

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: Trade-offs That Didn't Turn Out Well, Romans 1

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INTRODUCTION: Today we are beginning a series on the Book of Romans. Romans is a rich book, and we are going to learn a lot from the Book of Romans. This morning, I want to start out this series in the Book of Romans by reading the whole chapter of Romans 1.

I have four points to my message today. Here they are:

1. The human race traded truth for lies.
2. The human race traded the glory of God for idols.
3. The human race traded stewardship for the pursuit of pleasure.
4. The result of mankind's tradeoffs was devastating.

ILLUSTRATION: The other day I was in the lobby of some business, and "Let's Make a Deal" was on television. I thought about how people trade something really great for something terrible. It happens all the time. And, in Romans Chapter 1, Paul tells us about the trade-offs mankind has made throughout human history.

BACKGROUND: Let me give you a little background about the Book of Romans before I read Romans Chapter 1. This information is gathered from various sources, but it will set a good foundation for where we're about to go.

Paul's letters are a systematic presentation of the gospel for a lost world. Where would we be without Paul's letters? I have no idea, and I'm so glad we have them. Paul had direct revelation from the Lord. God took him into the wilderness for specific instruction. And, he was in the right place, the right time, with the right words from the Lord. Many people were converted through a reading of the Book of Romans. Augustine is one. Martin Luther is another. The Protestant Reformation was really stimulated by the Book of Romans. Martin Luther understood the meaning of God's righteousness and that the just shall live by faith. John Wesley's assurance of salvation came through reading Romans. John Calvin said, "When anyone understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture."

Romans is a good starting point for someone brand new to the Bible. Romans deals with the root issue of sin, man's guilt because of sin, God's love for the world, repentance of man, and God's forgiveness and restoration of his people.

How did the gospel reach the Romans? Paul had not yet reached Rome, but the gospel was already there. It could have been from the Roman Jews who were converted and received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Jerusalem. That's probably what happened. The Jews could have taken it back to Rome. We don't know for sure. But, when Paul wrote the letter, he was writing from Corinth. Can you imagine writing a letter of instruction to a group of people who live in a place you'd never been before—that had a completely different culture, economy, and architecture? Everything was different from the other places Paul had been, yet Paul was led of the Lord to write a letter of instruction to the Romans.

It makes sense that if you were writing a letter to people of another country—that you would learn some about that culture first so that your words would make sense to them. Paul was an educated man, and he probably knew a lot about their culture already, but we really don't see a lot in Paul's writings in the Book of Romans dealing with Roman culture. He's just dealing with the broad picture and people. And, the problems people had in Corinth and in other places, Paul knew were the same problems people had in Rome. So, he wrote from his heart as the Lord was leading him. Paul finally made it to Rome later on, but he went as a prisoner for Jesus.

- The Book of Romans, to the unsaved, explains the sinful, lost condition of mankind and God's plan to save them.
- To the saved, the Book of Romans, tells believers how they are identified in Christ and about the victory we can experience as believers through the Holy Spirit.
- And, for mature believers, there are all kinds of deep truths in the Book of Romans—doctrinal truths, prophetic truths, and practical truths.
- There's also another dynamic in the Book of Romans—Paul anticipates opposition. Paul faced a lot of opposition, and he knew how to have a good argument on behalf of the Lord. I would never have wanted to argue any point with Paul because I would have lost the argument. But, Paul brings up several

arguments, and he defends his point of view as if there was going to be opposition.

There are seven main questions in the book of Romans:

1. What is the subject of the gospel?
2. What is the gospel?
3. Why do men need the gospel?
4. How can ungodly sinners be justified by a holy God?
5. Does the gospel agree with the Old Testament?
6. What are the benefits of justification in the sinners lives?
7. Does the teaching of salvation by grace permit or even encourage sinful living?

Romans deals with other things as well, such as the relationship of a Christian to the Law, how the Christian is enabled through the Holy Spirit to live a holy life, and other things. In the Book of Romans, Paul revisits one problem people have had since the beginning. And, that is sin. We don't hear a lot of sermons about sin. I guarantee, if you watch television preaching today, you probably won't hear a lot about sin. Sin doesn't really sell from the point of view of raising support for something. Sin sells in other ways. The temptations of sin sell, but there's not a lot of preaching today on sin, but there certainly ought to be. And, Romans revisits the root problem—sin.

