

## Righteous Wrath Revealed: *The Great Exchange* – Part 2

### Romans 1:24-27

*“The fundamental truth of the universe is that God exists and that he should be worshipped and served and his name should be praised.”*

Thomas Schreiner

**Introduction:** Since the Garden of Eden onward, we as created beings have struggled with a fundamental issue: *we have an overinflated or misunderstood view of ourselves.* One of the first responses to sinful reality from Adam and Eve was to **deny the reality or practice of sin and blame it on others:** *the woman you gave me; the devil made me do it.* This is a plague for everyone born since then, since we are ALL born into sin and sinners from birth, being *dead in our trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1). Most people believe people are basically good, while a staggering amount believe they are the best person they know. *Where do we see this play out?*

How many couples believe that their spouse is a roadblock to their happiness, and if only THEY would change, their marriages would be better? The answer? Just about everyone who has ever done marital counseling. How many kids when they get in trouble at school admit they were wrong right away, not lying or trying to justify it, or pointing out the other kids doing the same thing. How many people will point out the flaws of others, or see the downsides of their family, church, government, job, etc., but never actually acknowledge their own part in the conflict. How often do you admit: *“I was wrong”, “I need to change”, or “I realize I was the cause of your pain”?*

The problem with this misunderstood and overinflated view of self is not only does it hinder our growth in relationships and life: If you don’t see that you need to change, grow, and improve, you never will. If you think the problems you are facing are all external or the result of someone else, you will adopt a **victim** mentality and stay in your present misery. No, the bigger problem is that an overinflated view or a diminished understanding of our nature means we do not understand our vital need of the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ! We think we are good, but just need a little help, instead of seeing ourselves as desperate, wretched, full-fledged sinners, beggars who need Someone else to help us and have Something else change us. And the reality is, even after we have been made new creations in Christ, our flesh still wages war against us and vies for influence and control, leaving us STILL in constant need for grace every day. So every person is in continual need of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that is both reality and good news. This is why Paul spent so much time and space in Romans on the issue of **our sin and God’s wrath**, so that we would have a better understanding of our own hearts and the glory of the gospel.

### Wrath Revealed

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

But the point that Paul makes here is that the gospel both reveals God’s **righteousness AND His wrath**. Each are part of the same gospel. The wrath of God is *“the response of our holy and righteous God against sin and sinners that have not been covered by the atonement of Christ.”*<sup>1</sup> (Robert Rothwell). His wrath is perfect, a response to the offense of sin. It is different than our anger because His is **impartial** (Rom. 2:11), consistent with His nature, and paired with His kindness, forbearance, and patience (Rom.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/what-is-the-wrath-of-god>

2:4-5). God's wrath is consistent with His righteousness, and a lack of wrath would diminish His holiness and glory, making Him less than God.

**Rebellion, idolatry, and immorality ultimately are a result of truth suppression**, which also means it is the answer to these issues in the heart and mind of men.

### Excuses Rejected

*"For what can be known about God is **plain to them**, because **God has shown it to them**.<sup>20</sup> 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**."*

God displays Himself to people by what He created, leaving a witness to His power AND benevolence and grace. This is what we call **general revelation**, a built in knowledge that every person from every culture and every ethnicity knows simply by experiencing life on this earth. General revelation leaves people **without excuse**, since it is plain. God also gives **special revelation** through His Word, which allows us to see and know the truth of Jesus Christ. But whenever we talk to ANYONE about the truth of God, we already know that they know something. But we also know that by nature we are **suppressers**, desperately keeping the truth bottled up, pushed down, and squeezed out so that we do not have to answer to that God. That is the mark of **true rebellion**.

### Rebellion Reveled

*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**.<sup>22</sup> Claiming to be **wise**, they became **fools**,<sup>23</sup> and **exchanged** the **glory of the immortal God** for **images** resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things*

Deliberate ignorance gives no excuses. I can ignore the rattle in my car and hope it goes away, but a breakdown is coming. I can refuse to see a doctor when there is real pain, but left untreated, whatever is in me could lead to death. No one can plead ignorance before God since everyone knows there is a God. This means that **neutrality** is a myth, and there are ONLY two real paths in life: **glorifying God in a restored life through Jesus Christ**, which means to acknowledge and honor Him as He has revealed Himself, or to exchange that knowledge for a foolish lie, settling for created things that can never satisfy. These are the ONLY choices, only paths, only outcomes.

