



Romans

05 The Exchange, continued

February 17, 2019

Courage Church, Detroit, MI

scriptures: Romans 1:18-25, Genesis 3, Proverbs 4:23

Here is **Romans 1:18-25:**

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness* of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 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 lusts 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.**

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Over the years in our old house here in Detroit, we have dealt with a lot of mice issues. When we first moved in it was actually a rat issue, but we figured that out pretty quickly.

But because of the level of construction always going on, we often have had openings to our home that mice have gotten in. And usually, when we see one, we know enough to deal with it right away before it gets out of hand.

Mice are not one of those things that you can let go. But last week with the cold, they started to get bad, and because it got so cold that we left the house for a few days, by the time that we got back we were noticing that the problem was a lot worse than it had been in the past.

And to be honest, I have barely been able to sleep... because we always hear them grinding away at something in our room... behind our fireplace... and have been pretty aggressive... we have tons of this poison out that is killing them... we have snap traps set up... but our nights lately have consisted of hearing the rustling sound of mice, then after a bit we will hear a trap snap... then within seconds we will hear another one digging into the poison. It truly is a source of constant nightly anxiety for me, but I do think that we are getting a lot closer to having it taken care of now, finally... but Friday morning as we were leaving for school, Brooklyn went to put on her boots and there was a mouse in her boot.

She screamed... she had't seen one yet, and it really shook her up. And as I was driving home from dropping her off I just kept thinking... that little six year old had to start the day at school after something like that.

This thing has gone too far.

Mice are small, but they are destructive. The smells of urine, feces... the way they get into your food (and butter) - they destroy property, spread sickness, they keep you awake with their constant scratching and chewing and whatever other demonic activity they are doing in your house.

But yet it is easy to look at one in your house, ESPECIALLY IF YOU HADN'T DEALT WITH THEM BEFORE, and think "I don't want to hurt that," OR "I don't want to go to the store and get the traps... I am just going to hope that it leaves on its own... it found its way in, it can find it's way out."

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but it doesn't leave. Instead, it reproduces. Extremely quickly. And the longer it takes to take care of, the harder it is to solve it, the more damage is done - and the more furniture and food and whatever else, has to be replaced.

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Last week we talked about how in Ancient Hebrew, the language was written pictorially. We showed you the word picture for the word “honor” - and how the picture illustrates that honor is the thing that opens the inside door, and how when we don’t honor God, we are actually closing a door to Him in our lives.

In a moment, we will look at another picture, and that is of the Hebrew word AVON - which is the word “iniquity”

An iniquity is an inward motivation, something that is OR IS NOT always acted on, but is destructive all the same, and causes damage that you may not even realize.

It comes from the word (*avah*) meaning “to bend or distort.” - “*avah*” is used to describe a road or a path that is NOT straight, but has a lot of turns and bends.

“iniquity” is often (but not always) used in the Bible alongside of other words like transgression or sin but this word seems to go a bit deeper, as it is something that can be done completely in the darkness... even in some instances completely in your mind where nobody else sees or, as you may convince yourself of, nobody else is affected by.

And the Hebrew pictures that make up the word AVON is the picture of an eye, the picture of a hook, and the letter “noon” which sometimes means a seed or is sometimes interpreted to be the picture of “fish” which, both in the ancient world symbolized multiplication. If I were designing this alphabet, I would use a mouse as the third picture. I am sure we can all use our imagination as to what that third one could be.



But what some sages and poets and later Rabbi's in the ancient world would have told you this was saying when they look at these three pictures, was they would say that "whatever your eye hooks to, multiplies."

And when you get into the world of multiplication, you realize how quickly something can go from seeming like "no big deal at all" to being a absolutely out of control, very quickly.

When your eye hooks to something, it determines "that is what I want" - and as that multiplies, that turns into: this is what I need... this is what I deserve, and before long "this is what I can not live without" - things get out of control rather quickly. And that is a pretty accurate description of what seems to be being described here in Romans 1.

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So we are going to spend today mostly talking through what is happening in Romans 1:25, lets read this one verse again, and try and make a bit of sense of it:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts 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.

