



The Dark Exchange Behind the Light of the Gospel Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #17

Romans 1:22-28

Justin Taylor

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Please turn with me in your Bible to Romans 1. Let me pray before we begin.

Lord, I pray that as we open Your Word we will sing these words in our hearts:

Show us Christ, show us Christ
O God, reveal Your glory
Through the preaching of Your Word
Until every heart confesses Christ is Lord

(Show us Christ by Sovereign Grace Worship)

Show us Your glory, Lord. Reveal Who You are through the preaching of the Word. Help us honor You by listening to Your Word. Help me preach the Word faithfully. Give us humility of heart. Give us expectation and hope in You and in You alone. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

We are continuing a series in the books of Genesis and Romans, and Pastor David has preached the last couple of weeks on Romans 1. This is a great letter from the Apostle Paul written to a local church body in the city of Rome in the first century. Paul did not know this church personally. He had never been there, but he had hoped to visit this church on his way to his missionary journey. He wanted to be supported by them, but he also wanted to instruct and encourage them. Therefore, this letter begins with an introduction from Paul, talking about his identity as a bondservant of Christ Jesus. He then goes on to talk about his gratitude in the Lord for this church and his desire that they would manifest the obedience of faith for the sake of the name of God to go to all of the nations. Finally, in verses 16-27, he comes to the high point of the first section of this letter—the thesis and main point that he wants them to grasp, which is the gospel of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. This letter builds very quickly and Paul worships and exults over the great glory, beauty and power of this gospel of God's righteousness. He said it is revealed from faith, for faith, and by faith alone.

I am sure if you were hearing this letter for the first time, it would be very jarring. Paul makes a sudden move, pivoting on a dime. He talks about glory, righteousness and joy, but then he begins to talk about the wrath of God and the unrighteousness of man. It is like a jeweler who wants to show you the beauty of his diamond necklace and display it for you against a black backdrop. Or if you really want to see the brilliance of the stars at night, go out in the country, get away from manmade lights and shut off the car lights. Only then, against the darkest of nights, will you see the beauty of the stars. I think that is part of what Paul is doing here. He wants to show this dark backdrop so that the gospel will shine more brightly.

You can almost think of the first few chapters of Romans like two mountain peaks. We have Romans 1:16-18, the gospel, and then Paul quickly descends into this valley of darkness and depth. He will rise again in Romans 3:21-26, as he comes back and celebrates the gospel. However, until you see this valley and darkness, you will not appreciate the true beauty and glory of the gospel. Until we see the dark backdrop, we will not see the brilliant light.

We will not have time to walk through every verse in this chapter, but I want to start with verse 22. If you have your Bibles, look there at verse 22, where Paul starts talking about a foolish claim that contradicts reality. What I want to do is walk step-by-step like a detective through these verses to build a profile of these people—what kind of people they are, what they are doing and why God disapproves.

Verse 22 reads, “*Claiming to be wise, they became fools...*” Paul is setting up a series of contrasts here. The first is wisdom and folly, which is a theme throughout Scripture. God is on the side of wisdom; the world is on the side of foolishness. These contrasts are at the heart of the book of Proverbs.

If you want to be about God and His ways, you are on wisdom’s side, but the world is bound up with folly and ungodliness. One of the ironies is that both sides think they are on the wisdom side. God says, “I’m wise; you are fools.” The world says, “We’re the wise ones. We know what’s going on, and God and His ways are foolishness.” Both cannot be right. However, if God exists, then God is God and God is right.

Let’s look at verse 22 again. It does not just say that there are wise people and foolish people. It says something specific about them. It says, “*Claiming to be wise, they became fools...*” These people make a specific claim, but the claim does not match with reality. Their claim contradicts who they really are. This is an important principle. It is obvious, but it needs to be restated. Just because somebody claims something about themselves or evaluates themselves in a certain way does not mean that it is true. Ultimately, we need God to tell us

whether we are wise or foolish. We need someone above us—someone outside this horizontal conversation—to make the final determination and final verdict.

