

The Great Exchange

Without doubt, the most tragic exchange in history was that which took place when man rejected God in exchange for those things that the Creator God made: the earth, himself, and all other creatures. In the exchange, man set aside God so God then handed over man, handed him over to his natural, sinful bent. Everyone lost in this exchange

In Romans 1:18-32 Paul describes the condemnation of the unrighteous. Paul begins with the revelation of both the wrath of God (1:18) and the knowledge of God (1:19-20).

Man however rejected the knowledge of the one true God in 1:21-23, and Paul then sets out to unpack the implications of this rejection in 1:24-32. We will address this rejection and its corresponding consequences.

The rejection of the knowledge of God takes place in 2 areas:

- Futile thinking (1:21-22)
- Idolatrous worship (1:23)

Paul writes of futile thinking,

“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools”
(1:21-22)

And of idolatrous worship he declares,

“and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (1:23)

The rejection of the knowledge of God culminates with man doing the unthinkable: he “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God.” The verb “exchanged” is ἀλλάσσω (*allassō*) and it has two major uses: “to change” or “alter” in terms of making something other or different, or also “to exchange” in the sense of one thing for another (BDAG, s.v. “ἀλλάσσω,” 45-46) with only context making the determination. The second use is the correct use because the context demonstrates that an exchange took place, an exchange of

“the **glory** of the **incorruptible God**”
for
“an **image** in the form of **corruptible man**
and of **birds** and four-footed **animals**
and (of) **crawling creatures**.”

In 1:24-32 Paul then unpacks God's response: God handed over man to degradation. Paul demonstrates this handing over by God of man in three major areas:

- Man is given over to impurity (1:24-25)
- Man is given over to degrading passions (1:26-27)
- Man is given over to immorality (1:28-32)

The key verb in each section "gave them over" is παρέδοκεν (*paredōken* –from παραδίδωμι). God is the subject of each use in 1:24, 26 and 28. In other words, he produces this action and man is the object of his actions. The verb basically means "to hand over" or "deliver over," often found in contexts of handing over prisoners in battle or criminals to the courts (BDAG, s.v. "παραδίδωμι," 1.b., 761-762). What God gives man over to is the natural actions of his sin. God, being rejected, allowed man to live without him, his grace, his power, and his presence. Man was allowed to live without God and the consequences were devastating.

Man is given over to impurity (1:24-25)

"Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

The result is impurity. Why again, for man "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever." The second use of the verb "exchanged" is a cognate, μεταλλάσσω (*metallassō*). This verb means only "to exchange" and validates the first use of ἀλλάσσω (*allassō*) means "exchange" for the same reason is given. The exchange is a "truth" for a "lie." The result is also a strong contrast: instead of God being worshipped man opts to worship those things created by the Creator God! What a stunning fall, what a stunning exchange. Next,

Man is given over to degrading passions 1:26-27

"For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error."

Here, in God giving man over to his sinful impulses, man *exchanges* something once again. Women *exchanged* what is natural before God for what is unnatural, as did men. The verb "exchanged" is again μεταλλάσσω (*metallassō*). Finally, man is given over to immorality (1:28-32). The list of sins here is depressing enough.

Is there any hope? Yes, but it comes in a whisper of sorts. The "exchange" that took place was horribly sad. God was rejected and offended and man was left alienated from God in his sin. Man has exchanged God for

himself and Paul uses the verbs ἀλλάσσω (*allassō*) and μεταλλάσσω (*metallassō*) to describe this pathetic exchange. But in the uses of these two verb, we hear a quiet echo of sorts of another favorite verb of Paul: καταλλάσσω. Here are a few examples of Paul's use of this verb:

For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been **reconciled**, we shall be saved by His life (Romans 5:10)

“Now all *these* things are from God, who **reconciled** us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18)

“Namely, that God was in Christ **reconciling** the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19)
[“reconciliation” in verse 18 and 19 is noun form καταλλαγή]

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

There is hope for man who offended God and was handed over to unbridled sinfulness, and that hope is found in reconciliation. God, in love, acted to reconcile man to himself. But here is the catch. The God who was offended by man's sin and rejection, would have to suffer again by sacrificing his own perfect Son to bring creatures such as us to himself. But in Christ, man is able to be forgiven his sin and be reconciled to God, which is clearly the greatest exchange of all.