

## **Romans: God Gave Them Over (3)**

**Romans 1:28-32**

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 1 as we continue to work our way through the first chapter of this great book. You remember Paul's argument as we've been looking at it the last few weeks. Beginning in Romans 1, 16 and 17 he has set forth in outline his gospel.

Beginning in Romans 1:18 and going all the way to Romans 3:20 he explains why his gospel is necessary. Why it is that everyone is in need of the gospel of grace, and he evidences to us in that particular section of Romans our own sin. He's holding up a mirror to us. And he's saying now look, put your finger down for a few moments, stop pointing at someone else and look at your own heart. And he's making a universal argument that absolutely everyone is in need of the grace which he is going to explain and offer in this great gospel of Romans.

And so, beginning in verse 24 he makes a series of three statements about God's judicial abandoning of sinners to sin because of their sin. He says that these deliverances, these judicial abandonments are not only evidence of our sin, they're not only evidence of God's just penalty against sin, but they are, in fact, evidence of God's wrath against sin. So when we see these things happening around us and in us, we see the evidence of God visiting His judgment, not just in the final end-time judgment, but right now against sin. In fact, it's a blessed clue that God is giving to us in order that our hearts might repent and turn to Him. The reason that He visits these judgments upon us is not because He delights in seeing sinners destroyed, it is because He delights in seeing sinners turn from their ways and turn to Him. And so he begins in verse 24 by saying, "Because of our sin God delivers them over to impure desires."

And then in verse 26, "Because of our sin God delivers us over to degrading passions." Paul knows that he's receiving arguments all along the line at each point. He started out verses 18 through 23 arguing that we're all idolaters, and he knows that he's going to get some people arguing: Well, I'm not worshiping gods of stone, gods of precious metal, gods made out of my own hands. The apostle Paul says, yes, but you're worshiping your own desires. You're putting other things ahead of God, and you're worshiping God according to your imaginations.

Therefore, you are idolaters, and that idolatry leads to something else, and it evidences itself in various other kinds of sin. Sin is the punishment of sin. And so God punishes sin by other sins.

And he says one of those other sins is the sin of impure desire. At the very core of your being, your desires are corrupted, and you start desiring things which are wrong, which are deviant, which are not in accordance with God's law. And Paul knows he gets some argument back from that. Well, wait a minute Paul, that's a general kind of charge. Prove that to me. And he does that in verses 26 and 27. He says well, let me give you an example. God gives us over because of our idolatrous hearts, God gives us over to degrading passions; and he illustrates that by pointing to homosexuality, male and female homosexuality. And he says this is an example of a heart given over to its own sinful passions. And he says this is something that is pervasive in your society, he knew it was pervasive in Corinth, he knew it was pervasive in Rome, it was pervasive all over the Greco Roman world. It's pervasive today. The apostle Paul says this is an illustration to show you just how all pervading is sin in your society.

But the reason he points that out is not to say, well, you see, that's the only problem in your sight. If you can just get rid of that, everything will be fine. Paul's point in this whole passage is not to pick some particular group and say, now, they are the real problem. If we could just get rid of them everything would be great. Throughout, Paul's illustrations and his main points are all directed at you and me. Anyone who happens to be sitting under the reading and preaching of what his particular gospel has to say at any particular point, we are the target. And so in this passage he says, look that pervasive sin in the way of homosexuality is an illustration of all of our sinfulness and all of our need of grace.

And here in verse 28 he goes on and he gives one more example of God's deliverance, His just judgment against our sin of idolatry. And it is His delivering us over to a depraved mind. So let's hear God's holy and inspired word in Romans 1:28:

