

The Big Picture

GOD IN THE CENTER FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION

Glory Exchanged

When Humanity Questioned the Creator

Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7

When we last saw Creation, everything was as God intended it to be. God had created the heavens and the earth, formed humanity in His image, provided for them, and declared all that He had made “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Creation belonged to Him and existed for Him. Humanity lived under the authority and provision of their Creator. And God had spoken.

Let’s begin by reading Genesis 2:15–17 and 3:1–7. As you read, pay close attention to what God says, what the serpent says, and how the man and woman respond.

God’s command began this way: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Genesis 2:16–17).

Notice where the emphasis begins. God did not place Adam in a barren garden with only one desirable tree that He refused to let him have. God’s command began with abundance: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden.” Only one tree was withheld.

Then the serpent enters the story.

His first recorded words are “Did God actually say...?” (Genesis 3:1). Thus, the first temptation recorded in Scripture begins by casting doubt on God’s Word.

But the serpent doesn’t stop there. He then subtly distorts what God had said. God had given the man every tree but one. However, the serpent asks whether God forbade them from eating from any tree in the garden.

Through doubt and distortion, God’s abundant provision is now pushed into the background while the one restriction moves to the foreground.

Then the serpent goes even further: “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Now, God’s Word is not merely questioned. It is contradicted.

Finally, God’s character itself comes into view: “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (v. 5).

Suddenly, God’s restriction could be viewed differently. Was God really protecting them? Was His command really good? Or was He keeping something good from them?

Adam and Eve didn't know everything God knew. They were innocent and finite beings. They had never experienced a fallen world. They didn't have our long history of seeing where sin leads. But they knew their Creator. He had given them life, made them in His image, surrounded them with His abundant provision, and declared His Creation "very good." Everything God had revealed about Himself testified to His goodness. And they had His Word.

The point is, they didn't need to know everything God knew in order to trust Him. They simply needed to trust the God they knew.

Then, something changes in verse 6.

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Genesis 3:6).

The woman "saw that the tree was good for food," that it was pleasing to the eyes, and that it was desirable for gaining wisdom. Note that the tree's desirability is not itself the problem. God had already filled the garden with other trees that were "pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Genesis 2:9).

The problem was that her own judgment of what was good now took precedence over what her Creator had said. God had established the boundary. Another voice offered a different account of reality.

Eve looked. She evaluated. She desired. She took. She ate. Then she gave the fruit to Adam, who was with her, and he ate it too.

Genesis 3 certainly presents the serpent as tempter, but his role in the temptation does not remove human responsibility for what happened. The serpent questioned and contradicted God's Word, but the man and woman chose to act contrary to what God had said.

Now step back and look at what has happened.

Humanity has begun to question the Creator.

God's Word is no longer accepted simply because God has spoken.

His goodness is doubted.

His authority is challenged.

The creature has begun to place its own judgment above the Word of the Creator.

The Fall, then, is about far more than eating forbidden fruit. It reaches into humanity's relationship with the God who created them.

God had spoken. **Would they believe His Word?**

God had surrounded them with His goodness. **Would they trust His goodness?**

God had established the boundary. **Would they remain under His authority?**

They did not.

And as the rest of Scripture unfolds, we discover that what happened in Eden did not remain in Eden. Humanity would continue to turn away from the Creator.

Centuries later, Paul would describe that reversal with one devastating word:

exchanged.

Glory Exchanged

Romans 1:18–25

Read Romans 1:18–25 and notice the language Paul uses to describe humanity's response to God. Humanity knows something of God through Creation. However, they refuse to honor Him or give thanks. They exchange His glory and worship what God has created instead of the Creator Himself.

“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him...” (Romans 1:19–21).

Paul makes clear that God reveals Himself to humanity. Verses 19-20 say that what can be known about God is evident because God has shown it. His eternal power and divine nature have been perceived “in the things that have been made.” This takes us straight back to our last blog, *Created for Him*. In Psalm 19, we saw that Creation declares God's glory. Now, Romans also tells us that Creation makes something of the Creator known.

Humanity's problem, then, isn't simply ignorance. God has revealed Himself through what He has made, but humanity's response to that revelation is wrong. Paul is not saying that Creation reveals the entire gospel. But it does genuinely reveal something about its Creator, particularly His eternal power and divine nature. This is why verse 20 ends, “So they are without excuse.”

Then, in verse 21, Paul says: “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him...” Honor and thanksgiving are worship language. The previous blog on Creation ended in Revelation 4, where Creation directs our attention toward the worship of the Creator. Now, this blog on the Fall, specifically in Romans 1, shows humanity refusing that proper response.

God is God.

But humanity does not honor Him as God.

