

October 23, 2016 by Steve Brandon



When God Gives Up

Romans 1:24-32

He ...

1. Gives over to impurity (verses 24-25)
2. Gives over to homosexuality (verses 26-27)
3. Gives over to iniquity (verses 28-32)

One of the pictures that we rightly have of God is that of a patient God, waiting for people to come to repentance. I say, "Rightly," because we have many passages of Scripture that speak of the patience of God, waiting for sinners to respond. 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord ... is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." Paul said that, "the kindness [and forbearance and patience of God] ... is meant to lead you to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

God, himself, has said that he is "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Exodus 34:6). This exact phrase ("slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love") is repeated verbatim in several Psalms (Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8). Several prophets also repeat it (Nehemiah 9:7; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).

This is to say nothing of the more than 200 times that the Bible uses the word, *hesed*, which is translated, "steadfast love" in the ESV or "lovingkindness" in the NASB. This word describes the covenant faithfulness of God to his people, bearing patiently through their times of disobedience. This is to say nothing of the hundreds of times in Scripture when God is described as being merciful and gracious and loving.

Indeed, our God is a patient God. He patiently waits for us to turn to him in repentance. And yet, we can easily fall into error if this is the only picture that we have of God, of the all-loving, kind, Santa Claus in the sky, waiting passively upon his creatures to turn from their sin. Because, there is a time when the patience of God will run its course. Moses writes in Exodus 34:6-7, ...

Exodus 34:6-7

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

There is a time when the judgment begins. There are times when God gives up on people, allowing them to walk in their sin. My message this morning is entitled, "When God Gives Up." It comes from Romans 1:24-32. As I read, I want for you to listen for God giving up on people.

Romans 1:24-32

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. 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. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

I trust that you can see the repetition in the text. I trust that you can see how I derived the title of my message this morning: "When God Gives Up" (Romans 1:24-32).

Now, before we actually begin looking at the text this morning, let's notice the first word of verse 24. It's a "therefore." In other words, this is the fitting conclusion to what Paul said before. So, what did Paul say before? He said that God has made himself known. Verses 19 and 20, ...

Romans 1:19-20

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

He has made himself known through creation. He has made his power known to all (verse 20). He has made his deity known to all (verse 20). He has made it plain to all (verse 19). He has made it clear to all (verse 20). The result is that they are "without excuse" (verse 20). Everyone knows that there is a God. Everyone knows that he is the all powerful one.

Paul also said that People have rejected God. Verse 21, ...

Romans 1:21-23

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Rather than honoring the Lord as God, they took glory for themselves. Rather than giving thanks to the Lord, they have taken everything for granted. Rather than submitting to the wisdom of God, they became fools. Rather than submitting to God, they exchanged him for their own gods.

And God is angry. Verse 18, ...

Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

They know God, but they have suppressed the knowledge. And they have pursued their sin. And so, God's wrath is upon them all. So, God gave them up (verse 24). And God gave them up (verse 26). And God gave them up (verse 28). He gave them up to sin and all its fruits. God's wrath is the consequence of sin.

Those who reject the Lord are like a German Shepherd on a leash. They struggle and tug against the leash, because they want something. They want their sin. They know it's wrong. They know that they shouldn't do it. But they want it. And they can't control themselves.

And it is only God's grip that holds them back. You might well call this, "common grace"--the grace of God that keeps us from pursuing all of our lusts and our passions and our desires.

At this point, I want for you to keep this picture in your mind. This is the plight of mankind. God is at our back. We want our sin. But the grace of God is holding us and keeping us and protecting us.

Picture the German Shepherd on his leash, but tugging after a squirrel. We have the picture of a harmless squirrel. But suppose that the squirrel runs into a busy street. Or suppose that the squirrel jumps onto a tree overlooking a huge canyon. Or suppose that the squirrel is really a lion in disguise. In that case, the owner is really protecting the dog from harm. This is what God does in our lives. He protects us and holds us back from hurting ourselves too badly.

But this isn't how many think of our situation today. Many think that there are many ways to God, and that all of us are on a spiritual quest to find him. But as Paul concludes his argument which we will read in Romans 3:10, ...