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

*Father, open our hearts this day. If we come trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, remind us of the glory of the gospel again; reacquaint us with the depth of our sin, the greatness of His grace. We come this day skeptical of the gospel, thinking that the gospel is for weak-minded people that need a crutch in life. If we come thinking that the gospel is for somebody else, but not for us. We pray, O God, that by the Spirit You would open our eyes to see our own black hearts, to see our own need of grace, and to see the only remedy for our sin, that is the Lord Jesus Christ's atoning work. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Paul in this passage is continuing his theme: the theme that our need for the gospel is evidenced by the wrath of God against our sin, which is seen in the consequences of our idolatry. God's judicial abandonment of us to do exactly what we want to do, Paul says, is the evidence of God's judgment against sin. And we've already said in this passage three times he gives us examples of that. First, he speaks of our being given over to sinful desires. We rebel against God, we desire that which is wrong. God's judgment against that is handing us over to do precisely what we want to do. Then in verse 26 he goes on to speak of our sinful passions. And he says this again is an evidence of God's judgment against our sin, that he gives us over to do exactly what we want to do, even though it's degrading, even though it's dehumanizing. It's the very opposite of self-actualizing. We're becoming smaller and smaller as we do it. And it's the sign of God's judgment against us.

But he doesn't stop there. Paul is an equal-opportunity critic. If you think that Paul is picking on some marginalized group of society, you've missed his point. In fact, in what he's going to do in verses 28 through 32 is aim his cannons at you. Everyone comes under the strictures of Paul's words here. In fact, Paul is anticipating an argument. Well, Paul, sure there are people in society that have perverted sexual lifestyles. But that's not me. That's not my sin. And Paul says, I was waiting for you on that. Let me list twenty-one sins in verses 29 and 30, and let you think about it for a few moments, let you think about how you participate in these sins. How these sins are present in your heart. How, even if these sins don't work themselves out to their logical conclusion, their maximal potential, nevertheless they are there. The seeds of them are there in your heart. The apostle is making it clear that everyone is under the wrath of God apart from the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. That apart from God's restraining grace or apart from His saving and transforming grace, this is the direction that all of us could go. He's telling us this because he wants us to understand that all of us need the gospel. The gospel is never something about which you can say, well, that's really nice; he really needed to hear that. The gospel is something that we need to hear. Christians need to hear it, and non-Christians need to hear it.

Christians need to hear it so that we would remember again just what God has done for us, so that it will color our whole attitude and posture towards those who have not yet come to know the Lord Jesus Christ; so that we will have a heart of

mercy for them; so that we'll be patient with one another; so that we'll be thankful to God for the grace which has been shown to us.

Unbelievers need to hear it, because even if you don't think it right now, this is your problem, sin. This is your problem, the wrath of God. This is your problem, the final judgment of God. And there is only one solution. There are not many ways up the mountain. There is only one solution. Now the message that Paul has for us today, my friends, is very simple.

Basically, in these three verses Paul is going to remind us again that God's judgment against sin is absolutely just. It's never arbitrary. Secondly, he's going to remind us that all of us are sinners, all of us are in need of grace. And then he's going to sort of bring his final, crowning blow by saying one of the ways that you see sin at its worst is not only when people practice it, but when they enjoy it, and they enjoy others practicing it, and they actually advocate others practicing it. It's his final blow against the society. He's saying, if you don't want to admit to the pervasiveness of sin in your society, just look around and see how many people are advocating sin. They want it to be written into statutory law. It's Paul's crowning blow in his argument against the sinfulness of a pagan world. But he tells us all of this because he wants us to understand not that these things are beyond the reach of the gospel, but that this is precisely what Christ came to deal with.

In fact, in Romans, chapter 5, he's going to say this beautiful phrase. Notice how he uses the phrase *unrighteousness and ungodliness* in this passage. And then notice what he says, that Christ Jesus came into this world at the right time to die for the ungodly. The things that Paul was going to talk about in this message are horrible, but none of them are beyond the bounds of the power of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why he's talking about these things with utter frankness. Now I say his message is simple, but it's hard; because it's not easy to swallow. So let's take our time and walk through the passage together.