Notice that in an act of defiance out of **rebellion**, mankind thinks they are acting **wisely**, reveling in their own intellect and knowledge. But truly all we can do, even the best of minds, is discover the order and intricacies of things that God has already created. No, defiance to God's truth is NOT wise but the epitome of foolishness, trading the God of this universe for things HE CREATED, thinking they are better for us. This leads every human to create God substitutes called **idols**, which are less about pieces of wood or carvings to bow down to and instead anything that we value more than glorifying God. This is NOT new. In fact, this is exactly what Israel struggled with according to **Psalms 106:19-21**:

*They made a **calf** in Horeb and **worshiped** a metal image.  
They **exchanged** the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.  
They **forgot God**, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt*

If you remember Exodus 32 as Israel felt like they could not wait for Moses any longer to get back from receiving the Law from Yahweh, so instead of trusting by faith, they had Aaron make a golden calf out of

the jewelry that God supplied them coming out of Egypt! This was the epitome of the great exchange and idolatry, leading to God's wrath being poured out through a plague. Later in their history, Jeremiah records that Israel made two major sinful mistakes: 1) they forsook God, the fountain of living waters, and 2) exchanged Him for broken cisterns that could hold no water (Jer. 2:13). **Idolatry is the source of immorality, and our hearts are idol factories.**

**Idolatry is foolish** because it makes secondary or good things into ultimate things, putting God and His glory on a lower shelf in our lives. Idols are often acceptable things on their own, but how we treat them makes all the difference. Tim Keller, in his book *The Reason for God*, laid out a helpful way of remembering that idols only harm us, the idolater. If we idolize our spouse, we will become emotionally dependent, jealous, and controlling. If we idolize our family or kids, we will try to live vicariously through them until they resent us or have no self of their own. If we idolize our work or career, we will drive toward being a workaholic or be depressed if you career fails. If we idolize our money, possessions, or health, we will be eaten up by worry, jealousy, or self-trust that tries to control everything. **Idols do us harm, but they ultimately are an affront to the glory and holiness of God.**

The foundational exchange is choosing the creation over the Creator. God gives good gifts to those He created, but He did so in order that we would in turn, glorify and enjoy Him. When we give thoughtful gifts to our spouse or kids, ones we know they would enjoy, our hope is NOT that they would focus on the gifts but enjoy them **in light of** the relationship they have with us. **Tom Schreiner** said it this way: *"The fundamental truth of the universe is that God exists and that he should be worshipped and served and his name should be praised."*<sup>2</sup> A failure to worship God in light of how He has revealed Himself is the central sin mankind commits, from which all others flow. This is both **foolish and destructive**, and brings about real consequences. Once idolatry is solidified in the mind and heart, our hearts not only drift, but are actually given over by God to what we want.

### Consequence of Idolatrous Exchange #1

**Romans 1:24-25** *"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they **exchanged** the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."*

Just like God ushering Adam and Eve out of the Garden or the cycle of the book of Judges, sin will always elicit punishment, and for God, the punishment always fits the crime. Here, the consequence of the foolish exchange worshipping the God of the universe and instead desiring the creation instead brings particular consequence. **Note** that the issue of the heart and mind of every person is an issue of **truth, worship, and service**. We are created to WORSHIP, so we will absolutely find something to believe in and serve. The direct consequence of idolatry is IMMORALITY, and God gives humanity over to its **desires**, which means that sin will be devolving, growing, and multiplying until they are awakened to repent.

It is essential to Paul's argument and progression to see a couple of things about these verses. **First**, notice that God's wrath on sin is giving us over to both **desire AND action**, not just external consequence. To truly understand our plight with sin, we must remember that sin STARTS and originates in our minds and hearts and then leads to actions. The first appeal to Adam and Eve was to their pride ("you can be like God"), and that the fruit was good for food, a **delight to the eyes, and desired to make one wise** (Gen. 3:6). Faithless desires are sinful, and with growing sinful desires, external sin will always

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<sup>2</sup> Schreiner, p. 99.

grow. That is why the gospel is **transformative** and has to give a **new heart** by being a **new creation** since even our inner man is corrupt to the core. This also helps us know how to move forward in sanctification.

