

What Does it Mean for God to Give Someone Up?

Romans 1:24-32

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Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity - v. 24

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. - v. 26

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. - v. 28

"*God gave them up.*" These are among the most frightening words in the Bible. Paul repeats them three times in today's passage. But what do they mean? What would cause God to give someone up? What does being given up by God mean for someone's life? And, perhaps most importantly, is there any hope for someone whom God has given up?

First of all, when God gives someone up, it is an act of judgment. The giving up mentioned in these verses comes as an outpouring of God's wrath, as an act of judicial condemnation. The cause of this giving up is the heart idolatry of truth-suppression and God-replacement. When a people suppress the truth in unrighteousness, refuse to honor God as God and turn to created substitutes for God, God gives them up.

When God gives someone up, He gives them up to something. In this case, "to impurity" and "to dishonorable passions" and "to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done." God is removing His protecting hand of common grace that actively restrains people from sin and from depraved thinking. So, God essentially gives people what they want, but more tragically, He gives them over to the power and possession of what they want.

We can see the reality of being given over to something in the life of addicts. An alcoholic begins drinking because he likes the benefits he receives from it, but he ends up unable to stop. The same pattern happens with drugs, pornography or other addictions. What begins as a way to satisfy the heart and numb the pain of life becomes a prison of inescapable addiction.

So, the reality of being given up by God to the power of our sin and our sinful desires means that we are, to a degree, cut off from the protecting and restraining grace of God. We can no longer think clearly, love rightly, desire properly or act in a restrained and honorable manner. Instead, our lives are dominated by impurity, by dishonorable passions and to a debased mind.

So, is there any hope for a people who have been given up by God to their sin? Yes. As the wonderful motto of the State of South Carolina states, "While I breathe, I hope." Until this life is over, God can always redeem and transform anyone.

We see God do this all the time: God rescues people from impurity, from dishonorable passions and from a debased mind. God saves His people from the condemnation, even from the judicial hardening He Himself has brought about. In fact, God's purpose in hardening someone is often to show them the depth of their depravity and the tragic consequences of their sin so that He can save them.