Romans 3:10

as it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
No one seeks for God."

And if that's the case, how then are we saved? We are only saved when something changes. We are only saved when God works. We are only saved when God shows mercy and exerts his control over the wayward sinner, and brings us to himself. We will get to that. We will get to Romans 9:15, "I will have mercy upon whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

But, at some point (as Paul says in our text this morning), God does let go of some. "He "gives them over" (verse 24, 26, 28). And they pursue their sin. And they continue to pursue their sin. And they continue and continue. Perhaps this imagery helps to give context to the hymn-writer's famous words, ...

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;

Rather than striving against God, the believer in Jesus Christ cries out to him, "O God, don't let me go. Hold me tight. Let me rest in you."

We read in John 10, ...

John 10:27-28

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Or think of the hymn How Firm a Foundation, ...

Fear not, I am with thee,
O be not dismayed
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid
I'll strengthen thee, help thee,
And cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand

"Amazing Grace" reminds us that it is, "Grace [that] has brought me save the far, and Grace will lead me home." And as we progress through Romans, we will see this theme of the love of God that keeps and guards and protects.

Romans 8:38-39

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let's get into the text. When God Gives Up, He ...

1. Gives over to impurity (verses 24-25)

Look at verse 24, ...

Romans 1:24

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

Notice here that when God gives people over to their sin, he merely lets them do as they please. God gives them up to the desires of their own hearts. He says "If that's what you want, then have at it." And they begin to do things that ought not to be done. And they dishonor their bodies.

The drunkard makes a fool of himself, and damages his liver. The drug addict loses weight, and loses his job, and begins to steal to support his habit. The meth addict deals with sores and scabs. The promiscuous deals with sexually transmitted diseases. The porn industry takes that which is beautiful and transforms it into pure ugliness. And notice in verse 25, again, how Paul puts forth an argument that shows how entirely justified God is in letting go of the leash.

Romans 1:25

because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Here's what takes place. People know the truth. And they hate the truth. They want their sin instead. And so, they exchange the truth of God for a lie. And so, they go and serve the creature and not the Creator!

This is our culture. We have removed God. We have exchanged him for man. And now, man is supreme, and not God. This is what we call secular humanism. It's the removal of God. It's the elevation of man to the top spot.

And people say that the Bible isn't relevant! This is 21st century America. We have loved our own wisdom, and not the wisdom of God. We have dethroned God.

Now, again, I want for you to notice. This isn't what we have done and God is angry with us. This is what God has let us do. This is the wrath of God to live in a society without God, to live in a society where we do our own thing.

Let's move on. When God Gives Up, He ...

2. Gives over to homosexuality (verses 26-27)

Look there in verse 26, ...

Romans 1:26-27

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

When God created the world, he created man in his own image. "Male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). And God put them together and declared, "A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

What we see here in verses 26 and 27 is perversion of the created order. Rather than a man and a woman living in harmony and unity as God designed in the garden, we see men and women forsaking the created order. We see women pursuing women. We see men pursuing

men. And we see this in our society today. It's nothing new in the ancient world. Homosexuality has been brewing in our society for quite some time.

As a part of my preparation for preaching each week, I often listen to five to ten messages on my passage. I listen to Kent Hughes, who preached through the book in the 80's (more than 30 years ago). I listen to Rich Kerns, who preached through the book in the 90's (more than 20 years ago). And both of them brought out the change in our society toward the homosexual agenda. And how more and more, our society was being pushed in this direction. Groups and legislation and school curriculum and books and advertisements and movies and constitutional amendments have all been aimed at normalizing the homosexual lifestyle. And the campaign has been successful.

And after a long battle, it all came to a head about a year ago on June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the Obergefell decision that state-level bans on same-sex marriage are unconstitutional. And the laws of our land are described in verses 26 and 27.

Romans 1:26-27

... For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another,

Some try to deny this behavior as a sin. Did you notice how God describes this behavior? He called these "dishonorable passions" (verse 26). He called them "shameless acts" (verse 27). He says that those who practice these things receive "in themselves the due penalty for their error" (verse 27). I have no doubt that HIV is a judgment of God upon those engaged in this behavior.

