



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 1:24-32

"God Gave Them Up, or Divine Retribution"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] ...the Epistle to the Romans and we are beginning with the 24th verse and reading through the last verse of the chapter, verse 32: Romans chapter 1, verse 24 through verse 32. And remember the context, the apostle has given us in the opening 17 verses, something of an introduction, and has mentioned his theme "The gospel of God" in verse 16 and verse 17. And then, having launched into a discussion of the wrath of God and it's revelation from heaven, the apostle has come to some consequences that flow inferentially from what he has just spoken and in verse 24, we read,

"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did exchange the natural use for that which is against nature: and likewise also the man (or 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 recompense of their error which was fitting. 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 seemly; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, insolent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

May God bless this reading of his word.

[Prayer removed from audio]

[Message] The subject for this morning, as we turn again to the Epistle to the Romans is, "God Gave Them Up, or Divine Retribution." Preaching to his Sunday congregation in Bern, Switzerland in the Reformed Cathedral there, the minister Walter Lüthi said, "In the words that we have just read, Romans 1:18-32, we are told the whole truth about our condition. There may well be people among us who cannot bear to hear the truth, and would like to creep quietly away out of this church. Let them do so if they wish."

Now there is much justification in Mr. Lüthi's words, because Paul's canvas upon which he has painted his picture—dark, foreboding, threatening, flashing with lightning, and crashing with thunder—is crammed with forms and figures, lights and shadows, of sin, wrath, and judgment. And the revelation of wrath is total and complete, encompassing all and rendering all without excuse and under condemnation, both individually and collectively.

Isaiah, in the 28th chapter of his prophecy and the 21st verse speaks of judgment. He says, "For the LORD shall rise up in mount Perazim, he shall be angry as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act." It is sometimes been

thought that judgment is God's strange act and his strange work simply because it is contrary to his mercy.

But, that is not really the truth that the prophet is seeking to bring forth. That word "strange" means simply unusual, extraordinary and the work of God in judgment is his strange or extraordinary work, his unusual work. Retributive justice, for that is what Paul speaks about here, is one of his essential properties and it comes to the center of the stage in Romans chapter 1, verse 24 through verse 32, particularly in the threefold occurrence of the word *paredōken*.

Now that is the Greek word and I've simply transliterated it for you or pronounced it in English, but it is a word that means to "deliver over." It is translated in verse 24 as "gave up". It is translated in verse 26 as "gave up" and then in verse 28, it occurs for the third time and it is there translated "gave over." So in this threefold occurrence of *paredōken* retributive justice is brought to the center of the stage of the apostle's revelation here.

Now we want to analyze and clarify the meaning of retributive justice or "God gave them up" as it is found here in our text. The apostle introduced his theme of the gospel in verses 16 and 17, for after his introductory salutation and the explanation of why he had not visited the Romans yet, he said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek." And he is not ashamed of it because he says, "In this gospel there is revealed the righteousness of God and it is for all who believe." And he says it is perfectly orthodox because in the Scriptures we read, "The just shall live by faith." So the theme that the apostle seeks to set forth is justification by faith.

This he has followed with case history and I said, last time, that it's very much like, just to use an illustration, a doctor who sits in front of a patient and seeks to get from him information that will enable him to diagnose the difficulty and prescribe a remedy. So the case history of human sin is set forth by the Apostle Paul in verse 18 and following.

The apostle actually continues this account of case history through chapter 3 and verse 8. It's the case history of the sin of the Gentiles. It's the case history of the sin of the Jews or the case

history of the sin of all men. And then in verse 9 through verse 20 of chapter 3, he diagnoses the difficulty as simply the fact that men are sinners and, therefore, they stand before God speechless in their lack of righteousness. He says in verse 9 of chapter 3, "What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved (or charged) both Jews and Greek, that they are all under sin." So his accusation is made. The Gentiles are sinners and that Jews are sinners. And then, in order to prove his case, he cites a series of passages from the Scriptures. For the Apostle Paul, what the Bible says is the truth and for him the Scriptures of the Old Testament are what God says. And so, he concludes in verse 19 and verse 20 by saying,

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

In other words, the apostle affirms that all men are sinners and that they cannot hope to be justified by anything that they do. Bringing it down to the present day, they cannot be justified by coming to church. They cannot be justified by being baptized in water. They cannot be justified by other religious acts. They cannot be justified by civil righteousness or social righteousness, by the deeds of the law, or by any legal system. No man can ever stand righteous before God.

