

God Gave Them Up

Romans 1:24-32

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I want to read our whole text, Romans 1:24-32, and then we will come back and unpack it.

Paul said, "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

Verse 26, "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."

Verse 28, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents..." it's interesting that in the middle of this list of horrible sins or 21 sins so prevalent in our culture today, we find this sin "...undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving..." or "without love for family" "...unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."

We have come in the study of Romans to the section I'm calling "Condemnation." We started there last time in chapter 1, verse 18. The section on condemnation runs from verse 18 through chapter 3, verse 20. This section shows us the need for salvation. So before we get salvation, we get condemnation. Before we come to the doctrine of salvation, we need to see that all the world is guilty before God.

The Bible teaches that when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they brought sin, death and condemnation on the whole, human race. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned and fell, and as a result, they brought that sin capacity or sin nature to the whole, human race. So we are born with a sinful nature. We are sinners because we are born with a sinful nature. Then we sin because we're sinners. We're not sinners because we sin; we sin because we're sinners. We were born with a sinful nature. So we need to understand our need for the Gospel. Paul makes it clear that the whole world of mankind is "without excuse," verse 20.

In review, verses 18-21 tell us that they "knew God" but they "suppress the truth." They knew God, because He spoke to them in their conscience and in creation. The things that are seen in creation spoke to them about God, but they didn't live up to their knowledge. In verses 21-23, "They did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful." But they perverted the truth of God. They switched the truth for a lie.

Now, as we come to verse 24 of this section, God gives them up. "Therefore..." which is based on chapter 1, verses 18-23, "...God also gave them up." Because they abandoned God, because they suppressed the knowledge of the truth, because they weren't thankful, because they wouldn't glorify Him as God, because they insisted on going their own way, God abandoned them. He said it three times in our text: "God also gave them up," verse 24; "God gave them up," verse 26; and "God gave them over," verse 28.

What it means is that God took His hands off them and allowed them to follow their sinful lusts. If you turn your back on God and run your own way, God will allow you to go into sin so that you will come to the end of yourself.

This is illustrated by the prodigal son, Luke 15. He said to his father, "Give me my inheritance." So the father gave his son his inheritance; he let the boy go. The boy ended up in a pigpen. Then the son came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" When the son came near his father, the father ran to him, put his arms around him, smothered him with kisses, put a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, a coat on his back and began to celebrate. God will let you go so that you come to the end of yourself and realize you are a sinner in need of God's grace, you repent and turn back to Him.

So man knew he was created by God in His image, but now he makes God in man's image. Man begins to sing, "Glory to man in the highest." It's called "humanism." Humanism today is basically the idea that man is the center of all things; that everything revolves around man. There is no God. There is no Being out there to whom we are accountable. So basically we just have to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. That's humanism. Man abandons God, so God abandons man.

I want to make it clear that verses 24-32 is the eventual result of verses 18-23. Because of verses 18-23, "God gave them up." And there are three stages of this abandonment. Stage one is that "God...gave them up to uncleanness." We see the essence of man's sinfulness, verses 24-25. "Therefore..." or because of them suppressing the truth, not glorify God as God, substituting the truth for a lie "...God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts."

The word "lust" can actually be a neutral word. It can mean "a strong desire." The context determines if it is sinful lust. In this case, it is uncontrollable, sinful, sexual lust. So God gave them over "to dishonor their bodies among themselves." This is talking about sexual sin. It's not just any sexual sin; it's heterosexual sin. They give themselves over to this kind of lifestyle.

By the way, idolatry and immorality are often bound together. You show me people who substitute God with idols, and I'll show you people who are immoral. If you're wrong about how you view God, you're wrong about how you view sex. It's so important we have a right view and

a right understanding of God.

It says here that they were given over “to dishonor their bodies among themselves.” Sexual immorality dishonors your body. Your body was not made to be dishonoring to God. Verse 25, “...who exchanged the truth of God...” which is the truth about God “...for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” The end of this verse is actually a doxology; Paul broke forth in words of praise.

So God abandons man and gives him over to his uncleanness, “in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.” This is referring to sexual sin. We don’t know why, when Paul talks about man’s downward fall, why he didn’t move from low to high. Rather he started high with God and devolved downward. Why he gets into sexual sin we don’t know.

This would not be my choice of topic for the day. It’s very difficult to talk to a congregation about sexual sin and these kinds of matters. But we must be faithful to the Bible. If I did nothing else but simply read the text and say, “This is the Word of the Lord; we must obey it,” then closed the book, that would be good. Some would say, “Yeah, that would be great! Do it! I want to go home and watch football!”

We must obey God’s Word. This is my appeal to this Bible-believing congregation: make sure you are fully submitted to the authority, inerrancy, infallibility, reliability, clarity and sufficiency of the Bible. It is the authority. I’m just the preacher, the messenger, so don’t shoot the messenger. It’s the Word of God.

If you disagree with these verses, so be it. But you get to choose your own destiny. God will let you go to defile and dishonor your own body. “...who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” You’re going to have trouble. We have a lot of trouble in our culture today, because we’ve forsaken God’s standards and God’s Word.

