

## “God Gave Them Up”

*Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:21-32 • July 11, 2021*

By Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • September 12, 2021 (BSCC)

Dear Congregation of Christ: Just this last week, a choir posted a song on YouTube with these words included: “We’ll convert your children – happens bit by bit, quietly and subtly and you will barely notice it... We’ll convert your children – Yes we will! – reaching one and all, there’s really no escaping it... We’re coming for them. We’re coming for your children...The gay agenda is coming home. The gay agenda is here.” Who sang these words? You probably have an idea: it was the San Francisco Gay Men’s Choir.

Not surprisingly, this song was hardly publicized in the mainstream fake news media. The only new media that mention it was Yahoo News, which almost no one pays attention. These liberals know that the “gay agenda” to “convert” our children is opposed by a majority of Americans. So they are silent about this despicable song. What’s striking is that in 2004, Pew Research found out that 60 percent of Americans opposed same-sex marriage, while only 31 percent approved. Fifteen years later, in 2019, this opposition vanished into thin air: 61 percent approved, and only 31 percent disapproved!

Last Sunday, we continued our sermon series on Romans Chapters 1-3, focusing on the suppression of the truth by unbelievers that God is the Creator of the universe. They see the majestic and complex creation around them, but instead of worshiping the Creator, they worship creation: the sun, moon and stars; mountains, rocks and trees; and seas and rivers. Therefore, they are without excuse because they the Creator from his creation. On Judgment Day, they cannot say to God that they did not know he existed. Then, why do they suppress this truth? Because of their ungodliness and unrighteousness. And the outcome of this wickedness is they became fools, their hearts are darkened, and they ultimately became idolaters. Therefore, they are under the wrath of God.

In our text today, we read that Paul then gives us concrete evidence of this wickedness and idolatry among unbelievers. And what is this evidence? It is what the San Francisco Gay Men’s Choir is so proud of, what the liberal culture glories in, and what the present administration promotes and even tries to shove into the throat of everyone, including faithful churches. As a result, Paul emphatically says three times in these verses that *“God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts.”* What does he mean by God “giving them up”? And the total depravity of these unbelievers goes far beyond their own wicked lusts. They advocate them and do all in their evil power to convert everyone, including our little children!

So, our meditation today is **“God Gave Them Up,”** under two headings: first, **“God Gave Them Up to the Lusts of Their Hearts”**; and second, **“God Gave Them Up to a Debased Mind.”** I will dwell on the first point more extensively than the second.

## “God Gave Them Up to the Lusts of Their Hearts”

Because of their ungodliness and unrighteousness, Paul writes that God “gave them up” three times in verses 24, 26 and 28. What does Paul mean by this? The Greek word used by Paul is the same Greek word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. A couple of examples will suffice. In Joshua 6:2, before the walls of Jericho fell before the Israelites, God assured Joshua, “*See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor.*” And the reverse is also true of God giving Israel into the hands of their enemies because of their idolatry. In Judges 2:14, we read, “*So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers.*”

In the same way, Paul says that God gave unbelievers up to their wickedness. How does God do this “giving up”? Some scholars believe that it is in the passive sense. That is, God merely withdraws the restraint of the Holy Spirit from them, so that they are left to do their wickedness. We know that the world will implode on its own if not for the Spirit’s restraining action. Without the Spirit’s restraint, our world will be engulfed with violence due to idolatry, rebellion, murder, adultery, stealing and lying until it is completely destroyed. All the world’s inhabitants, including us, will be idolaters, rebels, murderers, adulterers, thieves and liars. We will all be utterly depraved, like the San Francisco Gay Men’s Choir.

But God’s action is not merely passive. Paul uses the active sense, “God *himself* gave them up.” One scholar says that God initiates the process of unbelievers descending into the pit of wickedness. God does not merely let go of a boat of unbelievers being carried away by the current. He “gives it a push downstream.”<sup>1</sup> But some will then accuse God of being the author of sin. No, he is not, and he cannot, for he does not and cannot tempt anyone to sin (Jas 1:13). Note that Paul says, “*God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts to impurity.*” We read this truth in Ephesians 4:19, “*They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*” Before God them up, they were already wicked!

