

Misplaced Hope: We Become What We Worship Rom. 1:18-25

Music and idolatry.

When I was a kid, when I heard the word idolatry I immediately thought of the parts of the Bible where it said people worship statues that they've made. Isa. 2:8 "Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made." And I thought to myself, "What idiots! How out of touch do you have to be bow down to a totem pole or a golden calf?" I said I would never do that! As I learned more I discovered that it was a little more nuanced than that—they thought the deities lived in the images. So they were worshipping the deity who inhabited the image. So they took a part of God's creation, and fashioned it into something, and if you say the right prayer, and do the right things, and show the proper devotion, it will give you the desires of your heart. Take a part of God's creation, devote yourself to it and trust in it so that your deepest needs and desires will be satisfied. And where I use to say, "I'll never do that" I began to see the hard reality that—I do that all the time.

You see as humans we are naturally hoppers. We hope in things. But the problem is that because of sin our hoppers are broken. And so we're constantly tempted to hope in and to ask the creation to give us, what only the Creator can. And what makes this hard to detect is that we're not hoping in statues. It's not something bad, is that the objects of our idolatry are often God's blessings. We're not hoping in criminal activity or drugs or violence to give us abundant life. We're hoping in our families for that. Our spouse and kids. Our wealth accumulation and career progress. Our appearance. We're not treasuring bad things. We're treasuring good things so much, that they've become ultimate things—things that we see as non-negotiables for a life that's really worth living. You say well Chase I mean the folks in the OT were making figures out of stone and wood and serving them are you really saying that the person who's highest treasure and hope in life is their family or job—are you saying they're equally as guilty of idolatry as the person bowing down to the statue they made? No I'm not—Paul is in Romans 1.

And we'll look at a few different texts today but I want us to camp out here in Romans 1, because it's where Paul offers his clearest description and analysis of idolatry and it's consequences. And in vs 18ff Paul answers the question, "What is humanity's fundamental offense that places us under God's judgment and requires Jesus to come and rescue us?" In a phrase—misplaced hope. Idolatry. For Paul, the very core of what has gone wrong in the world in your life is idolatry. The heartbeat of sin is idolatry. It's our decision to give our hearts and hopes to something or someone else. Overview of idolatry: What we know, what we choose, what we get, what we need. **Pray.**

What We Know

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. So right off the bat Paul is saying that there is truth that all people know, but choose to suppress. And it's interesting people suppress this truth not because of their intelligence or intellect—like they're aren't smart enough to understand—they suppress this truth because of their sin. By their unrighteousness they suppress the truth. Sin hinders our ability to discern truth. When our hearts are captured by something other than God—when we place our hope in something other than him our ability to discern truth—spiritual truth or truth in general is distorted. You just need to be in youth ministry. Conversation with a girl where a guy cheated over and over. Sin literally makes you stupid. It causes you to suppress what you know to be true and in your sin what many of us don't want to be true—that there's a God to whom we owe allegiance and devotion. And Paul says that everyone knows this. We need to understand very clearly this morning—**all people have some knowledge of God.**

“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.” You go to the grand canyon, northern lights, the alps, you see the sunset on the beach or the milky way in Colorado—and you stare in wonder. And Paul is saying that deep down—even though many suppress that truth—people sense something behind the beauty. Calvin called it the *sensus divinitatis*, the sense of the divine. You go to farthest reaches of the earth, in every culture, at every point in history—you find people worshipping Gods. You find people making sacrifices. You find people believing in a higher power. Why? Because the heavens declare the glory of God. Everyone has some knowledge of God. But none of us have been faithful with that knowledge...

Rom. 1 “21 For although they knew God—that is knew of God, knew he exists—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, see this idea of exchange again in vs. 25 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. All people have some knowledge of God Which leads to truth number 2...

What We Choose

All people have exchanged the glory of the Creator for something in his Creation. This is the core of idolatry and the core of all sin. Exchange. Idolatry is exchange. It happens whenever you and I prefer, look to, trust in, hope in something in the Creation, more than we do the Creator. Especially in light of Christ, we have the glory, power, majesty of God for us, with us, offered to us, and at any given moment we exchange that for something that we suspect might be better. This is what happened in the Garden. Adam had clear instructions and trusted something in the creation to give him what he thought God might not. This was the first instance of idolatry and it’s been going strong in different forms ever since.

Paul reference images or man and birds and animals and creeping things—no doubt a reference to the kinds of idols we referred to earlier. But if Paul were writing today, he might have said we’ve exchanged the glory of the immortal God for acceptance, career success and beauty. You exchanged the glory of the immortal God for comfort, health, and a nice family. You’ve taken a gift from the Gift-Giver, looked at him and said, “Can I just have this instead?” You’ve taken a good part of God’s creation and made it something worth living for. Friends there are a variety of things in God’s creation worth dying for, there is nothing in God’s creation worth living for. Scott letters. And I don’t for one second to suggest that we shouldn’t love our spouses or our children—that would be explicitly unbiblical. But I am concerned that acceptable forms of idolatry have infiltrated the church. Where the objects of our worship—the objects of our hope and joy and deepest longings—are something other than God. We’re not placing our hope in something bad, we’re just placing it in something else. I am concerned that we have cloaked idolatry in the language of love—I love my job, health, even family—and what we mean by that is, “this is where I find my abundant life.” These are the things I look to satisfy my deepest needs. He best idol is still an idol at best.

