

They Exchanged the Truth About God for a Lie

(Romans 1:25)

Paul writes his letter to the Roman church to mobilize their support for his mission to Spain. In verse 15:24 he writes, "I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you."

Since many of us are familiar with the book of Romans, and since Paul writes this book in such a friendly and familiar tone, it might seem strange to realize that at the time of writing, Paul had never been to Rome and had never met most of these Christians.

It is unclear how the church in Rome originally began. One explanation is that the Romans who were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:10-11) eventually made their way back to Rome and started a church in one of the synagogues. However, it really was true that 'all roads lead to Rome,' so people who may have heard the gospel in Asia, Greece, or elsewhere could have traveled to Rome and planted a church. Even though we think of Paul as the New Testament's most prolific church planter, in light of Rome's importance and accessibility it's not surprising that there was already an established church before Paul's arrival.

Paul lays out his gospel for them to see in these sixteen chapters. John Piper's reflections on this book can give us a taste of the richness of Romans:

"Oh that all our missionaries would know the book of Romans and preach the book of Romans. And oh that those of us who send would know the book of Romans and live the book of Romans so that we would send missionaries the way Paul wanted to be sent and supported from Rome to Spain. The mighty and merciful message of this book will make rich Americans strip down to a more wartime lifestyle and pour their resources into the cause of the gospel. And the mighty and merciful message of this book, in the mouths of suffering missionaries, will break the powers of darkness and plant the Church of Christ in the hardest places."

In this study, we will examine just one small aspect of Paul's letter to the Romans, found in 1:25. If you study from a bible that contains headings, you might see a title on this section of Romans 'God's Wrath Against a Sinful Humanity' or 'God's Wrath on Unrighteousness' which is pretty intense! Let's avoid socio-political commentary on our current culture, at least for the moment, and unpack what was happening in Roman culture up to and including the time Paul wrote. You will find that information just before our core verse, starting in 1:18:

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For 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. ²¹For 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. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (ESV)

In your own words, sum up the condition of the people that Paul is describing in this passage.

Underline verse 1:20. What would you say is the message of that single verse?

In verse 1:20, who is 'they' and why would Paul say this?

Read the first half of verse 21 and fill in the blanks:

For although they _____ God, they did not _____ him as God or give _____ to him

What is the first observation about these fallen people that Paul is describing?

What does it mean to know God?

What are the two responses that Paul says these people did NOT have to God?

What does knowing God have to do with worshipping God?

Read the second half of verse 21 and fill in the blanks

but they became futile in their _____, and their _____
were darkened

Write here the two ways these people were changed by their wrong response to God, and reflect on how big or small you think these two components are in daily life:

Paul really lays out the problem with the people's response to the God they knew. This is not a group of people who are unfamiliar with God, and that's an important component of our study today.

Paul seems to be laying out a clear problem these people had, but it applies through the ages. We see that wrong response to God produces a bad result in our minds and hearts (futile and dark). Paul is also clear that people are without

excuse for knowing the Creator. There is a theological term for what Paul is describing in verse 20 called 'general revelation.' This means that by simple observation of the world, the creation, humanity should come to the conclusion that there is a Creator. Psalm 19:14 also reminds us of general revelation,

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”

Theologians use the term 'special revelation' to describe the more specific ways that God has revealed Himself to us, like His Word in scripture, miracles, dreams, visions and most importantly, Jesus Christ. [Here is a great article](#) on general and special revelation, if you want to learn more.

Take a moment to reflect on verses 22-24. Identify moments or seasons in your life where you had right and wrong responses to the God you know. Describe those here:

Read 1:25, and fill in the blanks:

they exchanged the _____ about God for a _____

This might seem crazy to us. Why would anyone exchange the truth for a lie? The word exchange makes the context seem quite voluntary, an idea which is supported in the surrounding verses. How could anyone be so silly to willingly exchange the truth about anything for a lie, especially about God??



On the surface, it's easy for us to judge bible characters or groups and say we would never be so foolish. But guess what? We are. Denying that potential is a trap of the enemy. Instead, let's try to understand how this can and does happen and learn how to avoid it.

Paul's letter to the Romans was intended to destroy ethnic division between Jews and Gentiles in the church. In order to do this he levels the playing field between them. He has to show equal sin so he can show equal saving through Jesus Christ. In the first chapter, he addresses the Gentiles and how they sin in their unrighteous behavior. In the second chapter he addresses the Jews and how they sin in what they think is righteous behavior (they follow the law but forget the Law Giver). Both groups are sinning, neither is following God. He brings this thought train into the station in 3:22-24:

22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (NIV)

So, while we are looking explicitly at chapter one and verse 25, 'they exchanged the truth about God for a lie,' we can see that this terrible exchange can happen to anyone, if they're not careful. Those who know God and those who don't. Those who have His Word and those who don't. How do we avoid this?

First, let's explore what the truth about God really is.

What are some biblical truths about God? Read each passage and note the truth about God you see.

I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love, I have drawn you to myself -Jeremiah 31:3 (NLT)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (ESV)

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows -James 1:17 (NIV)

For nothing will be impossible with God -Luke 1:37 (NASB)

You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea -Micah 7:19 (NKJV)

Understand, therefore, that the LORD your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands -Deuteronomy 7:9 (NLT)

Have you ever come on anything quite like this extravagant generosity of God, this deep, deep wisdom? It's way over our heads. We'll never figure it out - Romans 11:33 (MSG)

Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever Psalms 73:25-26 (NKJV)

Since the entire Bible is all about God, these are just a small sample of the truth of God found in scripture. Can you think of others?

What are the ways that these truths impact you?

What are some lies we exchange for the truth about God? Read the passages below and reflect:

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. -2 John:9 (ESV)

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord GOD, rather than that he should turn [away] from his [malevolent] acts and live? -Ezekiel 18:23 (AMP)

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. Genesis 3:4 (NIV)

Late in the afternoon, when the breeze began to blow, the man and woman heard the LORD God walking in the garden. So they hid behind some trees. Genesis 3:8 (CEV)

Above we find ways that we can exchange the truth about God for a lie. But there are many others. Can you think of more?

Where have you tried to make God into someone else, a different God that fits your conveniences or lifestyle? What are some ways that you personally have exchanged the truth of God for a lie?

What are some ways you see the culture around you exchanging the truth about God for a lie?

Can you identify a thought, preconceived notion, something you've heard, that you're not sure lines up with the "truth about God"? How do you find out the truth?

At the end of verse 25, Paul describes the result of this transaction, exchanging the truth about God for a lie. What is it?

The passage quoted on page two of this discussion guide is from the ESV translation. However, for a finer point on the second half of verse 25, let's look at the NIV translation:

...and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.

What are some 'created things' that we find ourselves wrongly worshipping? Take your time here. Start with 'things' then move to 'ideas,' since all inventions, creations and suppositions of man are still 'created things.'

In your own words, sum up the biblical precept that ties together Romans 1:18-25:

Why is this biblical precept so important?

How have you had success or seen failure in your own life as it relates to this biblical precept?

What are some practical ways you can suggest for holding to the truth and not believing lies about God?