Turn to Romans Chapter 1—

SCRIPTURE: Romans 1:1-32 ¹*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—* ²*the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures* ³*regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David,* ⁴*and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.* ⁵*Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.* ⁶*And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.*

⁷*To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

[**EXPLANATION:** If you do not have that paragraph circled (verses 18-20), you need to circle it in your Bible—because when people ask the question, *What about those who have not heard?*—there is your answer. God has revealed himself through nature, so all people are without excuse.]

Verse 21—²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Verse 24—²⁴ *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.*²⁵ *They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.*

Verse 26—²⁶ *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.*²⁷ *In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

²⁸ *Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.*²⁹ *They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.*³² *Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

EXPLANATION: That is a heavy, heavy chapter. There is so much to dwell on there. We could spend a lot of time studying, talking, debating, and sharing among ourselves from Romans Chapter 1.

In the beginning, God created mankind in a perfect state. Two people were created in perfection to live in perfection. Yet, these two people—Adam and Eve—sinned, and ever since then, man has devolved. We hear the world “evolve,” which is normally compared or spoken in relation to theistic evolution, but really, man has not evolved to a higher state. Man has devolved to a lower state from the very beginning in the Garden of Eden. In my message today, Paul dealt with why the human race had become so deprived. Here's why:

First, THE HUMAN RACE TRADED TRUTH FOR LIES.

EXPLANATION: They traded truth for lies, and they worshiped idols. We get this knowledge from Romans Chapter 1, from Psalms 19, and Romans Chapter 18. We

suppress the truth. The result was refusing the truth. Listen to the progression here. Suppressing the truth leads to refusing the truth, and refusing the truth leads to turning to a lie. Abandoning the truth and believing the lie leads to wrong thinking. And, wrong thinking leads to wrong living. We go back to the Garden of Eden where the serpent said, *“Did God really say that?”*

All of you know what that’s referring to. The serpent said to Eve, *“Did God really say that? You can eat of the fruit of this tree, and then you will be like God”* (Genesis 3:3-5).

APPLICATION: People want to believe lies because they want them to be true.

ILLUSTRATION: I received a call from a man none of you know. He was concerned that a woman, a relative of his, was caught up in a scam. The scam involved a soldier who was not getting the medical help he needed from the army. He was wandering around trying to get medical help. And, apparently the soldier’s story went like this: He was wealthy, but his money was locked up in some way. Oh, you can just see it, can’t you?—If the woman would just help him financially, he would get well and be able to access his money and would pay her back 100%.

Of course, the woman fell for it. This is why I got the call—to help expose the scam. The man who called me knew I was familiar with how the military works, and he wanted to ask me some questions so he could show the impossibility of the man’s claims. He talked to me and did his own background study and went back to the woman to reveal the truth—that she had been scammed. She became angry because she wanted the lie to be true. She wanted to believe she was helping a sick, patriotic man. She wanted to believe she would get a financial reward for helping him. She would rather go broke living in a fantasy than to know the truth.

ILLUSTRATION: Along with trading the truth for a lie, we must consider the atheist delusion as well. You know, today’s atheists actually have conferences so they can learn how to debate believers. They’re becoming well-versed in their atheistic beliefs, and the reason they believe their point of view is true, is because they want it to be true. They don’t want to face God with their sins. They want to justify their sins.

APPLICATION: And, here's the application for it all. We might chuckle at the absurdity of the scam. We might roll our eyes when hearing another atheist is on TV staging a debate, but, really, all of us should take heed lest we fall into some other sin by trading the truth for a lie. All of us are susceptible if we don't stay close to the Lord.

So, the human race traded truth for lies—

Next, THE HUMAN RACE TRADED THE GLORY OF GOD FOR IDOLS.

They did not know God or honor him as God. People refused to thank God. We will worship gifts given to us but not worship God.

