

Romans 3:1-8

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Date: 11 April 2021

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[0 : 00] We do turn to Romans chapter 3. Romans chapter 3. And we're beginning a new series this evening. We're going to look at the Beatitudes.

I thought that would encourage us and strengthen us and balance a little bit with Romans. And so we're going to start on the Beatitudes this evening. With our Bibles open before us, let's pray. Your word is a lamp into my feet. And a light into my path. Heavenly Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit, who inspired the Apostle Paul, would enlighten our minds and hearts.

Help me as I preach your word. Help me to preach it faithfully and clearly. Help your words to fall on good soil in our lives, that it might bear an abundant harvest.

For we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. No way. Certainly not. Over my dead body.

[1 : 10] You've got to be kidding me. By no means. Ten times in the book of Romans. Ten times in the book of Romans, Paul says, by no means. Certainly not.

No way. No way. Ten times Paul anticipates different questions, the kind of objections that there would come to his gospel.

And he says, may it never be. The old King James, I think, said, God forbid. You've got to be kidding me. Over my dead body. Two times in our passage.

I don't know whether you picked it up. It comes out. By no means. Verse four and verse six. So here's my big point this morning in what's a pretty tricky passage.

The big point, I think, is God is always fair and sin is always wrong. God is always fair and sin is always wrong. That's the bottom line.

[2 : 11] Very often, we flip it round, don't we? We often think that God is unfair and I am seldom wrong.

Things don't go the way you want. God hasn't responded to your prayers in the way that you would have liked. And so we're quick, often, to get angry with God.

To think he can't be trusted. He's not fair. And at the same time, we're always more charitable to ourselves, aren't we?

I don't know about you, but I know very easily how to rationalize my sin. We know how to excuse ourselves. I am a victim.

I didn't mean to hurt anyone. And so I'm quick to judge God and slow to judge myself. And this passage reminds us that God is always fair and sin is always wrong.

[3 : 18] There's four criticisms that are leveled at Paul in this passage. And I'm going to give you them because I think it's a little bit complex. I'm going to give them to you now. The first criticism is this.

They say to Paul, you are undermining the covenant. You're undermining the covenant. The second thing that you're doing, Paul, is you are tarnishing God's name.

The third thing you're doing is you're impugning God's righteousness. And the fourth thing is you're promoting evil. So number one, Paul, it seems like you're undermining the covenant.

The criticism is surprising because when you go back to chapter two, just look with me at chapter two, verse one. Paul says, Therefore you've got no excuse, O man, every one of you judges, for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

Or verse four, in chapter two he says, Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

[4 : 26] But knowing, but because of your hard and impenitent heart, you're storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Same thing's in verse 23. He says to the Jews, You who boast in the law, Hey, we've got the law, they said. We're okay. We've got the law. You dishonor God by breaking the law.

We're Israelites. We're circumcised. We've got the traditions. Paul says you dishonor God by breaking the law.

For as it is written, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. You've boasted of your righteousness.

You've boasted how you are different and yet you've broken the law and because of that you are under the wrath of God. And so the Jews respond in this way. He anticipates their response.

[5 : 34] They say, Well, okay, we had all those things, so was being a Jew pointless? Has this been a waste of time? Being God's covenant people? What is the point of it?

And so he says in verse 2, much in every way. Much in every way. Don't think that I'm undervaluing the covenant.

There's much value in being part of the people of God, in being a Jew. He doesn't say what the much is. If you go to Romans chapter 9 and verses 4 and 5, he gives us an extensive list there. He says, It belongs to them. Adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises. To them belong the patriarchs. And from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all.

There's a long list of privileges in Romans 9, but in Romans 3, there's only one. Paul mentions one advantage that the Israelites had. What would you think is the privilege above all other privileges?

[6 : 35] What is the chief advantage? What was the best thing about being a Jew? The temple? The victories? Tradition? Paul doesn't mention any of those things, does he?

