



THE DARK EXCHANGE

Romans 1:18-32

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 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. 21 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. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 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 worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 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. 28 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. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 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.

Do you see what I ordered this week? A brand new clicker! If you were here the last two Sundays you know that both of our clickers were on the fritz and I thought they were working last Sunday morning—and they worked right before the service started!—so I thought all was well. Then I got frustrated when I started the message and discovered that they did not work. I just blurted out that I was frustrated about the whole thing because I knew it was already showing on my face!

At the fellowship dinner after the service, two people made the comment that admitting my frustration was helpful because it showed that I am human and that I can be frustrated and angry by the bumps in life, just like everyone else. When I got home I was telling this story to Karen and Ryan overheard it and immediately interjected his opinion saying, “They don’t live with you.”

I thought that was hilarious and I certainly deserved it. I am quite human. I am ridiculously sinful and it no doubt shows more at home than anywhere else. I am going to start at the end of chapter one and work our way backwards. In this passage Paul has one of his famous lists of sins and this one happens to be the longest list of all. Technically, he starts the list in verse 29 but I am going to back up to verse 24 to get the two big ones he mentions first. As I read his list, make your own mental checklist and see how you come out the other end.

- *Idolatry*—putting anything in place of God’s authority and love in your life
- *homosexuality*
- *filled with all manner of unrighteousness*—filled to the brim with unrighteousness, a general term to take in the entire list of sins
- *Evil*—not merely doing evil acts but ‘being evil’
- *Covetousness*—you want something that belongs to someone else
- *Malice*—evil thoughts and actions toward someone
- *full of envy*—jealous of others
- *murder*—anger in your heart
- *strife*—conflict that results from envy and covetousness
- *deceit*—subtle, crafty, a lie that is planned out in advance
- *maliciousness*—thinking or acting to cause harm to another person
- *Gossips*—‘whisperer’, a quieter, more secretive form of slander
- *Slanderers*—to outright speak evil of someone
- *haters of God*—one word, ‘God-hater’
- *insolent*—‘hubris’, a feeling of superiority
- *haughty*—Pride: “*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*”
- *boastful*—like to talk about their accomplishments
- *inventors of evil*—God given creativity, but twisted to evil ends
- *disobedient to parents*—not occasional disobedience but a rejection of parental authority
- *foolish*—no understanding
- *faithless*—no faithfulness
- *heartless*—no love, C.S. Lewis: “*storgos* lives with humble, undressed, comfortable clothes. It is to our emotions what old clothes and slippers and an old chair is to our worn out body. I love my sofa at home. I sleep in it. I read books in it. I drink wine and look at

the fire. I can see the woods from there, and I don't feel that way about every chair in the house.”

- *ruthless*—no mercy

How did you do on your list? Better than you would have ten or twenty years ago? I don't share this list in order to pound you over the head with your sins. Before we go any further I want to encourage you from 1 Cor. 6:9-11, where Paul has another of his list of sins.

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.

The key phrase comes at verse eleven—and such were some of you. When we read lists of sins from Corinthians or Romans or wherever, if we know Christ, these lists do not define us. We may still struggle with some of these sins but we should not allow them to become our identity.

But even though these do not define us, we can learn why we still choose these sins. There is a process described in this chapter which can give us insight into why we choose to sin and hopefully how we can choose not to sin.

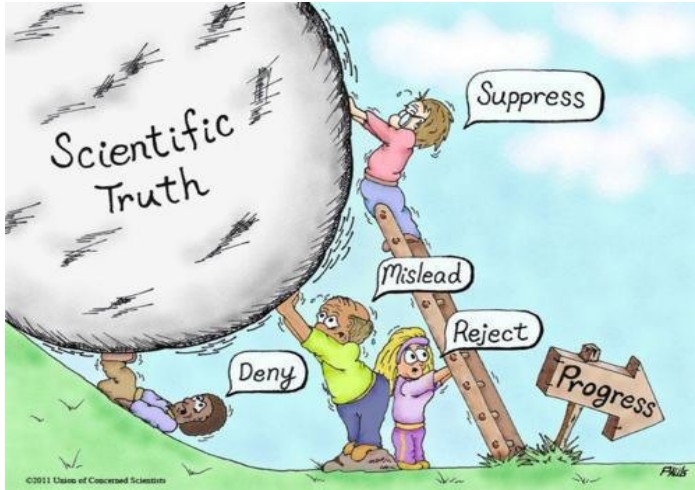
Last Sunday we covered—general revelation—how God reveals himself through his creation to every person.

” 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 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.

Here we see the first two steps in the process to sin. First, God reveals himself and we suppress the truth.