Now in the immediate context in the preceding verses of chapter 1, verse 24, verse 18 through verse 23, the apostle has sought to prove that man's only available righteousness is a faith righteousness not a works righteousness. That is excluded. And so, he has spoken of man's retrogression, of man's devolution, of man's downward moving from the upward place upon which God had put him in the Garden of Eden.

Instead of evolution, we have devolution. Instead of progression, we have retrogression. Instead of an upward path for man, it is a downward path. And the apostle sums it up by saying, "We have had light in the beginning as a result of the abandonment of the light of God. We have

moved to futility and, finally, to the folly of worshiping idols. They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man." The apostle does not go into detail here because the Scriptures go into detail.

Isaiah tells us in the 44th chapter of his book how that, "Those who make idols, cut down a tree and with part of the tree, they build a fire in order to warm themselves. With the other part of the tree, they build a fire in order to cook their food. And then with the other part of the tree that is left, they carve out little idols and bow down before them. The apostle calls this "feeding upon ashes".

Now we're inclined to say, "Well, we live in nineteen hundred and eighty and, consequently, we don't worship idols," but we do. The apostle says that covetousness is idolatry. Whatever is our ultimate concern is our god in a practical way. And so, we are guilty of idolatry. That's why the Apostle John says, "My little children keep yourself from idols." He's speaking about these things that can become idolatry for us. Put simply, man's problem is sin, that little three-lettered, x-rated word. This *verbum non gratum*. Man loves to trace his predicament to every other thing than the one satisfying explanation of all, the little word s-i-n.

Eight years ago, when one of our political leaders at the time was shot on Monday, May the 15th, Eric Sevareid, in CBS news that evening in his commentary attempted to analyze some of the reasons for the violence of our country. He said that some had traced it to the frontier spirit by which our country was settled. Others traced it to the permissiveness of the day. The motion picture industry was the object of some concern and the media, both radio and TV, were also accused for being responsible for some of the difficulties. He, himself, admitted that he had no solution. When John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas a number of years ago, Oswald, the supposed murderer of him, was called everything but a sinner. It's as if that little three-letter word has been banished from our conversation. It's truly a *verbum non gratum*.

The situation is similar to a man floating down Niagara River toward the Falls having ventured out a little too far, gotten out upon a rock and then having slipped. And having fallen in

and on the way down to the Falls, he seeks to analyze his difficulty. And so, he says first that it's the steep incline of the riverbed that is responsible for his difficulty. Or, he reasons, that it's the terrible power of the water. Or perhaps even his inability to swim upstream because he had never been taught to swim properly. Or that he was too far from the rocks in the water. And, finally, that no one loves him enough to throw him a line. Whereas, the real problem all along was his unbelief in his danger and, consequently, his foolhardiness by which he got out on that rock and slipped and fell into that stream.

S. Parkes Cadman, who was noted for his liberal theology, once said something rather interesting. He said that he had reached the conclusion, and he was a liberal, that our planet was being used as the lunatic asylum of the solar system [Laughter]. George Buttrick, who was a very prominent minister here in the United States, has spoken about the Bible's honesty. He has contrasted it with Marxist dialectic, which ends in a stainless steel paradise. He compared it with Hegelian optimism supposed to come to climax in the perfect Prussian state and then he compared it with the American faith in the natural goodness of man and the endlessness of material progress. What we would call the American dream, which our politicians love to speak about because some historian a hundred years ago made a great deal over that.

