



## The Exchange

Romans 1:18-32 | Jan 19, 2020

There are few words more frightening to us than “cancer.” Especially when that diagnosis is followed by the equally horrifying prognosis, “There’s nothing we can do about it.” But that’s exactly the condition of everyone in the human race, spiritually speaking. Except it’s infinitely worse. “It’s sin ... and there’s nothing we can do about it.” (Of course, just because there’s nothing “we” can do about it doesn’t mean there’s nothing that can be done. What is impossible with us is possible with God.)

In today’s text, Paul probes the depths and causes of human sin, as well as the result. Sin is not only a malady that kills in this life; it also subjects us to judgment and hell, which the Bible calls “the second death.” The wrath of God is being revealed against all our godlessness and wickedness right now, in advance of Judgment Day, and we need to know why. In fact, Paul almost seems to employ the modern leadership strategy of asking “5 Whys” to get to the root of the problem. **Why** is wrath being revealed? Reading Romans 1:18-23 we discern:

**Why 1: People are godless and wicked.**

**Why 2: People suppress the truth.**

**Why 3: People can see the truth about God plainly, and are accountable for it.**

**Why 4: People reject the truth about God and God’s purposes for them.**

**Why 5: People exchange God for images—for idols, lies, and brokenness.**

This frightening exchange, God for “images,” is the interpretive key to the whole text. Humans were made to image forth God. To reflect him like a mirror. To represent him like an icon. The familiar NBA logo serves as a good example. In 1969 an ad agency traced a photo of Jerry West—the all-time great player with the great all-American name—to represent the league. And to this day, Jerry West’s nickname is, “The Logo.” Likewise, human beings were designed to be the logo of God.

We were meant to stand before God in the world, basking in his glory and grace, giving him thanks for all things, and thereby reflecting him in all we do. But we chose to stand before other things, and to stand other things before us. And as a judgment for that godlessness and wickedness, *God gave us over*.

We made three dark exchanges: The glory of the immortal God for mortal images; the truth of God for a lie; and natural relationships for unnatural ones. All our image-bearing got twisted around.

Thus God gave us over three times: To sexual immorality (because our hearts will never be satisfied until they find their satisfaction in Him); to shameful lusts for the same sex (because if you put yourself in God’s place you tend to set your affection on yourself); and to depraved minds that crave every other kind of evil. The diagnosis: “Sin.” The prognosis: “There’s nothing we can do about it.”

But what we couldn’t do, God did in Christ. Romans 18-32, begins with the word “for” or “because.” This points us back to what comes before, which is a statement about God’s righteousness being revealed in the gospel. Righteousness that comes as a gift to be received by faith. God gave us the gospel opportunity to **exchange** our sin for Christ’s righteousness, precisely because his wrath was being revealed against it.

## Discussion Guide

1. Read Romans 1:18-32 and try to identify and name your feelings about it. Share the first two or three natural reactions you have to it. Do these feelings compare any other experience in your life? (Like maybe a medical diagnosis?)

If a person doesn't have much of a reaction to this text, could we say that they are suppressing the truth, just like this text says? Why?

2. We tend to think of wrath as being opposite of love, and since "God is love," we might wonder if wrath is even compatible with his nature. How would answer this?
3. Leon Morris describes God's wrath as, "The settled and active opposition of God's holy nature to everything that is evil." Unpack this definition. How is God's wrath like and unlike our anger?
4. We said in the sermon that sin is like alcohol to someone in AA: "cunning, baffling, powerful." Our sin is rooted in an inscrutable combination of nature, nurture, and personal choice. Like Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"
  - Why does this matter to a discussion about sin and wrath?
  - Why does it matter to a discussion about sexual orientation and attraction?
5. The very heart of this passage is 1:21-23: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave him thanks, 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 made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." How does this passage explain the core of our problem? How would you explain this passage to someone who had never read it before?
6. A true heart turned toward God will reflect his image. It will glorify God and give him thanks. On a practical level, what does this mean? How exactly do we glorify God and thereby reflect his image?

A sinful heart turned away from God will make images. Why is this so? What's the "anthropology" behind this? Why do we *always do this* when we reject the knowledge of God?

7. The Bible repeatedly says that Jesus is the true image of God. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). What are your favorite things about Jesus, and how do these show you what you're becoming in him? ("Those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" *Romans 8:29*).
8. How do you explain the two great "revelations" of God in Romans 1? In verse 17, the righteousness of God is revealed; and in verse 18, the wrath of God is revealed. Explain this juxtaposition.
9. What is one take-away from this text for you?