That is bigger than breaking an isolated rule. Something is wrong with humanity's relationship to God Himself. God is not given His rightful place. And humanity refuses to remain in its rightful place beneath Him.

Also notice what happens to wisdom. Paul says in verse 22: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools.” Think back to Genesis 3. The tree was “to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6). We should not claim more than Scripture gives us by insisting that Paul is deliberately referring to Genesis 3 here. But when we read the two passages together within the larger biblical story, notice the contrast:

Genesis 3: “desired to make one wise.”

Romans 1: “claiming to be wise, they became fools.”

Then comes the language that gives this blog its title.

They “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (v. 23), and “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” (v. 25).

Something infinitely greater is traded for something infinitely less.

Notice first the categories Paul names: man, birds, animals, and creeping things. We have already encountered these categories in the Creation account of Genesis 1. Deuteronomy 4:15–19 similarly warns Israel not to make images resembling human beings, animals, birds, creeping things, fish, or the heavenly bodies and then bow down and serve them.

Again, the distinction between the Creator and His creation is crucial.

But Paul is not finished with the exchange. His glory is exchanged for images of created things, and in verse 25, His truth is exchanged for a lie. The result is a reversal of worship itself: humanity worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator.

Now we can see the progression:

God revealed Himself, but humanity refused to honor Him.

His glory was exchanged for images of created things.

His truth was exchanged for a lie.

Worship was redirected from the Creator toward the creation.

The exchange of glory became an exchange of worship.

The proper relationship between the Creator and His Creation was turned upside down.

And yet Paul ends the sentence in a way that is easy to overlook: “the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”

Human beings may refuse to honor God, but He does not cease to be worthy of honor.

We may exchange His glory for something created, but the exchange does not diminish His glory.

We may direct our worship elsewhere, but that does not make what we worship worthy or the Creator less worthy.

He is still the Creator. He is still glorious. He is still worthy of the honor, thanksgiving, worship, and service humanity has refused to give Him. He remains “blessed forever.”

Now step back and look at Genesis 3 again in light of what we have just read.

In Genesis, we watched God's Word questioned, His truthfulness challenged, and His goodness called into question. The man and woman God had made chose to act contrary to what God had said.

Romans 1 now gives us theological language for what Genesis 3 begins to show us. Humanity refuses to honor God as God. His glory is exchanged for created things, His truth for a lie, and worship is redirected from the Creator toward what He has created.

The Fall, then, is far more than the story of humanity breaking a rule about a piece of fruit. It is the story of humanity refusing to honor the Creator as God. The proper relationship between humanity and its Creator is overturned, and worship itself is turned in the wrong direction.

Genesis shows us the rebellion beginning in Eden. Romans helps us see more fully what that rebellion means.

And it did not end in Eden.

The Exchange Continues

Psalm 106:19–21 / Jeremiah 2:11–13

The exchange Paul describes in Romans 1 is not merely an abstract theological idea. We see that same kind of exchange repeatedly throughout the biblical story.

Consider Israel's worship of the golden calf. God had made Himself known to Israel in unmistakable ways. He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, demonstrated His power through His mighty acts, and brought them to Mount Sinai. Yet while Moses was on the mountain, the people made a golden calf and worshiped it. They declared, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (Exodus 32:4).

Generations later, Psalm 106 looked back on that event and described what Israel had done: “They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt” (Psalm 106:20–21).

Romans 1:23 closely echoes this language when humanity “exchanged the glory of the immortal God” for images of created things. Psalm 106 gives us a concrete example of that exchange within Israel's own history. And Psalm 106 also makes the tragedy deeply personal: “They forgot God, their Savior.”

The tragedy of the exchange becomes clearer when we see whom they exchanged. This was their Savior, the God who had delivered them from Egypt, demonstrated His power on their behalf, and done great things for them.

They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.

They had not simply chosen the wrong object of worship. They had turned from the God who had revealed Himself to them and saved them for the image of an ordinary creature.

Jeremiah gives us another vivid picture of what is lost in the exchange. Speaking of His people's unfaithfulness, God says: “my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit” (Jeremiah 2:11).

The wording is significant. Jeremiah says they exchanged “their glory.” In context, the Lord Himself is Israel's glory. The God who was their true glory was exchanged for “that which does not profit.”

Then He describes exactly what they have done: “they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13).

Don't miss the picture.

They exchanged the fountain for a broken cistern.

They turned from the Source and chose something they had made for themselves, something that could never provide what the fountain provided and could not even hold the water they needed.

Once again, Scripture draws our attention not only to the worthlessness of what was chosen, but to the incomparable worth of the One who was forsaken.

He is their glory.

He is the fountain of living waters.

This is what makes idolatry such a tragic exchange. It is not simply the worship of the wrong thing. The creature turns away from the Creator and reaches for something created, something lesser, something that can never take His place.

