

# God Gave Them Up

Romans 1:24-32

All men, beginning with Adam and Eve and continuing down through all history, in one way or another suppress the truth about God. Not everyone suppresses the truth in the same ways. But all men fail to honor God in the way that He deserves.

And because all men are guilty of this sin of ungodliness, God is justified in pouring out his wrath upon them. God's wrath involves both his anger and his just punishment.

In verse 18, Paul says that the "wrath of God" **is** revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. Paul is not merely thinking about a future Final Judgment that would punish sinners to an eternal hell. He has in mind something that is occurring now, in the present, as he is writing the letter.

You may be shocked to discover what God's present wrath involves. We typically think of punishments as the infliction of some sort of pain or the withdrawal of some desire or privilege. Parents may spank their children for disobedience. They also might take away privileges: grounding or time out etc. So, we tend to think of God's punishment in these terms as well. The ultimate punishment is to the eternal pains of hell. But even in this life, the variety of pains that we experience get our attention: sickness, disease, poverty, etc. And, even though God can and does inflict these sorts of punishments, this is not the sort of wrath that Paul has in mind.

Read Romans 1:18-32.

The punishment that Paul has in mind is organized around the repeated phrase: God gave them up. Paul repeats this phrase 3 times in these verses: vv. 24, 26, and 28. Closely following these, Paul explains "to what" that people have been given up. If you look closely, you will see the little word "to" repeated several times.

"to impurity"

"to the dishonoring of their bodies"

"to dishonorable passions"

"to a debased mind"

"to what ought not to be done"

And also, every time Paul repeats the phrase "God gave them up," he also takes the time to further define the previous sin of not honoring God and/or suppressing the truth of God.

"they exchanged the truth about God for a lie"

"they worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator"

"they did not see fit to acknowledge God"

So, structurally, Paul repeats his main point three times. Men did this, so God did this. But as far as this sermon goes we will look at three main points.

1. What does “God gave them up” actually mean.
2. To what does God give us up.
3. How do sinful men respond to God’s wrath.

First, what does “God gave them up” actually mean?

The Greek word is paradidomi.

It is a compound word. para = alongside and didomi = give

It is the action of handing someone over to the authority of another for judgment.

The Sanhedrin handed Jesus over to Pilate in hopes that he would condemn him to death.

**ESV Mark 15:1** And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole Council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.

When a church member is excommunicated for gross and unrepentant sin, the act of excommunication hands the person over to Satan.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 5:5** you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that the action of handing over or giving up is a positive action. There are other words that Paul could have chosen had he wanted to communicate a more passive “allowing” on the part of God. This is not to say that many within the Church have tried to interpret “God gave them up” in a passive way.

Chrysostom interpreted this action of God as merely the withdrawing of his positive influence.

Godet says: ‘He (God) ceased to hold the boat as it was dragged by the current of the river.’

Why they do this will become clear as we consider more closely what it is that they are handed over “to”. But the grammar will not allow for mere passivity on the part of God. God is actively doing something in the “giving up”.

All men dishonor God, and therefore, God actively pours out wrath upon them, and his wrath involves the positive action of giving people up. The idea that God has the right, and does indeed “give them up”, increases in me the seriousness of not honoring God. The people do not ask to be given up. They do not wake up one morning and say to themselves, I choose to be given up.

“To what” does God give us up.

“to impurity”

“to the dishonoring of their bodies”

“to dishonorable passions”

“to a debased mind”

“to what ought not to be done”

Everything on this list can be summarized with one word: sin.

For the sin of not honoring God, we are punished by God with an increasing desire to sin against one another.

Tholuck says it very succinctly: “sin is the punishment of sin.” Another theologian writes, “sin follows sin as an avenger.”

Now you can begin to see why some have been hesitant to think of paradidomi as anything but passivity on the part of God.

To attribute sin to a positive action of God seems dangerously close to making God the author of sin, which of course, God is not.