What does he mention? He says, you were entrusted with the oracles of God. The biggest thing that set Israel apart from all the other nations was that God spoke with them.

God talked to Israel. He revealed himself. He gave them prophets. He gave them his law. He gave them his commands. Listen to Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 8.

What great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as this law that I set before you today? Listen to Psalm 147 verse 19.

He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and his rules to Israel. He's not dealt with any other nation. They do not know his rules. And so God spoke to them.

[7 : 45] Only Israel did God tell how to live. You know that, don't you? Each week when we read the law. How do the Ten Commandments begin? How do the Ten Commandments begin, children?

Don't let me down. How do the Ten Commandments begin? Do you remember? Anybody want to have a guess? What is it? No? Yeah. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

Out of the house of slavery. I've treated you differently from all the other nations. I've given you my law. He tells them how he wants to be worshipped.

Tells them how to live. I think we rarely stop to think of the profound privilege that you have and I have to hear from God in the scriptures.

That you can hear from God any time you like. That right here, right now, God speaks to you through his word. The law of the Lord ought to be our delight.

[8 : 52] There is a really dangerous and a really maddening view out there in the wider church that words get in the way of relationship with God. Have you heard that?

I heard that really recently. The thing is about God is God wants a relationship with you. I don't want all those rules. I don't want the laws. I don't want a relationship with a book, they say.

I just want to be able to come to God, me and God. But of course, all the way throughout the Bible, God's words are treated as an extension of himself.

And that is why if you obey God's word, you obey him. And that is why if you delight in God's words, you are delighting in God. You cannot, you must not separate God from his words.

The reality of our relationship to God is determined by our relationship to his words. There's an intimate relationship between Christ and his words.

[10 : 00] And so as we gather Sunday by Sunday, Jesus Christ is present among us where his word is. And so top of the list, Israel, you've been given the oracles of God.

God has been more than fair with you. Even if they couldn't see it. It's often the case, isn't it? That those who grew up in church, those who've had the biggest privileges and the biggest advantages can become the most bitter towards God.

I was sent a message on social media this week by an old friend of mine who I used to go to church with.

He's walked away from the gospel and he was recommending a site. And he said to me, recommending, I won't tell you the site, my little evangelical fascist.

[11:05] With a smiley emoji. He'd grown up hearing the word of God. He'd had great privileges, great advantages, and yet he has become the most bitter towards God.

You know that story. God is unfair. The most critical, the most ready to shake their fist at God. And after all the privileges, that was exactly what Israel were doing.

They were like a spoiled child that couldn't see all that they'd been given. Like the child on Boxing Day, complaining to his parents.

Like the small child, the day after his birthday, who's been given so much, and yet angry at his presence that he's not come downstairs to a table full of presents. Here's the second criticism.

The second criticism is they're tarnishing God's name. Look at verses 3 and 4. Paul circles back to his point in chapter 2 and verse 5. He says in chapter 2 and verse 5, because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

[12:20] And so here's their thinking. Their thinking is judgment. How can that be? What are you talking about? We have the covenant. We've been circumcised.

We have the promises of God. We've been chosen. How can we be on the wrong side of God's wrath? Just because I'm bad, God is still love, right? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?

In other words, because we were not true to the covenant, we did not keep the law, we did not obey God, let me get this straight. Is God not going to be true to his side of the deal? Is God going to break his covenant and punish us?

Do you see what you're saying, Paul? If I screw up, you're saying God will as well. You'll make God unfaithful. I will make God a liar untrue to his promises.

We'll look at verse 4 by no means, not in a million years, even if everyone in the whole world was a liar. God would still be true. He's saying to the people of Israel, God is not to blame here.

[13:32] God has been true in the sense that he says things that are true. God has actually been faithful to his promises. Okay, how can that be?

Hadn't God promised that he would love them? That he would make and keep covenant with them? That he would be God to them? But now you're saying he's going to judge them?

And they've forgotten something really fundamental about the covenant of God. Namely, that God promised to bless them if they believed his promises, if they lived in obedience, but God also promised to curse them if they walked away from him.

