of the world out there no one would understand that kind of exchange and the only person who would do that was someone who had deluded themselves into thinking that the tree itself was not valuable was not worthy or that there was something beyond the tree that surpassed the tree in value it would be a ridiculous exchange and the only way to go about making that exchange is to convince yourself that it's worth it and so you have to lie to yourself either about the tree or what's out there beyond the tree you would have to lie to yourself and that's what we've done in our pursuit of things other than God himself we've lied though we think that we are wise we have become fools and our hearts have been darkened and that's the course of human history pursue an idol pursue something other than God and then in order to make ourselves feel better deny the truth about God forget about God and the great tragedy in all of that is not only that God's glory is denied him but also that we his creatures created for his glory are now cut off from the only one the only thing in the entire universe that can really and truly satisfy our souls the great tragedy of all this is that you are exchanging an infinite fountain of delight and pleasure for dirty muddy bitter pond water turn over to

Jeremiah I want you to see this Jeremiah says much the same thing Jeremiah chapter 2 where he again references this event in the history of Israel and uses the language that Paul uses in Romans chapter 1 Jeremiah chapter 2 verse 11 says this has a nation changed its gods even though they are no gods so he says the false nations around you Israel they worship false gods their gods aren't even gods but have any of them traded in their false gods no but my people have changed or exchanged their glory for that which does not profit be appalled oh heavens at this be shocked be utterly desolate declares the Lord for my people have committed two evils they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters and have hewn out for themselves cisterns broken cisterns that can hold no water this is the this is the great foolishness of exchanging the glory of

God for anything else you reject the fountain of living water and instead you hew out for yourself a broken cistern that will never hold what you need for your nourishment and all sin is at its bottom all the sin that we commit little sins big sins all the sins that we ever commit are an exchanging of the glory of God for something of lesser value that will never satisfy and Paul says all of us have done that and because all of us have done that we are without excuse and the wrath of God now is being revealed against us and wrath he says in chapter 2 is being stored up by us for the day of God's wrath terrible exchange it's a dark and deadly exchange and the only remedy for this the only fix for this problem in your heart and in your life is another exchange because wrath is due to us for this exchange and only if someone else will trade in themselves for the wrath that we deserve only if another who possesses the righteousness that we need will exchange his righteousness for our unrighteousness can we be freed from the penalties of our dark exchange and the good news and the gospel of

Jesus Christ is that that is exactly what he has done we have made the worst exchange possible he has come along and exchanged his righteousness for our righteousness he has taken upon himself the wrath we deserve so that we might once again drink from the fountain of living water and live forever he has now made that exchange for all those who trust in him and only for those who trust in him and so the question that we have to ask ourselves is not have I made this exchange do I belong in this category because we all do every one of us the only question to be asked here is have I trusted in the only one who can rescue me from the exchange that I have made and restore to me the right to drink from the fountain of living water water and the only one who can be asked to the only one who can do the only one who can do and the only can do!