Remember the Israelites in the desert grumbling against Moses and against God? They said they would rather be slaves back in Egypt rather than die in the desert of hunger and disease and killed by their enemies. So God granted them their wish, making them wander in the wilderness for forty years towards Egypt. And in the process, all the adults who came out of Egypt died in the desert. Be careful what your wish for!

Note also the parallelism Paul uses. In verse 23, he says that unbelievers “*exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images.*” In verse 25, he says they “*exchanged the truth about God for a lie.*” And what is this lie? It is the lie that there is no God the Creator, therefore, they worship creatures rather than God who created them. Although they know it is a lie, they “believe” it, because they do not want to be accountable to him for their wickedness.

Then in verses 26 and 27, Paul gives two concrete examples of human depravity because “*God gave them up to dishonorable passions.*” Obviously, these two examples are not popular with our present culture. What I’ll be saying here might even get me canceled on Facebook and Youtube.

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<sup>1</sup> Moo, Douglas J., *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 110.

First, Paul says, *“their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature.”* In the ancient Graeco-Roman world, homosexuality was not that uncommon. Many Roman emperors practiced homosexuality, including Caligula, Nero and perhaps Julius and Augustus, the emperor at Jesus’ birth. But lesbianism was not common. So Paul is in effect saying, “Even your women were so depraved that they also became lesbian homosexuals.” This was how far down the pit of wickedness the ancient unbelieving pagan world of the Greeks and Romans have gone. How is our culture today different from theirs? There is no difference whatsoever.

Also, Paul did not mention here that lesbianism was not biblical, because it was known by all Christians that the Old Testament—particularly in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13—prohibited sexual relationship between two men. Note that Paul says that these kinds of relationships are not “natural.” They are against God’s design of nature at creation. God created human beings male and female, and sexual relationships must be confined between a man and a woman in marriage. So if homosexual relationships among men are unnatural, lesbianism is also unnatural.

We see this in the created order. Animals, birds, insects, even the simplest forms of living creatures, only have male-female relationships. Why? Because this is God’s way of preserving the living creatures he made, especially human beings. This is why in our form for marriage ceremony, it says, “by marriage the human race is to be continued and increased.” The homosexual culture is a “culture of death.” If the human race becomes totally homosexual, it will eventually die. This is all too obvious. But medical and scientific technology has helped promote the idea that transgender men can also become pregnant like biological women. Again, this is purely unnatural because only by medical and scientific technology can a male become pregnant. This is absolutely opposed to God’s natural order of his creation.

So Paul condemns lesbianism as under the wrath of God. Second, he also condemns male homosexuals, *“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.”* Again, he says this is unnatural. In addition, he calls homosexual practices “shameless acts.” They are consumed by this unnatural fire that destroys them because of their unnatural lust.

Why are homosexual practices “shameless acts”? After Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, they knew they were naked, so they tried to cover their nakedness. They knew that they have sinned against God, and nakedness is a symbol of sinfulness. So they hid themselves from God, knowing their guilt. In contrast to Adam’s feeling of shame and guilt, homosexual men practice “shameless” acts, ignoring the natural sense of guilt because of their sin.

Therefore, our statement of doctrine concerning marriage and sexuality says, “marriage from the beginning is meant to be a single, exclusive union of one flesh between a man and a woman.” We also reject the “identification of any new gender categories such as Agender, Androgynous, Bigender, Gender Fluid, Transgender, and so on.” We also reject “all forms of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and use of pornography) as sinful and offensive to God.” Therefore, we reject the acceptance of LGBTQ+ as natural, biblical forms of human sexuality.

Paul condemns homosexuals in two other texts: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, which we read earlier; and 1 Timothy 1:9-10. Liberals spin the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as being inhospitable, but Jude 7 is clear, *“just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”* Just as Sodom was consumed by the fire of God’s wrath, so will homosexuals who are consumed by their passion for other men will be consumed by the fire of God’s wrath. This is the *“due penalty of their error”*: the fires of hell. Liberals perform all kinds of gymnastic contortions and twisting of these Scriptures to justify their promotion of homosexuality.

But why does Paul single out homosexuals in our text as those who are under God’s wrath? Because they commit unnatural, unbiblical, shameless acts. Adultery, fornication, and other sexual relationships between a man and a woman, are also under God’s wrath. But they are natural acts between a man and a woman. Paul singles out homosexuality because it is crystal clear to all people that it is unnatural.