The covenant includes blessing, and cursing. And so in punishing God's people, Israel, God is not forgetting his covenant and the promises, he's fulfilling them.

They were saying, God, you'll be faithful to your word, won't you? And God said to them, you've forgotten, I am actually being faithful to my word. Your unrighteousness is proving my righteousness.

[14:46] It's like in Amos, when you read the book of Amos, do you remember we did it in house groups, didn't we? And they kept saying the day of the Lord, the day of the Lord.

When God will come, the day of the Lord, and we'll be alright then. And Amos says, yes, there will be a day of the Lord, but it will be a day of darkness and a day of judgment for you. They thought, didn't they, the day of the Lord is going to be great, he'll judge the wicked and Amos says, absolutely, you're right, he will judge the wicked.

You are the wicked ones. Now, I believe, I believe that those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, that are indwelt by God's Holy Spirit, God will keep until the final day.

He will keep those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus. I believe in the preservation of the saints.

But there are lots of people who sit in churches like ours who have a false assurance of salvation. They think that because they came to church, they think that because maybe in the past they were baptized, they might think, I had an experience 20 years ago, and they think God owes me something.

[16:08] they think my parents are Christians, so I'm going to be alright. And they think they've got God right there in their back pocket. Great is thy faithfulness, God is God like me.

And when Jesus comes down from heaven, there will be some people who are really surprised. Jesus, glad to see you, Jesus will say you shouldn't be.

Because Jesus will come, won't he, to judge the living and the dead. God is not God. I'm not trying to unsettle you this morning. Each of us stumble.

I stumble. The Christian life is a life of struggle. But a life that is lived in blatant, habitual, consistent, disregard for God and his word and the Holy Spirit is not a life of faith.

And that life should expect God's judgment and God is faithful to his covenant and he will judge those with hard and impenitent hearts.

[17 : 18] And so Paul quotes, doesn't he, from that really famous psalm, Psalm 51, where David says, against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

This is a psalm. David has committed adultery. He's committed murder. And he's hidden it. And Nathan comes and rebukes him, the prophet, the preacher, and says, you are the man, David. And David is exposed and laid bare. And Nathan tells David, David, there is bad things coming your way. The Lord will raise up trouble for your own house.

Your wife is going to be taken away. Your family will never be the same again. Your child that Bathsheba will give birth to from that kind of illegitimate union will die.

And in response to that, David says, against you and you only have I sinned, God, and I've done what is evil in your sight so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

[18 : 24] In other words, David says to God when he repents, he says, God, you're in the right and you're right to judge me and right to discipline me. You're not at fault, God.

You're not to blame God. I've broken faith with you, but you now be faithful to your character and your promises.

You are justified when you judge. That's why David was a man after God's own heart. David wasn't a man after God's own heart because he got everything right, but because he got things so wrong but he quickly said, Lord, I've sinned.

It's my fault. You are right. You are Lord. Nehemiah 9, again. Do you remember this?

We saw it a few months ago. Thou therefore are God, the great, the mighty, the awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love. Let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, upon our princes, upon our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people since the time of the kings of Assyria to this day.

[19 : 32] He's saying that, Lord, we're wiped out. Lord, would you look at us, your people? We're in big trouble. It's not a little thing. Don't make it a little thing in your book, Lord.

It's a big deal, but here's the next verse. Yet you've been righteous in all that has come upon us and you've dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. Lord, you've been faithful to discipline us. Sounds just like my children. Mum and Dad, you said not to wind up my sister and I've done that. And I've been faithless.

And I want you to be true to your character, Dad, and I expect you now to discipline me and you are justified in your words. I've never heard it.

I've never said it. But that is how we should feel about God. We want God to be faithful to judge disobedience.

[20 : 41] We have a hard time, don't we, with the doctrine of hell. Our generation is happy to believe it in Reformed churches but not very happy to hear it preached.

