

HAS GOD ABANDONED MAN?

“Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them”
Rom. 1:24-32. KJV

Do you want to know why man is the way he is? The problem with man is that God is not restraining man and has given him up. God has given man up! He has abandoned man and we see here in these verses a catalog of man's sin and the reason God has given him up. Now basically those verses are a catalog of the sinfulness of man. Men are wicked. They are vile. They are evil. They are creatures utterly filled with sinfulness. They are characterized as ungodly and unrighteous.

Now we are not in this particular day and age surprised to hear this about men because we see it all around us. We see the depravity of man, made manifest to us. We're not in a world of isolation. We are in a tremendously integrated kind of world, a multi-ethnic kind of world, a media-oriented kind of world that is shrunken to such a small size that we pretty well know everything that's going on everywhere, and the sinfulness of man is common knowledge. No

matter how well a society begins, it always descends to the same pit of immoral behavior and subsequent judgment of God that is categorically presented to us in Romans chapter 1. Like a baby, the beginnings may be lovely and beautiful but the end is ugly. Everything starts well but the vileness of man's nature plunges him into the pit of sin under the condemnation of God with nothing but a prospect of eternal hell.

Man is not good and you need to mark that down at the very beginning. Man is evil. His nature is bent on sin, and given his prerogatives he will inevitably end up in the chaos of immorality.

Why? Why is it so? Why has man always inevitably to sink to such a sad condition? How is it that that infant life, so lovely, so precious, so soft, so innocent, will descend to the corrupted adulthood that inevitably awaits the human race? Why?

People, I think the answer is right here. You want to know why men are like they are. Women are like they are? Do you want to know why the fall of man is inevitably marked in every single life? The answer is clearly here, it is because God gave them up. Three times that is said in these verses. And it basically means that man is abandoned by God. God has abandoned man. God is still in control but He has given man up because of his sin. God has taken His hands off man and allows him to do as he pleases, to reap what he sows. That's really the problem that man has. You see, because of the Fall and the depravity of man, his innate sinfulness, as we shall see in a moment, because of this man has no, and I'll say it again, no capacity to restrain his sinfulness. It is impossible for him to restrain his sinfulness. He can't detain it. He can't harness it. He cannot do good. He cannot keep from doing evil. There is none, says Romans 3, that doeth good, no not one. They do evil continually. Even the most religious among men, the seemingly self-righteous among men may be committing the most heinous sin of all, which is "self-righteousness." Man cannot restrain evil and he will inevitably do what is wrong. There's only one force in the entire universe that can restrain evil and that is God. And the problem with man is that God is not restraining him. God has abandoned him. God has given him up, given him up, given him up. And what that really means is that God no longer restrains man. God is still in control but He has

abandoned man. That is the story of the human race. It really all began in the Garden.

Now this passage is the most tragic, the most fearful, the most sobering, somber passage in all of the epistle to the Romans, and because of this single thought, that man has been abandoned by God. Look at verse 24, "Wherefore God also gave them up." Verse 26: "For this cause God gave them up." Verse 28, "And as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them up, same verb, to a reprobate mind."

Now if you want to know why man is like he is, that's it. And that really is the major reason I write here as I do. Man is the way he is because he's abandoned by God. And God is the only restraining influence there is in the universe to hold back evil. And the more God lets go, the worse it gets. And as you go through human history, it says in 2 Timothy 3:13, "Evil men will wax worse and worse." And it's almost as if God just continues to let go of man and man continues to go his own way. And in the process he compounds sin upon sin upon sin, which escalates his evil, until ultimately you end up in the Tribulation. And in the Tribulation Period, according to 2 Thess. Chapter 2, the final restraints are taken off and the one who hinders, who is the Holy Spirit, hinders no more, and literally all hell breaks loose across the earth. The pit opens up, says Revelation 9, and belches forth all of the bound demons. You compound that with the last bit of restraint being taken off man, with centuries of escalating sinfulness, and you have the Tribulation. Abandoned by God, that is man's problem.