John Stott said, “The history of the world confirms that idolatry tends to immorality. A false image of God leads to a false understanding of sex.”

Paul doesn’t tell us what kind of sexual sin is in view in verse 24. But most likely it is heterosexual sin. There is such a thing as sexual sin. I feel I need to say that, because the culture says otherwise. “Anything goes between two consenting adults. It’s okay whatever you want to do. Just don’t hurt anybody else.” How they came up with that criteria I don’t know. They just make it up!

There is no fixed standard for that in the Bible. What you think may not hurt somebody else does hurt somebody else. So we need a higher authority; we need to be able to fix ourselves to God. We need to have a standard of right and wrong.

The problem with our culture today is Romans 1: we have forsaken God. Everything is relative; there are no absolutes. So we are reaping what we have sown (Galatians 6:7). We’ve sown to

the wind and reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7).

So Paul is most likely referring to heterosexual sin. There is a thing called sexual sin, verse 24. It is uncleanness, a lust of their own hearts, a dishonoring of their own bodies. And verse 25, they “exchanged the truth of God for the lie.”

Sex is actually God’s idea. It is a gift from God. But I want to make it perfectly clear: it is only within the covenant relationship of marriage. That is the only place that sex is designed for. What is marriage? The Bible says that God made Adam and Eve, male and female (Genesis 1:27). Jesus said in Matthew 19:5, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” And in verse 4, He said that He “made them male and female.”

That’s what our text says in the Greek. It doesn’t say “women” and “men”; it says “male” and “female.” In the marriage covenant, it is between a man and a woman or between a male and a female. The problem today is that we don’t know what a woman is! Nor do we know what a man is! We think men can have babies! That’s because we have a reprobate mind. We’re going to see that in the text, in verse 28. It’s unbelievable! We’ve lost our minds!

When you lose God, eventually you lose your mind. You can’t determine right from wrong. You see what a vast subject this is and why it is so overwhelming to put it together and preach it from the pulpit on a Sunday morning.

Sex is only for marriage, Genesis 2, Matthew 19. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Paul says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality.” So premarital sex is sin. Extramarital sex is sin. All of these areas outside the marriage covenant is sin. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

And every married couple should read 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. If you’re married, you render to your spouse their due benevolence, their conjugal right. A husband’s body is not his own; it belongs to his wife. And a wife’s body is not her own; it belongs to her husband. But it’s your own wife and your own husband; you don’t go outside that covenant relationship of marriage. You only engage in this kind of intimacy with your spouse in the marriage relationship.

I learned the word “nihilism” this week. It is the rejection of all religious and moral principles in the belief that life is meaningless. Nihilism is the chief philosophy of our culture today. Nothing has meaning. Nothing has purpose. No truth, no absolutes and everything goes. That’s the culture we live in today.

But we are God’s people with God’s Word. We must stand on His truth; not exchange the truth for a lie. So many people’s lives have been scarred, damaged and ruined, because they have believed the world and didn’t follow God’s design for marriage. They have reaped what they have sown.

The second division of our text is verses 26-27. God now gives them up to passions of dishonor. We see the expression of man's sinfulness. "For this reason..." which was just described in verses 24-25 "...God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women..." which I think should be better translated "females" "...exchanged the natural use for what is against nature."

I've read the stupid argument some people have that says they're involved in same sex when they're not really doing it according to their nature: "I was born a lesbian. I was born a homosexual. So it is according to my nature and is not contrary to this verse."

No; that is not right. According to "nature" means "according to God's original design." We are "created...in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27). We have not evolved from animals. A chimpanzee is not your close uncle or relative. When man sinned in the Garden of Eden, he fell and was cast out of the Garden, we are separated from God, so Jesus came to redeem us back to God.

Verse 26 is talking about the sin of lesbianism, a female with a female. "Their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature." And verse 27 is homosexuality. "Likewise also..." or "in the same way" "...the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another..." this is men lusting after men "...men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due." So they suffered within themselves their deserved penalty. Sin brings its own punishment or penalty. Many times that is sexually transmitted diseases.

I am speaking in a time and in a culture that has bought the lie that marriage can be between two men or between two women. By the way, with nihilism or with the philosophy we live by today, why can't it be between three men and one woman, or between four women and one man? Why can't it be bestiality? "I want to marry my horse." It is laughable but sadly it's tragic. It is actually happening in our culture.

And the scary thing is that we keep going further and further away from the light of God's Word. There is no way to stop it. When America so called "legalized" same-sex marriage, it was the beginning of the end of America. There is no stopping the flood tide of wickedness and immorality; it will sweep over our land.

Marriage is a divine institution. You can't redefine it. You can't change it. It is the building block of society. It is a reflection of the relationship between Christ and His church. So Satan hates marriage and attacks it. So changing marriage leads to sexual immorality, to lesbianism and homosexuality, which is sinful. Notice in verse 26, it is called "vile passions." In verse 27, it is called "shameful." They are receiving the right judgment for these sins. We must submit to the Bible's clear teaching.

