



Romans

06 The Exchange (Romans 1:18-32, 2:1-4)

February 24, 2019

Courage Church, Detroit, MI

scriptures: Romans 1:18-32, 2:1-4, John 1:14, Luke 18:9-14, Matthew 9, Genesis 2:18, Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31-32

I recently saw a video of a man giving a talk about the issue of same sex relationships, and it bothered me a bit... The message he was communicating was this “why is it that pastors, when they talk about this issue, have to give all these disclaimers before they get into it at all and call it what it is” - his point was we need to just call it out as sin and stop trying to tip toe around something that he feels like is a black and white issue. I am sure there are many who believe that.

and the reason that I find that to be a bit ridiculous is because we are dealing with PEOPLE.

HUMAN BEINGS. People who have, in many instances built their lives around something, and in order to follow the path that we are laying out for them, THEY WOULD HAVE TO TEAR THEIR ENTIRE WORLD DOWN.

and what it has left us with is a complicated world in which one worded or even one sentence answers OR EVEN ONE SERMON ANSWERS... leave people more scarred than healed.

more confused than inspired...

when our objective is to bring Jesus into all the areas of their lives.

if the way this topic is handled PUTS YOU FARTHER AWAY FROM JESUS, then that is a problem.

I believe the church contributed to creating the chasm that exists in our culture between God and the gay community because when we should have been loving people, standing up for the marginalized, taking the time to LISTEN... we have been so quick to cast stones at people and heaped

guilt upon people and drawn a line in the sand in which we say “it is us, and them. they are on one side, we are on the other.”

but the entire point of Romans 1 is that WE ALL HAVE TRADED THE GLORY OF GOD, the image... the life he intended for us... we have traded that for one thing or another. And how easy it is to look down on someone who exchanged glory in a way that we don't understand trading it.

But at the same time, the church does have a responsibility to be faithful both to the people that God has brought to us and to the Word by which we believe Jesus followers are called to live their lives by.

and this is definitely one of those issues like we talked about last week... where people go to church, and they read their Bibles, and they listen to teachings, and they say I AM WITH YOU I AM WITH YOU I AM WITH YOU and then we get to this issue and they say... I am not sure I am with you.

listen, Courage Church is NOT in the business of behavior modification. We are in the business of the transforming power of the Gospel that meets you right where you are. We are not here to tell you what you can and can not do behind closed doors...

we are here to tell you about Jesus... the God of the universe who died in your place, and who wants to work miracles in every area of your life... from the ones that we all see, to the ones that nobody sees.

we are here to help you fall more in love with Jesus and to cultivate that romance with Jesus Christ because we believe that when the Gospel takes a hold of your life, it begins working on the deepest parts of your hearts and will over time make you more and more like Jesus.

But we also are a Bible church and we are Bible teachers. So when you come in to this place, I would hope that you would come with an expectation that the Word is going to be preached as faithfully as possible. The reason that we determined years ago that we would do these expository, line by line teachings through the Bible is because it allows the Bible to speak... we don't avoid the difficult parts of it, but we don't go searching for them either, we just address them as we come to them and face them head on. This is a passage that we will try to answer the questions you may have as clearly as possible, but also will be something

that we will likely create more resources for in the future on our website and in podcasts.

This is a subject that many have wrestled with and drawn *different* conclusions on, and is one that, if you are uncertain of what we say here, you should research... you should read... you should read books and more importantly you should read the Bible, and pray to the Holy Spirit to be a light that guides you through this study.

This will NOT be a thorough teaching through the ins and outs of gay marriage or a look through all that the Bible has to say about it.

Rather, this will be a teaching through this section of Romans that we find ourselves on today.

If you, in hearing the words of this message feel REJECTED by the church or by Jesus or by me... that is the farthest thing from what we want to do and please, please have a conversation *with us*. We exist FOR YOU and for your friends and for the people who are not here yet. We believe the conversation is ongoing, as we all do the hard work of living out the Gospel in our city, in our families, and in our own lives.

This is not something that I took lightly at all in preparing.

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Before we get into our reading out of Romans, I want to read you something that the Gospel writer John says as He is introducing His readers to Jesus. This is John 1:14 and we often quote this passage but typically we only flesh out the first line..

“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his **glory**, **glory** as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”

Glory.