In our everyday lives, truth is suppressed all of the time. Truth suppression is the lifeblood of politics, is it not? Most of us have not been adversely affected by the government shutdown but none of us really know the truth as to why it was shut down. If you lean democratic, you blame Congress and if you lean Republican, you blame Obama. Do you get your news from Fox or CNN, Public Radio or Rush Limbaugh? Politicians have one spin on the truth and the reporting of what politicians say and do has another layer of spin. Digging down to find the actual truth is nearly impossible because the truth is suppressed.



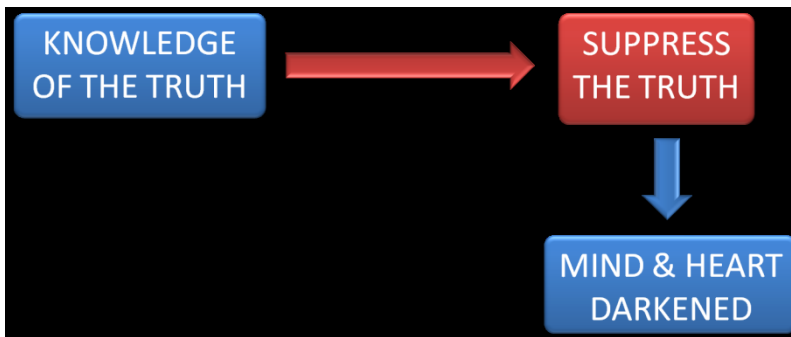
We know that the world suppresses the truth but the world also accuse Christians of suppressing the truth, as it evident in this cartoon. If you believe in creationism instead of evolution or if you dare cast doubt on the religion of global warming, the scientific community believes that you and I are engaged in suppression of the truth.

The next step in the downward spiral comes in verse 21ff.

21 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. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

Once you start suppressing the truth, something dark begins to happen in your mind and heart. Our thinking becomes futile—that is our mind are darkened—and our hearts are darkened. This



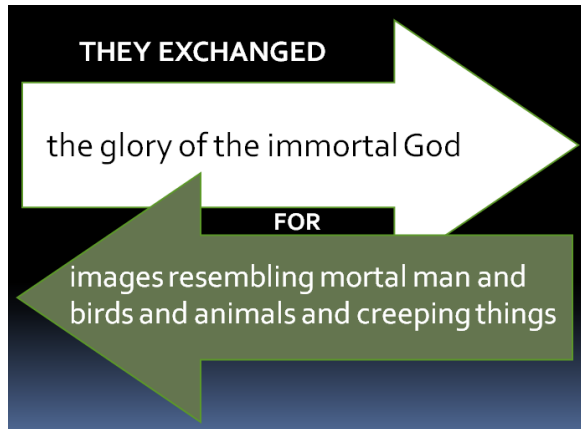
is something that happens to us but in some respects, God may be the one causing the futile thinking and darkened hearts. As we will see in a few minutes, God is actively involved in this darkening and hardening process and he may be at this step as well. In my diagram, I am using blue boxes to represent God's

activity and red boxes to represent our choice. God may or may not be actively involved in darkening our hearts and minds but it is not something that we do directly ourselves—it happens to us as a consequence of our choice to suppress the truth.

It's kind of like drinking poison. The decision to drink poison is like our decision to suppress the truth. We are the ones doing the action. But once the poison begins to do its deadly work, we become passive recipients to the poison's work. In the same way, once we suppress the truth, we become passive recipients of the darkening of our minds and hearts. Like pushing a boulder down a hill, we started the process but then it keeps moving under its own force.

If that weren't bad enough, it only gets worse from here. We now move into what can be called, the Dark Exchange. *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

Once again we have an active decision on our part. We know the truth, we suppress the truth and now we exchange the truth. We take it away and substitute it for something else. But it's a dark exchange. We are offered the glory of the immortal God and we take this highest of all possible



good and exchange images of God’s creation. We take something that should rightfully have authority over us and we exchange it for something that we can control. In every sense of the word, this is flat out idolatry.

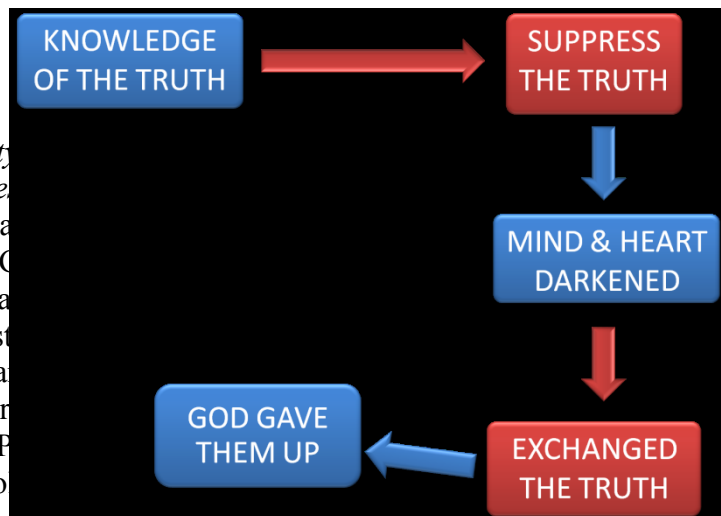
And what have we given up? What is the glory of God? Living Waters is building a tabernacle and we know that the shekinah glory, the glory of God dwelt in the tabernacle. So we are used to thinking about the glory of God as some mystical, misty appearance of God. I like the passage in 2

