

Romans

Bible Study

God Gave Them Up

Romans 1:18—32

Romans 1 holds man accountable to acknowledge that there is a God. The evidence is so overwhelming that only a fool could deny God's existence. As Psalm 14:1 states, "A fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." The rest of this Psalm continues in showing how mankind is completely depraved, and that the heart is absolutely corrupt. A parallel passage can be found in Psalm 53.

All through Scripture, those who turn against God are called foolish, while the righteous are called wise. Those who look only at the physical and ignore the spiritual think they are the ones who are wise, all the while condemning those who are truly spiritual. The wise of this world are fools in God's eyes, and are unable to receive and understand spiritual things because they don't have the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The men spoken of in Romans 1 were called foolish because they did not glorify God as the God of creation. They made for themselves images that they would worship. They continued their downward slide by worshipping created beings, but not the Creator. This is the height of foolishness (Isaiah 44:14—19).

Today, in this country, contrary to what many preach and teach, we do not generally have idols that we truly worship. So often pastors will point to things that consume us and accuse us of worshipping them. They may mention the television, a hobby, fishing, football or any number of thing that takes us away from Christ. However, we are not worshipping these things in the manner of a true idol worshipper. Yes, we are often distracted by them to the point that we fail to do what we know we should do. These things may even be instrumental in stunting our spiritual growth, but they are not things we truly worship. The men Paul refer to were those who literally believed that there was special power contained in the things being worshipped. They substituted the true God for one that was manufactured in their own minds. This led to God taking action.

God gave them up—the body (verses 21—25)

Verse 21 shows that what Paul is speaking of happened in the past. It says that they knew God but glorified Him not as God. This is what happened at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1—9). They had heard about God because it was perhaps only 100 years or so after God sent the Flood. There would have been no excuse to not know about God's judgment upon all of mankind. However, they still went their own way, and did what they want to do instead of what God wanted them to do.

It was because of their disobedience that God confounded the languages and caused them to scatter. It was also at this time that God turned His back on them, allowing them to go in their own way. When the Bible says that God gave them up, it literally means that He gave them to those ungodly desires. Although being given the freedom to do the desires of one's heart sounds good, it actually resulted in hopelessness and bondage to those evil desires. The same word is used when God delivered rebellious angels into chains of darkness (2 Peter 2:4). The Gentiles were also delivered over to their own prison of sinfulness. This means that the Gentiles were no longer being actively dealt with. Instead, God raised up Abraham to be the father of a great nation, Israel. It was through Israel that God gave His blessings including the adoption, glory, covenants, promises and the Law. God allowed the Gentiles to go the way they wanted to go, but, part of the deal was that they would not be able to come to God, unless they came through the nation of Israel.

The lusts of their heart are not necessarily meant in a sexual way. These lusts are their fleshly desires that took them away from God as they fulfilled their own impulses. They lived to please themselves instead of God. They turned their backs on God and did things that put shame upon them. These actions are actually an outward expression of the inward man.

God gave them up—the soul (26—27)

When man turned against God by not worshipping Him as God, they began a downward spiral into the depths of depravity. As stated above, they turned away from the truth of God to follow their own imaginations. What God called truth, they called a lie, and vice versa. Having declared himself a god, man continued his downward slide by acting in a godless, perverted manner. The wisdom of man says it is good and right to not deny the homosexual the freedom to follow his urges. This happened because mankind has no solid moral rock to stand upon when God is taken out of the picture. Man uses his logic and reason to make moral decisions without understanding that we are all born into a spiritual vacuum. There is nothing good in the heart of man and therefore there is nothing that the natural man can do to please God. We have no right to autonomously determine what is morally right or wrong because God has already told us what He expects. Sexual perversion is an abomination that is detestable to the Lord, yet man passes his own laws, and defines his own morality, to preserve the right for people to continue in their perversion (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13).

These actions indicate a twisted and evil inward man, which is the soul. The conscience has been seared so that even the built-in law given to man (Romans 2:14) is not effective in giving guidance. Having left God, man's understanding has been darkened, making it difficult or impossible for him to know right from wrong (Ephesians 4:17—19). The inward, natural soul of man is unable to comprehend spiritual matters (1 Corinthians 2:14). It is in the soul where Satan attempts to lead man away from God by appealing to the lusts of the flesh.

God gave them up—the spirit (28—32)

This section deals with the spirit of man. Hebrews 4:12 shows that there is a division between the soul and spirit with the Bible able to judge and discern the thoughts and intentions of the inner most man (Hebrews 4:12). It is man's spirit where God does His work of regeneration.

Instead of turning to God and obeying Him, they turned to themselves and followed the desires of their own hearts. Their spirits were as dark caverns left untouched by God. Without God working in them, their souls were being lured by Satan to move farther and farther away from God until they no longer even knew Him. There was absolutely nothing good in them to cause them to act in a righteous manner. Verse 32 shows how low man is willing to stoop. In spite of understanding they deserve death, they continued in their debauchery and even took pleasure in others following them in their pathway to hell.

The end of chapter 1 leaves the Gentiles in a very serious spiritual state. They stand condemned at this point, but Paul is not done pointing an accusing finger at them. He will continue to paint a bleak picture of their condition, leaving no doubt that they are without hope.

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