And I want to be perfectly clear this morning if you are looking to something other than God to be ultimate satisfaction, we are just as guilty of idolatry as someone bowing to a statue. And I know I said that was just an intro sermon but I don’t want to risk being abstract: Can I just ask you is there something in your life that if you lost it, life wouldn’t be worth living? If I didn’t have_____. Is there something you’d be willing to sin in order to get? Would you be willing to bend the truth preserve your reputation or

not lose people's respect? Would you be willing to neglect your family to make money? Would you be willing to keep your children out of church so they could play sports? Could you still have abundant life if the other candidate gets elected? Would you avoid sharing the Gospel because it might be uncomfortable? These are the idols that plague us and the real danger and threat here is that if we pursue our idols... God will us over of them. He'll look at us and say "Thy will be done". Leads to point #3

What We Get

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven... Look at vs. 24, "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves." Vs 26 says "he gave them up to dishonorable passions" to the point of same sex relationships—he said I'll no longer prevent you from doing what you want—thy will be done. This is God's present wrath and judgment... he gave the up. You keep reading it keeps going, "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"—kids are idolaters, too. Don't miss the picture here, usually we think about God's judgment as some sort of intervention where he does something to you or gives you something you don't want, but the picture of God's judgment in the present age is one where God gives you over to what you want. Judgment is where God withdraws his restraining grace releases you to float down the river of our desires. "Take your idol and go. I won't try to stop you anymore." And what's really sad is our culture loves that—our culture sees God's judgment as a gift. Just the kind of God I want! Our culture is more attracted to God's judgment than God's grace.

But it doesn't make you happy, it makes you worse. This is the tragic irony of idolatry—the more you worship your idol the more you become like your idol. Look at this Ps. 115:4-8, "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them." Greg Beale says it very simply, "We become what we worship. We resemble what we revere." Your career can't see sin. And if you worship it eventually you won't either—you'll just see dollars signs and high achievement. Comfort and luxury don't care for anyone. If you idolize it you won't either—you'll be concerned about getting more. If you worship people's approval and what they think about you, you'll always be thinking about yourself. Why? Because we become what we worship. And the closer we hold our idols, the more deaf and blind we become to the reality of our sin and God's glory and eventually given over to our sin.

And that's why I am so glad that Rom. 8:38-39 that for believers, he never will. He will allow me to taste some of the consequences of my idolatry, but God's gift to us in salvation includes a promise to not hand us over to ourselves. That is such good news. We come to God and say I am prone to wander, my hope is broken, I constantly exchange you for something in your Creation, I'm constantly wanting my will to be done and my kingdom to come and I am begging you to rescue me from me. Don't you dare let me have my way—don't untether me from mercy and let me float down the river of my sinful desires. Chase nothing can snatch you out of my hand—nothing in life or death will separate you from my love for you in Christ—I have never lost a sheep. Which leads us to number 3 what we need...

What We Need

In short, what we need is to be delivered from the penalty of idolatry and the power of idolatry. And we get both in Christ. You see because we've exchanged the truth about God for a lie—because we've exchanged the Creator for the creation, we stand under God's wrath. And in order for us to be restored to

him another exchange is going to have to be made. Someone Else is going to have to make it. And vs 16 and 17, Paul tells us that Jews and Greeks can have salvation through the Gospel and that in the Gospel, God's righteousness is revealed. Why not God's forgiveness? Why righteousness? Well, forgiveness is certainly a part of it, but how the forgiveness comes is what displays God's righteousness. A crucial part of God's righteousness is his commitment to punish evil—without which he's not righteous. Imagine a judge looking at a serial killer and saying I forgive you, you may go. That's not a good judge—that's forgiveness at the expense of justice—of righteousness. A righteous God must punish sin and in the Gospel, God has found a way to punish sin—to satisfy the demand of justice—and show mercy to sinners. Your sin debt was not erased. It was paid for, so that you could go free? How? Through the work of a substitute.

You see at the core of our sin is an exchange we made, and at the core of the Gospel is an exchange that Jesus makes. At the cross the perfect son of God looks at us and says, I'll take your sin and shame and guilt and I'll absorb the wrath of God in your place—and in return I'll give you my righteousness so that you can stand in God's presence with me. 2 Cor. 5:21. You made an exchange that's gotten you into this mess, I've come to make an exchange to get you out of it. This is the only way out of the penalty for idolatry. Not to do better in the future, but to stand before God covered in a righteousness that's not my own. Claim that—it's the only way to be rescued from the penalty of the exchange we made. That's our only escape from the penalty of our exchange is to receive by faith the gift of Christ's exchange—his righteousness for our sin.

And even when we're rescued from idolatry's penalty, we're still plagued by idolatry's power. So how can we be delivered from day to day placing our hope in some part of God's creation? We said earlier, that we become what we worship—that we resemble what we revere. When worship our idols, we become like them. But this works in the other direction as well: as we behold and treasure God, we become like him. 2 Cor. 3:18, "And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to the other. This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." And so, the best thing we could do is to behold God's glory to that the superiority and satisfaction of his glory makes our idols pale in comparison. Stars in the sky! They've been made obsolete in light of a superior glory. In the same way when the glory of God shines into our hearts, it renders our idols defenseless because it satisfies the deepest desires our idols promised to fill all along.

You see, in Christ we have everything we need to joy and satisfaction. We have abundant life. And so not only is idolatry foolish, but it's false advertising. Idols promise to give us something they can't and something that we already have. Adam and Eve, "I already am." Promise to give you a cheaper version of what you already have in Christ. I already all the approval I need. I have all the riches and inheritance I need. I have the security I need. I have the hope I need. Christ gives me that—and if you don't know that, if you don't see that, you will trade it for some plastic substitute in the world. Don't misplace your hope.