I want you to just think that thought with me for a minute. And I'd like to show you that it is not a new thought in Romans; it is elsewhere in the Bible. And I'll give you a couple of illustrations. In Psalm 81 verse 11 it says, "But My people would not hearken to My voice and Israel would have none of Me, so I gave them up." To what? "To their own hearts' desires and they walked in their own counsels." Israel would not hearken. They would have none of Me so I gave them up. What horrifying words.

In Hosea, the prophet marks the same tragic reality. In chapter 4 verse 17, an unforgettable verse, it simply says this, Ephraim, and that

is a term designating the nation of Israel, "Ephraim is joined to idols." And then here comes the shocking line, "Let him alone." "Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone." God gives up on the northern kingdom. God gives up on his wayward people who will have none of Him.

Listen to this. In Matthew 15:14 our Lord talks about the rulers of Israel, most specifically the Pharisees. It says this, "Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." Let them alone. Let them go. The restraints are off. That's man's problem. God is not restraining him and he has no capacity to restrain himself.

In the Seventh Chapter of Acts there is a masterful address, a sermon given by Stephen. Part of it speaks to our point. Listen in verse 37, "This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like me. Him shall you hear. This is he that was in the church in the wilderness or the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him in Mount Sinai and with our fathers who received the living oracles to give unto us, whom our fathers would not obey but thrust him from them and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt.'" In other words, they didn't want the leadership of Moses, who represented God. They said, "Aaron, make us gods to go before us, for as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what has become of him. And they made a calf in those days and offered sacrifice unto the idol and rejoiced in the works of their own hands." Listen to this. "Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven." Gave them up, let them go. That was the choice they made and He let them go.

Just one other Scripture comes to mind. Chapter 14 of Acts, verse 16 says that God in time past allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Oh my, what a statement. He let them walk in their own ways.

Now, believers, I submit to you that whether you're talking about all nations or whether you're talking about Israel, there is a point at which God lets them go. God gives them up. To the pre-flood, the antediluvian society, God said back in Genesis, "My Spirit will not always strive with man." It doesn't go on forever.

Now we have to ask a question as we look at Romans 1. How did this ever happen? How did God ever get to the point where He gave people up, where He just turned them over, let them go? What is it that brings God to such a place where He gets so angry, so full of wrath that He lets people go, that He just takes off the restraint?

Well the answer to that is to go back to the full thought of our text, and you have to begin in verse 18. And there you see the descent of man presented in successive steps, leading to verse 24. And I want you to follow this. First of all, we can go back to verse 16 and remind ourselves that Paul has designs in the Book of Romans of preaching the gospel. He's not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. He wants to unfold the gospel which is the standard of salvation for everyone that believes. And as he unfolds the doctrine of salvation, he begins with the principle of wrath. That's not typical of our approach when we come to someone who is not a Christian, to start with the subject of wrath. And in defense of Paul, these people to whom he writes are already Christians and he's simply delineating to them theologically all that is necessary for a full understanding of the gospel of Christ. So he begins with the fact in verse 18 that God is very angry. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

So, God is angry. He is so angry that He gives men up. He lets them go, takes off the restraints. Why? Why does He do this? Why does He let them go? Well there are basically successive steps, first of all, because of revelation. You remember back in verse 18, it says they hold the truth. And then in verse 19 it says they hold it because God has made it manifest. And then in verse 20 he says it's manifest through the creation of the world so that men can see that God is powerful and God is supernatural so that men are without, what? EXCUSE, so they've had revelation. They've had the truth. It's not only given unto them, in verse 19, but it is manifest in them. They've thought about it. They've conceived it. They've perceived it, that God is, God is supernatural, God is eternally powerful, and they are inexcusable. And so we start with revelation.

And then you descend to rejection, verse 21. "Because when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but

became vain, empty in their thinking, and their foolish heart was darkened.” In other words, they had the knowledge of God and they refused the knowledge of God. They rejected it. It was all theirs. They turned their back on it.