We should never want someone to go to hell. Of course not. We shouldn't be gleeful about it. But I do think we need to understand this, that if we grasp God's righteousness, even the doctrine of hell and the doctrine of God's wrath and his anger, there will be, can I say this, a certain sweetness about that.

Because we will not see God's wrath as opposed to his faithfulness. They're not separate. We'll see God's judgment as the fulfillment of his integrity and as much as it will pain us to know the prospect of those that we love suffering God's wrath.

We will say, great is thy faithfulness and I so love your glory, Lord, and your justice that your wrath is justified.

It's justified in my heart and in this world. And so what Romans 3 does to us, and it's not easy, is it shakes us out of a self-pity and a self-referential way of looking at the world and it gives us a picture of God whose glory is massive and whose justice is massive and whose salvation is massive.

[22 : 22] That even our sin proves the righteousness of God. Now the third criticism which all follows from the second one is they say you're impugning God's righteousness, Paul.

You're impugning God's righteousness. I'll explain that as we go on. Look at verses 5 and 6. Here's the logic. They think, okay, Paul, if our faithlessness proves the faithfulness of God, then when I sin, I'm doing God a favor.

because even when I sin, God gets glory. He upholds his righteousness. Wow, I'm really helping God out.

How can God judge me when I'm just doing something in the end that will give him glory? And Paul says, doesn't he, verse 6, by no means, no way, over my dead body.

for then how could God judge the world? It's interesting to follow the Bible's logic.

[23 : 28] Paul assumes something here and he assumes something that they all assumed that we actually have a harder time assuming today. Paul is arguing that everybody agreed that God will judge the world.

Everyone agrees that. It's often hard for us to think of God as a judge and his wrath. Paul is saying, we all know this, everyone understands this, that God will judge the world.

After all, what kind of God doesn't judge disobedience? What kind of God doesn't care if people dishonor him? That's no kind of God at all.

So Paul argues from that starting point. God can judge Israel even when Israel sins serves to show his faithfulness because if God did not judge Israel, God would not judge the world.

And everyone knows God will judge the world. Paul takes it as read that the world will be judged and so therefore Israel is part of the world, they will be judged too. Even if Israel sinning leads to judgment which leads to the righteousness of God being shown, we have to be careful don't we?

[24 : 48] We have to be really careful when we're reading through the Bible that we don't come to our theological conclusions, we don't come to a conclusion based on human logic that runs counter to the Bible's logic.

I'm not saying that the Bible's illogical, I'm not saying 2 plus 2 equals 5 and all that sort of stuff, but I am saying that sometimes with our own human logic we can end up in a place which is very different from what the logic of the Bible is talking about.

So, let me show you, we go to Romans chapter 6 and we see that God is glorified, God gains glory through our sin because he forgives us.

Romans 3, God is glorified by judging us. Well, the human logic therefore is let's go on sinning.

Here's the inference, God gets glory when we sin and God likes to get glory so let's sin.

Paul says that is wrong. an inference from the Bible cannot trump the plain meaning of the Bible.

[26 : 03] The plain teaching of the Bible. And the plain teaching of the Bible is this, God hates sin. That is basic. Human logic and Bible logic don't let a human inference deny what the Bible really clearly teaches.

So if God chooses people and God hardens hearts and God melts hearts well it's not my fault is it? God is to blame. That's a human inference isn't it? That's not the Bible's logic. I'm justified by faith and not by works so I can go and live and do whatever I want.

that's not the Bible's logic. God gets glory by judging my sin but that does not mean that we should go on sinning because God hates sin.

And Paul says no I'm not impugning God's righteousness. The fourth criticism is this Paul you're promoting evil it's a kind of follow on from that last point. let's do evil that good may come.

[27 : 20] That's what they're charging Paul with. Let's sin. Even good things come from our sin. God will be get glory God will be righteous let's sin and make God look wonderful.

And Paul was accused of teaching this doctrine. maybe his opponents said that we don't know. But more likely what they did is they put that inference into Paul's mouth.