The images in these stories may change, but the change in direction remains the same.

In Eden, humanity turned from what God had said and reached for what He had forbidden.

In Romans, humanity exchanges God's glory for created things and worships the creature rather than the Creator.

In Psalm 106, God's people exchange His glory for the image of an ox.

In Jeremiah, God's people forsake the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns.

Again and again, the exchange moves in the same direction: away from God and toward something less than God.

And that raises a difficult question:

Why would we ever make that exchange?

The Exchange Comes Closer to Home: Idolatry and Worship

Colossians 3:1–5; Matthew 6:24

It would be easy to leave this exchange in the ancient world. We may never bow before a golden calf or carve an image to worship, but Scripture does not allow us to confine idolatry to statues.

In Colossians 3, Paul calls believers to set their minds “on things that are above” (v. 2) and then makes an extraordinary statement: Christ “is your life” (v. 4). Our lives are to be oriented toward

Him. Then, in the very next verse, Paul commands: “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (v. 5).

Suddenly, idolatry comes much closer to home. Something does not have to be carved into an image before a created thing can begin to occupy a place that belongs to the Creator. Jesus makes a similar point when He warns, “You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

The question is no longer simply, “Do I bow before an idol?”

It becomes, “What is my life oriented toward? What am I allowing to rival God for my devotion, my desires, and my service?”

Glory Exchanged is not merely the story of Adam and Eve or ancient Israel.

It is our problem too.

But He Gives More Grace

James 4

By this point, the pattern is difficult to miss. Humanity turns from the Creator toward creation itself. God's Word is questioned. His glory is exchanged. Worship is redirected.

Read James 4:1–10. James begins with desires that have become so disordered that they produce conflict among God's people. But then his language becomes startlingly personal: “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” (v. 4).

Why adultery?

Because sin is not merely the breaking of an impersonal rule. It is rebellion against God, and here James describes it in the deeply relational language of unfaithfulness.

But then come five words that change the direction of the passage: “But he gives more grace.”

We have spent this blog watching humanity move away from God. James now calls us in the opposite direction.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God” (v. 7).

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (v. 8).

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (v. 10).

The sinner who has turned from God is called to humble himself before Him. The one who has wandered is invited to draw near. And the God against whom we have sinned gives more grace.

Think of the God whose glory humanity has exchanged. He is the Creator, blessed forever. He is the Savior who has done great things for His people. He is their glory. He is the fountain of living waters.

Humanity has turned from Him again and again.

But He gives more grace.

The God whose glory humanity exchanged is the God who gives grace to those who humble themselves and draw near to Him.

The Direction Reversed: Repentance

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

While James calls us to submit to God, draw near to Him, and humble ourselves before Him, Paul gives us a beautiful picture of what that looks like in the lives of the Thessalonian believers.

“You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10).

Think back again to Romans 1. Humanity “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). But here in Thessalonians, there has been a shift in direction. They turn from idols back to God.

This is repentance.

The creature who has turned away from the Creator turns back to Him. Paul’s language describes a genuine conversion, a decisive change of direction and allegiance. And notice the contrast he makes. They turned from idols to the “living and true God.” The idols they had served were lifeless and false. The God to whom they turned is living and true. And they did not turn merely to acknowledge Him. They turned “to serve” Him. Worship is being turned back in its proper direction.

Now the contrast that has run through this entire story comes into focus. The creature can never compare with the Creator. Humanity can never compare with God. The idol can never compare with the Savior. The broken cistern can never compare with the fountain of living waters. What is false and lifeless can never compare with the living and true God.

God alone is glorious and worthy of our worship.

But Paul adds one more thing. They turned to God “to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven ... Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (v. 9-10).

And there, the next movement of this story begins to emerge. Humanity needs more than instruction.

We need deliverance. And God has sent His Son.

Conclusion

If we read these passages only as individual accounts of human sin, we can learn important truths about the Fall and still miss something even greater. The Bible is God's story. He is its central character; His purposes unfold throughout it, and ultimately, His glory fills the story from beginning to end.

In this part of the story, our subject has been the Fall, but our lens has been God's glory. And when we step back and look across these passages together, something else comes into view. While humanity turns away from God, Scripture keeps directing our attention back to Him.

Creation: God's glory revealed. God at the center. Worship is our response.

Fall: God's glory exchanged. God remains at the center. Repentance is our response.

Humanity questions Him. **He remains true.**

They exchange His glory. **He remains glorious.**

They refuse to honor Him. **He remains blessed forever.**

They forget their Savior. **He remains the God who saves.**

They forsake the fountain. **He remains the Source.**

They turn away. **He gives more grace.**

They need deliverance. **He sends His Son.**

And there, we see God's story continue: **Redemption.**