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Before that, it was described that they gave up the GLORY of God... they thought "this is not as great as it seems, we can do it better ourselves" as Paul quotes the Psalm about the story of Israel building the Golden Calf when Moses went to Mt. Sinai, where God made a covenant with Israel.

God created a divine order for the world... and He is central to that perfect order... but what humans have forever done is lived in such a way in which they can achieve what they need to achieve all by themselves.

Let me try and give you a visual of this. The creature... humanity, really has come a long way.

You can simply get on google, and see how far we have come. For instance, this is a SINGLE IMAGE... a photograph of the city of Shanghai, taken from a camera with the ability to capture an image at 24.9 BILLION pixels.

From the aerial view you can scroll down all the way from the sky to the street, where you can see the license plate numbers of the cars on the street. You can see the families walking, the man with a food cart trying to make a living, the mom with her daughter. You can see the businessmen having a meeting or enjoying a break and some fresh air together.

Then there is the world that you can't see. Inside this glass is an underground apple store likely filled with several people drooling over the most recent technology itching to throw their hard earned money at it.

In a world that is advancing as quickly as ours, it is no wonder less people than ever acknowledge that there is any need for a god, at all.

But as incredible as this technology is, all that this image is doing is capturing a fraction of the glory of something far bigger, and even 25 billion pixels has its limits to one major city when in fact that are many.

Behind every pixel is a story of a God breathed image bearer, made up of millions of cells working together to keep them alive... with a heart that feels things, is drawn toward things, can be captured and can also be broken... eyes that see things, and a mind that has to comprehend right from wrong, good from evil... behind some of those pixels exist human souls, navigating our broken world and making the most they can of it.

Behind the walls of each and every one of these buildings are *more* people, with more stories.

Some people know God... some are far from Him... but all are loved by him... all are being pursued by him... and, as Romans says, all have the ability to look up and see the depth of the world that He created... and there is something deep down that tells us "this is glory." - This is beyond me. This is heavy.

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Now, the Bible begins with the story of God creating this beautiful, glorious place and, as we talked through last week, the culmination of creation was the creation of man and woman, who were given the task of taking care of this beautiful, glorious place and spreading the glory of God throughout it, as image bearers of God.

They lived among the perfection of God's creation, and they had nothing to worry about. There was nothing to stress them out... there was nothing to fight about...

In Genesis 2:9 tells us that in the middle of the Garden was the tree of life, a tree bearing the fruit of eternal life in paradise with God, and another tree, a forbidden tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And this is setting for the first exchange.

God told Adam and Eve that anything that they wanted, they could have, besides the fruit of one tree...

The tree of life was their's to eat from, as was everything else in the garden, besides the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... a tree that bore fruit that produced just that...

it gave humans the ability to determine good and evil. Before they ate of the fruit, they didn't have to worry about all of that. They just got to live in the perfection of God's creation. But when the serpent deceived them, he did it with the promise that "if you eat of this fruit, you will be like God, in that you will know good and evil" - Genesis 3:5

Now, that was true. We know that, because after they eat of it, Genesis 3:22 actually has God saying "they are like us now, now they know good and evil"

The lie wasn't that they would gain that knowledge... The lie was that they **NEEDED THE KNOWLEDGE**... the lie was that the glory of God and everything that God gave them was not enough. But what it opened up for

them was eyes that saw the bad in themselves and in each other... it opened them up to look at something that God created as good, and now they had to determine... IS THAT GOOD? They lived in a world in which God navigated good and evil for them, and kept evil far from them. But they decided that they wanted to navigate good and evil on their own... which, as you begin to determine what is good and what is not good, it begins to be very easy to make all sorts of judgments against others who are doing things that you deem as “not good” -

So what God has to do, is he has to kick them out of the garden, and put an angel with a flaming sword guarding all directions leading to the tree of life because God knows “no human being can live forever with that type of knowledge, so we have to make sure that they never eat of the tree of life, lest they live forever. And this is very interesting... because the account in Genesis tells us that God wants to make sure that they don’t “reach” for the tree of life... and actually grab it.