I hope that you notice here in Romans 1 that God isn't angry with the sin of our country because of our legalization of same-sex marriage. Rather, same-sex marriage is the judgment of God upon our land. And we need to deal with it in right ways. This behavior is all around us. It is coming closer and closer all the time.

Our family went to a football game on Friday evening And right before us were a few high-school students, girls, who were putting some of this behavior on display. It was "dishonorable" (verse 26). It was "shameful" (verse 27). And we need to deal with it.

Let's move on. When God Gives Up, He ...

3. Gives over to iniquity (verses 28-32)

Verse 28, ...

Romans 1:28

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.

Notice yet another detail of what takes place when God gives people over to their sin. There is a lot going on in the mind. When people don't acknowledge God (Romans 1:19-20), he lets their mind go where it wants to go. Isn't it amazing here that God has control over our minds. It's not merely our bodies that God lets go. When God is holding back the leash, it's not merely physical danger that he is keeping us from. It is our minds also. God has a leash holding back our minds to travel into all sin.

But when God lets go of the mind, it's not pretty. And with our sinful natures, it doesn't go to a good place. In fact, it goes to a sinful, wicked place. We read of these sins in verses 29-31, a whole litany of them. Twenty-one of them to be exact. And here they begin to hit home. It's easy for us to look at the sins of verses 24-27, and say, "That's what others are doing. That's not me." But here, we see sins that are us.

And hopefully, you can see the complexity of Romans 1. Though I have emphasized over and over again that these sins are the wrath of God upon us today, it's not that simple. It's not that there are sins only reserved for those whom God lets go in their sin that others don't commit. Because these sins are committed by those who know and believe in the Lord Jesus. These are sins that we all are guilty of. And they aren't signs that God is through with people. In other words, don't go out and look for these sins and think that those who commit these sins have no hope

And realizing this ought to help give us compassion to the homosexual world. It ought to help us reach out to those entrapped in their sin. Because there is hope. Homosexuality isn't only God's judgment upon sin. It can also be the sin of believers.

Romans 1:29-31

They were filled with all manner of (1) unrighteousness, (2) evil, (3) covetousness, (4) malice. They are full of (5) envy, (6) murder, (7) strife, (8) deceit, (9) maliciousness. They are (10) gossips, (11) slanderers, (12) haters of God, (13) insolent, (14) haughty, (15) boastful, (16) inventors of evil, (17) disobedient to parents, (18) foolish, (19) faithless, (20) heartless, (21) ruthless.

Let's consider what each of these sins could be referring to, ...

(1) Unrighteousness - Wickedness

(2) Evil - Doing wrong

(3) Covetousness - The craving for more and more

(4) Malice - General badness

(5) Envy - Despising those who have something that you want

(6) Murder - Fueled by hate and envy, as well as the actual killing of another

- (7) Strife - Fighting and quarrelling
- (8) Deceit - Trickery
- (9) Maliciousness - The desire to harm others
- (10) Gossips - Won't say it in public, but will gladly whisper in the ear
- (11) Slanderers - Saying harmful things in public
- (12) Haters of God - There is no explanation needed
- (13) Insolent - Lack of respect
- (14) Haughty - Thinking only of themselves
- (15) Boastful - Bragging to others of their own successes
- (16) Inventors of Evil - Thinking up new ways to sin
- (17) Disobedient to Parents - Despising those in authority over them
- (18) Foolish - Lacking understanding, stupid
- (19) Faithless - Not to be trusted
- (20) Heartless - Without natural affection
- (21) Ruthless - Cruel people.

And verse 32 tells it about as straight as can be.

Romans 1:32

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

This is what happens when God gives up on people. He gives them every opportunity, but they don't want anything to do with God. And so he lets them go. And they pursue their sin, and seek recruits to join them. May we heed the counsel in Proverbs, ...

Proverbs 1:10

If sinners entice you, do not consent.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 23, 2016 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