The same glory we have been looking at... the same glory we are called to be image bearers of... it says that when you look into Jesus, the Son of God... you see THAT glory in the way that He is completely filled with both GRACE, and TRUTH.

and that is what we hope today will be filled with. The Glory of God... the God who meets you right where you are, and shows grace to even the most hopeless situations... but also who truth is found in, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32) - He has more for you than you could ever even imagine for yourself.

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There is one last thing that I need to say to you before we read:

when you isolate parts of the Bible, things can get very very very ugly. The verses we are about to read have been used as missiles to destroy people... but what we are going to do as we read today, is we are going to do something **somewhat unheard of** when it comes to this brutal passage at the end of Romans one...

we are going to keep reading.

Into Romans chapter 2. And we want to remind you that when Paul wrote this letter, **he did not break it up into chapters and verses.**

We did that later, in 1551 (for the New Testament, 1445 for the old) **as a way to make it easier to locate specific parts of it.**

So for us to just determine when one thought ends and when another begins is really making assumptions that **I don't think are always right.** This one in particular, if you read Romans 1:18-32 but don't read the first four verses of Romans 2 - you have something a bit different, and very incomplete.

In fact, really this thought continues until at least 2:16, but we will save most of chapter 2 for next couple of weeks.

I think we can get the point across by going to 2:4.

So Right now we will read Romans 1:26-32, and Romans 2:1-4.

Remember as we read this: DOXA. GLORY.

The point is the GLORY OF GOD, and why anyone would ever want to exchange that for something that will one day disappear? Yet we have been doing it since the beginning of time.

Adam and Eve did it in the Garden, Israel did it with the Golden Calf. And we do it every day, when we choose to live life on our own terms, in spite of the mission and purposes that God has given us.

Here we go:

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For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up **natural relations** with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and **receiving in themselves** the due penalty for their error.

And **since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.** They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, **they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.**

God's Righteous Judgment

2 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

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First of all, before we hone in on any one passage, we should understand something about Paul's flow of thought here.

In Romans 1:18-32 he is speaking directly to the sins of the Gentiles. This list is a list of DIFFERENT people... and he is giving a handful of DIFFERENT EXAMPLES. It is not saying that one sin results in all of these sins... the point is that EVERYONE FINDS THEMSELVES ON THIS LIST.

He begins with something specific that not everyone would relate to, and then widens it more and more... it gets so bad that he actually says some people are just inventing new ways to be evil, that is how far they have gone.

These were things that Jews knew very clearly were wrong, and as Paul is saying these things, it would be very easy for a Jew who had abstained from much of this list to get all puffed up about their own lives and agree with Paul that the wrath of God was going to come down on everyone else.

But what Paul goes right into after that, is he immediately says "if you think you aren't on this list, then you are just as guilty."

So Chapter 1 begins with the Gospel, then a description of how the Gentiles are guilty. Then chapter 2 really focuses on how the Jews are just as guilty, and chapter 3 eventually gets back to the Gospel, explaining how God, through Jesus, dealt with all of the sin on behalf of all of the guilty.

You have to treat this as a "whole" before you look at it with a microscope, and as a whole, that is the point: EVERYONE IS ON THIS LIST.

EVERYONE, in one way or another, HAS EXCHANGED THE GLORY FOR SOMETHING THAT EXPIRES... or has traded the truth for a lie... everyone is guilty. And EVERYONE ON THIS LIST CAN BE JUSTIFIED if they call on the name of Jesus.

From the list we just read, today we will ONLY focus on verse 26-27. Next week we will focus on 28-31, though some of the big ideas from today will definitely carry over into next week.

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But As a foundation for both, I want us to look at the second half 1:32 and 2:1.

v.32b says “they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

and **2:1** says: “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.”

first, 1:32.

GIVING APPROVAL.

Now, this applies to the ENTIRE list, and this applies to any other areas of our lives that perhaps are not as they should be...

but telling people that the way they are living is permissible... giving approval... that is what people are looking for, and it is what Paul specifically says we can NOT give.

One thing that I have determined in my journey of faith is that, as a general rule, I don't affirm people when it comes to questions of “who am I? Identity stuff” - unless that identity is solely found in Christ.

We need to affirm what we can in one another as far as what we are doing well... we need to be encouraging each other - keep the faith... lean on Jesus... 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says to encourage one another and build each other up... we need to do that... we need to affirm that IF we are in Jesus we don't need to worry or be afraid but can walk confidently knowing that we are a child of God.

but the Bible also says to “speak the truth to one another” (Ephesians 4) - and the truth is that Jesus wants to work IN EVERY AREA OF YOUR LIFE.

so when it comes to the question of “Am I alright with God?” - the answer is and will always be another question: “Do you love Jesus? Do you think that you can save yourself?”