Rejection led to rationalization. Verse 22, "They then professed themselves to be wise, and thus they became the biggest fools of all, for who is a greater fool than he who is a fool and thinks he's not?" And so man has revelation, followed by rejection, followed by rationalization, in which his empty imaginations tell him that he is really wise.

And the fourth step in the successive fall of man is religion, verse 23. He then changes the glory of the incorruptible God, the true God, into an idol, an idol made in the image of men and birds and beasts and snakes and bugs. And he worships everything but the true God. Religion is not man at his highest, religion is man at his lowest. For religion is idolatry, and idolatry is man in the pits, for idolatry violates the first commandment, "Thou shalt have, what? No other gods before Me." And the second, "Thou shalt make no graven images."

And so man starts at revelation, descends to rejection, descends to rationalization and descends finally to religion, manmade, Satan-inspired, demonic religion that has absolutely no truth in it and no power to restrain sin.

Now watch what happened. At this juncture, God lets men go. Why? Because they have gone so far away from Him “Ephraim is joined to idols.” What's the rest of the verse? “Let them alone.” Because you will have none of me, I give you up. You have forsaken me and I forsake you. That's the story of man. The human race is not on an ascent to God, the human race is on a descent from God. They're running as fast as they can away from His presence and reality. And they have come to the pit of religion. And once you come to the pit of false religion, you have violated the first and foremost commandment, and that is that you should love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. You have made other gods, you have blasphemed the truth of God and you are at the worst possible level of human existence. And at that point, God says I gave them up.

THE HUMAN RACE IS NOT ON AN ASCENT TO GOD, THE HUMAN RACE IS ON A DESCENT FROM GOD.

And that leads to the results of verse 24. When God gives men up, they sink into reprobation that is almost beyond description. Because when the restraints are off all hell breaks loose. Now I want you to think this thought with me because it's the key to the passage. Now listen carefully. The wrath of God is not only something future, there is a day of wrath; we'll get to that when we get into chapter 2 over about in verse 5. There is a day of wrath in the future, but the wrath of God is not just a future reality. The wrath of God is going on all the time. Verse 18 says, "For the wrath of God, the Greek says is all the time being revealed from heaven."

Now listen. How is God's wrath being revealed? It is being revealed in His giving men up. For when He gives them up to their sinfulness, that in itself is the working of His wrath. He could restrain men, but He is so angry with their apostasy that He lets them go, and the consequences of their own sin are the outworking of His wrath. Men today who live their own life in sin are seeing the wrath of God unfolding through the result of their own sinfulness.

And you see it all over the place. The terrible disasters that come into people's lives because of their incessant sinfulness is the outworking of the present expression of the wrath of God. And you're going to see this as we go.

Now, look at man at his worst. Man at his very worst, man in the muck, in the mire of his filthy depraved heart, that's my obligation and yours, even now, to show men the outcome of having a depraved heart. It's not necessarily a pleasant one but it shows us that when men abandon God, God abandons them and their own sin takes over and works its own effects.

In Judges 10:13 it says, "Yet ye have forsaken me and served other gods." And that is always man at his lowest. He gets religious. "Wherefore I will deliver you no more." You abandon me, I abandon you. Second Chronicles chapter 15, I want to show you two passages in 2 Chronicles, verse 1 says, "The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded and he went out to meet Asa, the king Azariah is a

prophet and said to him, 'Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin, the Lord is with you while you are with Him and if you seek Him, He will be found by you. But if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.'

Second Chronicles 24 verse 20, "The Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, to the priest, who stood above the priest, above the people rather, and said to them, 'Thus saith God, 'Why transgress you the commandments of the Lord that you cannot prosper?' Because you have forsaken the Lord, He hath also forsaken you.'" What a verse. You forsook Him, He forsakes you. And when that happens, it is a short step to the abandonment of the sinfulness that we see in these verses.