Now the Bible--the man on the street, incidentally, has a great deal more insight than the philosophers and our historians and our sociologists and psychologists at this point. He knows that there is something wrong with the world. The Bible's pages are bloody and the reason the Bible's pages are bloody is because men are violent. The Bible tells us very frankly and forthrightly of patriarchs who visit prostitutes because the human story has never been free of that stigma. There is no Pollyanna in Scripture and for that we may be thankful because, as Mr. Buttrick has said, "Pollyanna is a revoltingly sugary child."

And then, he has gone on to speak about the flawed nature of human nature. That really is our problem, "There is none righteous no not one." That's the reason that sermons on morals are so useless and fruitless to men who have never had a transformation of heart. It is one of the

strangest things to me that a man can claim to be following the teaching of the word of God and preach only sermons on morals. They do not get to the root of the matter. The root of the matter has to do with the change of man's heart.

Paul sets to work much more thoroughly, "All the perversions of life, he says, "can be traced back to one fundamental cause and that one fundamental cause is perversion in faith. Perversion in life arises from perversion in faith. And if we do not think right it is inevitable that we shall not do right."

Now one of the things that we learn from this passage before us is that God takes the fact that he is God very seriously. And, consequently, he being a very righteous and holy God, as well as a loving God, does not hesitate to set forth the consequences of our human sin.

Now there are three occurrences of this word *paredōken*. It means "to give up" or "to hand over" or "to give over" and in these three occurrences the apostle speaks about men, as first, given up to uncleanness in verses 24 and 25. Then in the next two verses, he speaks of men as given up to vile passions. And, finally, in the last verses of the chapter, he speaks of men as given up to a reprobate mind.

The apostle begins that 24th verse by the word "wherefore". That adverbial particle "wherefore" makes the connection with the preceding context. He has just spoken about man's rebellion. And so, from rebellion on the part of man comes the natural inference of the vindictory judgment of God.

"Be not deceived, Paul says, elsewhere, "God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap." Not what he thinks he sows. Not what he hopes that he sows but that, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." The *Leit Motif* of this passage, the very heart of it, is found in that threefold, "God gave them up. God gave them up. God gave them up."

Now what does that mean? God gave them up. It has been given several different senses. Some have said that what this means is that God has permitted man to fall into the consequences of his original apostasy and infidelity. And so, they give it a permissive sense. That is a sense that has

been popular since the time of Origen and the time of John Chrysostom. This verb, however, is a very active verb. It does not say that God suffered them to turn to uncleanness or allowed them to, but rather that God gave them over or gave them up. It is a verb that is put in the active voice stressing the activity of God.

Now in this case it is true that man's apostasy leads to this judgment. God gave them up because of the preceding apostasy set forth in the context just before this. But, it is God who maintains the connection between apostasy and the consequences by carrying out the judgment himself. It is not as if there is some other power in this universe and he permits that other power, which is not really under his total control, to take over at this point. Our God is a sovereign God and he controls all things in this universe.

Now in this case, we do not read that he suffered that. You can find that in the Bible that God suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, but even then, he maintains the connection as the cause and the effect because he is the sovereign God. In this case, to say that this means that God permitted them to fall into the natural consequences of their act is not as strong as the language demands. So we must, I think, reject this permissive sense.

It has been given a lesser sense than the permissive sense. I guess a stricter sense we would call it. It has been given a privative sense. That is, God deprived man of an aspect of common grace. That is, he withdrew his evil-restraining hand. If God did not in common grace restrain men from sin, this would be a universe in which there was total chaos. We have human government by the common grace of God. We know certain things about God because of the common grace of God. This common grace is not saving grace, but we are the recipients of a hand of God that restrains the activities of men so that his purposes may be carried out. And so, some have given it that force, that he deprived man of an aspect of common grace. He withdrew certain forces that, as a result of being withdrawn, then the consequences of apostasy more freely took over. "He positively withdrew his hand," someone has said, "He ceased to hold the boat as it was dragged by the current of the river."