Do you think you need Jesus? Have you let Jesus into that area? What has the Holy Spirit spoken there to you, and have you confirmed that Word with the Word of God?

The Holy Spirit will never tell you something that is in opposition to the Bible.

The problem is that the moment you think that you are okay in your own flesh and in your own life, you are denying the need for Jesus to work in that area of your life...

which is, by definition (and I know that this is a scary word), ANTI-CHRIST, no matter what it is that you are pointing to and saying "this part of me doesn't need to change." - The word "*antichrist*" - which is only used in the Bible in 1 and 2 John, literally and simply means "seeks the place of Christ" - it is something that gives you the idea that "this can save me, so I don't need Jesus to."

When you are able to convince yourself that the way that you are living on your own IS JUST FINE, no matter who you are or what it is you are doing... I don't care if you have the perfect heterosexual marriage and you never fight (which is impossible) and you have three kids who never misbehave and you tithe 10% of your income and you give another 20% to missions and you serve at the soup kitchen after you spend time having dinner with the widow from down the street and you foster two more kids and are in the process of adopting them...

Those are great things. But if Jesus is not in your life, I am going to do everything that I can to show you that you **STILL NEED JESUS**.

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My theology on this has been shaped over the years of studying, mostly in the Gospels. And I will give you two brief examples that have really helped shape this in me.

One is a parable that Jesus tells in Luke 18:9-14... This thing wrecked me when I grasped it because I saw myself in the story, and I was the bad guy. I was the wrong character.

There are two men who go into the temple to pray. One is a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. One is religious... lives by the book, does everything that HE can do in HIS OWN STRENGTH to, at the end of the day, pat himself on the back and believe that He is okay. And that is exactly what he does. He says “man, I am exactly as I should be.”

The other does WAY WORSE THINGS. He extorted people... hurt them... essentially robbed them...

And in the story, the religious man prays this prayer “God, thank you that I am not like this tax collector... thank you that I am not an adulterer, thank you that I am not unjust... I fast twice a week and even tithe... I give ten percent of EVERYTHING THAT I GET.”

but the tax collector would not even approach the altar because he knew how guilty he was... He had done WAY WORSE THINGS and he knew in his heart that he was unworthy of anything that God may give him and should he receive forgiveness it would only be a pure act of grace on the part of God.

He beat his breast and he said “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!”

And Jesus ends the parable by saying “I tell you, this man went down to his house... JUSTIFIED.”

the point was not the level in which one person’s sin seemed worse than another’s - the point WAS the posture in which one person approached the throne of grace knowing “I am not as I should be”

and the word Jesus uses there for that man is JUSTIFIED. He knew in His own life “I am in big trouble” - BUT... because of the humble posture he took knowing that he can NOT save himself, he was declared to be righteous SOLELY based on what Jesus did.

God exalts the humble. I think religion can serve as an *antichrist* for a lot of us, just like the first man in the story... I think in a lot of cases it is harder for religious people to come to Jesus than people who commit obvious sins, because at least one KNOWS they are doing the wrong thing.

But the point of the story is not that religion is bad, the point of the story is that we can get so caught up in how we think that things should be, or what we have gotten comfortable with, that when look at our lives we think that all on our own, we measure up. We think “I can stay this way - I am doing fine” - but the one who refused to acknowledge his need for a savior was NOT justified. It doesn't say BOTH were justified, it says the tax collector, RATHER THAN the religious man... was justified.

the other example that I often revert back to is Matthew 9. Jesus had just called Matthew, also a tax collector, to follow him. Matthew was Jewish and had purchased the rights to tax his own people from the Roman government, and he would tax them the amount owed to Caesar, as well as whatever amount he wanted to off the top, for himself.

Fellow Jews would look at Matthew and say “that is a traitor and a thief” - but Jesus called him, and then went to his house for a party. And while there, he was having dinner with a bunch of other sinners and the religious people all complained, asking Jesus' disciples “why does Jesus eat with sinners?”

And Jesus responds to this question by saying: “those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”

Again, this story wrecked me, the day that I read it and I realized that I was the person on the WRONG SIDE OF THIS STORY.