Now, I want you to divide the text into three parts. Each of the three is introduced by the statement, "God gave them up." The first marks, now think with me, the essence of sin. The second marks the expression of sin. And the third marks the extent of sin, meaning "to give up." It by the way is a very intense word. It means to turn someone over. And it's kind of interesting if you follow its use for just a minute. Look back at Matthew, and I won't go all over the Bible, but I'll just hum through Matthew and show you a couple of places where it's used in Matthew. It's used in Matthew 4:12, "Now when Jesus heard that John was cast into prison," and there the idea is he's thrown into punishment, he's thrown into judgment. Matthew chapter 5 verse 25, "Agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge." Again, meaning, turning someone over to a judge for sentencing. In the first case, turn them over to a prison. The second case, turn them over for judgment.

If you follow along you'll see it also in chapter 10 of Matthew, verse 17, "Beware of men for they will deliver you up to the councils" again, turning you over for some kind of sentencing, turning you over to some judge. You find it also in verse 19, "When they deliver you up, again don't be anxious what you're going to say on your behalf." You find it in verse 21, "And your own brother will deliver you up to death." And again, every time so far in Matthew it's used of putting someone in a position to be sentenced or putting them under judgment or putting them in prison.

And if you follow it into the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, verse 34, again you find in the parable of the kingdom of heaven, in which there were servants involved who owed the master, it says the Lord was angry and delivered him to the inquisitors till he should pay all that was due unto him. In other words, he turned him over because of non-payment of his debt to some who would punish him until he learned to pay. Again it speaks very specifically about a judicial setting and a judgment rendered by a judge or by some kind of authority.

In the 26th chapter of Matthew, in the 15th verse, Judas Iscariot said to them, "What will you give me and I will deliver Jesus unto you?" And there again it means turning Jesus over to the Jewish authorities for punishment for execution or whatever. Chapter 27 of Matthew verse 2, "And when they had bound Him they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate." I think you get the picture, don't you? God gave them up, God gave them up, and God gave them up. And when He did, He gave them over to a punishment. He gave them over to an imprisonment. He gave them over to those who would inflict pain or to that which would inflict pain upon them.

Spurgeon, writing says, "The lost enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded and are therefore self-enslaved." God gives them up judicially. God gives them up punitively. God gives them over to the consequence of their own sinfulness.

Now, there is a sense, and this is a theological point that I want you to get in your mind, we're going to go two ways on it, there is a sense in which the phrase means "God let go." God just took His hands off, pulled the restraints back and just let them go in their sin, and sin brings its own consequence. One of the problems, by the way, in our society is that we're working furiously to remove the consequence of sin. I always think about that when I think about all the medicines they've invented to stop venereal disease when venereal disease is God's way of stopping immorality. And as soon as you can deal with venereal disease you can free up everybody to do whatever they want. There's a sense in which God just lets men go, takes away His restraints, gives them their freedom, and they go on in their sins and reap the results. So in a very real sense, without revealing fire from

heaven, without some cataclysmic event, God pours out His wrath on a day-to-day basis as He abandons men to the destructiveness of their own compounded sin. It's an amazing and awesome reality. God makes men's passions the very instrument of His wrath.

So, we have a world of sex perverts. We have a world of people who live in moral permissiveness. We have a world of liars and cheaters and thieves and robbers and gossipers and disobedient and loveless and brutal, proud boasters, because God let them go. And there's no way to restrain that. People say, "Oh, God in the future is going to judge America." God is judging America right now. Can't you see it? Can't you see a whole nation gone after perverted sinfulness and reaping the consequences of its own sin? God's judgment is at work right now. And our culture, if it reflects anything, reflects the utter meaninglessness, the utter despair and the loneliness and the lostness and the fragmentation and the absence of identity that results when man is cut off from God. One writer said, "What God, without God there are no abiding truths, there are no lasting principles, there are no norms and man is cast upon a sea of speculation and skepticism and attempted self-salvation."