I was reading an old sermon transcript by Timothy Keller, and I want to read to you what he says about the tree of life:

What’s the tree of life? The tree of life is to have that in its fullness, to have all the **glory** and **greatness**. Look at the scale on which the Bible says you are made. Look at the grandeur. Look at how huge, (you might say,) your tanks are. Look at what enormous stuff it’s going to take to fulfill it, and that’s what the tree of life is. What is God saying when he says they must not be allowed to reach out? Here’s what it means. They’ve lost God. **If you’re going to be your own god, you’re going to lose God.**

So human life was cut short by its eagerness to determine right from wrong, a role that was only meant for God, and something that to do this day has been one of the biggest struggles humanity has ever had to face. We all say it “only God can judge me” - even the Bible says that... God is the judge... but yet man has tried to take the role of judge and they have heaped it both onto OTHERS and onto themselves in how they determine that they will and will not do.

And I think I’ve said this before, but the name Adam literally means “humanity” - because in this story, Adam represents you and I. Even though

in hindsight we love to think “we would not have eaten the fruit” - the truth is that Adam and Eve did exactly what we would do if it were us, they chose to be their own gods, and we do it now, every single day.

So in the Garden, there was an exchange... and they worshipped the creature (serpent) rather than the creator (God)

now, you need to hold on to this for next week... because it is very important to note the way that the fall of man has instigated a world in which people view each other from a lens that says “there is something wrong with that person” - and the problem is that most of us have formed worldviews that point to OTHER PEOPLE being sinful and ourselves being righteous. And though Paul calls out some specific things in the coming passages, the bigger point when it comes to SIN is that we all, in fact, ARE GUILTY.

Last week we talked briefly about this. We mustn't throw stones at others, but we also must not tell people that the parts of their lives that DON'T bring Glory to God are as they should be and are pleasing to God. They aren't. God wants people who will come to Him knowing that they will never be able to get themselves out of the mess that they are in without Him... that is what the first beatitude means... blessed are the poor in Spirit... the Spiritually bankrupt people who know that they are without hope if Jesus doesn't step in.

The Gospel is for the broken... the people who know “I am not as I should be.”

BUT when you convince yourself that “I am as I should be” - watch what happens:

this is what happened as a result:

Therefore **God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity**

God gave them up.

He is saying “If you are willing to trade the infinite glory of an almighty God, for something in this world that is fleeting... that will be crushed in an instant... that breaks My heart... but you are a human who has a will of

your own and you are allowed to do that. You are giving up EVERYTHING, FOR NOTHING... but if that is your choice, I will step back.”

He gave them up in the lusts of their hearts... the Greek word is “*epithumia*” (*epi-thume-ay-o*) and it is a combination of two words, *epi*, which means “*in*” and “*thumos*” essentially means “the mind.”

In.

The.

Mind.

If you separate the words, you get “in the mind” and if you combine them you get the word “*epithumia*” (*epi-thume-ay-o*) which literally means “to set your heart upon.”

Lust is when your heart determines that it has to have something that you would have to cross a line in order to get.

We like to limit it to sex, and it definitely does mean that too, but lust is exactly what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden. They set their heart upon something, and the only way to get what they wanted was to cross THE ONLY LINE that God had laid out for them.

In the sermon on the mount, when Jesus talks about lust, **He paints a picture unlike anything that the world had heard at that time.** In those days, everybody knew you couldn’t commit sexual immorality... You could not transgress, breaking the trust of your spouse and the community and actually acting on your lust... everyone knew if you were married, you had to be faithful to the person you are married to, and if not you could literally be killed according to the law. Adultery was punishable by death (though it was *almost* never enforced)

but in those days, people had no problem looking. They had no problem with lust, they had no problem with the inward motivation of iniquity as long as they did not act on it. But then Jesus comes along, and in one of the boldest things we ever hear from Jesus, he says that IF YOU EVEN THINK

IT... IF YOU EVEN LOOK AT A WOMAN WITH LUSTFUL INTENT... He says you have ALREADY committed adultery with her in your heart.

Why?

Because WHATEVER YOUR EYE HOOKS TO, MULTIPLIES.

and whatever you allow to reproduce inside of you will one day find it's way out. Inward motivations turn into outward actions that break trust with others and ALWAYS leave us empty.

It can't stay inside you forever.