### **I. God's wrath against sin is evidenced, our sinfulness is proven, God's just sentence is vindicated in God's deliverance.**

First, let's look at verse 28. Here Paul makes it crystal clear that God's judgment against sin is just. And he makes it clear by the parallel of the first two phrases in verse 28. Notice what he says: Just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind. They didn't acknowledge God, they abandoned God in their thoughts. So what was God's punishment? He abandoned them to their thoughts. He abandoned them to their corrupt thoughts, their depraved thoughts. He let their thinking run its logical course. That was God's punishment. They refused to acknowledge Him. They abandoned Him in their thoughts. Therefore, He gives them over to their thoughts, to their corrupted and depraved minds. God's judgment against sin is not arbitrary. It's the perfect

judgment.

You know, we can often times complain about the judgment that human judges give against sin. Often times, we've got a lot of legitimate complaints about that. Sometimes criminals get off light. Sometimes people are wrongly convicted. Sometimes we think that the judge has been a little bit overbearing. God's justice is never arbitrary. It is always the exact thing prescribed. And the apostle Paul shows us this here. Those who want to live without God in this world, God hands them over to their own desires. The vanity of their own imaginations. They want to live without God. What's his judgment? Fine, you live without Me, and you will see what your own minds without Me will reap. You reap what you sow. So those who abandon God, He abandons to their own corrupt mind. Why is Paul saying this? Because this is an evidence of God's wrath. It proves our sinfulness, and it shows the justice of God's own judgment. He has successfully talked about idolaters being abandoned to their own impure desires, to their degrading passions, and now he speaks of God abandoning them to their depraved mind. Notice all of those things have to do with the inner-man. The corruption, the problem that Paul is trying to get at is not caused by societal problems, it's not caused by deficiency in the legal code, or in the social program of the nation or state in which we live. It's a heart problem. And nothing can get at this heart problem but the power of God which is able to work in the heart.

And so Paul is helping us to understand the nature of the problem. It has to do with our desires. It has to do with our desires, it has to do with passions, and it has to do with our mind or with our heart. That thing which is at the very core of our being. When he speaks of a depraved mind, he's speaking of the very seat of our thinking, our willing, our feeling and our actions. And he's saying, at the very core of us, we are corrupt apart from the grace of God. The mind that is not God-centered, the mind is not God-honoring will become a slave to its own carnal desires. And so the apostle Paul is saying when we see that happen, we are seeing the judgment of God against a mind, against a heart, against the person who wants to have nothing to do with the worship and honor and adoration of God in his heart of hearts. From this source of corrupt thinking, Paul goes on to say at the end of this verse, "To do those things which are not proper from that source of corrupt thinking and willing and feeling comes improper actions." And that again is why external solutions will never ultimately work. We can constrain sin with external solutions, but we can't get at the interior problem. Only the grace of God can. One person has said the worst penalty for sin is to love sin. And the apostle Paul is saying here that God is giving these people over to the love of their own sin in their corrupt minds. And so his point, God's judgment is absolutely perfect. It's absolutely just. It's spot on. He gives them exactly what they want. There's no one who can argue with this particular judgment of God.

**II. The ubiquity and intensity of this catalog of sins demonstrates our deserving of judgment and need of grace.**

But now in verses 29 through 31, he makes it clear that this is not a problem for them. For those people out there it's a problem for anyone who is apart from the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul knows that people are going to respond by saying, well, Paul, that may be a problem with some people in our society. You know we may have problems with that quadrant in our society, but this isn't a universal problem. This is not a problem with me. And the apostle Paul says, oh, yes it is. And Paul rattles off a list of twenty-one sins. Now by the way, this is not intended by Paul to be a comprehensive list of sin. There are other lists of sins in Paul's letters where he includes things that he doesn't include here. But he's giving you a sampling. And he's asking you to hold this up like a mirror, and ask yourself do I see this in my own heart. When God's constraining grace is removed, the true extent of depravity becomes evident as does the wholeheartedness of the sin of the sinner. In this passage, Paul is showing the universalness, the ubiquity, the *everywhereness* of sin. And he's showing just how intense it can become when God removes His restraining grace, and He hands us over to our own desires. It shows not only the fact that we deserve judgment, but it shows our need of grace. Now Paul is not asserting that everyone's heart problem is worked out to its logical extent, to its maximal potential. But he is saying that it would be if it were not for either God's restraining grace or for his saving grace. Paul is showing us elements which we can all identify with. These sins, these social sins are things which every single one of us can identify. We may not have committed to its full extent every sin on these lists, but we are familiar in our own hearts with this kind of sin.