Corinthians. *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Co 4:17).* The glory of God has some weight to it. It is a weighty thing. Put simply, the glory of God is the presence of God. This is what we exchange—we give up the presence of God for something of no value.

Of course Paul has in mind literal idolatry where people literally fashion images of men, birds, animals and creeping things but this also covers anything that would in any way be a substitute or an exchange for the glory and presence of God.

You and I do this all of the time. This dark exchange is the foundation of all sin. If I get upset and yell at my kids, the foundation of that is my idolatrous right to be obeyed. Now I do have a Biblical right to be obeyed by my children because God has granted that to me. However, this responsibility to parent my children can quickly devolve into a sinful right to be obeyed. I have exchanged God’s privilege to care for my children with an autocratic demand to be obeyed. All sin begins with some kind of idolatry like this. If you struggle with a particular sin, I encourage you to try to trace the sin to the foundation of idolatry in your heart.

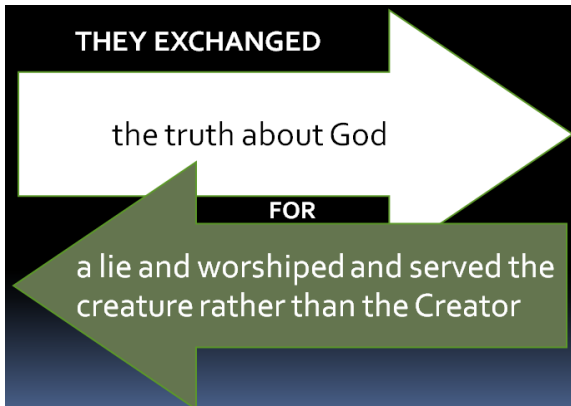
I say again, if that weren’t bad enough, what comes next is even worse. After we do our dark exchange, *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, dishonoring of their bodies among themselves* choices in red and God’s actions in blue. At a give us up. It’s important to understand that C process. This viewpoint is backed up the mea “The word occurs frequently in the passion s betrayal of Jesus by Judas (Mk. 14:10 and pa for His handing over to Pilate by the Sanhedr 15:1 and par.); and for His delivering up by P the will of the people (Lk. 23:25) or to the so for execution (Mk. 15:15)”¹



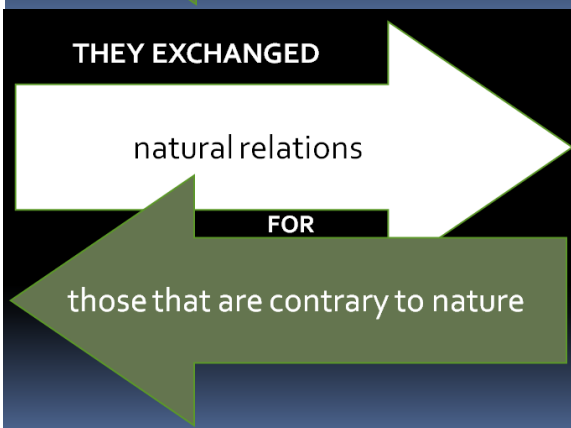
God has the authority to hand us over into a deeper level of sin and this is exactly what he does. One commentator wrote, “God does not simply let the boat go—he gives it a push downstream.

Like a judge who hands over a prisoner to the punishment his crime has earned, God hands over the sinner to the terrible cycle of ever-increasing sin.”²

But what is the purpose of this handing over? Is God’s process of being “given up”/ “handed over” an example of his wrath or of his “kindness that leads to repentance”—OR BOTH?? What is the purpose of the “handing over”? Is it to help the person reach bottom so we will know that the only way is up? It may be some of both but we are not told exactly the purpose for the handing over but we do know that it continues to get worse. *25 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.* Here we see another dark exchange—the truth of God for a lie.