Now that is the force of the word in Acts 14:16, "He suffered the Gentiles to walk in their own ways." He didn't do for them what he never ceased to do for his own people. But he was, even then, still in control of what was happening. He was the cause and he also was the effect. But, this word again is an active word, "He gave them up." It's not that he withdrew his hand, he gave them up and so, most of the commentators have come to the conclusion that we must give this word here a judicial sense. That is, that God positively gave men over to the judgment of a more intensified cultivation of the lusts with which they were afflicted and with the consequence, that there was a greater toll of divine retributive judgment. That is, he gave them over to uncleanness. He gave them over to their vile affections. He gave them over to a reprobate mind. And in that positive act of judicial judgment, men were given to the consequences of their own sin by God himself.

Now this is the activity of a sovereign God because of man's sin. It's rather striking to me that in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 19, the apostle uses this same word, but he uses it there in such a sense that the human responsibility of the act is stressed. In Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 19, the apostle writes, "Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness." This affirms what we try to say over and over again, that our God is a sovereign God and controls the affairs of this universe. There is not one thing that is not under his sovereign control.

The Scriptures say he works all things according to the counsel of his own will, but that does not excuse us of responsibility. The Bible also states that we are free, moral agents. Not that we have freewill, but we are free, moral agents responsible for our acts. And so, we have God giving men over and we have men giving themselves over. God inflicts his judgment, his judicial penalty upon men, and men are responsible for the consequences. The apostle has just said in verse 21, "Because when they knew God they glorified him not as God." They did not treat him as if he were God.

It's very popular for preachers to say, "God made man in his own image, but now man is returning the compliment. He is remaking God in his own image." That is one of the results of

failure to read the Bible. We have a God who has been remade in the image of men. But, the Bible tells us of a God who is not only a God of love, a God of tenderness, a God of care, we like to hear these things and they are important for us. But, the Bible also tells us that he is a sovereign, just, and holy God, and he inflicts judgment upon men when the word of God is disobeyed. So men are given up to uncleanness by a judicial act of God. Paul writes then,

"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. (Paul does not stop with "given up to uncleanness," but now turns to vile sexual passions, and the theme of homosexuality, as relevant a topic to our day as possibly can be found is taken up by the apostle at this point. He says in verse 26): For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did exchange the natural use for that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their desire one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves the recompense of their error which was fitting."

Isn't it striking that when Paul begins his topic of homosexuality he begins with women? Just this weekend in one of our southern cities there has been a conference going on, a conference going on lesbianism and homosexuality. I think it was the fifth of the series. Over five hundred people so, *The Dallas Times Herald* has said this morning, are meeting in Memphis at Holiday Day Inn-Rivermont, in order to convene and carry on seminars that have to do with their own particular style of living. Lesbianism is one the things specifically mentioned.

Now isn't it striking, I say, that Paul begins with women? Why is that? Well, perhaps the reason that he begins with women is because he's thinking of the Book of Genesis and he's thinking also of divine judgment. Later on, we'll say a word about that. And, if you'll remember, in the Book of Genesis, when God executes his judgment after the fall of man, he begins with the serpent, and

then he moves to the woman. And, finally, he moves climactically to the man. So there is a progression from the serpent, to the woman, to the man, and perhaps that is in his mind.

We all know that so far as we can tell, the female sex is more shamefaced naturally than the male sex. And Paul's statement here that "even their women" is designed to stress the fact that the sex, which is naturally more shamefaced about sexual evil, has become shameless, and in becoming shameless, has become like the worst of men.

Paul's language, incidentally, is the language of sex. He uses the term "male" and "female". He doesn't use woman, but female because he's looking at men and women here as sex animals. That is the stress of the language that he's used. Even animals are usually monogamous. But, in this case, we have women exchanging the natural use for that which is against nature and the men likewise doing the same.

Natural use, incidentally, those words by the apostle make plain that in the Bible, the propriety of the sex act is grounded in the natural constitution of the sexes. Homosexuality is an unnatural relationship to oneself and to one's body. And, consequently, if we may believe the words of the Apostle Paul, it is contrary to God's order. This is the teaching of the whole of the Bible. In other words, the apostle says that the relationship of heterosexuality is that which is natural. This is unnatural and one by the very constitution of the physical makeups of males and females would come to that conclusion.