So far, we know that these are foolish people. They are fools. It is not just a put-down or label; it is a description of their reality. It is not a comment on their intelligence. Some of the smartest people in the world are among the most morally foolish. However, these people do not look at God, themselves or the world around them in the right way. They make a claim to wisdom, but, in reality, they have become foolish.

What justifies that label? You have the God of the universe putting His stamp that says “fool” upon a certain group of people. What did they do to deserve it? Verse 23 tells us. It says, “[They] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” They committed a tragic and inexplicable (and we could call it insane) exchange. God is in a certain place and His creation is in a certain place, but they have been switched around. These foolish people have tried to trade these two things.

From day-to-day life, all of us know what an exchange is. You will commit many exchanges this week. If I go to Target, I am going to go into an exchange with them, assuming that they have something I like. I may see a nice, new shirt and try it on. It fits and I walk up to the front. I have something that Target wants; Target has something that I want. They have a shirt that I do not have; I have \$20 that they do not have. We make an exchange.

If an exchange is something of comparable value, it is a good exchange. Another exchange would be if I have to pay my rent. I write a check for \$1,000, and if I think that is a good price for the place that I want to stay, that is a good, valuable exchange. If I pay \$1,000 for a shirt, that is a bad exchange. If I receive \$20 for rent from somebody, that is a bad exchange. Good exchanges, therefore, are when you have valuables that are comparable. Bad exchanges are where they are out of balance.

God is saying, “These people are committing a foolish exchange.” So what exactly are they exchanging? God tells us. In essence, it is God and creation—the Creator and the created. Drop your eyes down to verse 25, where Paul says the same thing in different words. He comes back to this same idea about their exchange. “... [T]hey exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” God is saying that these people are a worship factory. They can’t help but worship something, but the worship is of themselves.

I don’t know how many of you have heard of David Foster Wallace, a brilliant essayist and novelist who tragically died at the age of 46 in 2008. Wallace attended a Mennonite church downstate in Normal, Illinois, at least a few times, but we really do not know much about what he

thought of Christ. Sadly, I think he probably died an unbeliever. However, during a commencement address, which has probably become his most famous talk, he had some very interesting things to say about worship. As you listen to this quote, remember that this is not a theologian talking. It is not a pastor or even a card-carrying Christian. But listen to David Foster Wallace who had very significant insights into the human condition and the world around him. He was able to see certain things that match up with this passage.

He spoke to college students about to go off into the real world, saying:

Here is something that is weird but true: in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshiping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. If you worship money and things—if they are where you tap real meaning in life—then you will never feel you have enough. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure, and you will always feel ugly. When time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you. Worship power, you end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need even more power over others to numb you of your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, and you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud always on the verge of being found out. And the so-called real world will not discourage you from operating on your default settings because the so-called real world of men and money and power comes merrily along in a pool of fear and anger and frustration and craving and worship of self. The world runs on worship.

Paul said the essence of worship is the creature rather than the Creator Himself. What was so maddening to Paul, and what he could not believe, is the nature of the exchange. It is not just getting a bad deal—such as paying \$1,000 for a shirt—it is trading something infinite and glorious for something finite that can never satisfy and is broken. It has never satisfied a human heart so far and never, ever will.

I wonder if Paul was thinking of Jeremiah 2:13, where God issued to Israel His lament about how they were acting. God said, “... [F]or my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” The word image here is that people are turning from this fountain of eternal, refreshing, life-giving and life-sustaining water and instead, trying to build a clay container that is broken, cracked and dirty. If you have ever tried to drink water from a broken tap, you know that (1) it is dangerous and (2) you are never going to satisfy your thirst. It is futile. It is frustrating. It is foolish. It is maddening, especially when you have just turned your back on an eternal fountain of living water.

