

WHAT IS MEANT BY GOD GIVING OVER THE GENTILES IN ROMANS CHAPTER ONE?
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When one studies the concept of the watchful care and concern of the Creator (i.e. God), directed at the created (i.e. man), they cannot help but to see providence in action. Throughout the Bible God's concern is displayed through various means. There can be no doubt, "God is love,"¹ and that that love is clearly seen in the way in which He deals with man as it relates to direction in life. Yet, on the other hand, man often finds himself in such a state of denial and rejection of God that it leaves God with little or no choice. He must allow them to pursue whatever course their hearts wish to pursue. Such is the case here in Romans chapter one as we will see.

The phrase "God gave them up" is "first aorist active indicative of paradidomi, old common verb to hand over...to one's power as in Matt. 4:12."² It basically means that God had "handed them over to the power of sin."³ In study of Romans one the student can clearly see that man had "progressed" to the point that he no longer "glorified" God "as God" but had become "vain in their imagination." This led them to profess "themselves to be wise" while in reality they had become "fools." This resulted in the Gentiles having corrupted their life styles to the point of idol worship and abuse of the "natural use" of the human body sexually. They continued their downward spiral to the point that "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge." Therefore, God was compelled to allow them to follow the dictates of their "hearts" as free-moral agents. Thus, the idea of God "giving them over."

The following comments by various commentators are well worth our careful consideration in this matter. "When people are determined to reject God for their own way, God allows them unhindered to follow their chosen course so that they may the⁴ sooner see the degradation that comes to those who follow their own wisdom." The words of Plummer, as quoted by J.W. McGarvey, are just as enlightening, "Wherefore, finding them living in lust, God ceased to restrain or protect them from evil (Gen. 6:3), and abandoned them to the uncleanness toward which their lust incited them, that they might dishonor their bodies among themselves to the limit of their lustfulness, as a punishment for dishonoring and abandoning him. He did this because they had exchanged the truth of God (which from the start they had hindered in unrighteousness, vs. 18), i.e., the truth respecting God and his law and worship, for the sham of idolatry and the false worship pertaining thereto, and because they had given to the creature that inward reverence and outward service which was due to the Creator, thus preferring the creature to the Creator, who is blessed for ever."⁵

I think, also, the words of Jim McGuigan are worthy our consideration on this point, "Because of this rebellious attitude, God 'gave them up' (that is, permitted them to go the way they wanted and let them eat of the fruit of their ways). He gave them up to all kinds of perversion involving the men and women, dishonoring their bodies by bestiality and other perversions and much of it in the name of religion."⁶ Likewise, the words of Lard are important to our understanding of this. "God gives people up when he ceases to restrain them from evil or protect them against it. When, in other words, he lets them alone to do as they please without hindrance from him in the matter of sin. This clearly implies⁷ that till God gives a people up, they are always under his protecting care."

Therefore, in conclusion, it seems that the condition that Paul writes of in this chapter is similiar to the events described in Genesis chapters six and nineteen. We realize from these chapters that man had gotten to such an immoral position in his life that God simply had taken all that He could take. He, therefore, "gave them over" to the desires of their hearts. This is not done so due to his lack of love for them but, on the other hand, because of his love for mankind in general. Perhaps the situation described in 1 Corinthians chapter five best indicates God's desire in the "giving over" of man. Notice, carefully, what is said in verse five, "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." It appears, then, that God "gives over" man to his fleshly desires so that he can see the lack of good "fruit" in his actions and turn back to God before it is too late.

ENDNOTES

1. 1 John 4:8
2. Robertson, A.T., Word Pictures in the New Testament, Baker, 1931, Vol. IV, p. 330.
3. Vincent, Marvin R., Word Studies in the New Testament, Eerdmans, 1946, Vol. III, p. 18.
4. Whiteside, Robertson L., Commentary On Romans, Whiteside, 1945, p. 34.
5. McGarvey, J.W., Commentary on Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Standard, undated, pp. 304,305.
6. McGuiggan, Jim, The Book of Romans, William C. Johnson, Inc., 1974, p. 35.
7. Lard, Moses, E., Paul's Letter to the Romans, Christian Board Of Publication, 1914, p. 57.
8. Romans 6:21