The great theologian A.W. Tozer says wrong thinking begins with a wrong knowledge about God. [*Wrong ideas about God are not only the fountain from which the polluted waters of idolatry flow; they are themselves idolatrous. The idolater simply imagines things about God and acts as if they were true (Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy).*]

What is idolatry? I wonder how many of us are really worshipping God for who he is. It's possible we could be caught up in some form of idolatry and not even realize it.

ILLUSTRATION: One form of idolatry that has crept into many churches is the prosperity gospel heresy you've heard me preach against numerous times. It is not God's will everyone be healthy...and that may be a tough pill to swallow for those who have bought into the prosperity gospel.

APPLICATION: We're made to worship something, and if you have a biblical understanding of God, then you know to worship. And, we will make our own God if we don't worship the one true God. We will make ourselves God in our own minds if we do not worship the one true God.

So, they traded truth for lies and the glory of God for idols—

Next, THE HUMAN RACE TRADED STEWARDSHIP FOR THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE.

EXPLANATION: In the creation story, we learned the human race was created to worship God and to be stewards of his creation. You know our best understanding of what it was like in the Garden of Eden really is only childlike understanding. My understanding of Adam and Eve in this Garden God created isn't really that different than it was when I was six or seven-years-old because we can't even imagine what it must have been like. But, Adam and Eve blew it. They traded their role of responsible stewardship for the pursuit of pleasure.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION: Idolatry leads to immorality. Look back at the judges in the Bible. *Everyone did what was right in his own sight*, and numerous scripture passages tell us that phrase when there is the decline of someone or a group of people. Inevitably, the phrase will come up—*everyone did what was right in his own eyes*.

EXPLANATION: And, in Romans Chapter 1, Paul talks about sexuality, which is another Biblical theme. Any time people oppose God by trading the truth for lies and trading their righteousness for unrighteousness, it does seem that some way or another, sexual perversion comes into play.

ILLUSTRATION: I think about Jim Jones, David Koresh, or other cult leaders who got people to follow them, and they traded the truth for a lie. And, then somewhere in that mix, some type of sexual perversion creeps in. And, because of their sin, the Bible says, he gave them up. God is talking about mankind in general. The scripture talks about God giving people up to a depraved mind, which leads to my last point.

Last, THE RESULT OF MANKIND'S TRADE-OFFS WAS DEVASTATING.

“Let's Make A Deal” has not worked out well for the human race. God has presented a plan. His plan is perfect. His plan is flawless, but it's human nature to want to risk trading it for something that's seemingly even better. Man forgot about his knowledge God gave him, so God gave him over to a depraved mind. Only with Christ can your mind be renewed.

Romans Chapter 12, verses 1 and 2 talk about the renewing of your mind. And, the worst part of it all is found at the last scripture of Romans Chapter 1—is that those who fell into sin encouraged other people to sin and approved of others who sinned.

APPLICATION: You know, it's still the same today. You never sin alone. You always pull somebody else into it. And, the verdict of all of it is found in the middle of the chapter—*people are without excuse*.

All of us here this morning are without excuse. And, when we start justifying our sin, when we start justifying our behavior based on a lack of knowledge, or when we start justifying our actions based on what was done to us—if those actions, thoughts, behaviors, attitudes creep over into sin—we have no excuse. And, here's what we must do. We must repent. None of us are excused from repenting.

Dan Crawford, a British missionary to Africa made this statement:
The heathen are sinning against a flood of light.

I don't think that's just the heathen. I don't think that's just the heathen on the Dark Continent. I believe it's people all over the world. People are sinning against a flood of light, and Christians, I believe, are being disobedient against a flood of light.

CONCLUSION: But, we have hope. Romans Chapter 1 ends kind of harsh, doesn't it? But, Paul's harshness is meant to bring all of us to the understanding of the truth of the gospel—that only Jesus can forgive sins, and that if we don't watch out and are not careful, we can fall into sin ourselves.

The gospel message was presented to you as clearly as I could present it this morning. If you'd like to respond, if you feel that tug in your heart this morning—God's Spirit drawing you to be closer to him—his first tug is for you to repent and believe. Let's stand together.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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