**Second**, the specific sin that God gives people over to is the **lusts or desires** of their own heart, which then leads to **impurity**, or uncleanness, which most often points to *sexual acts* (2 Cor. 12:21). **“Sexual sin is a consequence, or outworking, of the rejection of God and a failure to honor Him. The fundamental sin isn’t sexual but failure to worship God. All other sin is the consequence of this one.”** (Schreiner) In other words, sexual sin is a **consequence** of distorted view of God which breeds a distorted view of His design. *“Rebellion against the Creator leads to rejection of his design.”*<sup>3</sup> The proliferation of sexual sin in our culture, where any sex outside of marriage has been normalized and celebrated, is a direct result of a culture that has turned from God to idolatry and received God’s wrath as a result. We have so denigrated God’s design for sex that for young people today, they are looked at with **distrust** if they declare they are waiting for marriage for it. **But what is God’s design?**

Remember, there are **three main** reasons God gave sexual interaction to the world. The foundational reality is it is designed for the confines and honor of marriage ALONE, between a man and woman in a covenant relationship that should not be broken. This sheds light on the purpose of sexual interaction. **First**, it is given as a way of procreation, to fulfill the mandate given to Adam and Eve to fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). **Second**, it is given as a means of pleasure and enjoyment (see Prov. 5:18-19), a way of rejoicing and delight. God is no prude. He gave us this gift to enjoy. **Third**, it is a vivid and regular reminder of the **covenant made before God**. When Adam saw Eve and said she is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh (Gen. 2:23), he was speaking in covenant language. When the two became one flesh in sexual union, it was an ultimate expression of physical intimacy, being united together.

Now, when we understand and practice these three in the context of God’s design, it is an **act of worship!** It is delighting in a gift as we recognize the gift giver. This inherently means that a true worshiper recognizes that just like life, marriage and even sex is **NOT ABOUT THEM**, but about selflessly serving each other. This is where **lustful desires**, given over by God, **distorts the gift and brings DISHONOR, rather than worship**. *Outside of God’s design, all sexual expression, in thought, desire, and action IS SINFUL.* Because it is sinful, it CANNOT bring joy and satisfaction, but WILL continue to devolve in a downward spiral. It will never stay neutral. Sadly, our younger generation has been so inundated from the consequences of idolatry that they think that MORE sexual partners is not only acceptable but the path of meaning and satisfaction. This, of course, is a lie from the pit of hell, but also the consequence of their own sin. Unfortunately, the downward spiral does not stay contained, and in a connected and continual way, unrepentant sin leads to even more consequence.

### Consequence of Idolatrous Exchange #2

**Romans 1:26** *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 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.*

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Doriani, “Romans: Reformed Expository Commentary”. P. 42.

This is a much discussed and debated text, but not because it is unclear, but runs counter to the desire and experience of many.<sup>4</sup> So we will first explain the text and then draw some conclusions as it pertains to our church and culture (which is really what we always do with every text).

**First**, notice that this is a continuing of God giving humanity over to their sinful desires and actions: “*for this reason*” connects it. This means Paul is focusing his point and argument from broad to narrow, from any and all sexual immorality to a particular engagement. “Same sex behavior is portrayed as both **evidence** and **consequence** of humanity’s rebellion against the Creator and his **purpose** for human life.”<sup>5</sup>

**Second**, the *act* of the unnatural union of women with women and men with men is sourced in misplaced or *dishonorable passions*. It is the **desire** for these that is the first step, and the desire leads to the act. **Tom Schreiner** said it this way: “*It is clear that Paul condemns not just the activity but also same-sex lust, though, of course, such lust translates itself into actions that are shameful.*”<sup>6</sup>

**Third**, Paul is not addressing a narrow type of homosexuality as some have proposed, but a general kind. “*The wording of Rom. 1:26-27 is not restricted to a specific kind of homosexual act but is a general proscription of ALL homosexual activity.*”<sup>7</sup> These practices were going on in Rome, much like in our world today. His point was that the **unnatural** way mankind exchanges the truth of God for a lie, **mirrors** the exchange of the **natural with the unnatural** in sexual activity. The Bible addresses this multiple times (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:8-11), but only here does it specifically speak to woman to woman practice.

**Fourth**, far from somehow being an acceptable or compatible **desire** or **practice** with following Christ, homosexuality itself is seen as the “*due penalty for their error*”. Paul’s point was not to point out every type of activity or even the cause of desires, but rather to point out that same sex desire and action is one of the signs that mankind has turned away from God.

Let’s now think together about some practical implications of this particular text and the context as a whole. We find ourselves in a time in history where sexual sin has affected us all, from consequences of pre-marital sex, to the proliferation of pornography, to the normalized and celebrated manifestation of homosexuality. There is likely no family in this room or listening today that has not interacted with a family member, friend, or co-worker that practices it. This leads to comfortability, hard conversations, and harder decisions of interaction. So some plain, frank, and honest consideration is needed.

