

# Romans 1:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

## Analysis

**And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.**

Paul describes the essence of idolatry: *kai ěllaxan tēn doxan tou aphthartou theou en homoiōmati eikonos phthartou anthrōpou kai peteinōn kai tetrapodōn kai herpetōn* (καὶ ἔλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνοϛ φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πετεινῶν καὶ τετραπόδων καὶ ἑρπετῶν, 'and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image of corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things').

Ēllaxan (ἔλλαξαν, exchanged) is a commercial term—humanity traded the infinitely valuable for the worthless. Tēn doxan tou aphthartou theou (τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ, the glory of the incorruptible God) refers to God's eternal, unchanging, radiant majesty. They exchanged this for homoiōmati eikonos phthartou (ὁμοίωμα εἰκόνοϛ φθαρτοῦ, an image/likeness of corruptible things). The descending order—man, birds, quadrupeds, reptiles—echoes Genesis 1 in reverse, a de-creation. Humanity, made in God's image (Genesis 1:27), now worships images of creatures. This is cosmic insanity—the creature worshipping the creature rather than the Creator. It violates the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-6) and Deuteronomy 4:15-19.

## Historical Context

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Ancient idolatry was pervasive. Egyptians worshiped animal-headed gods (Anubis, Horus). Greeks fashioned anthropomorphic deities (Zeus, Aphrodite). Romans adopted these, adding emperor worship. Jewish readers would recall Israel's golden calf (Exodus 32), making an image 'like a calf that eats grass' (Psalm 106:19-20). Temples with statues, shrines, and household idols saturated the Roman world. Paul's audience in Rome would have walked past countless such images daily. Modern idolatry is subtler—self, money, pleasure, power—but equally destructive.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

## Study Questions

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1. What are you tempted to 'exchange' (ἀλλάσσω) the glory of God for—what created things rival God's supreme worth in your life?
2. How does idolatry involve not just addition (adding false gods) but exchange (replacing the true God)?
3. What modern idols do Christians rationalize or disguise that are spiritually equivalent to ancient statues?

## Interlinear Text

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καὶ	ἥλλαξαν	τὴν	δόξαν	τοῦ	ἀφθάρτου	θεοῦ	ἐν
And	changed	G3588	the glory	G3588	of the uncorruptible	God	into
G2532	G236		G1391		G862	G2316	G1722
ὁμοιώματι	εἰκόνης	φθαρτοῦ	ἀνθρώπου	καὶ	πετεινῶν		
made like	an image	to corruptible	man	And	to birds		
G3667	G1504	G5349	G444	G2532	G4071		
καὶ	τετραπόδων	καὶ	ἐρπετῶν				
And	fourfooted beasts	And	creeping things				
G2532	G5074	G2532	G2062				

## Additional Cross-References

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**Psalms 106:20** (Glory): Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.

**Jeremiah 2:11** (Glory): Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.

**Acts 17:29** (References God): Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

**Romans 1:25** (References God): Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

**Ezekiel 8:10** (Parallel theme): So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about.

**1 Peter 4:3** (Parallel theme): For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

**Deuteronomy 5:8** (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth:

**Isaiah 44:13** (Parallel theme): The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house.

**Isaiah 40:18** (References God): To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

**Isaiah 40:26** (Creation): Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

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