In verse 23, Paul gives us a few more descriptions about the nature of this exchange—of what is being given up and what is being taken over. Paul said it is the glory of God that is exchanged. It is not just the glory of God but also the glory of the immortal God (verse 23). What did these people switch in place of that? Mortal things and images. They are things that may last years, decades or even centuries, but they are mortal and finite. They are not even necessarily tangible things, but images of them. God is not against mortal things. He is not against images. But why should we trade those things for infinite, immortal glory? Paul could not believe it. He said these people are idolaters. They are foolish, not wise. They are believers in a lie, not the truth. They are worshiping something mortal rather than something immortal. They are worshiping an image rather than being content to reflect and have divine glory.

So whom are we talking about here? Who has committed this insane exchange? If we back up to verse 17, where Paul gloried in the gospel, he said that his gospel is not just for Jews or Gentiles. He said it is for everyone who believes (verse 16). The contrast in verse 18 is that God's wrath is being revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness—against those people who by their own unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Paul did something very interesting in Romans 2 because he knew his Jewish brothers were reading chapter one and nodding in agreement, cheering him on and saying, "You tell them, Paul! You tell those Gentiles about all this idol worshiping they have done. Go get them!" But then Paul said to the Jews, "Not so fast! You are just as guilty. Don't get comfortable here. You have all sorts of advantages, but you are just as sinful."

It comes full circle in chapter three when Paul let everybody have it, saying, "*For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'*"

People who have committed this great exchange are you and me. We are all in the same sinking ship called sin. To use a metaphor Paul might like a bit more, we are all lying dead in a graveyard called sin, waiting to be rescued. None of us are off the hook. All of us are idolaters who have committed this great exchange. This is the story of each one of us.

What does God do in response? Does He throw down the gauntlet? Does He pour out the full fury of His wrath upon these people—these idolaters and exchangers of Him and His glory? Yes and no. What it says starting in verse 24, which is in reference to God's response, is perhaps not what we might expect. Let's read it so we make sure to get the wording. Verse 24 says, "*Therefore...*" Whenever you see the word "therefore," you ask what it is there for. The reason it's there is because of what just preceded it. Because of the great exchange, "*[t]herefore God*

gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...

God gave them up. He delivered them over. He handed over people who, He says, had impurity in their hearts. Their hearts were impure, which resulted in their bodies being used in dishonorable ways—these bodies that God created to be used honorably and these hearts that were made for purity were given up by Him. He let them have it. In essence, God is saying, “Do you want to live your way? Is this the way you want it to be? I will let you go. I will let you act that way. Are you telling me your greatest desire is to worship immortal things and images rather than divine reality? Let’s see how you like it. I will give you over to it. I will hold back the dam of grace that was preventing this from coming in. I will let it go and will let you live the way you want to live.”

If we do not understand God’s righteousness, purity and holiness that Paul talked about in Romans 1:17-18 and comes back to at the end of Romans 3, we will never understand His judgment. We will never understand why this bothers Him so much and why He cannot just sweep things under the rug. If you think you are pretty good, it is because you think God has pretty low standards. But God has infinitely high standards that none of us can achieve. That is why Paul loved the gospel so much.

Now let’s look at verses 25-27. Paul is going to give us one vivid illustration, and, in his mind, it is not the only illustration—it is not the only sin on the block. He gives us one vivid illustration and manifestation of this exchange, this handing over that has to do with the impurity of heart and dishonoring of the body. I think Paul sees in verses 25-27 an exhibit of disordered desire and of putting things out of place regarding how God has ordered the world.

Let’s look and make sure we hear the words of God Himself through the Apostle Paul. Verse 26 begins, *“For this reason...”* What reason? The exchange, impurity and dishonoring. *“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions...”* He talks first about women and then about men. Verse 26 continues:

For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 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.