Now, I think it's important to say this. Though sin is a result of God's wrath, God doesn't make men sin. He just abandons them to their own perversity. And we say that to protect the holiness of God. I had a man say to me one time, "God makes you sin." That's not true. God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, cannot look upon iniquity. God is always good and right and true. God does not sin and God tempts, says James, no man to sin. But God will abandon men to their own sin as a part of His judgment. He loosens the restraints and man's depraved desire takes over. That's why our society is like it is. God just took off the restraint. And I think we've seen it happen sort of progressively in our own country, as it happens, I think, in a lot of societies that are founded on Christian principle. For a long time it seemed as though the restraints were there and things were different. In the last 100 years it just seems that God has just taken them off and we're reaping all the results.

If there's anything that I believe, and I believe a lot of things, but if there's anything I believe, I believe that God is in the process of pouring out wrath on American society and society around the world

as we know it in Western culture. Because we have abandoned Him, He has abandoned us. And as I said earlier, it's not that He's totally lifted the restraints. That's yet in the future. And when He does that, according to 2 Thess. 2:7, when the one who hinders stops hindering, that is when the restrainer, the Holy Spirit, doesn't restrain anything, then you will have chaos that is unimaginable. And the earth will turn into a slaughterhouse. Men will even massacre one another.

A further thought is necessary. And I told you there would be a kind of a two-fold thing as you think about the judicial act of God. It is not just a negative restraint withdrawal. It is not that just God just pulls back. That is, that is too be non-involved. There's a sense also in which in pulling back or letting the restraints go, God is acting in a positive overt move of judgment. It isn't that God just says, "Ah, that's enough of you," and turns around and takes a walk. It is that God in taking off the restraints which is sort of a negative thing, He just takes them back also is positively inflicting men with His wrath, because He knows the consequence. He abandons us totally to our sinfulness. He removes the restraints. But in a real sense that is a positive punitive act on His part.

Now let's follow that thought as we move through our text. Keep in mind, God lets men go and we find out what happens when He does.

I want to give you one footnote. It's important to say at this point that this is not a final forever act that damns all men without recourse. God lets men go to the consequence of their sin and all the while endeavors to reach them with the message of His salvation. You understand that? You see, the gospel begins with the fact that God let men go. But it is these very men, the world of people like you and I, that He has abandoned to their sinfulness, that He calls back later in Romans in the redemptive invitation of the gospel.

For example, the woman Jezebel seems to have been, in Revelation 2, the very embodiment of gross, vile sin. And yet God, it says, gave her time to repent, time to repent. 1 Peter 3:20: It says, "The patience of God waited, for God was not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

In 1 Corinthians chapter 6 you have a list that's almost identical to Romans chapter 1. It says, "Be not deceived, fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, none of these shall inherit the kingdom of God." It's almost an identical list to Romans 1. And then it says, "And such were some of you. But you are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." It's those kinds of people that He wants to redeem, do you see? So He has abandoned man, yes. But He calls man back to Himself. The abandonment is from that pristine knowledge where men knew God and ran from God, and now God runs and calls them back. And very often, as He lets them go deeper and deeper into the pit of their own sin, they eventually hit bottom and scream for mercy. And so in a real sense, as it says in Isaiah 19:22, God smites in order that He might heal. Divine mercy and grace and patience without response result in the outpouring of wrath. Man won't respond, God pours out His wrath. Impenitent sinners are swept away into their own sins, and vile passions lead them toward hell. In the midst of it all God calls them to Himself.

Let's look at the first of the three and, I don't know, we probably won't get past this one. The essence of man's sinfulness, verse 24: "Wherefore God also gave them up." When He let them go they went directly to uncleanness. The word "wherefore" indicates the judgment of God's wrath finding its reason in the preceding verses. God gave them up because they had revelation, they turned it to rejection, then rationalization and finally in their idolatry, false religion. And because of that God gave them up. And first we see the essence of their sin. He gave them up to uncleanness, impurity. And that is the essence of man's sinfulness. That he is on the inside impure. It goes on to say, "Through the lusts of their own, what? Hearts! It is an internal impurity. Man is given over to rottenness on the inside.

