

# DEVOTIONAL

WHEN IN ROME I // THE GREAT EXCHANGE  
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GRACE  
FELLOWSHIP

**Discussion Starter:** What is an idol?

**Key Text:** “For although they knew God, 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.<sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools,<sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,<sup>25</sup> 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.” (Rom.1:21-25)

## The Great Unseen Piano Player

Once upon a time, a family of mice lived in the bottom of a large upright piano. They loved their piano world: to them, the music was frequent, filling all the dark places with lovely melodies and harmonies. At first, the mice were impressed by the music. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought that Someone—invisible to them, yet close to them—made the music. They loved to tell stories about the Great Unseen Piano Player. Then one day, an adventuresome mouse climbed up part of the way in the piano and returned with an elaborate explanation about how the music was made. Wires were the secret — tightly stretched wires of various lengths that vibrated and trembled from time to time. Later, a second mouse ventured forth and came back telling of hammers beating upon the wires. The mice decided they must replace their old beliefs about the Great Unseen Piano Player with a more complicated theory of mechanisms and mathematics. Soon, the mice came to think of the Great Unseen Piano Player as merely a myth. Meanwhile, the Great Unseen Piano Player continued to play, nonetheless.

Like those mice who attributed the beautiful piano music to wires and hammers instead of to the Great Unseen Piano Player, in today’s text, Paul says many humans do not honor or give thanks to God as Creator. They make their own gods and exchange “*the glory of the immortal God for images*” (v.21), ending up worshipping and serving “*the creature rather than the Creator*” (v.25). But Genesis 1:1 declares, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” Psalm 115:15 says, “[God is] *the Maker of Heaven and the earth.*” The universe is finely tuned, evidenced by cosmic laws of physics that work in harmony to support complex life – such as human life – to live on Earth. The fine-tuning of the universe can only come from an intelligent, purposeful designer. The characteristics of the intelligent, purposeful designer precisely describe the God of the Bible. God is the best explanation as the purposeful Designer of the universe, just as the Bible says. Attributing creation to any cause other than God is idolatry.

**Discuss:** Why do you think people would rather believe the universe and all that is in it came about by random, unguided, purposeless processes than give God glory as Creator?

**Discuss:** Why does rejecting God as Creator eventually lead to idolatry?

## Repress then Reject then Replace

Paul tells us that repressing truth (v.18 “*suppress the truth*”) leads to rejecting truth (v.21), which ultimately leads to replacing truth (v.25 “*they exchanged the truth about God for a lie*”). After all, there’s no sense in honoring a God who did not create the world. And if God is not Creator, then He is not the provider of our needs. Paul describes people who have this mindset as becoming “*futile in their thinking*” (v.21). The word “*futile*” means worthless—this thought process has no value because it leads to wrong conclusions and, eventually, to darkened hearts. People who think futilely consider themselves wise, but “*they became fools*” (v.22; Psalm 14:1). Everything they end up believing is based on wrong assumptions about the universe and their place in it.

Paul says that futile thinking gets expressed through idol-making (v.23). We long to worship something, so we create idols made to look like the creation—people and animals. An idol is anything that we allow to replace God in our lives. Some idols are crude—like the wood and stones, and half-man and half-beast constructions of ancient civilizations. But there are also “*cultured*” idols in our modern society today, such as money, power, fame, cars, and mansions.

**Discuss:** Ecclesiastes 3:11 says God “*has put eternity into man’s heart.*” In light of this verse, why do you think humans have an innate desire to worship something?

**Discuss:** What are some examples of idols—things that take first place in our lives instead of God— in our culture today?

**Discuss:** Paul says that futile thinking leads to darkened hearts (v.21). What do you think “*darkened hearts*” means?

## God Steps Away

God takes worship personally. The first two of His Ten Commandments pertain to worshipping Him alone (Ex.20:3-6). Rejecting one aspect of God leads to even greater rejections of God. God’s response to those who have repressed, rejected, and replaced truth is to simply step away: “*God gave them up...*” (v.24). If people want to worship “*animals*” (v.23), then God will allow them to live like animals in all of their behaviors, especially regarding sex: “*the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves*” (v.24). Sex is one of God’s most beautiful gifts to humans and is designed for a man and woman in marriage. Paul says God gives rebels over to their animal urges, to live like animals in the full indulgence of the corruption of this gift.

**Discuss:** What are some examples of human misery that have resulted from unrestrained expression of human sexual desire?

**Discuss:** In what ways could God giving up on us be worse than active punishment?

## For Further Study:

*Counterfeit Gods* by Tim Keller

“Idolatry: Making God in Man’s Image” article at [www.crosswalk.com](http://www.crosswalk.com)