This is one manifestation. The impurity of the human heart manifests itself in the dishonorable treatment of the human body. Paul is saying there are passions that are right and passions that are wrong. There are passions that are natural and the way God has designed

things to be, and there are passions that are unnatural and go against His design. One is associated with shame; one is associated with purity. One is honorable; one is dishonorable.

We must recognize that these are not our words or labels for these acts. This is the Word of God and His perspective on these actions. I don't want to spend a long time here, but you should be aware that there are revisionist scholars out there who would say this passage does not condemn all forms of same-sex activity or behavior. They would say, "Paul didn't know or was not thinking of loving, committed, monogamous relationships. Paul was talking about something different. He was talking about just the lustful kind or the predatorial kind. So he was not condemning what we see the best of today."

Again, I don't want to spend a long time on this and get sidetracked. If this is something that you are personally wrestling with and asking, "Did Paul really say this, or have we misunderstood it all along?" there are very good books out there. Crossway has just published Kevin DeYoung's [What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality](#) that responds to arguments like this in some depth. He includes responses that prove these arguments are not convincing. I would encourage you to check out resources like this. You should also know the arguments are not new but very old.

I appreciate what Luke Timothy Johnson, a New Testament scholar at Emory University, said about this issue. The thing you need to know about Luke Timothy Johnson is that he would not agree with me about same-sex behavior. He would say, "It's fine. It should be celebrated. It's a wonderful thing." However, he also does not agree with those who say, "The Bible does not forbid that." He says:

The task demands intellectual honesty. I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation (which means how we interpret Scripture) is straightforward. We know what the text says. I think it's important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and we appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. What exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience, an 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.

Do you hear what he's saying? He's saying, "The Bible does forbid this behavior. The Bible is wrong. The reason I know it's wrong is because of my own experience and the experience

of thousands of others like me because we ultimately are a higher authority than Scripture itself.” Luke Timothy Johnson is wrong, yet he is to be commended for his honesty. What he has identified here is precisely the dividing line in our culture and sadly now within our churches. Will we believe, submit to and hold fast to Scriptural authority and the goodness of God, or will we hold fast to and submit to ourselves as the highest standard in the entire universe? Will we sit in judgment over God? Will we tell He what is right or not?

Listen to a man named Ed Shaw, who is a young pastor in the United Kingdom. He is single and does not plan to ever marry a woman, because his desires and attractions are exclusively same-sex, but Ed Shaw is committed to living within a biblical worldview. He is committed to fighting against lust and is also committed to not acting on those desires. He is committed to teaching the Word and remaining chaste for the rest of his life. He says he has spoken to countless pastors in their 40s or 50s who are holding the line. They believe the Word. However, he says that nearly all of them have said their children do not even get where they are coming from on this issue. Not only are children in disagreement, they do not even comprehend where you are coming from in thinking this is wrong.

Ed Shaw says:

A generation are changing their minds on homosexuality today, not because they are suddenly revising their opinion on the cultural context of Leviticus, the meaning of “unnatural” in Romans 1, the nature of homosexual practice in Corinth, or the translation of Greek words in 1 Timothy, but because in their mind the demand just doesn’t seem plausible anymore. It’s people, not theology, that seems to be powering their rejection of the traditional Christian ethics.

Brothers and sisters, these are very revealing days. Aren’t they? Although this was not a surprise to those who are familiar with his ministry, earlier this week, Tony Campolo came out and said that he is in support of gay union within the church. He is not just talking about the Supreme Court and legal issues, but that couples who are gay can engage in sexual behavior, be fully committed members of the church and be pleasing to the Lord. Tony Campolo has been a wonderful example for us all in his ministry of serving the least of these and the poor. However, he came out and revealed that this is his position.

Then David Neff, who was editor for Christianity Today for 28 years, posted on Facebook, “I agree with Tony. I think that he is making the right choice here. As I’ve gotten to know people who have this as an issue, I agree that the church must change.” It is important to note that Christianity Today wrote a response to David Neff, who is no longer an editor there. I’m thankful

that Christianity Today said, “We stand with the two billion other Christians around the world who still hold to biblical Christian ethics of sexuality.”

