

I want to begin this morning by telling you about a bad deal. In January of 1976, Steve Wozniak, Steve Jobs, and Ronald Wayne all signed an agreement that launched a new computer company, Apple. The two Steves were young and broke, but Ronald Wayne was a little bit older and had a home and some savings. Just two weeks into this venture, he started to get nervous, thinking that if this whole thing went south, he was going to be stuck with all the debt. He worried about losing his house and all his money. So he decided his safest option was to cash out. At that point, his 10% stake in Apple was \$800. Ronald Wayne took his \$800 and walked away from Apple Computers. Today, a 10% stake in Apple would be worth about \$200 billion. That was **a bad deal**. And believe it or not, it gets worse. Ronald Wayne had managed to hang on to the original agreement, the original piece of paper

they had all three signed. So in 1995, he sold that for \$500. Pretty good for a piece of paper. But that same piece of paper went to auction, and in 2011 sold for \$1.59 million. That was also a bad deal.

Now you might think that Ronald Wayne made the two worst trades in the history of the world, the history of mankind, the history of money. And from a financial standpoint, you may be right. But when it comes to matters that transcend dollar signs, when it comes to big things, deep things, profound, eternal consequences, the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Rome – the NT **book of Romans** – paints a picture of the worst deal ever made by man, a trade of something with unimaginable, immeasurable value offered in exchange for the wrath and judgment of an infinitely holy God. It's a bad deal.

Now last week, Caleb began in Romans 1:18 by asking the question, “Why do we even need the gospel?” Paul spends a considerable amount of space in the first 17 verses saying that he is set apart for the gospel, explaining what the gospel is, talking about the nature of it, what it accomplishes, how we come to benefit from it. But why is it necessary for God to reveal His righteousness to mankind? Remember, v.17 says that in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed by faith and is powerful to save any one who believes. But why do we need saving? Well the passage goes on to explain, and Caleb did a clear and powerful job communicating this, that it is necessary for God to reveal His righteousness because, right now, the WRATH of God is revealed against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. So we need

God's righteousness because we are UNrighteous. We need the gospel because we have turned our back on the truth of God that He has revealed in creation, becoming futile in our thinking and darkened in our hearts. We are in an awful, terrible, hopeless situation. And beginning in v.22, Paul lays out a series of bad deals entered into by unrighteous mankind that result in a series of judgments from God, judgments that may not be exactly what you'd expect. They aren't judgments of fire and brimstone and lightning bolts from the sky. They are the judgments of being handed over to the control and the consequences of our deepest, darkest desires. And if you think that sounds terrifying, you're right. So let me invite you this morning to take a Bible and turn with me to Romans 1, and I will ask you to follow along as I read, beginning in v.22 [READ ROMANS 1:22-32].

You may have noticed that Paul repeats this formula, this framework, where he lays out the reason, or the cause, and then the consequence. He tells what man did, and then he tells what God did. Man gave up this invaluable, magnificent thing, so God gave man up to his desires. He does it three times in this passage, and so I want us to look at each of them, one at a time. He begins in v.22-23 with the first cause, the first reason for God's judgment.

Why has God revealed His wrath? What does Paul tell us that man has done? He says [READ]. Mankind, as a

whole, claimed to be wise. What is wisdom? It is the proper application of knowledge. What does man know?

According to v.19 they know about God. They know that

He exists. They know that He is divine and that He has the power to create the universe. They know that. It's obvious

to them in what has been made. And yet, their lives demonstrate attitudes and conduct that don't match what they know. Instead of seeing and acknowledging and worshiping God as He has revealed Himself in creation, they trade that knowledge in for foolishness. Specifically, they have traded the glory of God for images of created things. They give up what is splendid and incorruptible for something worthless and fleeting. They prefer an imperfect copy of what God made to God Himself. It's senseless, right? It's foolish. The Greek word Paul uses there is where we get our word "moron." It's moronic to say, "Yes, I see and I know these things about the divine and powerful God, but instead of honoring and obeying Him, I'm going to worship this image of something He made." And yet, we see it over and over and over again, not just in the Bible, but in human history. The biblical term is "idolatry." Giving

up the worship of God to worship something God made. And it's not accidental. People intentionally turn their backs on God while claiming that this makes perfect sense. They claim it is a sign of intelligence to ignore and refuse God, to live independent of Him. That's the bad deal man has made. That's the trade mankind has engaged in. Giving up wisdom for foolishness. Giving up God's glory for images of creation.

