

June 10, 2015

God's Abandonment of Man (Part 1)

Romans 1:24-25 (NASB), **“Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”**

When I was a freshman in high school we moved into a new house and behind our new home was a preschool and day care center. Every day my mother would observe the children running out into the backyard playground and from her observations of them she shared this truth: “Those who think that man is basically good just need to come and observe those children playing.” Sin you see is not just something we do, it is who we are.

In verse 24 Paul starts about by using the word **“Therefore”** and this means that he is referring back to the reasons that he had just mentioned in verses 18-23. Even though God has revealed Himself to mankind as we learned in verses 19-20, man rejected God in verse 21 and then man rationalized this rejection in verse 22 and not only that but he created false gods that mankind in his rebellion created himself. So because man has abandoned God, God has abandoned mankind. It says here in verse 24 that **“God gave them over.”** It is this divine abandonment and its consequences that Paul explains here in verses 24-32, the most sobering and frightening passage in this entire letter to the Romans.

The phrase **“gave...over”** that Paul employs here is from the Greek word *paradidomi*. God's giving over sinful mankind has a dual sense here. First, in an indirect meaning God **“gave them over”** simply by removing His restraining and protective hand, allowing the consequences of sin to take their inevitable and destructive course. Sin degrades man, it debases the image of God in which humanity is created, and it rips away man's dignity, peace of mind, and a clear conscience. Sin destroys personal relationships, marriages, families, cities and even nations. Sin also destroys churches. The Scottish reformer Thomas Watson once wrote, “Sin... puts gravel in our bread [and] wormwood in our cup.”

Sinful and fallen humanity is not concerned about their sin but only about the pain from the unpleasant consequences that sin brings. Sin would probably have fewer takers if the consequences were more immediate than they often are. For example, many people are greatly concerned about sexually transmitted diseases and the scourge of AIDS and know what the cause of these diseases are but then at the same time they resent and often angrily so any suggestion of avoiding the behavior that they know leads to such diseases. Instead of following God's standards of moral purity, they attempt to remove the consequences of their sinful behavior. They turn instead to counseling, to medicine, to psychoanalysis, to drugs, to alcohol, to travel, and to a host of other ways to escape what cannot ultimately be escaped except by the removal of

their sin.

It is said that the Stout weasel would rather die than defile its beautiful coat of fur; this little mammal will go to extraordinary lengths to protect it. Mankind does not have such an inclination concerning the defilement that is the product of sin. We cannot keep ourselves pure and we really have no natural desire to do so.

However not all of God's wrath is in the future. In the case of sexual immorality and promiscuity – and perhaps more specifically and severely than in any other area of morality – God has continually poured out His divine wrath by means of sexually transmitted diseases. In regard to countless other manifestations of godlessness. He pours out His wrath in the forms of loneliness, frustration, meaning-lessness, anxiety, and despair that are so characteristic of the modern culture that we live in. As educated, sophisticated, and self-sufficient humanity wanders further and further away from God, God gives them over to the consequences of their spiritual and moral rebellion against Him. Commentator Alan F. Johnson said in *The Freedom Letter* way back in 1974, “Without God there are no abiding truths, lasting principles, or norms, and man is cast upon a sea of speculation and skepticism and attempted self-salvation.”

The divine abandonment of men to their sin about which Paul speaks here is thankfully and by the grace of God not eternal abandonment. As long as sinful humans are alive, God provides opportunity for their salvation. That is the marvelous good news of God's grace, which Paul develops later on in this epistle. Like her name sake in the Old Testament, the Jezebel who was misleading the church at Thyatira was the embodiment of idolatrous, immoral godlessness, yet the Lord graciously gave her opportunity to repent. Despite God's righteous anger and wrath against sin, God is patient with sinners. It says in 2 Peter 3:9 that He is “**patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**”

IN 1 Corinthians 6:11 after Paul had given a list of sins similar to the list in Roman s 1:29-31, Paul reminded his readers the believers at Corinth, “**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 Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.**” It is sin that makes the gospel of salvation necessary and that makes God's offer of salvation through Christ Jesus so very gracious.

In a second and direct sense God “**gave...over**” rebellious mankind by specific acts of judgment. The Bible is full of accounts of God's wrath being directly and supernaturally poured out on sinful men. The flood of Noah's day and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, were not indirect natural consequences of sin but were over supernatural expressions of God's judgment on gross and unrepentant sin.

Isaiah 19:22 says, “**The LORD will strike Egypt, striking but healing; so they will return to the LORD, and He will respond to them and will heal them.**” God often allows men to go deeper and deeper into sin in order to drive them to despair and to show them their need for Him. He punishes us at times in order to heal and restore us.

It was because of **“the lusts of their hearts to impurity”** that God abandoned them to their sin. Humanity’s lost-ness is not determined by the circumstances of their lives but rather by the inner condition of their hearts. Your sin, my sin begins inside of us. In Matthew 15:19-20 Jesus said, **“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”** In Jeremiah 17:9 it says, **“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick.”**

In our times the use of the word **“heart”** refers to emotions or feelings. But the way the word **“heart”** is used in Scripture it generally refers to the whole thinking process, including especially the will and man’s motivation. In its broadest sense, the heart represents the basic nature of a person, his or her inner being and character.

In our day and age the basic ungodliness of man is nowhere more pronounced than in the call for each of us to do our own thing. Humanity’s own thing is sin, which characterizes our entire natural being. Self-will is the very essence of all sin. Although Satan was responsible for their being tempted to sin, it was the voluntary and conscious placing of their own wills above that of God’s that caused Adam and Eve to commit the first sin. Sin is basically man’s desire to be his own god.

