

“When God Gives Up” **Romans 1:24-32**

CONTEXT: Paul’s argument in these verses is in the context of him trying to show how all men are in need of the saving power found only in the gospel of Christ (1:16). Here the Gentiles are presented as under God’s wrath (1:18) because of their rebellion against the revelation that God has given of Himself in creation (1:20).

I. The Surprising Nature of God’s Wrath, 1:24-25.

- A.** God’s response to idolatry is wrath but in the surprising form of lifting his restraint on mankind’s evil intentions, 1:24.
1. This surprising form of God’s wrath expressed in giving men up to their sinful desires is repeated three times in this section to drive home the point (cf. 1:26 & 28).
 2. “Lusts of their hearts” = God does not have to make the hearts of men sinful, for they are already wicked (Genesis 6:5); the punishment is his lifting his restraining hand.
 - a. Here we see that one’s rejection of the true God will always affect one’s morality in some measure.
 - b. Whenever we see non-believers who are outwardly civil or moral, it is only because God is restraining the expression of their sinful hearts.
 - i. God does this to support the progress of his plan of redeeming men and women from every people group on the face of the earth.
 3. The “impurity” and “dishonoring of their bodies” will be specified in 1:26-27.
 4. **DISCUSSION:** What sinful attitudes and actions of non-Christians are you sometimes tempted to envy? How should understanding God’s wrath in this verse help us not to envy them?
- B.** Mankind has turned to idolatry not out of ignorance but in rebellion against God, 1:25.
1. Paul has already stated the reason for God’s wrath but he restates it to make clear the culpability of men.
 - a. Men are not ignorant of the truth but willingly “exchange” it for a lie.
 2. Mankind was made to worship, so in their rebellion they do not stop worshipping but simply worship other things than the true God.
 3. Though this text is applicable to all alive today who have never heard the Bible (and those who have and reject it too), it is first and foremost an explanation of how God has dealt with all the Gentile nations outside of Israel before the coming of Christ.
 - a. The revelation of God in nature is clear but this has never led anyone to rightly worship the true God; thus, such a revelation becomes solely a basis for condemnation. The gospel is necessary for salvation.
 4. **DISCUSSION:** How does this text make sense out of the world, specifically in regard to the diversity of religions in it? How can we use this to counter the popular belief that all religions are equal?
- C.** The heart of idolatry consists in the substitution of the good things of God’s creation for God himself, 1:25.
1. There is always an element of truth in idolatry/false religion, because it is always based on something good; however, instead of the good being used and enjoyed for the glory of the true God, it is substituted for God.
 - a. This is why idolatry can sometimes be very subtle.
 - i. For example, money is a good thing but the love of it is idolatry (cf. Col. 3:5).
 2. **DISCUSSION:** It is often easy to point out the idolatries of non-Christians but what idolatries are we as Christians tempted to set up?

II. The Sexual Nature of Man’s Rebellion, 1:26-27.

- A.** Man’s rebellion against God often expresses itself most definitively in its abuse of God’s gift of sex for heterosexual marriage.
1. Sex is one of God’s best gifts to mankind, so we would expect wicked men to twist and corrupt it.
 2. Men often reject worshipping and serving the true God because they don’t like the demands he places on their sexuality; sin has blinded them to see that the proper use of sex (i.e. in marriage) is the most fulfilling as well.
 - a. *“I had motives for not wanting the world to have meaning; consequently, assumed it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find reasons for this assumption.... The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do.... For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.”*
--- Prominent 60’s atheistic philosopher, Aldous Huxley, in, “Confessions of a Professed Atheist”
- B.** Homosexuality is perhaps the grossest expression of rebellion against God in the sexual sphere.
1. God’s estimate is that homosexuality is “dishonorable.”
 - a. The “shameless” aspect of their sin is highlighted in the Greek text of 1:27.

2. “Natural” = The way God distinctly made male and female demonstrates the perversity of homosexuality.
3. “Consumed with passion” = We must be careful in speaking of homosexuality merely as a choice. Those who struggle with homosexual temptations have disordered desires, and it may feel “natural” to them just like many of our sinful thoughts and actions feel “natural.”
 - a. This does not lessen their responsibility but can help us to point them to the depths of their sin and their need for Christ to save and reorder their desires.
4. “Receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error” = It is tempting to see this referring to such things as sexually transmitted diseases (like AIDS), but it seems to be referring to the shame associated with homosexuality as the punishment itself.
5. **DISCUSSION:** How does this text shatter the pro-homosexual interpretations of the Bible?

C. Rampant homosexuality in a society is a sign of God’s wrath for idolatry.

1. Though God will certainly judge unrepentant homosexuals, when homosexuality becomes widely practiced it is not just storing up wrath from God but itself is an expression of God’s wrath for a wholesale rejection of him.
 - a. This can help us to understand why many liberal churches are beginning to support homosexuality. It is God’s judgment on them for their rejection of the clear teaching of the Bible about the exclusivity of Christ.
2. In Greco-Roman culture, homosexuality was not only widely accepted but many actually thought it superior to heterosexuality!
3. **DISCUSSION:** What do these verses tell us about the root of the gigantic surge in support for homosexuality in our country?

III. The Sinful Nature of Man’s Unrestrained Mind, 1:28-32.

A. Because men refuse to acknowledge God, he gives them over to a corrupt mind, 1:28.

1. The Greek text literally states that they “did not think it fit to have God in their knowledge.”
2. There is a play on words here because “acknowledge” and “debased” come from the same root verb. In other words, because men misused their mind by rejecting the knowledge of God, God allowed their mind to be corrupted.
 - a. It is important to see that man’s mind and not just his will is fallen. Thus, we can understand why they formulate all types of intellectual arguments to deny their need to bow before Christ as Lord and Savior.

B. When left unrestrained, the wicked mind of man plots and executes a full variety of unrighteousness, 1:29-31.

1. This is what is called a “vice-list,” which catalogs a number of sinful items for the purpose of illustration but is not meant to be exhaustive. These lists are common in the New Testament (cf. Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10) and in the secular moral literature of Paul’s time.
 - a. This list is the longest in the New Testament and there are no less than 21 different sins mentioned. Many of them overlap and there is not an apparent order to them, although they are in three distinct groups (the first four are meant to be together; the fifth through the ninth are the second group; the 10th through the 24th are the third group).
 - i. The first one, “unrighteousness” is probably a general one of which the other 20 are more specific.
 - ii. In the second group, “envy” can be thought of as the root of the other four that follow.
 - iii. “Inventors of evil” is “*an incisive characterization of men’s capacity for committing the oldest sins the newest kind of ways.*” --- C.B. Cranfield
2. **DISCUSSION:** Do any of the sins in this list surprise you, and why? Which ones are sometimes evident in your life?

C. The wickedness of man not only leads him to commit gross sins but to thoughtfully support the continued practice of such wickedness, 1:32.

1. Again the culpability of all men is espoused, for even the Gentiles who have never heard the Bible know that there is judgment for their rebellion against God; however, this does not restrain them.
2. Giving approval to wickedness is seen as worse than “just” performing the wickedness!
 - a. “*He has reserved for the end the characterization which is the most damning of all. It is that of the consensus of men in the pursuit of iniquity.*” --- John Murray
3. **DISCUSSION:** What examples do we see of this at the legislative level in our country today?

D. The situation may seem hopeless but the gospel is powerful to save and transform even those who have been given over to such wickedness!

1. Though God gave up the Gentile nations to pursue their idolatry for many centuries until Christ came (cf. Acts 14:16), now he is calling Gentiles out of darkness into light through the church extending the gospel to all the peoples of the world.