And please understand, Paul is not saying this is something people used to do, or something some people or groups do. He is implicating all mankind in all places and at all times. As a whole, humanity has done this and continues to do this. We see it explicitly in Exodus 32 when the people get tired of waiting on Moses and build a golden calf and worship it. But what idols do we build and

worship today? Money, the accumulation of wealth. Sports, youth sports, college sports, professional sports. Power, influence, control, authority. Politics, political candidates, political parties, political systems. Pleasure, comfort, indulgence, gratification. That's probably enough for us to chew on for a while right there. I think we can all find a few of those we are tempted to compromise what we know of God in order to get. God is true and honest, but if I can have a little extra money by being dishonest... God values the gathering of His people, but if sports demands that I forsake the assembling of the body... God says to lay down our rights and put others before ourselves, but if having control means that I get what I want... God says to love our enemies and bless them, but if politics demands I demonize my opponents and say vile and hateful things about them... God says that ultimate



fulfillment is found in obeying Him, but really I think that sex or food or some other indulgence will make me happy now... It's pervasive. It's around us and in us. John Calvin said the human heart is a perpetual idol factory. That's what man has done. That's the cause. So what's the consequence?

Read v.24 [READ]. **God gave them up**. God handed them over. Because they gave up wisdom for foolishness, because they gave up God's glory for idols, God gave them up, in the lusts of their hearts, to impurity and the dishonoring of their bodies. God hands mankind over to the consequences of refusing to acknowledge Him as God. And that makes sense, right? God reveals His glory, the human response to that is dishonorable and irrational, and so it results in dishonorable and irrational behavior. In

a measured and deliberate act, God hands humanity over, like you would hand over a convicted criminal to the prison system or hand over a nation to a foreign army. People have these unrighteous desires and insist on ignoring God and indulging themselves, so God removes His restraining hand and gives them over to what they long for. He hands over control so that their desires, their lusts, their animal appetites, their base urges and cravings take over.

Imagine for a minute that you were at the mercy of your every impulse, unable to restrain yourself or exercise any self-control. It's spiritual and moral anarchy. C.S. Lewis describes it as God saying to people, "Your will be done." Have it your way. And man's way, man's will, what man is given up to, is lust and impurity and the dishonoring of their bodies with one another. The obvious picture is of sexual sin, sexual immorality. They are handed over to

degrading, disrespectful sexual conduct because it's what they want. As they have dishonored God, He hands them over to dishonorable behavior. And I want to be clear; the conduct is the judgment. The sin is their rejection of God. The sin is their refusal to worship Him. The judgment is the indulgent, lustful, dishonorable, degrading immorality that follows. The immoral, unrestrained sexual impulsiveness and perversion you see in our culture is the symptom of a world that has rejected God. We can complain all we want about the sin around us; the root of it is that mankind has given up the glory of God. Traded it in.

He goes back again to the cause, the reason. What has man done? Look at v.25 [READ]. What was the bad deal? They gave up the truth for a lie. They traded in the truth of God's nature and power. And in exchange, they believed

the lie about the nature and power of idols. Same as before. They refuse to worship God, but worship and serve created things. They assert their autonomy from God and become dependent on the idol. Which confirms, I think, the truth that man is bound to serve and worship something. We were created to serve and worship God. But in the futility of our minds and the darkness of our hearts, we rejected that. But when we reject the only One worth worshiping, we will always replace Him with something else, something inferior, something unworthy. Which Paul drives home with that blessing right there at the end of the verse. It should be so clear that the Creator, who is blessed forever, is worthy of our worship and allegiance and obedience! How can we think these other things compare. It's foolishness. And yet, that's the deal

we made. That's the trade we made. We gave up the truth for a lie.

And what is the consequence? Once again, God gave them up. This time, to dishonorable passions that are contrary to nature. Because man ignored what was plain and obvious to them in nature, God gave them up to unnatural relations. He presses in on the idea of sexual immorality and gives one obvious, explicit example of it: the exchange of natural sexual functions for those contrary to creation. Because they trade the God of creation for other gods, they are given up to trade the design of God's creation for a perverse, distorted design. God gives them up to their own rebellion. And I want to be as clear as I can here, while still being appropriate. Paul is talking about homosexual intercourse. The type of sexual activity that is

contrary to the natural function of the bodies that God created. He's not just talking about exploitative relationships between same-sex partners. He's not just talking about abusive activity. He's not just talking about pederasty, relations between men and boys. He is saying, I think very plainly, that ALL homosexual activity, whether it be between women or between men, is contrary to nature, it violates God's intent, and is therefore dishonorable and shameful. And I know that runs counter to the cultural narrative. I know that increasing numbers of people believe that what I just said is bigoted and intolerant and hateful and homophobic and even inhumane. And I get it. We are in the middle of a cultural upheaval as it relates to sexuality and gender. Some of you may be angry with me for saying these things. And I hear you. I'm not saying these things out of hatred or anger. I'm saying these things

because Scripture says them. And therefore God has said them. And so I am bound to believe them and submit to them. And so are you. And if it sounds like I'm singling out one particular group or one particular behavior, stick with me for a minute. I promise I'm not. But Paul does zero in on this one expression of mankind being handed over to his impulses. And let me also say, again, that the behavior is its own penalty. The judgment, the due penalty Paul refers to, is the dishonorable activity itself. The unnatural sexual relations are the result of God's wrath, not the cause of it. He hands them over to the foolishness of pursuing pleasure in a way that is contrary to His natural design. Again, the sexual confusion we are seeing in the world today is the consequence of exchanging the truth of God for a lie. Mankind is given up to unnatural, dishonorable passions.