**1 John 1:5** <sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

**James 1:13-15** <sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

God never takes a good heart and makes it evil.

But he does act in such a way that the seeds of evil in the heart, blossom and flourish.

Look again at verse 24.

God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts

“in the lusts of their hearts”

“in the desires of their hearts”

The desires of their hearts were already present. But in the act of God’s wrath, those desires increase in intensity and corruption.

This action of God can be applied in at least three ways.

1. It can be applied to Adam and Eve at the beginning. In their not honoring of God, the whole world was plunged into slavery to all sorts of sin.
  - a. Original Sin: Adam’s guilt is our guilt. We are born with Adam’s corruption of the heart. We are not good and then become sinners. We are sinful from our conception. And from that heart flows the actual sins we commit.
2. It can be applied to societies. The more that a society dishonors God, the more that that society will increase in other sorts of immorality, and slavery to sin. This most certainly is happening in our own society. We can see that God is indeed pouring out wrath upon us because we can see evil becoming more prevalent throughout our society.

- a. We will look at the specific evils in a moment. It goes without saying that each of these sins are on the rise in our culture.
3. It can be applied individually. As we personally fail to give God honor, we will increasingly become enslaved to the desires of our hearts. To think that we can fail to honor God without becoming more immoral in other ways is foolishness.
  - a. Even if you are committed to remain a moral person, you cannot control the act of God to give you up to increasing immorality.

This brings me to what is always a “hot topic” – the concept of “free will.”

I am not going to give a full explanation of this issue. I am simply going to try to expose one commonly held lie.

The lie is this: I have to be “free” in my choices or I am not accountable for them. Freedom here is understood as ability. I must have the equal ability to either choose A or not A for me to be accountable in my choice. Take away my ability and you take away my responsibility.

The will of human beings is likened to a secure box that is somehow untouchable by God, or any other force of nature for that matter. For if this box is tampered with in any way, then freedom is lost and along with it accountability.

But this is not the way that the Bible defines “free will”. The Bible defines freedom as the freedom to act according to your desires. Because the choices of your will accurately reflect the desires of your heart, you are responsible for them. But there is nothing in the biblical concept about having the equal ability to choose either A or not A.

If that were the case then we would all lose our freedom when we get to heaven because no one in heaven will ever choose to leave. Why will we never choose to leave? Because our desires will always and only want to stay and dwell in the presence of God.

And, in our current fallen state, we may not be externally forced to choose sin, but the passions of our hearts bias us towards sin.

It may not seem “fair”, but because of Adam’s sin, we all begin life with a bias towards evil. And when we choose to dishonor God, He punishes us such that we become increasingly enslaved to our evil passions. Our world completely rejects this thinking. We are constantly looking for excuses to defend the corruption of our choices.

God made me this way.

My genes predispose me to this sin.

My upbringing caused me to be like I am.

There are elements of truth in all of these statements. But that does not make you a victim. You are still accountable for your actions. Why? Because they accurately reflect what is in your heart.

This passage makes explicit that our slavery to sin is progressive.

It can get worse. In fact, one could argue that hell is an existence where everyone is fully evil. Even the worst of unbelievers in this life are not as evil as they will be in hell.

So, increasing slavery to evil is rightly considered to be the first stages of the wrath of God being poured out on ungodliness.

Now, we have to take some time to explain the actual sins of which Paul speaks. Paul's list is not exhaustive. There are other sins not listed here. Paul does not expect that every individual will experience every form of corruption. Paul does believe that the principle applies to everyone – there are no exceptions.

Paul wants us to apply the passage to ourselves. He does not intend for us to pick out one sin of which we do not currently struggle and point fingers at others who do commit that sin. The point is to recognize that we are all under the wrath of God. Of course, Paul does not do this to leave us under the wrath of God without hope. His plan is to lead us to Jesus, and the good news of the gospel of God.