Contemplate this list of sins provided by Paul. I'd like you to just look very closely at verses 29 through 31. These twenty-one sins can be grouped into three sets of sins. The first four, the second five, and the last twelve have a certain connection. Paul's not making a logical argument necessarily, but there is a grouping to these sins. Let's just walk through them together, and I would just ask you to think for a moment how these sins are evidenced in your own heart, because the apostle Paul's point is not to point to them; they are the problem. Paul's point is to show all of us that we need the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unrighteousness, the very first sin in the list, is a general description. It speaks of the rejection of God's standards of righteousness. And we could think in our society of those who are working very hard to cast out the Judeo-Christian ethic. But before you throw stones too quickly, let me say this. I think that at least as destructive to the Judeo-Christian ethic in our society, at least as destructive as the efforts of those who have directly attacked the ethic is the life of those who claim to hold the ethic, and yet who do not live in accordance with it. You think through the Ten Commandments, and you ask yourself, how do we Christians obey those Commandments? We want them up on the walls of courtrooms, but how are we doing in our obedience of them? How are we honoring the name of God? How are we honoring the day of God? How are we honoring our parents and those in authority? How are we honoring life? How are we honoring

marriage? How are we keeping the marriage bed undefiled? The statistics say we are not doing very well. That's amongst evangelical Christians. And I just ask you. Before you point to someone else, ask how are we doing in the church?

Wickedness, delight in wrongdoing is the second thing. You know we see this expressed even in the phrases we use today. When we want to say something is good, sometimes we'll say, "Man that was wicked." When we say something is good, sometimes we'll say, "That was bad." We even turn it upside down in the adjectives that we use to describe particular activities in our songs. Now, young people, you want remember any of these songs, but some of the people who are old and losing hair like me will remember these songs. Some of us remember those soul-tunes of the sixties and seventies that said things like, "If this is wrong, I don't want to be right." Or, "Me and Mrs. Jones. We've got a thing going on. We know that it's wrong, but it's much too strong." Now we can laugh about tunes that we sang when we were growing up, but that sort of attitude certainly pervades our outlook.

There are certain things that we know are wrong that we actually delight in, we laugh at. Many of us unfortunately were flipping through the television and saw a fundraiser in Washington this week in which a six-year old boy was subjected to unspeakable filth and vileness during a fundraiser. And everybody was laughing about it, as all manner of filthy language was being used in front of this six-year old boy on the front row. We even delight in that which is wrong. Greed, covetousness, overreaching, craving for more and more. None of us would ever be guilty of that. More clothes, more car, more house, unwise debt at the expense of our charity. There is evil, depravity, badness in general. It's similar to the term "wickedness" that Paul has already used. Nobody would be deliberately wicked and evil, would they? Yes. But you know, sin is inherently self-deceiving. And so we have things happen like people become involved in marital affairs, and it seems like such a right thing to do until it's discovered. And then suddenly all the shame, all the embarrassment, all the humiliation, all the wickedness of it comes to light.

"Full of envy," he says in verse 29. This begins that second set of five sins that he mentions. "Full of envy, displeasure." Envy is displeasure aroused by seeing someone with something that we want, and then we begrudge that person for that. Oh, none of us have ever been guilty of the sin of envy. Maybe there's one wife in the room who's ever looked at a relationship between another wife and a husband and said, "Well, I sure do wish I could have a relationship like that. She doesn't deserve that. Why don't I have a husband that's so attentive to me?" Or perhaps there's a wife who's looked and said, "I've always wanted to have children. I've never been able to have children. How could she deserve to have children, when I want children like this?" Murder. Envy often leads to murder, actual and metaphorical. If it's not Cain murdering Abel, it's Joseph's brothers coming very close to murdering him. But we can murder in our hearts, Jesus says, without ever carrying out the acts. Strife, a spirit of unwholesome

competition and rivalry; bitter conflict, quarrelsome disposition, deceit, cunning, and treachery; tricking and lying in order to get what you want.