And then Paul goes back, one final time, to the cause, the reason, for God's wrath. Look at v.28a [READ]. What has man done? They did not see fit to acknowledge God. They did not consider God worth thinking about, worth keeping in mind. They found God to be unnecessary. Same as before. They gave God up. They traded Him in. They rejected Him for something else. That's always been the root of the issue. That's always been the first domino to fall. God makes Himself known, man sees, man knows, man rejects.

And so what is the consequence? Once again, God gave them up. This time, to a debased mind, a worthless mind. Because they consider God worthless, God hands them over to worthless thinking. And because the mind is where



every action originates, a debased, worthless mind results in doing things that are unfitting, inappropriate, things that ought not to be done. Now you might think, in light of what we've read so far, in light of the direction of Paul's argument, "How much worse can it get?" He started by God handing mankind up to sexual immorality. Then he dialed in on one expression of that immorality that the church has traditionally considered to be particularly shameful and unnatural: homosexual behavior. And so you might be thinking, "What comes after that?" And you may be surprised. Because he seemed to be narrowing the focus of God's judgment from sexual immorality (which you may struggle with, whether it's pornography or sex outside of the covenant of marriage) and then to homosexual desire and activity (which maybe fewer of you struggle with, so it's easier to point a finger at THOSE

people out there who are guilty of that). But take a look at where he turns his attention now. It's not something that only THOSE people out there do. This one hits every single one of us. What are the things God has given mankind over to that ought not to be done? Twenty-one separate indictments. Unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. Envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. Gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. You want me to read through those again? Everybody get hit somewhere in that list? Covetousness, greed? Malice or ill-will toward people? Envy, jealousy? Strife, conflict? Malice, mean-spiritedness? Gossips, whisperers? Slanderers, those who spread rumors? Insolent, bullies? Senseless, undiscerning? Faithless, untrustworthy?

Heartless, unloving? Ruthless, without mercy? I mean, that's a whole sermon series by itself. And it shows that often, what we think are the WORST sins, the most offensive sins, the most immoral sins, the things we would never think of doing, are listed right there alongside the stuff we struggle with daily. Every one of these is a judgment of God that mankind has been handed over to. Every time you see any one of these in the world, in your family, in the church, in yourself, it is evidence that the world we live in is under God's righteous wrath. In His wrath, God has passed judgment on the world by handing mankind over to his sinful desires.

And in v.32, Paul's summary statement, he drives that message home with three points. First, every single person instinctively KNOWS that these behaviors deserve

God's final judgment of eternal death. We know it from nature. We know it from conscience. Second, even though we know that, we still do these things. And third, even worse than doing them, we applaud others who do them as well. So it's not just that we fall into these thoughtless actions committed in the heat of the moment. This is a cool, calculated defiance of the truth we know, the truth God has made known to us. That's the state of the world. We have made a series of bad deals and we have traded the best things for the worst things.

Now that's heavy. That's weighty. And it's meant to be. It ought to be. If it's not, you haven't heard me this morning. But I don't want to end like that. Even though the passage does, I want to give you a word of hope. The question that remains here is, "Is this giving up permanent? Is this

handing over final? Is mankind resigned to hopelessness?” And the answer to all those is “NO!” Even in the darkness of everything we’ve read this morning, the bad deals, the giving up, the handing over, the judgment, the wrath, the sin, the idolatry, the immorality, there is hope. Yes, mankind has given up the glory of God for idols. We have given up the truth for a lie. And yes, God has given man up to impurity and passion and a debased mind. But that same Greek word translated “gave up” is found a few other places in the Bible. Once in each of the four Gospels, it’s the word used to describe how Pilate gave Jesus up to be crucified. He handed him over. But in Romans 8:32 it speaks of God, “...who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all...” God’s giving up of mankind to our sin was not His final giving up. He also gave up His Son for us. And in Ephesians 5:2 Paul

declares that “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Not only did God give Jesus up for us; Jesus gave Himself up for us. You see, these sins that we are guilty of, the ones we’ve been handed over to, from the initial rejection of God to the acting out of every expression of our depravity, they deserve death. We know that. But God sent Jesus to do what we could not, to live the perfect, sinless life that we weren’t able to. And then Jesus gave Himself up to die in our place, suffering the death that we deserved. And then, God raised Him from the dead, defeating death and the grave, to secure eternal life for everyone who believes in Him. And if we turn from our sin and ourselves and place all our hope and trust in what He has done, God exchanges all our sin for all Christ’s righteousness, and what started out as the worst deal in history turns out to be

the best deal for us. Have you done that? Have you turned from your sin and turned to Jesus, the One who gave Himself up for you? Have you exchanged your sin for His righteousness and become part of His family? If you haven't, He welcomes you to do it today. And if you have, rejoice that you are no longer an object of His wrath, but an object of His mercy and kindness and love. And that's a good deal.