I was the one thinking “Jesus came to call sinners... He came for the sick... and I, too, should exist for the sick... I should reach people and love them no matter where they are or what they have done... AND THAT IS ALL TRUE... but IF THE FIRST THING I think of when I read this story is “I need to go find sick people to eat with” - who does that make me in the story?

it makes me someone who doesn't think he is sick.

I want to be one of the ones that Jesus rescues... but He resists the proud... the resists the ones who think they don't need it. He eats with the people who know they don't deserve to be at that table.

I want to have dinner with Jesus.

So this is what Paul says in Romans 1:26-27 -

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up **natural relations** with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and **receiving in themselves** the due penalty for their error.

Now, people try and really dive into this historically which we don't have time to do right now... we can do that another time or on the website, BUT the reason they do that is to try and show that the relationships that Paul is describing is different than what we would consider today to be a monogamous same sex marriage, and that very well may be true, but the point of this passage is NOT to come down on one particular issue.

the point is ALSO NOT to show us what they are doing, BUT RATHER, WHAT THEY ARE EXCHANGING.

The point is that God gave them glory, and they chose something else.

Because marriage actually is, quite frankly, one of the most incredible, yet complicated images we get of the glory of God. So we will spend the majority of the remainder of our time on that. But first I need to bring a bit of clarity to this issue...

Because what we have found in the past with this topic is often we have people we are in community with, and because we truly do accept people as they are and love people as they are, people get a bit surprised when they hear our position on this issue, and they feel tricked... and we do NOT want to do that to anyone.

The question I usually am asked is: are same sex relationships sinful? is it sin to ACT on those desires? and to be clear, we are talking about actions, NOT feelings or emotions or desires.

But to me, that question - "is it a sin" TOTALLY MISSES THE POINT.

If you are asking that question, you need to revert back to the beatitudes.

Because what it is asking is: can I live a certain way and be fine? or “can I live a certain way and get into heaven?”

Well... you can't get to Heaven without Jesus. So let's start there... Do you Love Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus died for you? **Do you believe that the arms of His grace are wide enough to wrap around you even in whatever situation you have found yourself in?**

and if you do believe that, then what is it that is leading you to this question? are you looking for an advocate? or (God forbid) someone to demonize?

is there a conviction there?

and if there is a conviction there, I would say “take warning” - because the more you IGNORE the guiding voice, the quieter it becomes.

But the Bible makes this SO CLEAR... It is the job of the Holy Spirit to CONVICT PEOPLE OF THEIR SINS.

It is the job of the church to LOVE GOD, and LOVE PEOPLE... and to GO INTO ALL THE WORLD AND MAKE DISCIPLES. And yes, making disciples may include conversations like this one, but it's not the starting point, the second point or even the 30th point.

These are the kinds of conversations you have WHEN someone who lives this way GETS SAVED... and **AFTER THEY GET SAVED, THE HOLY SPIRIT STARTS WORKING ON THEIR HEART... AND SUDDENLY THEY GET CONVICTED AND DON'T KNOW WHY OR WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.**

Then we open our Bibles, and we have these types of conversations.

But for clarities sake: to give a SHORT answer which is always a bit dangerous, it is our conviction, based IN PART on that very last line in the first chapter of Romans but ultimately based on the whole of the Bible and a clear understanding of the Gospel...

I can't see a Biblical path for affirming, as in, to tell someone else who is trying to follow Jesus... that IT IS TOTALLY FINE TO LIVE THIS WAY... from everything that I understand about the Bible and what it is saying, it seems to me to be Biblically and theologically impossible to affirm same sex relationships in the way that many wish AND LONG to be affirmed.

I know that is hard to hear. Honestly, its hard to say. And it doesn't mean that we don't love you or won't fight FOR you or stand with you. We are here, willing to get as dirty as needed, for you to see how much Jesus LOVES YOU.

But if I am asked: "can I keep doing this? Am I okay to stay in this relationship? Does Jesus think this is beautiful?" -- by a person who is genuinely trying to follow Jesus...

How can anyone be faithful to a text that says how important it is TO NOT GIVE APPROVAL TO OTHERS WHO ARE MAKING THIS EXCHANGE, and still give approval of it?

Now, I also don't believe that we need to go looking for people doing this, or anything else, and try and puff ourselves up by telling them that what they are doing is wrong. That much is very clear by what Paul says here.

Discipleship takes place in the context of conversations, as we live out life in community with each other.