But the days are coming, and we are now in them, when these defections are going to happen at a rapid pace. There are evangelical megachurch pastors right now who have changed their mind on this issue and are only waiting for the right time to reveal it. That is not a guess; it is reality. The question that the serpent whispered to Eve in the garden—“Has God really said? Has God really, really said that?”—is still being whispered today and still being listened to (Genesis 3).

How then should we respond? How should we, as a church, think about these issues? I do think it’s important to note that we are often told that roughly 10% of our population would self-identify with homosexuality. In reality, in the most extensive study conducted last year with over 30,000 people (which is not just a small sample size), 96.6% identified as heterosexual, or orientated toward being attracted to the opposite sex; 1.6% self-identified as either gay or lesbian; and 0.7% self-identified as bisexual. I only mention that because you can sometimes get the impression that this is a tidal wave of behavior. It is not. It is a small slice, but what has changed so radically is the cultural acceptance and normalization of this behavior, not just as something allowable or something we disagree with, but something to be celebrated. Furthermore, the opposition to it is to be condemned as a form of bigotry and foolishness.

A really interesting example of that is when President Obama ran for his first term in office, he said, “Marriage is a sacred institution to be reserved for one man and one woman.” He came back later and said, “I didn’t really believe that at the time. I just had to say it.” Here is the important point: he had to say it to get elected eight years ago. You don’t need to say that to be elected today, but that’s how quickly our culture has changed. Social scientists have said they have never witnessed a moral revolution happen this quickly and to this degree of change in all of history.

As Americans in particular, to use the words of Duane Litfin, former president at Wheaton College, we have to recognize we are no longer the home team in America. We used to have home field advantage. Even if we weren’t a Christian nation, we were cheered on. We were the good team. Pastors were the guys who did the right thing. People looked up to Christians, even if they had some problems with them. Even if the country wasn’t owned by us, we had home field advantage. If you think we still have that or that can be gained back anytime soon, you are not living in reality. When the Supreme Court decision comes later this month, the lawsuits are going to come fast and furious, not just against bakers and florists, but against pastors, Christian colleges and institutions that try to hold the line.

I think this will be a bad thing for America, yet it could be the most wonderful thing that ever happened to the Church. It is going to reveal who we really are. Are we just in love with civil religion or cultural Christianity? Do we just like being accepted and on the home team when the crowd is cheering? Or are we going to go back and embrace the biblical reality that we are pilgrims, sojourners and strangers (1 Peter 2:11)? We don't own this land. We don't have rights to tell everybody. We are exiles; we are witnesses to Christ and His glory. We plead with sinners to come in. That doesn't mean we should refrain from fighting for religious liberty. It is going to be a great battle in the days to come. Can we as Christians be free to practice what we believe the Bible teaches and be able to act in a good conscience? I think that's a battle worth fighting for, but we have to recognize that we are exiles and do not have home field advantage.

One of the main ways Christians think about or respond to this issue of homosexuality is to say that we should hate the sin but love the sinner. I've said that. I agree with that, but we have to recognize that those who disagree with us on this issue dislike that phrase. One of the reasons they do is they have not felt that love part.

I had an interesting email exchange with Rosaria Butterfield, who is a Reformed pastor's wife and a mother of several children. You wouldn't know from looking at her that she used to be a lesbian, a gay activist and a university English professor. She would plead with the church, saying:

Let's drop the phrase that we hate the sin but love the sinner. Instead, let's adopt the phrase, 'Love the sinner and hate my own sin.' In order to show someone that he is deceived, we must model how we ourselves have come to an awareness of our own deception. That is, we must model what it was like to come to repentance, to lose for ourselves something that we loved that was primal and deep and pleasurable, and how Jesus was the only Person and the only power in heaven and on earth that would ever come close to allowing us to relinquish our idol. We must model what it means to love the sinner and hate our own sin.