Malice. The desire to harm people. Spite.

Gossips destroying someone's reputation in secrets.

Slanderers, those who destroy people's reputation openly. Haters of God. Not merely ignoring Him, but actually resenting him and working hard to exclude Him from our thoughts and from other's thoughts.

Insolence. Treating others with contempt. Shaming them without mercy.  
Arrogant. Making unwarranted claims of superiority.

Boastfulness. Bragging about one's self.

Inventors of evil. Being creative in thinking up ways to sin.

Disobedient to parents. In the middle of the list like this? Yes, because if you can deny parental authority and lawful authority, it's a reflection of your ultimate rejection of God's authority. And so young people, don't take lightly what it means to rebel against the authority of your parents. Because ultimately you're just rebelling against God when you do that. It will destroy you in the end, and Paul will lump it right here in a list of sin which includes murder, disobedience to parents without understanding. These people are what the Bible calls fools. That is, they are willingly senseless when it comes to spiritual and moral things. It's not that they don't know right from wrong. It's that they work very hard not to act like they know the difference between right and wrong.

Untrustworthy. Not keeping one's promises or doing one's duties, unreliable, not true to the covenant, unloving without natural affections. And often times we say that we look into some of the children in the society, and we look into their eyes and we see nothing looking back at us. There's no moral framework looking back at us. You see this in youth court and family court. Many of us are still traumatized by the vision of Susan Smith letting two little children roll down a ramp alive into a lake to drown. And we say that woman has – what's in her? She has no natural affections, and yet I wonder if there's a husband in this room who's so bitter against his wife that he's lost all natural affection. It's easy to point that finger somewhere else, but Paul is pointing right at us, and he's saying now you look you can say the problem's out there. We just need more trigger locks. We need more federal government. We need more social programs. Paul's saying, that's not where the problem lies. The problem lies in you, unmerciful without pity or compassion. All the apostle is doing here is setting forth the doctrine of total depravity, and he's saying this is what everyone would be like apart from the grace of God. And, therefore, everyone needs my gospel.



### **III. When we go beyond participating in sin to actually encouraging it, we evidence the central mark of extreme depravity.**

Now he goes on. He's not done, because he says a third thing in verse 32. He says that when we go beyond, actually participating in sin, but to enjoying it, enjoying in others, encouraging it, and actually advocating it, we are showing the full extent of depravity. The fact that we are not satisfied to engage in sinful behavior but insist on applauding and advocating it in others is the definitive proof of our wickedness. And this is rampant in our society. You see it with regard to pornography. Oh no, it's not just that somebody needs to be able to pick up a pornographic magazine. It's that we can do absolutely nothing to restrict it. And so Larry Flynt and Playboy are going to make sure that we don't scramble that on our television screens. Heavens no, that would be to violate the First Amendment. Something, by the way, which none of the founding fathers had in their mind protecting. Or maybe it's sexual freedom. Whether it's Hite or Kinsey or Comfort, or Johnson or NAMBLA, or gay and lesbian groups. It's not just that they can just do this behind closed doors. It's got to be a statute requiring that this be allowed and actually promulgated in our society. Whether it's the rejection of parental or lawful authority by groups that work very hard to make sure that law and order is not the rule of the land.

Paul's point is that everyone is corrupt of heart. And that apart from God's restraining and saving grace, we would all become consistently depraved. What we need is the grace of God, and that is found only in Jesus Christ. And the apostle Paul is continuing to build his case for the necessity of the gospel.

If you've seen yourself in this picture that Paul paints today; and you're not in Christ, you haven't trusted on Him. You've never realized your sin; you've never said, "Lord God, I deserve damnation, and I don't know what to do. And there's only one way for you to respond. One wise way. And that is to recognize that only in Jesus Christ can a heart like yours or mine be transformed and become the righteousness of God. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we ask that You would help us to see ourselves and then to see the Savior and to run to Him. For in the gospel of Your Son, Your mercy is shown, and Your salvation is dispensed. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

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