I think as a general rule, we always need to go back to the way that Moses handled it when Israel did their exchange... he stood between them and God... He loved them so much that he stood in the gap... Jesus with the woman caught in adultery is another beautiful reminder.

The gay community needs to know that the church is FOR THEM... NOT speaking out AGAINST THEM or advocating for laws that keep them marginalized and held down. Those things do nothing to bring people closer to Jesus and in fact only push them further away from ever wanting anything to do with Jesus.

The church exists to lift people up and usher them into a relationship with the God who died for them.

they need to know that they are welcome in our community and that we trust the Holy Spirit to work in them in the same way that I trust He is working in you, and in the way that I have seen Him work in ME.

So that doesn't mean "you are welcome here as long as you change" - that means "you are welcome here, let's talk about Jesus, and let's see what the Holy Spirit does in you, AND IN ME."

You belong here. No matter who you are, no matter what you have done.

Built into all of us is the desire to be fully known, and still fully accepted. The church should be the one place that's possible... But you can fully accept someone and still acknowledge the need for the Gospel to work in their lives. That is the entire point of salvation... Jesus saves us and is saving us and will save us. If you affirm that something is as it should be, you cut off its ability to be transformed.

but is the Holy Spirit's job to convict people of their sins... and it is God's job to judge that person... and if God's judgment is truly upon a person, we have to have enough faith in the working POWER of the Holy Spirit to trust that the Spirit is going to do HIS JOB in THEIR LIFE. Whether they respond or not of course is not for us to determine.

We don't need to do the Holy Spirit's job, but we certainly shouldn't be hindering him from doing it.

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But that is why I find it SO SIGNIFICANT that so often we close the book after chapter 1 verse 32, and not read what the VERY NEXT THING THAT PAUL SAYS IS... in 2:1 - let's read it again:

"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things."

The Gospel is the only thing that will reconcile the lost back to God.

and it's the only thing that matters until a person comes to terms with the fact that they are poor in Spirit, and that they can not save themselves.

At that point, we all are sinners and are washed by the blood of Jesus and who have no business looking FOR sins in other people while ignoring our own. We work out our salvations in the communities that God has brought us into through accountability and love, not through judgment.

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Now, I am well aware that THAT is not enough for some of you.

I am well aware that culture has changed.

But the God plan... the cultural mandate, the image of God revealed through His creation and the image of God revealed through marriage between a man and a woman has always existed and will always be.

And the entire point of Paul using this example is not to call out this specific practice but to demonstrate the magnitude of which we have exchanged the very things that God has designed to BOTH move the world forward AND TO REFLECT HIS GLORY.

His message is the IMAGE of God... The glory of God, and how we have given that up for all sorts of things that are unworthy of our praise and attention.. So in verses 26 and 27, he talks specifically about the sexual stuff... and he says “exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature”

“nature” here is not what you feel is natural as some may argue, but it is natural as it is laid out in the early parts of Genesis.

If you read it closely, he returns to Genesis over and over here... verse 20 - God’s divine attributes are clearly perceived ever since the CREATION of the world - exchanging the truth for a lie and worshipping the creature rather than the CREATOR...

I believe it is important that we CLEARLY define what the Bible would describe as “natural” - and what that even means... especially because marriage itself is actually described by Paul in Ephesians as the greatest reflection we get... the closest image that we get to the relationship between Christ and the church... ultimately, it is an image of glory.

So God created Adam, IN HIS IMAGE. But the Bible said that Adam was all alone. He created all of these things and said “it is good” - but then, when seeing Adam all alone, he said “it is NOT good”

Genesis 2:18 says:

“Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper *fit* for him.”

The word “helper” (*ezer*) is a word we often get describing God, like when the Psalmist (33:20) says “Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he *is* our **help** and our shield.” - it has a resonance of redemption... of redeemer... of one who rescues man. In fact ALMOST EVERY TIME THE WORD IS USED, it is talking about God. This is one of the only times its not.

That is how woman is described... something is missing...

something that she completed.

Now, the word FIT is the Hebrew word “*kenegdo*” and it is a combination of two words... one that means “similarly” and another that means opposite.

Similar, but different.

Genesis is filled with contrasting things that are different, but work together. In 1:4-5 you have light and darkness... and God separates them yet says they are both necessary to make up a day.

It says he created TWO GREAT LIGHTS... one for day, one for night.

The land and the sea... (waters and dry land, Genesis 1:9)

you get the picture.

now:

after God creates woman from man, he describes the way that the two will come together, and what happens when they do.