Proverbs 4:23 says "above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." (NIV)

Once something has lodged itself into your heart... that will start to flow out...

But here is the human problem with that, that we need to figure out:

The Bible tells us that the heart is DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL ELSE (Jeremiah 17:9). So more than ANYTHING, the one thing that we know about the heart is that IT IS DECEITFUL, and whatever it is convinced of will flow out of it.

What does it mean to be deceitful?

it means "your heart is trying to trick you"

God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts.

they are tricked.

Romans 1:25 really is a culminating moment in this section, when Paul says that people "gave up the truth about God for a lie..." something tricked them... something got ahold of their heart and THEY GAVE UP the truth about God for that thing.

God allows us to reject Him.

this could not be more relevant to us today... watch this process:

What begins with your eye, **makes its way to your mind**, and then *lodges in your heart*...but if we give in to the notion that we should “follow our heart” which is the bill of goods the world LOVES to sell us... - the odds are, **we will be following a lie**... because *by nature* our hearts lie to us.

but if you hook to that lie, it will only multiply.

Ephesians 4 talks about the heart as something that can callous...

when you want to play guitar... it hurts when you first start... your fingers can't take much of it... but if you are persistent and you play through the pain, eventually you don't feel it anymore.

it's like that with sin.

THE MORE WE DO IT, THE EASIER IT BECOMES TO DO IT.

And **the things that at one point caused you a certain level of conviction, as it multiplies it will only come to feel more and more acceptable**... because as things multiply, the mindset becomes “**I have to have that...**” - and the easiest way to justify having something that maybe is not right is to first of all convince yourself that *you deserve it*, and second of all convince yourself that *it would not be wrong to have it*.

But it didn't start there. It started *here* (in your heart, in your eye)

But at the root of it is an exchange. It is you saying to God “I think I want this instead...” or “this is what makes me feel good, so who cares what the Bible says or what the Holy Spirit tells me.” - it's an exchange. We give up the creator for that which was created.

and the reason that it is so offensive to God is because He wants to give you His glory... He wants his glory to fill the earth... Its an absolutely crazy

exchange... its like trading a billion dollars for a quarter because you would rather have a coin than paper money, because someone convinced you that the coin would last longer.

Nobody in their right mind does that... but what does Romans say next? In 1:28 Paul says that, BECAUSE THEY CHOSE TO EXCHANGE... God gave them up to a *debased* mind... when something is debased it means that its value has been reduced... BUT the Greek word Paul uses here (*adokimos*) literally just means "WORTHLESS" - they didn't HONOR God... they didn't give him the weight he deserved, so he gave them over... he let them have a mind that did that... that had no value. That had no GLORY.

When it says "God gave them up" - we must not read it as God throwing his hands in the air and literally giving up ON US. In life, we all know that there are times when there is only so much that can be done.

As a parent, I can coach, I can discipline... but ultimately there will come a day when my children are going to have to decide for themselves the life that they want to lead and I will be powerless to dictate their decisions, no matter how much I gave TO them and invested IN them all of the years of their growing up.

And When God gives you EVERYTHING, but you exchange that, for NOTHING... that is not God being the mean - it is you being stupid.

Another translation (NIVSB) reads "God allowed sin to run its course"

Sometimes God lets sin run its course in our lives.

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But the thing that is so devastating, is we are living in a cultural that has, as a whole, made that exchange. It really has shifted. It's been really dark for a long time, and we have always believed that the church is the hope of the world and we certainly still believe that... but it's in the church too.

In Ephesians 4, when it talks about calloused and hardened hearts, the question is: how do you take on that new self? how do you lose the callouses? And the answer that Paul gives is: you remember how you learned Christ... how you were given the truth but you were given it

coupled with love, and the communities that should follow should be those... we have knowledge of good and evil... we have our worldview's... now its time to sort out our communities, so that we can take that knowledge, and direct it toward accountability, not condemnation... so we can direct it toward loving each other more right where they are, but always submitting to the fact that none of us are as we should be, and that Christ still wants to move in our lives... in our hearts... in our minds... in our marriages... in our churches.