One of the things that is frustrating to me as a Christian is to watch the talking heads on TV who imply that this is all about those people out there, those sinners and people doing that stuff. Instead, they should say, "I'm among the sexually broken. I'm among the dysfunctional. I'm a sinner, too, and I want to invite you to be rescued like I am. You're deceived like I was deceived. I want Christ to overcome your deception."

I think we also need to recognize that this issue is not nearly about those people out there who have same-sex desire, but those people in here among us and, perhaps, some of you. There is a distinction between having certain desires and temptations and adopting an identity. Having

temptations in a certain direction does not mean you are adopting an identity as someone who is gay. However, there are probably more people than we realize whose own temptations are toward people of their same sex. I want to call us to have some empathy and try to get our minds inside someone else's mind and walk in their shoes.

This must be a very difficult position to be in. On the one hand, you have liberals speaking in one ear, saying, "That's great that you have that desire. Become who you are. Stop repressing those desires. You need to throw off the shackles of tradition and religion, and embrace gay relationships. Just say, 'Yes.'" On the other side, they have their conservative or Christian friends in the other ear, saying, "No, it's not great. This is gross. Don't just say, 'Yes.' Just say, 'No.' Just cut it out and quit thinking those thoughts. Become who you really are. Become straight. Become married."

The longer you study and live with the Bible, the more you see that the Bible is incredibly nuanced and rich. It offers a different way from the conservative or liberal perspective. The Bible says, "Don't just say, 'No,' and don't just say, 'Yes.'" The Bible says, "Say, 'No,' by saying, 'Yes,' to Christ, the Bible and His glory." As Christians, we often want to say, "Just say, 'No.' Just cut it out. Just stop."

The Bible never encourages us to define ourselves by our desires. The whole world says, "If you want to be truly authentic and be who you are, then you need to define yourself by what you desire most deeply." The Bible calls us to be shaped and defined by who we are in Christ, not by how or with whom we are tempted.

The Bible also holds up more highly than I think most of us realize the noble calling and gifting of singleness. The Apostle Paul was single and it can be a little strange for us who are married to read Paul saying, "I think it's better to be single than married." Paul talked about the advantages of singleness. Remember, Jesus Christ Himself was the most authentic Person Who has ever lived and the most mentally, spiritually and emotionally healthy Person to ever walk the planet, but He never had one moment of sexual experience in His whole earthly life. The calling of singleness is a high calling. It's a noble calling.

I put the blame on myself first before blaming anyone else, but I fear that we have unwittingly been unloving and neglectful of singles. We have perhaps given the impression (again, unwittingly) that if you really want to become a mature Christian, you will go find a spouse, have 2.5 kids and have a little yard with a white picket fence around it. That is living the American Dream, or the Christian Dream. Those who are single never quite fit in, whether they have never been married, they have been abandoned by a spouse, they have become divorced, or their spouse has died. Perhaps they feel like a third wheel or a second-class citizen. They don't

get invited to double date or go on vacations with a family. I want to call us to be more intentional and sensitive to those who are fighting the good fight of faith, desiring purity and desiring to live biblically. There are a growing number of people who experience same-sex desire. They don't want to, but they do. They fight against it. They fight for purity and have committed to living a single life.

Sam Allberry, the English pastor who preached here a few months ago from this pulpit, would put himself in this category. He's committed to lifelong singleness. He acknowledges the Lord could change him, and perhaps some day he will be married. He experiences exclusively same-sex desire, but he is living in light of the gospel and fighting daily for holiness. I think we should commend brothers and sisters like Sam and welcome them into community, have them into our homes and love them. I want New Covenant Bible Church to be a safe place for sinners. That is not to say it's a safe place for sin or that, if you come to New Covenant Bible Church, it's fine to sin or flaunt your sin. Rather, I want a place where we can be honest and take the masks off.

