

SOUND DOCTRINE FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS – Studies in Romans

Abandoned by God (Romans 1:24-32)

“Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchange the truth of 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 over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper. . .” (Romans 1:24-28)

The idea of abandonment by God strikes us as exceptionally harsh; standing in direct contrast to His unconditional love as expressed in the gospel. Yet this co-existence between justification and condemnation is presented to us throughout the New Testament. As Paul is about to embark on a lengthy discussion of justification by faith, beginning in chapter 3, he wants all of us to be aware of the flip side of that coin. So, in Romans 1:24, 26, 28 we find ourselves confronted by the expression “God gave them over.” The verb indicates a deliberate decision by God, revealing that in the post-Flood world, God would no longer be directly involved in restraining man’s sin. Instead, it would be delegated to human government, which would be occupied by people just as prone to corruption. Sinners regulating sinners is not the best formula for ethical and moral progress. It virtually ensures a steady decline in the downward spiral of a lost and fallen humanity; culminating in that last-days scenario described in 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

But be certain of this, it is not God’s desire to accelerate the proliferation of sin in our world. It is man’s desire! So, in response to man’s resistance to and suppression of God’s truth (vv18-23), God has given fallen humanity over to its own sinful desires, and the consequences resulting from it. The repercussions from this judicial action are three-fold: the foolishness of idolatry (v25; cf. Isaiah 44:9-20; the perversion of homosexuality (vv26-27; cf. Leviticus 18:22); and the criminality of a depraved mind, producing an array of anti-social behavior (vv28-32).

Therefore, every Christian faces the challenge of coping with this dual reality. He or she has been saved from humanity’s downward spiral into death; creating a sense of hope for reaching those who have not yet believed the gospel. So we must be in the world, while not allowing ourselves to become adversely impacted by the world (John 17:13-19); or our testimony can become tarnished. We must be in the world, while not allowing ourselves to become confused or deceived, in these last days, about the negative direction of our world (2 Timothy 3:13).

In other words, we cannot forget that individuals caught in the downward spiral are savable, but the spiral itself is not salvageable. It has been abandoned by God. The imperative of the apostle John to not love the world, in 1 John 2:15-16, is supported by the following rationale in v17: “The world is passing away and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.” So, as a follower of Jesus Christ, stop trying to salvage the downward spiral of our lost and fallen world through political activism. Instead, start allowing God to use you in rescuing the sinners caught in that spiral by sharing God’s plan of salvation with them. Or, as someone once put it: “Trying to save the world through political activism, is like spitting into the wind.”