Let me give you some cross references to make it clear that homosexuality is sin. Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13 and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18-19. The homosexual community likes to say that the reason God judged these cities is because they

were inhospitable. Really?! God rained down fire and brimstone on them, because they were inhospitable?! Nothing could be further from the truth. It was because of their sexual sin. We've referred to it in times past as the sin of sodomy. It became synonymous with Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible. Also, in the New Testament we have 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:9-10 and Matthew 19 where Jesus spoke.

A common argument today of the LGBTQ community is that Jesus did not condemn or address homosexuality. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus affirmed God's design of male and female, man and his wife, the two becoming one flesh. "What God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9). In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul showed us that marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. So any attack on marriage is an attack on God Himself.

But because it is a sin, you can be forgiven and set free. It is not a sickness; it is a sin. And that's good because God forgives sin. It can be washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators..." which is the sexually immoral "...nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

The blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse from any sin. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). God can give you a new heart. God can forgive your sins, He can give you a fresh start, you can be born again, you can become a child of God, if you turn from your sin to the Savior, Jesus Christ and put your faith and trust in Him.

The last section is verses 28-32. God gave them up to a reprobate mind. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge..." deliberate, willful disobedience "...God gave them over..." This is an intended word-play. They didn't want God; God let them go. Remember that God loves them; God sent His Son to die for them on the Cross. "God so loved the world..." (John 3:16). God won't force you to follow Him and believe in Him and live for Him.

So "God gave them over to a debased..." or "reprobate" in the King James translation "...mind, to do those things which are not fitting." A "reprobate mind" is a mind that does not work. The origin of the Greek word used here means "tested and found wanting, tested and found to be inadequate or broken."

A "reprobate mind" is like a clock that doesn't tell the right time. Do you have a clock like that? It needs the battery changed. Every time you look at that clock it gives you the wrong time. That's what a "reprobate mind" is; it's a mind that doesn't work. It doesn't know right from wrong. It calls "evil good, and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20). The mind is broken.

I don't know how many times when I look at the news feed on my phone about what is going on

in our culture that I say, “Are we out of our minds?!” We’re so crazy on the positions we’ve taken culturally. Whoever thought that so many moral issues would be an issue in our voting for politicians in America.

What is legal is not necessarily right. Just because the government sanctions something doesn’t mean it’s right. God is the authority; not the government.

Following, in verse 29, is one of the most frightening lists of anti-social sins in the Bible. There are several places that list sins. It would take weeks to preach on all these sins and break them down. Paul gives us this horrifying list of heinous sins. This shows us mankind without God. This is living in a world without God. This is living in a culture that has abandoned God.

I want to read it to you in the NASB. It’s a little clearer than the King James translation. There are about 21 sins listed here. “...people having been filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, and evil; full of...” which means “controlled by, overflowing with” “...envy, murder.” I’m amazed at how often sexual sin is related to homicide; how many homicides take place because of perverted, sexual conduct. “...strife, deceit, and malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent...” which means “rude” “...arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents.” Can you imagine that right in the middle of these heinous sins is “disobedient to parents”! God takes this very seriously.

Verse 31, “...without understanding, untrustworthy, unfeeling, and unmerciful.” So they are senseless, faithless, heartless and ruthless. 2 Timothy 3:2 says that they will love pleasure more than God, they will love money more than God and they will love themselves more than God. And they will love themselves more than they love the family. “Without natural affection” means “without family love.”

When I read this section of the Bible and I read this list, I’m overwhelmed. I’ve been preaching from this text for over 50 years, and over those years, I’ve seen nothing but continual degeneration of our culture.

To some degree, it leads me to blame the church in being compromising and not preaching the truth and not standing for the truth. The church is to be the light of the world. The church is to be the salt of the earth. The church is to be “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

“God, help us to stand on Your truth, not to compromise with the culture and not to listen to the lie!” The lie is, “You will be like God” (Genesis 3:5). “It’s okay; God will not judge you. Everybody’s doing it. Times have changed.” So we capitulate to the lie.

Verse 32, “And although they know the ordinance of God...” yet they do all these 21 sins in verses 29-31 “...that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them.”

They give hearty approval to those who do these sins. They clap for them. They go to their parades. They celebrate with them. They promote it on TV talk shows. They advertise it in

music videos. And they condemn the believer, who speaks the truth in love and stands on God's Word. That is hate speech and is bigoted; we're homophobic. They don't understand they are dishonoring God and dishonoring their bodies and bringing destruction to their own lives and to others.

In closing, not all these sins are found in every individual. But some of them are found in some of us. Read this list over and see if God convicts you. If so, then ask God to forgive you.

Jesus came to save us from sin. The challenge in our text is that we don't get to the good news until chapter 3, verse 21. But first we have to hear the bad news.

The next text we'll study is about the "moral man." "Well, I don't do those wicked things! I'm a good person!" Are supposedly "good people" still guilty before God? Yes, chapter 2. But Jesus came to redeem and save us. Jesus came to buy us back to God. He said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).