But as we said last week, the gospel of God becomes unnecessary and insignificant if men are not currently under the wrath of God. Even though, I really believe that Paul does not want us to point fingers at one specific sin, he seems to do just that when he begins with the sin of homosexuality. I am not exactly sure why Paul singles this particular sin out instead of lumping it with the list of sins in vv. 29-31. But in the providence of God, he does.

It is possible that he does this because homosexuality not only increases desires in ways or contexts that are sinful, but it also twists the very nature of the desire itself. In some ways, the sin of homosexuality is like other sins. But in one sense it is distinct. When God created man, he created them male and female, with the distinct purpose that they would be joined together in a lifelong union of love and intimacy and companionship. The two would become one flesh. In this context, sexual desires could flourish.

Of course, we pervert God's good plan when we commit all forms of adultery and fornication. God is against all sexual activity outside the confines of the marriage relationship. And Jesus, condemns us all by saying to look at another lustfully who is not your spouse makes you guilty.

But the sexual desire for someone of the same sex is a sin against the order of nature at creation. It is a form of sex outside of marriage. But it goes a step further in that the natural desires for someone of the opposite sex are corrupted into desires for someone of the same sex.

Paul calls the acts of homosexuality a "dishonoring of their bodies." They are using their bodies in ways that are dishonoring to the body itself. Paul also says that they are doing this because they are experiencing "dishonorable passions."

It is not only homosexual acts that are dishonorable, but the desires themselves. This is true for all sin. Sin begins in the heart. This is important when we get to helping someone out of the sin of homosexuality. We are not simply trying to change behavior. We are also working to renew the mind in such a way that the desires themselves are actually transformed.

This is not to say that homosexual desires can be instantly altered like flipping a switch. When a person repents of their sin and looks to Jesus in faith, he promises to both forgive and to change. Forgiveness is immediate and complete, but change is ongoing and incomplete in this life.

Through faith in Christ, God forgives. And God cleanses the heart of its corruption, such that the evil desires no longer define who we are. Like all of us, we must learn that we are no longer defined by our sin, but by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Of course, we must strive to put the evil desires to death; to overcome them with the help of the Holy Spirit. God may give

some freedom more quickly than others. And some may struggle to the day that they die fighting against inner demons.

We should want to be a church that welcomes all who come to Jesus repenting of their sin. I have recently been a part of a group of men committed to sexual purity. None of us can claim absolute perfection over our hearts and eyes. But we hold one another accountable to never quit striving for purity.

I hope that more of these groups would occur in our midst. And I would hope that there might be groups including those fighting against homosexual sin.

This being said, may we never become a church that explains away the sin of homosexuality.

There have been many attempts within the Churches of our land to explain away passages like this one.

I am not going to go through a full defense against their lies. I recommend to anyone interested Kevin DeYoung. He has written a short and clear defense of the biblical truth concerning homosexuality.

But I want to at least touch on how this passage is sometimes explained away. One way is to try to redefine “contrary to nature” to mean “contrary to my nature”. The argument goes like this: Paul is talking about people who are themselves heterosexuals. So, as heterosexuals by nature, they go against their nature to have sex with other heterosexuals. But, in our modern day, things have changed. It is argued that the nature of the individual is homosexual. So, he is indeed acting according to his nature when he engages in homosexual behavior. In fact, for him to engage in heterosexual behavior would be wrong because he is acting “contrary to his nature.”

There is no justification in the text for this sort of interpretation. It just assumes that Paul could not have envisioned the situation that we have today. The Bible is outdated in this sense. We are dealing with issues for which the Bible does not have answers – except in some general way of telling us to “love.”

Another way in which this passage is explained away is to argue that Paul is only referring to those forms of homosexuality that are “shameless.” This view argues that unbridled homosexuality is wrong (described here as “shameless”), but when a couple seeks some form of exclusive commitment it is not shameless and therefore not the sort of activity that Paul is condemning.