Most Christians believe that sin is sin, no matter how small or egregious it is. It is true that all human beings are sinful, and sin results in death (Rom 3:23; 6:23). But all sins are not equal. Little white lies are not as evil as murder. A little shoplifting is not as costly as kidnapping for millions in ransom. So is God’s judgment not all the same. Jesus says that the cities of Israel that rejected Jesus will suffer more terrible judgment from God than Sodom (Matt 10:15; 11:23-24). In our text, Paul did not use rebellion, murder, adultery, theft and lying as examples of human depravity. He used homosexuality. In the Old Testament civil law, we find penalties against unlawful acts that are commensurate with the crime. Unintentional murder, which is manslaughter, was not a capital offense. So were stealing, lying, disobedience to parents, and other minor offenses. But homosexuality, together with rape, incest and bestiality, were capital offenses.

Lastly, we do not have Rebel Pride Month, or Murderer Pride Month, or Thief Pride Month, or Adulterer Pride Month, or Drunkard Pride Month, or Junkie Pride Month. Only Gay Pride Month. Only homosexuals demand to be approved and celebrated. Which brings us to our next point.

### **“God Gave Them Up to a Debased Mind”**

Paul’s third use of the words “God gave them up” is in verse 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.”* Again, the reason why God gave them up is they reject God, though they know him as Creator. Again, they do not worship him as God and give thanks to him for all things he created for them.

What is God’s response to this rebellion against him? Again, God gave them what they wanted: a worthless mind of a fool. They are disqualified from having a true knowledge of God and his Son Jesus Christ who saves sinners from a debased mind. They will never acknowledge and understand the truths about God unless God gives them the Holy Spirit to transform their minds and their lives. Jesus taught the same in his parables, *“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given”* (Matt 13:11ff). He reveals the truths of God to those whom God has chosen but hides these truths to those whom God did not choose to save.

And what is the outcome of this worthless mind of unbelievers? Paul lists a litany of “*unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice*” against neighbors. These are what we see all around us in our culture: “*envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness... gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.*” And not only in our culture today, but throughout these last days that began when Christ first came 2,000 years ago. Paul lists the same ungodly and unrighteous thoughts, words, and deeds in 2 Timothy 3:2-5.

Paul then condemns these unbelievers in verse 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.*” Again, Paul emphasizes that they have knowledge of God’s righteous wrath against them. But even with this knowledge, they reject God because of their ungodly desires of the flesh. Paul condemns their practices, but there is an even worse condemnation: they approve and promote them. They even want to shove this wickedness down the throat of those who do not agree with them.

Think, for example, of the TV shows that our children are watching. Nickelodeon, Disney, and Cartoon Network used to be harmless—and sometimes even educational—shows. But in these last few months, they have added gays, lesbians, transgenders, and same-sex marriage to their children’s shows, thereby teaching them that these are normal, natural and good. For us adults, consider that in the last several years, all TV shows and movies include gay and lesbian sex scenes. Even TV commercials promote their wicked agenda.

**D**ear friends, all around us we see God giving ungodly and unrighteous unbelievers over to their wicked passions. Homosexuality is not only unbiblical; rather, it is also unnatural and obvious. It is Paul’s example of an unbeliever’s total depravity resulting from his rejection of God as Creator and Redeemer. We are all sinners, and we Christians must remember that if not for the restraining and transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds, we would all be ungodly and unrighteous.

Therefore, we must remember that homosexuality is not an unforgivable sin. All sinners, including homosexuals, have hope that if the Holy Spirit works in their hearts, they will repent of their sin and be transformed. They will then have “clean hands” and a “pure heart” (Psa 24:3-4), striving to obey God’s laws. We have seen this in a few who have had a reverse “coming out of the closet.” They turned back from homosexuality and transgenderism because our Lord Jesus Christ transformed their lives through his Word and his Spirit.

Paul says in our earlier reading that all believers were formerly ungodly and unrighteous, even homosexuals. But then he says, “*But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*” (1 Cor 6:11). Nothing is impossible with God. We must pray for them, even speak to them about the amazing saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, James encourages us with these words, “*whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins*” (Jas 5:20).