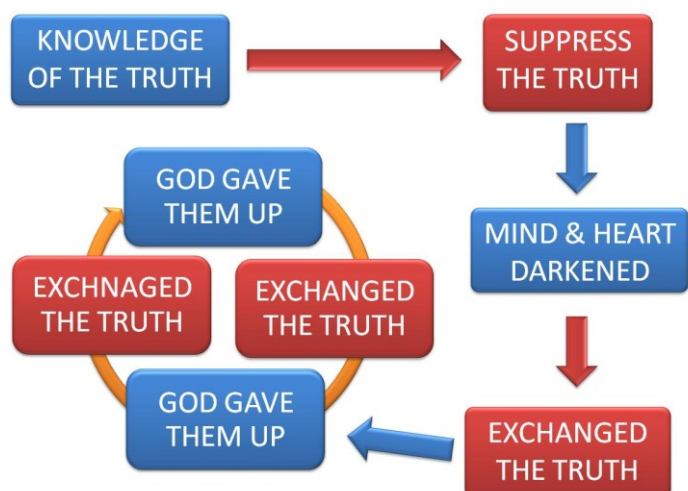
Then the downward spiral continues to descend. *26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. 28 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.*



Here we have the infamous passage on homosexuality. One thing ought to be crystal clear—homosexual behavior is a sin. We should always be very careful to separate homosexual temptations from homosexual behavior. Temptations, at least in their infancy, are not sin and what Paul is describing here is most definitely behavior. I know everyone who preaches on this subject lands on homosexuality.

I may spend more time on this next week, I haven’t decided for sure, but let me give you at least two reasons why this sin is listed here.

One, it fits Paul’s model of a dark exchange. All sin is an exchange of some form or another but for obvious reasons, homosexuality is a prime example of an exchange—of a substitution. The second reason it is listed here is simply because it is one of many sins that can happen when you begin with idolatry, when we



begin with something other than being enamored by the glory and presence of God.

Continuing our diagram we see that the process of a further downward spiral. We choose a dark exchange and then God hands us over. We choose a dark exchange and then God hands us over. I think that one could just continue this volley back and forth: exchange/handover—exchange/hand over—exchange/hand over, on and into infinity.

When we see it laid out like this, we can begin to see anew the destructive power of sin. It is a cycle that repeats itself over and over and drags the person deeper down and further away from the glory of God. It has such a powerful downward pull that it even passes down through the generations, as the second commandment states.

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me” (Exodus 20:4-5).

We know that everyone is caught in this dark exchange of sin but how do we get out of it? The simple answer is that *we* don't.

John Calvin had this to say about God revealing himself through creation.

It is therefore in vain that so many burning lamps shine for us in the workmanship of the universe to show forth the glory of its Author. Although they bathe us wholly in their radiance, yet they can of themselves sin in no way lead us into the right path. Surely they strike some sparks, but before their fuller light shines forth these are smothered... But although we lack the natural ability to mount up unto the pure and clear knowledge of God, all excuse is cut off because the fault of dullness is within us.³

It does not matter if you have more knowledge or less knowledge. Everyone rejects the knowledge that they do have. The problem is that everyone is spiritually dead and unable to change. Natural revelation is sufficient to make us guilty but is not sufficient to save us. General revelation reveals God as Creator but Scripture alone reveals him as Savior. But even this truth is suppressed and rejected outright. Later in Romans Paul writes, *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot* (Romans 8:7).

We have one hope to pull us from this dark exchange of sin and his name is Jesus Christ. The dark exchange is meant to show us our utter powerlessness. If you are not yet a believer and have been depending on your own efforts, then today you can surrender your life to Jesus. He is your only hope. Jesus demands and deserves our full allegiance.

If you are a believer and are caught in this dark exchange—and since idolatry is at the heart of a dark exchange, we are all part of it—then the solution is nearly the same—surrender your life to Christ. But do more than that. Get your dark exchange out into the light of truth. Find someone you trust and confess your sin to them. You don't have to confess to me or to the whole church, although, sometimes that is necessary. In July Chuck Metz shared his testimony of his decades-

long battle with pornography and the thing that finally set him free was to get his dark exchange out into the open. He had been living a double life for so many years he felt that he owed everyone he knew an apology. But maybe you just need to find a good friend and confess to him or her.

And the response to Jesus pulling us from this dark exchange is worship. He has pulled us from the miry clay and placed our feet on solid rock so we should be able to respond to this amazing grace and mercy. Worship—all worship flows from knowledge of our salvation and knowledge of our Savior. There are two basic types of worship. The first is a ‘bow your knee’ before our sovereign Lord. Whether or not you actually get down and bend your knee, it is a bending of your heart to the allegiance of Christ. But there is another kind of worship which results in service to the Lord out of pure thankfulness for what he has done.

As a beautiful response in worship, let’s read this passage from Revelation 5 together.

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.”

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they were saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”

Rich Maurer
October 13, 2013

¹ . *Vol. 2: Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (169). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

² Moo, Romans, p. 111.

³ John Calvin, Institutes, 1.5.14