We humans reject God because our preferences, our lusts, are for our own way rather than God’s way. *Epithumia* is the Greek word that is used here for **“lusts”** and it can refer to any desire but was most often used of carnal desire for that which was sinful or forbidden.

In James 1:14 it says, **“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.”** Because even Christians are tempted to desire their own sin above God’s holiness, Paul warned the Thessalonians about falling into the lustful passions that characterized pagan Gentiles. He reminded the Ephesians in Ephesians 2:3 that **“we too formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”**

The word **“impurity”** is from the Greek word *akatharsia* which was a general term used for uncleanness and was often used to describe decaying matter, this especially referred to the contents of a grave, which were of course considered by Jews to be both physically and ceremonially unclean. In reference to morals, this term was usually used to refer to sexual immorality. Paul lamented in 2 Corinthians 12:21, **“and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.”** Paul used the same three terms to introduce the list of **“deeds of the flesh”** that are in constant conflict with **“the fruit of the Spirit”** in Galatians 2:19-23. He encouraged the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 5:3, **“Do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”**

What was the result then of mankind’s rebellious, self-willed **“impurity?”** It was **“that their bodies might be dishonored.”** When humans seek to glorify their own ways and to satisfy their bodies through shameful indulgence in sexual and other sins, their **“bodies”**, along with their souls, are then **“dishonored.”** When we as humans seek to elevate ourselves for our own

purposes and live by our own standards, then we inevitably do the exact opposite. The way of fallen humanity is always downward, never upward. The more humanity exalts itself, the more humanity declines. The more humanity magnifies itself the more humanity diminishes itself. The more humanity honors itself, the more humanity becomes **“dishonored.”**

There has probably been no society in the history of the world who has paid more and given more attention to the caring for of the human body than the United States. Yet despite this there is probably no culture that has done more to degrade the human body. The more human life is exalted for its own sake, the more it is debased. It is a tragic irony that the same society that glorifies the body has no regard for the body, the same society that exalts man incessantly degrades him. The world echoes with calls for human rights; yet books, movies, the internet and TV offer fare that is unspeakably brutal, filled with murder, sexual promiscuity, and perversion and portrays these depravities as normal.

Humanism which is the dominate belief system of our time rejects God and because of that rejection there is then no basis for humanity's dignity. In the name of humanism, humanity is then dehumanized. While lamenting man's inhumanity to man, fallen humanity refuses to recognize that in rejecting God they reject the only source and measure of human dignity. So while loudly proclaiming the greatness of humanity, modern culture at the same time abuses humanity at every turn. We sexually abuse one another, economically abuse one another, criminally abuse one another, and verbally abuse one another. Because the humanist rejects God who made them and would redeem them, it says in Ecclesiastes 9:3, **“the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives.”**

John MacArthur quotes a well-known founder of a pornographic empire as saying: “Sex is a biological function like eating and drinking. So let's forget all the prudery about it and do whatever we feel like doing.” This type of thinking is nothing new. The apostle Paul confronted such thinking 2000 years ago in Corinth. A common saying in that day was “Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food.” The Apostle intimates that it was used even by some Christians to justify sexual immorality. This is why Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:13, **“The body is not for immorality but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body.”**

In verse 18 the Apostle wrote, **“Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.”** That is Paul's entire point in this passage today. The body that indulges in sexual immorality is itself then **“dishonored;”** it is debased, disgraced, and degraded.

The news in our day and age abounds with reports of senseless violence for no other purpose than to record the act on someone's smart phone. There is brutality everywhere. Last week I saw a video of two women get into a violent confrontation in the middle of a retail store and front of children all the while in the background could be heard two men laughing as they recorded the depravity. We live in a world where child molesters have their own organization whose sole purpose is to normalize sexual attraction to children. This is the path we go down when we begin to normalize sexual behavior that is clearly forbidden in Scripture. Let's be clear this is not just

an indictment of the movement to normalize homosexual behavior, we long ago normalized sexual behavior outside of marriage and that has led us to where we are today.

This then is the legacy of those who have **“exchanged the truth of God for a lie.”** Having suppressed God’s truth in unrighteousness, rebellious humanity submits itself then to untruth, **“a lie.”** The basic divine truth that fallen humanity suppresses is that of God’s very existence and therefore His right and demand to be honored and glorified as sovereign Lord.

Tragically, as in the Corinthian church in Paul’s day, many people who claim the name of Christ today have succumbed to the world’s self-oriented view of morality. Just this past weekend I read a statement from a pastor in a mainline denomination celebrating the fact that in his words his denomination, “approves [a] petition to acknowledge diverse beliefs on sexuality in our discipline. Praise God for the renewal and transformation of our minds Romans 12.”

When humanity turns from God and His truth, Paul goes on to say, they then **“worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”** As Paul has just pointed out, they found themselves foolishly, and wickedly worshiping lifeless images of their own creation. Verse 23 says, **“in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”**

As we get to the end of verse 24 one gets the sense that Paul had come to the end of his tether in the discussion of such vile things. Paul inserts a common Jewish doxology here about the true God, **“the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”** Paul thankfully could not resist adding that refreshing thought in the sea of filth he had been describing. That word of praise to the Lord serves as a contrast in order to magnify the wickedness of idolatry and all other forms of ungodliness.

I have said many times over the last few years as I have observed the downward trajectory of our culture and our abandonment of all sense of morality that we are now living in a Romans 1 world. This is becoming more and more true each day and with it comes the urgency of the right proclamation of the gospel. May we remain ever faithful.