William G. T. Shedd, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, describes a celebrated actor who was walking through the syphilitic ward of a hospital and after he had walked through that ward, he made the comment, "God Almighty certainly writes a legible hand." The apostle affirms that these unnatural practices are the things that one may expect to cause these disorders in the human body, and in human nature, and before God they stand under judgment.

It was said of Julius Caesar, as it has often been said of men that we have at times thought very highly of, "That he was every woman's man and every man's woman." Today films, plays, clubs, now even churches and ministers apologize for, and even glorify, the unnatural practices that the

Bible speaks about both here and elsewhere. The apostle goes on to say in the latter part of this chapter that God has given men over to a reprobate mind.

Now this section is a rather interesting section. It's one that Greek teachers always like to give to their students on exam time, because there is a collection of interesting words here. And some of them are used only here in the New Testament and it's a very good way to test a student's ability to remember his vocabulary. The apostle has, it seems, ransacked the language for descriptions of the out breaking acts of sin that flow from man's evil nature. The stress here, if we may find any stress at all, rests upon mental sins and the apostle concludes the section with one of the Bible's most damning texts, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

That reminds us of the word that James speaks in the 4th chapter in the 17th verse of his epistle when he says, "Therefore to him that knoweth to [do] good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Therefore not only are we under sin, not only are we under condemnation, but all men are under condemnation. We know naturally what it is to do right, but instead we do wrong and, consequently, we are under sin.

Now there is hardly any passage that says plainer that moral depravity is the result of God's judgment. What is the significance of the spread of immorality, crime, violence in our Western civilization? We are inclined to say, "Well, the spread of immorality, the spread of violence, the spread of crime, the spread of sexual sins, is evidence that we are in danger of judgment by the Lord God." I'd like for you to notice carefully what Paul is saying. He's not saying that we are in danger of judgment. That is not Paul's theory at all. He is saying that these things that we are talking about, the spread of immorality, the spread of sexual sin against God, the spread of violence, the spread of crime, IS the judgment of God. It is not that we are in danger of judgment, it is that these things are the judgment of God.

In other words, our original apostasy has brought it to pass that the kind of life to which we are exposed IS the judgment of God. We stand under judgment. That is why the Bible speaks of all

men as men who are perishing. We are on the way to the infliction of the ultimate punishment of eternal judgment from the Lord God. We are not in danger of judgment. We are under judgment. These things are part of our judgment. Death is at work and this physical death, which is at work in us, proven by the fact that we all die, is not the ultimate penalty. For that death becomes ultimately eternal death in the separation of men from the Lord God.

The term "Sorokin", a Harvard sociologist in his book, *The Crisis of Our Age*, warned that "increases in crime, suicides, mental breakdowns, revolutions, and war, have been symptoms of civilization in the midst of death pangs." In another article on homosexuals in *Time Magazine* an author wrote, "At their fullest flowering, the Persian, Greek, Roman, and Moslem civilizations permitted a measure of homosexuality; as they decayed, it became more prevalent." Later Sorokin in his *American Sex Revolution* pointed out that "sex anarchy leads to mental breakdowns, rather than the other way around, as the Freudian psychologists have taught." He pointed out that "increasing sexual license leads to decreasing creativity and productivity in the intellectual, artistic, and economic spheres of life."

What are the sources of the problems of the present age? Well, one of the men whose occasional articles I have profited from is a minister who lives in the East, I won't bother to mention his name. I'm not sure he's still there. But I used to read a number of his articles ten or fifteen years ago. Commenting on this, he said, "Spengler had a biological answer to the problems of the present age: civilizations grow old and die like any other living thing. Toynbee had a religious answer: civilizations fail to respond to the higher challenges of the spirit and therefore they fossilize. In his *Civilization and Ethics*, Albert Schweitzer tried to find an ethical answer. St Paul had a different answer.