I was listening this week to a talk given by a Pastor in Australia named Mark Sayers, and he was describing this moment that he had on stage preaching to his church. He pastors a large church in Melbourne called Red Church... and he is an expert on culture, and can tell you the exact process that our world went through over the last however many years that has lead culture to where it currently is... that has lead our mindsets as a whole to what they currently are.

and as he was preaching that day, he had what he called a "crisis" on stage... as he looked out and was overwhelmed by the challenge in our culture, knowing exactly how we got there, but not quite sure how to fix it.

and what he went on to describe, there couldn't be a better description of where the western church is at this moment in history... he explained how Christians have adopted this do-it-myself mindset... where they may go to church because they love the teaching and love learning from the pastor, but there are other areas of their lives, the example he gave was sexuality... where we just determine "I can sort of make that part up myself" - or... I don't like that part, it doesn't fit with the life that I have created or the worldview that makes the most sense to me, so I will take the first part, but leave out the second.

Right? when Romans was written we didn't have google... we didn't have aerial views that could see everything that is happening in an entire major city at that split second moment... we have progressed beyond the book... So we will take the parts that fit, and we will make up the rules for the parts that don't.

And we think that its harmless... but it really is like that mouse.

It will seem harmless, but it will only reproduce... it will lead to more and more compromising which will ultimately lead to destruction.

So this pastor was on stage, looking out, and he was so overwhelmed by how powerless he is, to turn around culture...

and he went on to describe how, when pondering that moment of absolute powerlessness, a dangerous question came into his mind:

And hopefully this message, so helps you understand his question...

because when God gives someone over... when he lets sin run its course, it is not so that they will be destroyed by their sin, it is so that they will reach a point in their sin where they are so fully on the bottom that they FINALLY realize there is nowhere lower that they can go... so they have that moment when it clicks... THIS TRULY WAS NOT THE BEST WAY OF LIFE FOR ME. The reason that often people who find Jesus when they are at their lowest are the ones who hold onto him the tightest is because they know who they were before Christ, and they are not going back.

So the question that Mark had come to his mind, is he felt like he heard God asking: What if at this moment I would like to renew the church? what if I have to let it get so bad... to where even the best preaching, is not going to work? Worship that's amazing and tries to get as close to the culture as possible, is not going to work...

Then he said this:

RENEWALS HAPPEN WHEN PEOPLE GET TO THE END OF THEMSELVES, AND THERE IS NOTHING TO RELY ON EXCEPT A CONTENDING ON YOUR KNEES FOR GOD'S PRESENCE TO MOVE.

we all have areas of our lives in which we believe that we should be allowed to live it a certain way, and often, whether we admit it or not, that way is totally void of God.

and we think that God doesn't notice, because sometimes He lets things run their course... but it breaks God's heart, because He loves you. He loves the church. He wants to renew it just like he wants to renew your life.

A better exchange

And in the same way that we all feel the result of that first exchange, we all reap the benefits of a better exchange. One in which Jesus exchanged all that He is, for all that we've done.

He took our sin upon His sinless life... and exchanged his life for ours. We will get more into this when we get to Romans 5, but in Romans 5 Paul talks about how sin entered the world through one man, but through another, it was dealt with.

And the book of Isaiah gives an incredible description of what Jesus did for us, in chapter 53. It says that Jesus was pierced for our transgressions... His skin was broken through, on behalf of the times that we have broken trust with another... for the times that we have committed outward actions that have had an outward effect... He paid a visible, outward price for those things which we have allowed to manifest into realities in our lives...

But it says that he was BRUISED for our iniquities. For the inward motivations, the things that our hearts were set upon... for the times in our minds that the path just started to bend, and twist... a bruise is under your skin... he had an internal bleeding for the inward motivations.

it says that He bore our griefs and he carried our sorrows... and it says that he was chastised so that we could experience peace.

It says that BY HIS WOUNDS, we are HEALED.

That is some powerful stuff...

A renewal is coming to our world... a Spiritual waking up... and you all know this, our church exists for so much more than what goes on in this place... but if God is looking for people who will stand in the gap for the broken... who will get on their knees and repent not only for themselves but on behalf of the broken world that we have contributed to creating...

He should look no further than this place... He should look no further than you and I.

There was a better exchange, church. let's stop living like we are BOUND TO THE FIRST ONE.