Genesis 2:24 says:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

The word “one” is the word “*echad*” and it is the same word that we get in the SHEMA, Deuteronomy 6:5 which says “hear of Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” THE LORD IS ECHAD. It means “unity in the midst of diversity...” together, but different. Which is a great image of the trinity... in my view, the best image of the trinity: Father, Son, Spirit. God says that in the same way that we all are one... man and woman shall become one and there will be a power in that coming together that reflects something bigger...

We are going to hone in on *echad* a little more closely next week, so hang on to that because it is one of the biggest concepts in the entire Bible, but for today I just need you to see that it is the distinct joining together in which two things that are distinctly different work together to create something that would be impossible to create without both parts.

It is used to describe God. and it is used to describe marriage.

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Next, there is a fascinating revelation in the Hebrew language itself in the words man and woman and the way that they work together.

and I will say this knowing that there is always a possibility that this is just a coincidence, but quite frankly, I don't believe that God is that random.

In Hebrew, the word for husband (or “man”) is “*ish* אִישׁ” it is made up of the letters: *aleph*, *yod*, and *shin*.

ok... now:

In Hebrew, the word for wife (or “woman”) is “*ishah* אִשָּׁה” - it is made up of the letters *aleph*, *shin*, and *hey*.

If you look at these two words carefully, you notice that Two of the letters are identical, and only one letter in each word **is different**.

Which isn't that surprising, since in English, man and woman are similar words, and of course, we know that when God created woman, he created her FROM MAN.

But here is what IS SURPRISING:

if you remove the letters that are the same, and combine the two distinct letters, (remove yod, from *husband* - or Y in English, and "hey," from wife... -and you put them together...

יה

you spell, in Hebrew: the word "yah" which is the name of God.

so all the way down to the first language the Bible was written in, the words are IDENTICAL with only ONE DIFFERENCE AND THAT DIFFERENCE, **WHEN COMBINED, SPELLS GOD.**

When the complimentary differences of a Husband and a wife come together, the way it was *intended* to be - God is there. It is a reflection of God.

when man and woman come together and are living in unity and in harmony, the way that marriage was designed to be... **God is in the midst.** He is there, and his spirit rests on that relationship.

In fact, it is the single greatest image of what He is like. **The two, both made in distinct, complementary images of God come together to create a beautiful reflection of God...**

but here is the problem.

Marriage is not easy. In fact, quite often I talk to people who are quick to point out that THE dysfunctional marriages tend to be the heterosexual ones... more fighting... more abuse... more chaos. And the reason for this

is complex, but the truth is that when differences come together, you have to learn how to sort out those differences and see how they work together, and what happens when they don't. Unity in diversity takes a level of determination in which you say "we are going to make this what it is supposed to be"

But the most fascinating (and terrifying) thing about this Hebrew image we get for marriage is that when you REMOVE the distinct letters that form the word God... or you could say it like this: when you take GOD out of the marriage...

and you try and read the Hebrew words WITHOUT God's name in them, what you are left with is the letters "aleph" "shin", "aleph" "shin"

"aleph" "shin" spells the word "FIRE" and you get it twice in a row.

שן שן

Fire! Fire!

In Hebrew, how you emphasize something is to double it. There were no exclamation points, so if you wanted to make sure you emphasized how important something is... you would double it.

Fire. Fire. The worst kind of fire.

In other words... this. is. as. bad. as. it. gets!

THERE are going to be tensions.

There are going to be things that are really hard to work out, and so often, they get very unhealthy and actually detract people from the idea of marriage, and IF THAT is a "reflection of Christ," it detracts people from a relationship with Jesus.

The point is: for us to be who we are supposed to be in Christ is always going to take work. It is going to take work to have healthy marriages and relationships, just like it takes work to abstain from the things you know are

not God's best for you and just like how it takes work to live a life that truly demonstrates to a broken world the Savior who died for them.

Something that was *designed* to be the absolutely greatest gift... the absolute best... can become THE ABSOLUTE WORST, MOST DESTRUCTIVE THING IN YOUR LIFE. Which is why even what the Bible calls "natural relationships" can become *false and distorted images of God*.

We have the potential to destroy the very things that were created to bring glory to God. To be an image bearer of God. That is the whole point of this entire section...