That word, by the way, is used often by Paul. In fact, it's a common word that he uses to express the condition of men. He uses it in 2 Cor. 12:21, Gal. 5:19, Eph. 5:3, and 1 Thess. 4:7. Man is basically unclean. That's the essence. When I say essence, I mean the nature of man or the heart of man, the internal part. You see, the problem with man is that inside down deep he is a rotten, a vile sinner; uncleanness, impurity.

Now may I add this? That as I looked that word up and traced it through Paul's thinking, it primarily refers to perversion of the sexual area of life. But it encompasses a general essence of a God-rejecting heart. It becomes a sort of a totally unclean, vile character, which expresses itself primarily in the sexual area. That's why it says at the end of verse 24 that they wind up dishonoring their own bodies between themselves. The baseness, the vile nature of man's heart is the reason that he becomes sexually perverted.

The thought of the phrase, let's look at it a moment, "through the lusts of their own hearts." "Their own hearts" emphasizes that they are self-willed. Their own heart, do what you want, do your own thing, do whatever you feel like doing, let your lust tell you what to do. And because their hearts are unclean, out of it comes filth. In Prov. 4:23 it says, "Out of the heart are the issues of life." And Jer. 17:9 says, "The heart of man is deceitful above all things and what? Desperately wicked" when God gives men up He gives them up to uncleanness, which comes out of their own insides. "Heart" means the thinking processes, the will, and internal character. Man abandoned by God has only to do what his heart tells him to do, and his heart is corrupt. He has no other norms, no other standards, no other principles than his own desires. And those desires come out of a perverted heart turned over to its own devices and utterly sinful. They eventually manifest themselves in physical perversion.

And I would just say again, man is not good. You know, if you believe in the basic goodness of man, you're dead wrong. Man is basically rotten. Rom. 3:10, "There's none righteous, no not one." How many? Not one, and he put that extra phrase cause somebody would have said "except me" so he said "no, not one." "There's none that understands, there's none that seeks after God, they're all gone out of the way, there is none that doeth good, again, there's none that doeth good, not one. "Their throat is an open sepulcher, with their tongues they use deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips, their mouth is full of cursing, their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery is in their ways. The way of peace have they not known and there's no reverence for God in their eyes." And the whole world is guilty before God. And later on he says, "For all have, what? Sinned and come short of the glory of God." Man is basically vile. And the

problem is because his basic nature comes from within him, and within him is rottenness.

Mark 7, you know the passage, "For from within," verse 21, "out of the heart of men proceeds what? Nice things? No. Evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness and evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness, and all these evil things come from within and defile the man." You were born into this world a sinner, you're defiled from the inside and it manifests itself on the outside. And if you've abandoned God and God has abandoned you, there is no way to restrain that evil, there is no way to cover that evil, and there is no way to deal with that evil. In fact, in Proverbs 6 it says "Men have hearts that are quick to devise wickedness. In Prov. 10:20 it says, "The tongue of the just is like choice silver but the heart of the wicked is of little worth." Why? It has no worth because it has no good that it can produce. Isa. 44:20 says of man, "He has a deceived heart and hath been turned aside." Jer. 5:23 says, "This people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart." Ezek. 14:3 says, "Men have set up their idols in their heart and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their own face." They cause themselves to fall because they're so filled with evil. Evil-perverted desires mark men.