There is nothing in this text or anywhere else in Scripture that makes a case for some forms of homosexuality as being good. One has to read into the text what one wants to see to make such an argument. Jesus sets the standard clearly: All sexual activity is to be confined to the marriage relationship – defined as one woman and one man for life.

Again, I stress, the Gospel is for adulterers and for homosexuals. But it does not ever try to explain away their sin. Rather, it seeks to redeem people from their sin. Praise God that he has provided for us a Savior!

Homosexuality, like many other sins, is dishonorable to the body. It is shameful. It flows out of a mind (heart) that is debased (disapproved).

But homosexuality is not the unforgivable sin. Nor should we treat people struggling with homosexuality as if they are the lepers. We should attempt to walk the ridgeline defined by Jude.

**Jude 1:23** <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment<sup>1</sup> stained by the flesh.

Homosexual desires are themselves evil, and must be repented of to experience salvation and fellowship with God. To argue anything less is to do exactly what Paul has just accused us all of doing: suppressing the truth.

It is also important to point out that the increasing prevalence of homosexuality in a society is one evidence of God's judgment upon that society.

**Romans 1:27** receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

When I was in High School, I was taught that the due penalty was the disease of Aids and other venereal diseases. The error was homosexuality and the due penalty was disease.

I do not believe this was what Paul meant. I believe the error is not honoring God. And the due penalty is the desire that is contrary to nature. But in saying this, we must be very careful.

I don't believe it is helpful to draw a tight circle. I committed this one sin of not honoring God and therefore I now have homosexual desires. None of us really gets to choose the particular evil desires that are most powerful to us. And although there are sometimes patterns that can be seen, there are enough exceptions to give me great pause in trying to draw close connections.

Struggling to discover why is natural and may have some value. But far more important is to realize that God is able to love as his own, all who come to him through Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not: get rid of every homosexual desire and then God will adopt you as his own. The Gospel is: come to Jesus in your corruption, looking to him to save you out of your sin.

**Romans 5:8** <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Homosexual desire, along with every other sinful desire, is not something that we ask for. We do not wake up one day and say, "I think I will have homosexual desires." But just because you did not ask for them, does not mean that you do not need to repent from them. Evil resides in our hearts. We do not all struggle with all of the same sins. But we all struggle with powerful desires within us that are evil.

And these desires grow more powerful as we choose to not honor God.

We can very easily become slaves of our passions. Instead of ruling over them, they rule over us. There is a certain justice in this. Verse 28 makes this clear, although it is more difficult to see in the English.

28           And  
              since they did not see fit to acknowledge God,  
                  God gave them up  
                          to a debased mind  
                          to do what ought not to be done.

In the Greek, the phrase “see fit to acknowledge” and the word “debased” come from the same root.

**dokima,zw** = as accepting the result of examination of a thing *think of as valuable* or *worthwhile* ([RO 1.28](#))

**avdo,kimoj**, = *failing to meet the test*; hence *worthless*

Since they did not consider God to be worthwhile, God gave them up to a worthless mind.

The most worthwhile use of our mind and desires is to set them upon God.

Once God is no longer ultimate in our hearts, our hearts begin to make the things in this world ultimate.

When we do this, we no longer are using our minds in the worthwhile way for which they were created.

We may not like what Paul is saying, but if the punishment ought to fit the crime, we must concede that is precisely what God is doing. But he has not done this to a select few. Every person in some way has been given a debased (worthless) mind – to do what ought not to be done.

It is not only those struggling with homosexual desires that have a debased mind. We all, to one degree or another, apart from Christ, have a debased mind.

Paul now gives a lengthy list of 21 passions that we as humans struggle with. Since Paul has address the corruption of sexual passions already, he does not mention it now.