The Pauline answer is plain. When man rebelled, God "gave them up" to uncleanness in the lusts of their heart. Sexual rebellion, license, anarchy, all of the other sins set forth here, and let me hasten to say this. We talk about homosexuality, but it is simply a sin too. It is a sin that is called an abomination to the Lord, but these other sins are sins as well and the apostle speaks of some that we

rather think are not so bad at all. Whisperers, gossipers, why that is a sin that has almost been canonized among evangelical Christians as being perfectly all right, but these things are all sin and our reaction to sinners, whether of homosexual stripe or of other stripe should be the same. The terms of the Scriptures should be applied to them.

But, anyway, here in this particular passage, we have sexual rebellion, license, anarchy, that IS the retributive judgment of God. So our civilization is not in danger of contracting a fatal disease. Our civilization has already contracted a malignant and fatal cancer through its unbelief in the message of God in Christ. And we are hurrying on to the climactic destruction that is to come. Death is already at work and the judgment has already been poured out upon us. It is ultimately to be the eternal punishment from the presence of the Lord God.

Now I stress that what Paul is speaking about primarily is physical judgment of death here in this passage. But the eternal judgment is hinted at and, of course, in other parts of Paul's literature, it is made very plain. I am reminded of a conversation that took place between Boswell and Dr. Samuel Johnson. The latter once appeared overfearful as to his future and Boswell said to him, "Think of the mercy of your Savior." "Sir," replied Johnson, "my Savior has said that he will place some on his right hand, and some on his left."

It is doubtful that there is a doctrine in all of the Bible that is easier to prove than of eternal punishment, and that's a fact that reminds me of a well-known story that I've referred to more than once here in Believers Chapel. A story about an incident involving Henry Ward Beecher, a famous preacher of last century in the United States and William G. T. Shedd, one of the clearest of the Reformed Theologians. They were eminent leaders in their day. *The North American Review* engaged the two men to write articles on the subject of eternal punishment, because they knew Mr. Beecher did not believe in eternal punishment and they knew that Mr. Shedd did.

Beecher had once commented, "I believe that punishment exists, both here and hereafter; but it will not continue after it ceases to do good. With a God who could give pain for pain's sake, this world would go out like a candle." So Shedd wrote his article and he sought to support the

doctrine of eternal punishment. Beecher was asked to answer Professor Shedd's article. Well, when the proof sheets of Shedd's article were sent to Beecher, he telegraphed from Denver, where he was at the time, to the magazine's editors. This is what he said, "Cancel the engagement. Shedd is too much for me. I half believe in eternal punishment now myself. Get somebody else." [Laughter] The reply was never written because Shedd remained unanswered and even to this day, remains unanswered. It's worth buying the three volumes of his theology just to read his chapter on eternal punishment. It is a magnificent contribution to questions that trouble our society today.

When did this retribution occur that Paul is talking about? He said, "God gave them over. God gave them over. God gave them over." When did he give them over? That's a reasonable question. Was it some indefinite time in the past? Are we simply to affirm from this God has given men over, but we're not to ask when? Perhaps. It is possible that he did it at Babylon, when collective rebellion rose up against God and God had to destroy the attempts of man to make a name for himself to the exclusion of the Lord God? Or did it take place in the Garden of Eden in Paul's thought? Well, I suggest to you the latter or the last is the proper solution.

Now I don't think that we can be overly dogmatic about this, but I do know that in the 5th chapter in the 12th verse, Paul says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned." And I think we are to conclude from that, that in Paul's thought, the fundamental apostasy of men took place when Adam took that fruit. Or rather, when Adam desired to take the fruit and it manifested itself in his taking of the fruit and the eating of it as the representative man. Then men fell and they fell from light. They had known God. They fell into futility and, ultimately, they have come to the folly of the history of mankind down through the centuries.

If you will look at the language of Romans chapter 1, you will find that there are many striking reminiscences in the language itself of Genesis chapter 1 and Genesis chapter 2. It was then that God gave men up. And since the fall in the Garden of Eden, mankind has been under the judgment of sin. Toynbee said that, "There have been twenty-one worldwide civilizations. Fourteen

of them have already passed into limbo, many of them forgotten. They would have been forgotten had it not been for the spade of the archeologist." He said, "There are seven at the present time still in existence and each of these is failing."