Tim Keller once said that the church should be more like a waiting room for a doctor than like a waiting room for a job interview. Anybody who's ever gone through a job interview will probably resonate with that. You get as cleaned up as you possibly can. You get your shoes shined and don't want anything out of order. You want your words to be correct. Any weaknesses you have are buried at the bottom of your resume (or are not even included). You get cleaned up and try to look as presentable as you can in order to impress the person interviewing you. So when he looks at you, he says, "Wow! He's really got it together. Isn't he competent? Isn't he compelling?"

In contrast, what happens when you go to the doctor's office? It doesn't matter if you're wearing sweat pants or haven't showered in three days. Who cares about getting yourself cleaned up, trying to look presentable and putting on airs that you're super healthy? Everyone else in the room is hacking away and sick as well. In fact, the more you try to hide how sick you are, the less likely it is that you will be treated. Therefore, let's let New Covenant be more like the waiting room of hospital. We're all sinners here. We're all broken. We all come broken, needing to be mended and healed.

If this describes you and you are seeking to be pure in your singleness, I want to encourage you from a short quote from a woman named Fabian. She is single and, though not struggling with same-sex desire, is deeply desiring to be married. She wrote an article about this on the Gospel Coalition blog. Being single and being committed to biblical ethics means she is also committed in this season of life to not experience physical intimacy. She wrote:

God seems to be in the business of blessing us, not in spite of suffering, but through suffering. I believe that one day I will look at my life and say with confidence that one of the greatest blessings I have experienced, and gifts that I have given to others, has been the pain of learning to live without physical intimacy. The pain of missing out on physical pleasure in this life holds out to us the gift of longing for the next life. Forgoing the earthly shadow by faith because we believe so much in the heavenly reality, our God is a God of pleasure. He's not calling us to hunger because He wants us to be miserable. He's calling us to hunger because He wants us to experience that greatest pleasure available to man—Himself. Nothing sounds as foolish to the world as a person who would pursue purity, not out of some sense of religious obligation, but out of a faith that there is greater pleasure in store for those who would trust in the Creator. Nothing makes God look as beautiful as when we who have tasted His goodness would use our lives to testify that we will forgo any momentary joy in order to taste more of Him.

We began this message by talking about a terrible, tragic, inexplicable exchange: taking the immortal, glorious Creator, rejecting Him, and exchanging Him for creation—finite, mortal and broken creation. We see that God's initial response is to say, "Have it your way. If that's the way you want to be, I'll let you have it that way." However, that is not God's final answer because God decided to respond with an exchange of His own. In that tragic exchange, we gave up everything to get nothing eternal in return. But in God's exchange, He offers back to us the gift of everything. There is only one catch. You have to recognize that you can give nothing in return. In fact, thinking that you can pay for this exchange disqualifies you from the beginning. All you have to do is recognize, "I am impure. My life has been full of shame. I am marked by unrighteousness. I cannot stand before a pure, holy and righteous God."

But there has been One Who has. It is His perfect Son, Whom He sent to live so that we can die and Who died so that we can live. No matter what you have done or what you have thought—those shameful desires that you would be mortified if anyone outside your head knew about it—can all be washed clean and nailed to the cross of Christ. No matter who you are or what you've done, some day, if you trust in Him, unite yourself to Him, bank your life on Him, and put all your cards on the table, saying, "I have nothing; You have everything," you will be able to stand before the judgment seat of God—before the perfect Father, the perfect Son and the perfect Holy Spirit—not dressed in your filthy rags, but dressed in splendor. Blessed in righteous robes that belong to another, washed fully and finally clean. He calls you to come. He calls you to come.

Isaiah 55:1-2a says:

*Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*

“Come to Me. Have your thirst quenched. Have every desire met.” Jesus is worth it!

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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