29 They were filled with all manner of

unrighteousness, (A general term for all sin against man)

evil, (A general term for the corruption of the good)

covetousness, (wanting what others have – no contentment in God’s provision for you)

malice. (wanting evil to come upon another)

They are full of

envy, (being jealous of the blessing of others.)

murder, (following through on one’s anger towards others)

strife, (conflict that arises from selfishness)



deceit, (not being truthful)  
maliciousness. (evil motivations)

They are  
gossips, (speaking ill of others; making yourself look good)  
<sup>30</sup> slanderers, (speaking ill of others untruthfully)  
haters of God, (Seems strange to think that hating God is a sign of the judgment of God.)  
insolent, (rude, disrespectful)  
haughty, (believing yourself to have more value than others)  
boastful, (to speak of oneself in an arrogant way)  
inventors of evil, (Far too often we are shocked by evil. Evil hearts are inventors of evil.)  
disobedient to parents, (Kids, doesn't disobedience to your parents come naturally?)  
<sup>31</sup> foolish, (Often we don't admit our behavior to be foolish until years later)  
faithless, (Not keeping our word)  
heartless, (Not possessing the ability to feel or care about the pain of others)  
ruthless. (Treating others in a heartless way)

Paul's point is to bring everyone under condemnation. We are not to read Romans 1 and condemn those around us while thinking ourselves innocent. We are all in one way or another experiencing the beginnings of God's wrath.

The fact that evil can at times be so all-consuming is proof that we are under God's wrath and that we deserve the fullness of God's wrath.

Our sinful desires are themselves the beginning of God's wrath over us.

What does God give us up to?

God gives us up to ever increasing and twisted passions.

How do sinful men respond to the beginnings of God's wrath?

And how should we respond?

<sup>32</sup> Though they know God's decree  
that those who practice such things deserve to die,  
they not only do them  
but  
give approval to those who practice them.

They suppress what they know about God's final judgment.

They continue to commit sin.

They encourage others in their sins.

I will return to the issue of homosexuality, only because this response has been so clear over my lifetime.

When I was a child, very few people thought homosexuality was good. It was accepted by all but a few as being a terrible evil.

Initially, the argument was not for the acceptance of homosexuality as good. It was only argued that we ought not to judge homosexuals. We should be tolerant of those who are different.

It is truth that we, as fallen sinners, are not in a place to judge. But as time went on, the argument shifted, and now God was not allowed to judge either. It was not enough for Christians to live side by side with homosexuals. Instead, Christians were called upon to accept the homosexual lifestyle and even to promote homosexual marriage – something that goes directly against the words of Christ.

But even that was not enough. Now, we have come to the point where we are somehow wrong if we do not encourage our children to at least consider homosexuality as an option.

Homosexuality is not the only sin in which we do this. It is just so clear in my lifetime to see it happen. It will not end here. Men will continue to invent new ways to commit evil.

This is man's natural response to the wrath of God.

But what is the response that the gospel calls us to?

The Gospel calls us to recognize our terrible condition: We are all under the wrath of God.

The Gospel calls us to cry out to God for mercy through Jesus Christ: Save me, for I am a sinner!

The Gospel calls us to turn from our sin to God: repentance.

The Gospel calls us to look to Jesus alone to save us.

The blood of Jesus is able to wash you clean from the guilt of your sinful actions and desires.

The Spirit of Christ is able to free you from the power of your sinful desires and behavior.

If it is true that your slavery to sin is the result of God giving you up, then is it not also true that when you are reconciled to God, he has the power to "take you back."

Giving someone up to evil is the beginning of God's wrath, but it is not necessarily the final action of God. For all who look to Jesus, God will also act to "take you back".

Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God.

Only the power of God can break the downward spiral of sin.

Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can truly free people from the wrath of God.

If you have never repented of your sin and believed in Jesus, today is the day.

If you have repented of your sin and are believing in Jesus, the journey is not over. Continue to hold onto Jesus Christ. Do not let go of him.

**Philippians 3:12-14** <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Christian, you are no longer under the wrath of God.

You belong to Christ. He lives in you, and you live in him.

**John 8:36** <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.