Ultimately, it is not about what makes you feel good or makes you happy or even what fulfills you... it is about the fact that God has created us for a purpose, and when we WALK IN IT, THE ENTIRE WORLD WINS.

but You can exchange God for fire. Your marriage can point people to Jesus and be a reflection of the Gospel, OR it can be the driving force which keeps people as far away from Jesus as they possibly can be.

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In Ephesians 5, Paul quotes the passage that we just spent so much time on, in Genesis 2. And then he drops a bomb at the end of it...

verse 5:31 quotes Genesis: Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." (*echad basar*)

then verse 32 says: This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

So Paul, bringing a bit of clarity, tells us two things that we need to understand about marriage, and this is very important to the concept of being image bearers of God's glory.

1. Its a Mystery.

Something that we will never fully understand. There will always be questions that we can't answer, but it is WORTH THE WORK. It is something that is profound (GREEK, *meegas*). Its not easy to understand, BUT ITS AMAZING.

2. Its a reflection.

Of something bigger than what meets the eye, designed to point people toward a relationship with Jesus. And quite frankly, to me, this is the one that levels the playing field...

Because what this is saying is that: MARRIAGE IS NOT FOR YOU.

Most of us enter marriage like we enter most things in our lives, thinking "this is the thing that I want" - of course we have so many that have failed - OF COURSE the world has a low view of it...

rarely do we enter into it thinking "this is my chance to make my life about someone else - this is my chance to live the Gospel out and be a part of something that demonstrates the love of God to our world"

Of course you do benefit from it... of course there are things mutual about it. But marriage serves a bigger purpose than just the parts of it that we consider to be pleasurable...

And when we exchange something that comes with the divine purpose of filling the whole earth with the glory of God... People, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 11:17 - we are trading away our call to the very first mission that God ever gave His creation.

But even with or without procreation, marriage is the reflection of Christ and the church and is an ultimate opportunity to bear the image of something divine.

You just can't read the writings of Paul and not see that, especially Ephesians 5... Marriage is the most clear image we get of God... a triune, UNIFIED YET DIVERSE God... A God that is ECHAD... recklessly pursuing the church knowing that the whole world can be changed by this.

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So as we wrap things up today, we must remember that Paul first speaks to the Gentiles... but then, right when we get to the beginning of chapter 2 he flips it on the Jews, showing them how they are all just as guilty.

Because if we so much as pass a judgment on someone who is sinning in a way that is different than maybe we struggle with, Paul says **we have coming what they do.**

We are just as guilty.

Those who try and play judge now in the lives of others will answer to The Judge later for impersonating Him.

Because it all is different forms of the same lack of honor and lack of glory given to the one who created it all.

But then Paul says “don’t you know... that it is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance?”

It’s not the stones that keep hitting us in the head by the crazy religious people who want to try and guilt us into salvation. It’s the kindness of God, that He would send His son to die for a world that deserved to die.

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When you come face to face with your guilt, and realize that because Jesus took all that, now, when God sees you, He sees Jesus... THAT is meant to lead you to repentance.

That is it. God saves us on account of nothing that we have done. But that salvation certainly is cause for us to reflect on who we once were, and determine that we are going to turn around...

That is what “repent” means... it means “to change your mind.” It means your life was going one way, but you are turning around now, and begin going another way.

And the only thing that has the power to do that is the kindness of God. The most perfect image of His love for us, played out on the cross of

Calvary. As Jesus allowed Himself to be killed by the very people He was dying on behalf of.

LIKE WE SAID LAST WEEK, THERE WAS AN EVEN GREATER, FAR MORE POWERFUL EXCHANGE.

Romans 1:18 says “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness...” - and it is one of those verses that is so so scary for so many people, and they don’t know what to do with it... because they know that they fall into that category - they know that they have removed God from areas of their lives and lived as if they don’t need him.

But the word ungodliness is the Greek word: “*asebeia*” - (ah-say-by-ah)

and you get the word again in Romans 5:6. And do you know what it says in Romans 5:6?

“For while we were still weak, *at the right time* Christ died for the **ungodly**.”

This is so significant, because the very word that Paul uses as a way to introduce EVERYTHING he is talking about in these passages about the wrath of God, he goes on to say that Jesus died for.

I can stand before you today and tell you with complete confidence that no matter what you have done... no matter what you are doing... no matter where your head is in this moment... that at the right time... the perfect time... RIGHT WHEN YOU NEEDED IT MOST... Christ died for you, and He died for me.

And we will forever lean into that reality. On my best day I can’t save myself, and on my worst day, Christ died for me.