Whether he's right or wrong or not, I don't know, but at least it's strikingly agreeable with the history of mankind. We are living in days in which civilizations do seem to be decaying and falling away. And he thought that the destiny of all the others is bound up in the destiny of Western civilization. What we have today is the manifestation of the outpouring of the judicial wrath of God upon the human race. We are under the wrath of God and the ultimate wrath is to come.

That raises the question, "Can God really give man up?" We're often only given a picture of a God who is good, who is kind, who is loving, who is a shepherd figure, who is a mother-kind of figure. And so, we're inclined to think of a God who is very softhearted and sometimes softheaded as well.

Now the Bible gives a very resounding answer to the question, "Can God really give a man up?" Over and over again, the Bible says, "Yes, God may give man up." But, the final answer and the most convincing answer is the cross of Jesus Christ, where the Lord Jesus hanging upon that cross cries out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" It is there that we learn that God can and does give men up. He is a holy God. He is a righteous God. He is a just God. Any other God would not be worthy of the name God. He does give men up.

And then the question arises, "Well, if he gives men up to eternal judgment, does he really care for us?" Why, the same picture that tells us that God gives men up, also tells us that God does care. For the cross of Jesus Christ and it's, "It is finished" is the word from God that he does care, that he has, at great cost to himself, offered the atoning sacrifice. The Scriptures and the cross affirm that he does give men up and he does care in the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The very fact that the word of God has revealed to us our condition of sin, the very fact that God led the Apostle Paul to write these words that I have expounded to you this morning, that very fact is evidence that he does care and wants you to know your condition as you stand before him

today and to flee to the remedy in the cross of Jesus Christ. It is the good news that Christ has died for sinners and that you may be delivered from the impending wrath of God, "the wrath to come," as he says.

Well, Isaiah is right. Judgment is his strange and unusual work, but is right and necessary. We naturally, of course, think of the God of grace and we sing, "Great God of wonders! All Thy ways are worthy of Thyself divine. But the bright glories of Thy grace beyond Thine other wonders shine: Who is a pardoning God like Thee? Or who has grace so rich and free?"

Some messages are very pleasant to give. Some are very unpleasant. This is not a very pleasant message, but it's a very needed one. If you're here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are not racing toward judgment. You are already under judgment. You are under wrath, under condemnation. You are heading to the ultimate infliction of the consequences of your condition. You are under wrath. You are under condemnation. You are lost, according to the word of God. You need to be delivered by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the pronouncement and proclamation of the forgiveness of sins in the saving work of the Son of God, who in great love, and compassion, and also obedience, has come and offered the sacrifice for sinners.

Come to Christ. Receive the forgiveness of sins. Receive justification of life in the gospel, in the good news. There is a righteousness of God revealed that satisfies this holy God and in coming to God with Christ, one has the benefits of the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ imputed to him through faith. Come to Christ. Receive the deliverance that God freely offers through the saving work of the Son of God. Don't leave this auditorium this morning without the assurance that you have everlasting life. It's a very simple decision that one makes. It's simply, "Lord, I thank Thee for revealing to me my condition, my lost condition. It's true, I am a sinner. I am under divine wrath and condemnation according to your word. I, also, recognize that Jesus Christ has died for sinners. That's the message that is given to me as good news. God welcomes sinners. I come, Lord, as a sinner, receiving the gift of eternal life."

“God Gave Them Up, or Divine Retribution” by S. Lewis Johnson
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When that transaction takes place, God justifies the individual. You possess a righteousness that is acceptable to him. You take your place in the family of God as a son of God, as a child of God, and have the assurance of right relationship to the Lord God. Come to Christ. Don't leave this morning without that relationship settled. May God the Holy Spirit bring conviction and conversion for it can only come from him. Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these words that the Apostle Paul has spoken. We speak, Lord, in tenderness and compassion for sinners, for we are all sinners. Some of our sins, according to Scripture, may be more heinous than others, but we are all guilty. We're all lost and we pray that by Thy grace there may be response to the message of the word of God. We pray that, if there should be someone in this audience who has not yet come to Christ, may they right at this moment...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]