They put words into Paul's mouth that he'd never said. It's easy to do that isn't it? It's easy to put the implications of someone's view into their mouths.

Now sometimes we need to say that we need to drive people to their conclusions not we say well if you're saying this then you seem to be saying this how does that work? But you can't automatically say Paul is saying when you sin you get glory so let's just do evil.

That's not fair. It's a bit like isn't it and people might say well people in that church they don't think God is sovereign and they don't believe in evangelism. I don't think we can say that.

[28 : 45] Or we say this that church doesn't have any women elders. They don't like women there. They're sexist throwbacks. Sometimes we tell stories that way isn't it?

In church life somebody doesn't invite you to something. Or they don't invite you to a party or dinner. And you say of that person they don't care about me.

They aren't interested in me. And then no one cares about me in that church. Well really did they say that? They say well they didn't invite me and so that is what they mean.

No it's not. It's practically slander to say that. Talk to them about it. Don't put inferences into other people's lives and mouths. And Paul is charged here with let's do evil that good may come.

The end justifies the means. So go ahead do what you want. Lots of good came from the cross. Let's start crucifying people.

[29 : 50] God sure did a lot of good with Joseph. Let's start selling people. If I watch rubbish on TV and on the internet I've got something to talk about with my colleagues.

The end doesn't justify the means. Do you see that? And just because God uses our evil for good doesn't mean that God wills us to do evil and say well that's what God will want us to do.

It's warped isn't it? To argue that way. And so in verse 8 at the end of verse 8 it's it's a very English translation at the end of verse 8.

He says the end of verse 8 to hell with you. Their condemnation is just. He's not saying it as a joke. He's saying to people if you miss something as basic as the fact that God wants us to do right and not evil.

[31 : 02] If you can't see that in the Bible you haven't got a clue. You don't have a clue and your condemnation is just. If you think that's what I'm saying well forget it you don't get it.

God is always fair. sin is plain wrong. And so the whole paragraph that I have struggled with all week comes down to one question and it's this.

Are you the judge of God or is God the judge of you? God the judge of you?

And pride is measuring God by our desires. By the blessings we think we deserve. And by relying on our wisdom so we put God in the witness stand and we say I'll put on the black robe and the wig and I'll stand in judgment on God.

I don't like the way you said that God. I don't like what you did there God. I didn't appreciate that very much. Guilty. That's pride. And that's the essence of rebellion.

[32 : 13] Way back in the Garden of Eden. God says don't eat of that tree. And we say who is God? you don't know what's good for me God.

I know what's good for me. Humility on the other hand is it means trusting God with your desires. It means seeing that any blessing that you receive is more than you deserve.

And humility is relying on God's wisdom and not your own. Tim Callis says this got a really interesting quote. He says that God always gives us what we would have asked for if we knew everything that he knows.

It's a brilliant quote. Write that down if you're taking notes. God always gives us what we would have asked for if we knew everything that he knows. And so we think God's not answering my prayers.

How come God is not giving me the desire of my heart? God always gives what you would have asked if you knew what God knows. Because God sees the end from the beginning doesn't he?

[33 : 29] And if you could see what the suffering that you're going through will do in your life and if you could see how that will all fit together in God's purposes that's what I need isn't it?

That's humility. To realise that God's ultimate concern is for his glory. to be true to his own character is a greater concern than what I want.

That's a very different view from what people have and yet it is the view of the Bible. He loves us and he loves us because he loves his own glory.

And his righteousness is beautifully displayed when he saves and when he judges because in both acts he is completely just and completely right.

Genesis 18 that question that should haunt you and I shall not the judge of the earth do what is right? Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is right?

[34 : 33] He always does what is right. Because God is always fair and sin is always wrong. And you and I are not the judge of God. but he will in the end judge you and I and either to bring condemnation for our faithlessness or to bring salvation for all who trust in Christ to be their covenant keeping Lord.

Let's pray together.