And the result, back again to Romans 1, "They dishonor their bodies between themselves." This gives meaning to the lust of the heart. You wouldn't know what the lust of the heart was unless you had a phrase like this to show you how it works itself out. They don't know how to handle their bodies. They pervert God's intended use for the body. They turn to fornication, sexual activities, sexual deviations, sexual perversion, and sexual promiscuity. And if there ever has been a society preoccupied with it, it's us. But may I hasten to add, we are just like every other society that's ever been around, only some have covered it up better. In their freedom from God's truth they turn to perversion and even inversion of the created order, as well. And in the end, their man-centered humanism resulted in dehumanization of each other. And that's what men do when they dishonor their bodies. They turn each other into animals.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul, I think speaks to this just in a marvelous way. He says, "This is the will of God, even your

sanctification, you should abstain from sexual sin and you should know how to possess your body in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of sensuality as the Gentiles or the heathen who know not God." If you're a believer, you ought to know how to control the body. Why? It is because the Spirit of God is there and He can control those things.

But, he says, "You should know how to control it, not like the pagans who know not God." What is the implication? It is that they cannot control it. As in Colossians, you have the capacity as a believer to set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth. They do not, they do not. They will go out and dishonor their bodies because that's what their lusts tell them to do.

But he says, God will destroy both it and them because the body is not for fornication, the body was made for the Lord. But man said no to God and started down the slide and now he winds up only doing what his own desire tells him to do and he fornicates. That's the legacy of man.

Why? Let's go back and at least look at verse 25 for a second. Why? It is because, again, "they exchanged the truth of God into a lie." They actually exchanged the truth of God into a lie! It expresses some mild shock, like, "Could you believe that?" They had the truth of God written in their hearts, visible around them and they didn't want it and they rejected it and they exchanged it into a lie. This means they exchanged the true God for false gods.

What is the word lie there? The lie is that God is not God that God doesn't have to be obeyed or honored or glorified. That is the lie that Satan has been pushing off since the Garden. They believed the lie that God is not God, God is not to be praised and honored and glorified and obeyed. They believed the lie. It is not unusual that God is called "the truth." It is not unusual that idols are called "the lie." Jesus called Himself, "the Truth." And Isa. 44:20 describes a sculptor who made for himself a god, who reaches out to take hold of the god, and Isaiah says, never asks, and "Is there not a lie in my right hand"? The idol is the expression of the lie that God is not God, the truth is not truth. Jer. 13:25 says, "Thou hast forgotten me and trusted in a lie." And the proof is shown in the exchange that follows, in the next

phrase in verse 25: "They worshiped and served the creature more than the creator." Their own idols made with their own hands in their own image and in that of animals and birds, expressions of their own evil desires, gods of their own liking and their own making, they worshiped rather than the true Creator.

When it says they worshiped and served, it means they adored and served. So, beloved, they deserved their punishment. Men deserve their punishment. They are without excuse. And the reason God gave them up to the essence of their evil hearts so that it would express itself in the corruption between their bodies was because they exchanged the true God for a lie. And they worshiped the idols and the things they love rather than the Creator. And at this point, the Apostle Paul can't stand it any longer so he just throws in a benediction, "Who is blessed forever, amen." I mean, he just can't go any further with the garbage. And the very mention of the name of the Creator who is blessed forever, amen, and you know what that was? That was an old, traditional, Jewish doxology. And Jews today, Orthodox Jews today, will still say that. They'll mention something about the Creator who is blessed forever, amen. That's not uncommon even today. And he just goes into that common phrase; he cannot resist a respite of refreshing thought in a sea of filth. He can't resist a word of praise affirming what is due to God. And in a sense he heightens and magnifies their evil, doesn't he, because God is worthy to be praised, He is blessed forever. And yet they worship the creature more than the Creator.

Men today worship cars, they worship houses, they worship clothes, they worship their bodies, they worship women, they worship success, they worship money, and they worship false gods in a religious environment. They have idols ad infinitum, ad nauseous, but not God, and that's why God gave them up. And He gave them up to the essence of their evil hearts.

May all of us so live under the power of the Holy Spirit that we see righteousness and godliness manifested in our lives, not because we can do it but because God's Son, Jesus does it in us as we yield.

Lord, we know the wrath of God is at work in our nation as men are abandoned to the essence of their sin. God, help us to take them the

message that if they will come back and embrace Jesus, You will embrace them. May they come, in the blessed name of Jesus Christ our Lord!