

## Tough Love – forsaken but not forgotten

Romans 1:24-32 *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. <sup>25</sup> They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is for ever praised. Amen <sup>26</sup> Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. <sup>27</sup> In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. <sup>28</sup> Furthermore, just as they did not think it worth while to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. <sup>29</sup> They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; <sup>31</sup> they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. <sup>32</sup> Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practise them.*

### Introduction

Tough love is tough on everyone. Good parents don't enjoy disciplining their children Paul teaches that sometimes the Church must take a strong stand when a member refuses to stop behaving in a self-destructive way or is clearly dishonouring God. If we genuinely love someone, we cannot remain passive while sin destroys the sinner and people around them are affected by their evil deeds. Whilst we are not responsible for another, we can refuse to allow destructive behaviour around us. This is the approach the Creator has taken with sinful creation.

**Question** – Is there somebody that you know or have known behaving in a self-destructive way or dishonoring way to God? How did you approach that person about their behavior? Would you do anything different now? If so How?

Humanity's rejection of God left Him no other choice but to pronounce judgment, which as Paul taught, began with ***giving over*** humankind to sin. Theologians call this **Judicial Abandonment**. God simply releases His grip and allows mankind to run headlong into sin and its consequences, allowing them to consummate their lusts. God removes His blessing and protection. He ***gives people over*** in order to accomplish a specific purpose.

A helpful example of **Judicial Abandonment** is found in the Old Testament when the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years and a result of their disobedience.

**Please Read Numbers 11:1-20.**

God said in effect ***the sin for which you lust, you will have until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you .***

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The Apostle Paul used the phrase ***gave them over*** three times:

1. **God gave them over to impurity** (v24). This Greek term translated impurity was used primarily in a religious sense to describe the quality of something or someone useless in the service of a particular god. Today we might call it ***infected*** or ***contaminated***. An instrument that is contaminated is no longer sterile and useless to a surgeon so it cannot be used. God's purpose for **turning people over** is redemptive. God allows the person to stay where they are until they decide they want to leave their impurity behind. People today serve jobs, relationships, position or bank accounts. They look to drugs, alcohol, sex, work, shopping, pornography, food and many other things rather than seek the Creator.
2. **God gave them over to degrading passions** (v26). Paul is writing this letter from a place called Corinth, a city that lay in the shadow of the Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty and sexual pleasure. The temple prostitutes enticed worshippers from throughout the Roman Empire. Aristophanes used the term ***corinthanize***, which meant to practice immorality. The prostitutes were highly valued as priestesses and honored guests at festivals. The Romans and Greeks valued integrity and yet had this bizarre double standard to turn a blind eye to adultery and openly condoned homosexuality.

In Greek culture, a high-born male was **expected** to maintain a same sex affair with a much younger partner. In other words they not only condoned pedophilia, they considered it a necessary part of education.

Paul teaches that those who pursue impurity are described as degrading or dishonoring. God created the human body with the capacity to enjoy sexual pleasure within the context of a life long covenant between man and woman. Sex as God intended honors the gift and the Giver. Unfortunately mankind has twisted this wonderful gift into something degrading.

3. **God gave them over to depraved mind** (v28). The Greek term translated ***depraved*** means ***worthless as proven by testing***. Today, depravity has been confused with meaning ***as bad as we can possibly be***. But its root meaning here means ***to be proved worthy or genuine by observation or testing***. Paul is saying here that mankind has put God to the test, judged Him and decided to reject him because they did not see fit to acknowledge Him.

In response to this God gives them over to their sinful desires and the result of the test speaks for itself. Mankind ***have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; <sup>31</sup> they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.*** The result of this mutual testing is the rejection of God by mankind. They reject Him as Creator, reject His character, reject His authority to determine right from wrong, and reject His judicial right to hold people accountable.

Consequently they have separated themselves from God and in response, God has implemented tough love - **Judicial Abandonment**.

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The Creator and creation stand on opposite sides separated by sin. The term depraved has mainly to do with mankind's position – separated from God. Having been given over to depravity, mankind's utter depravity reveals leave them without excuse. Disobedience forces God to withdraw his blessing and protection. **Judicial abandonment** is a tough-love means of redeeming someone from self-destruction of sin.

**Judicial abandonment** is not the same as rejection. God has not rejected us. It is the first step in redemption. **Please read Matthew 18:12-14.** Jesus taught His disciples about the relentless redeeming love of His Father in this parable of the lost sheep.

**Please read Matthew 18:14-17.** Jesus clearly taught how a believer may seek the restoration of a relationship. We are to mimic our Heavenly father, whose love is sometimes tough.

**First, we must bring the offense to the other persons' attention** (Matthew 18:15). It may be that the matter may have been an unfortunate misunderstanding; sometimes relationships breakdown over something that didn't actually occur. Other times a person may offend someone without even realizing it, or the offending party may be fearful to address the sin for fear of reprisals. In any case the relationship will certainly grow distant without someone taking the risk to talk about the unpleasant division.

**Second, if the person denies the truth or refuses to accept responsibility, get help** (Matthew 18:16). Frequently, broken relationships involve differing perspectives. The offended party may overstate the sin; the offending party tries to minimize it. The help of others may bring enough objectivity to the situation to resolve it.

**Third, if others are unable to help, ask the church leaders** (Matthew 18:17). This third step is only appropriate if the offending person is a believer. If private attempts to resolve the sin have failed, the authority of the leadership may be effective. Truth must ALWAYS be spoken – in love. To ignore the leaders is a serious matter.

**Finally if the person refuses to repent, we must hand them over to sin.** (Matthew 18:17). This is like God's judicial abandonment of humanity. Paul warned the church in Corinth to confront the unrepentant sin of a man who was having sexual relations with his father's wife. **Please read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.** The goal was to for repentance and restoration to follow.

Jesus did not prescribe Matthew 18 to be cruel but a means of redeeming someone from self-destruction of sin. Jesus came to redeem all mankind beginning with the immoral. While He rejected the sins of the prostitutes and tax collectors, He choose to eat with them in order to redeem them. He sought to redeem them through kindness. We too can take opportunities to help people find redemption and restoration through kindness and lead them to Jesus Christ.

**Request from Pastor Robin:** Do you see yourself accountable to others, the church leaders and to God? Why not find someone to be your accountability partner: to help you, challenge you, mentor you and encourage you in your Christian life. Do it today!