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<sup>4</sup> Doriani, p. 47 “Decades of liberal efforts to weaken or obfuscate the biblical teaching on homosexuality have failed. Romans 1 calls homosexual acts shameful, unnatural, and self-punishing. **Honest critical scholars admit this candidly.** They simply believe the Bible is wrong. Luke Johnson remarks:

‘I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, though appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation is straightforward: we KNOW what the text says. But what are we to DO with what the text says?...

I think it important to state clearly that **we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture**, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what is exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God created us. By so doing, we explicitly reject as well the premises of the scriptural statements condemning homosexuality.”

<sup>5</sup> David G. Peterson, “Romans: Exegetical Biblical Theology Commentary”, p. 123

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Schreiner, “Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary”, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> Schreiner, p. 105.

- 1) **Homosexuality is NOT the greatest sin or blight on our culture** – Homosexuality IS sin, just as heterosexual sin outside of marriage. Paul's point was not to single out a group of people but to illustrate the point of **idolatry leading to growing immorality**. In fact, next week we will look at a third way God gives us over, and it includes things like gossip and pride, which are seen as sin under God's wrath.
- 2) **If homosexuality is a sin that captivates, we should respond with loving compassion, not fearful condescension** – Understanding that sexual sin is captivating and spiraling helps every believer know WHY someone practices. We are ALL susceptible to idolatry and the consequences of it in our thoughts and actions. If you sit here today and comprehend this passage, know Jesus Christ, have repented of your sin, and now fight, battle, and struggle through your sin, it is because **God has been gracious to you, to open your eyes and change your heart through the gospel of Jesus Christ**. We are no better than someone caught up in their sin, but simply objects of God's redeeming love. This should cause us to be willing to move toward sinners, not reject, distance, or judge.
- 3) **Jesus gave us a paradigm of interaction** – We must be prepared to interact, love, and speak the truth to people in our culture, especially those that have been given over to a lie and captivating behavior. Jesus was the model of **speaking the truth in love** because He was **full of grace AND truth** (John 1:14). With the woman caught in adultery, he halted her execution from the leaders of the day, and offered her **no condemnation** but DID tell her to *"go and sin no more"* (John 8:11). In interacting with the woman at the well in John 4, Jesus interacted with her when so many others had rejected (there was a reason she was alone getting water) and amazed the disciples that he was willing to talk to a woman. Jesus gave her the truth, but also was willing to shine light on her sinful life ("you have had 5 husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband"). This woman left with new life, not offense. Finally, Jesus interacted with the beguiled **tax collector named Zacchaeus**, a man hated by the Jewish people. When Jesus called him out of the crowd and said he would come to HIS house, all the people **grumbled** that Jesus would dine with a SINNER (Luke 19:7). But as a result, Zacchaeus repented and gave half of his wealth to the poor and paid restitution.

*Why did Jesus operate this way? Simply put, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost"* (Luke 19:10), especially those who knew they were lost.

- 4) **There is hope for all sinners, especially for those whose identity has been held captive by their sexual sin** – If sexual sin is a result of misplaced desires and God giving us over to those desires, then HE CAN HEAL AND RESTORE US FROM THOSE. Perhaps there is not a better passage to close with than the hope found in **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**. Notice the grace and truth here, the reality and hope for sinners:

*Or do you not know that the **unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God**? Do not be deceived: neither the **sexually immoral**, nor **idolaters**, nor **adulterers**, nor men who **practice homosexuality**, 10 nor **thieves**, nor the **greedy**, nor **drunkards**, nor **revilers**, nor **swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God**. 11 And **such were some of you**. But you were **washed**, you were **sanctified**, you were **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*

Paul wrote this to the Corinthian church several years before he wrote Romans, and reminded the church where they came from. Some in the church were given over and PRACTICED vile sexual sin, as



well as other kinds of habitual sin. The consequence was they were stuck and left out of God's kingdom. BUT, they did not stay there. Notice that that's who they WERE, not who they ARE. When the gospel arrived, they were **washed**, or made clean and pure, **sanctified**, or made holy, and **justified**, or declared righteous. These were all *passive actions, meaning they were done TO THEM IN THE GOSPEL*. ***New identities, new passions, new desires, new actions, new hope, new life were the result.***

For any and all here today, the gospel is for those who know they are lost, who have been captivated by their sin, and who feel hopeless. Repent of your sin, believe in Jesus, ask for forgiveness, and HE will give you new life, living water, and hope for eternity!