

***“GOD’S JUDGMENTS AND GOD’S FAITHFULNESS” PT. 1***  
***ROMANS 3:1-8***

Life is filled with perplexing questions —

- ✓ What color is a chameleon on a mirror?
- ✓ Where does weight go when you lose it?
- ✓ Why are Chinese fortune cookies written in English?
- ✓ Why is abbreviated such a long word?
- ✓ Is there another word for synonym?
- ✓ Why is there only one Monopolies Commission?
- ✓ How do you write “zero” in Roman numerals?
- ✓ How much deeper would the ocean be without sponges?
- ✓ Would a fly without wings be called a walk?
- ✓ Why do we drive on *parkways* and park on *driveways*?
- ✓ Why don’t sheep shrink when it rains?
- ✓ What was the best thing before sliced bread?
- ✓ Where do forest rangers go to “get away from it all?”
- ✓ How is it possible to have a civil war?
- ✓ Whose cruel idea was it for the word “lisp” to have an “s” in it?
- ✓ Why is there an expiration date on sour cream?

More seriously, John Patrick says every person needs to answer these nine questions —

- ✓ Where did I come from?
- ✓ Why am I here?
- ✓ Where am I going?
- ✓ How do I come to terms with death?
- ✓ How do I make sense of suffering?
- ✓ How can I possibly believe in justice?
- ✓ What can I know?
- ✓ What should I believe?
- ✓ What must I do?

We have questions about many things, including how God operates in this world. And one of the primary questions about God’s activities is whether He is always fair in all He does. And that idea dominates the opening verses of Romans 3. In chapter two, Paul made clear that unbelieving Jews *will* be judged, despite their being part of the Abrahamic Covenant. Following his clear declaration against the faithless Jews in 2:25, Paul answers in chapter 3 a series of four potential objections that might be made against his comments against the sinning and unrepentant Jews.

Paul's theme in these opening verses is that —

*GOD IS FAITHFUL AND TRUE WHEN HE JUDGES SINNERS — EVEN JEWISH SINNERS.*

In this passage, Paul answers four questions that might be made against his teaching on the nature of sin and God's judgment of Jewish sinners (he's continuing the diatribe against the hypothetical, typical Jew who might be objecting to his understanding of the nature of sin).

**Q1: If God Judges Jews, Is There an Advantage to Being a Jew? (vv. 1-2)**

- ✓ The problem: It doesn't seem advantageous to be Jewish if God condemns Jews (v. 1)
- ✓ The solution: God has given Jews many benefits, beginning with Scripture (v. 2)

**Q2: If God Judges Jews, is God Unfaithful to His Promises? (vv. 3-4)**

- ✓ The problem: If Jews do not believe, then it seems that that God hasn't kept His promises (v. 3)
- ✓ The solution: God is always true to Himself and will be vindicated for His actions (v. 4)

**Q1: If God Judges Jews, Is There an Advantage to Being a Jew? (vv. 1-2)**

• The problem: It doesn't seem advantageous to be Jewish if God condemns Jews (v. 1)

- ✓ Paul's two questions in this verse are really one question — is there any benefit to being a Jew?
- ✓ By way of reminder, in chapter one, Paul addressed the wrath of God against unrighteous pagans who rejected Christ and God (1:18, 24, 26,28). Every Jewish reader would have been in hearty agreement with Paul's conclusion about the eternal fate of those pagans.
- ✓ But Paul is addressing in chs. 1-3 the sin of all men (and the eternal fate of all sinners). And God is not just against pagans who reject Him; God is also against "good, religious people" who reject Him. And that's the theme of chapter 2; Paul identifies Jews who claim that because of their connection to the Abrahamic Covenant, their sin does not matter — God will not (and cannot) judge them. They are wrong, Paul asserts (2:4-5, 23). And perhaps the most condemning sentence is given in 2:25 — if they sin by breaking the Law they are no better than the pagans of chapter one.
- ✓ And if that's true (and it is), then the objection/question can be raised, "then what is the advantage of the Jew?"
  - Paul uses two words to identify the Jews' advantage —
    - ... **Advantage** refers something extraordinary and remarkable; it is not only profitable, but it is uniquely profitable; it stands out. And the Israelites were made to stand out among all the nations. They did have a unique position; but if they are condemned, the critic could say, "Where is our advantage now?"
    - ... **Benefit** has the idea of value and usefulness. So the critic might say, "What's the use of being circumcised if God will still condemn Jews to Hell?" There is a despairing tone to this question.
  - Paul also uses two words to identify the Jew —
    - ... the word **Jew** refers to their heritage. It is noteworthy that the word **Jew** is derived from "Judah." And "Judah" means, "praise" (e.g., Gen. 29:35; 49:8). So to be a Jew is to want the right kind of praise — the kind that originates in God. The Jews' heritage was that they praised God and they were in fellowship with God.
    - ... the word **circumcision** refers to their identity as covenant people with Abraham. But as we noted when discussing 2:25, circumcision does not save, and it is only valuable if it leads the circumcised man to obey the Law, and by obeying demonstrate that his heart is also circumcised (Lev. 26:41; Dt. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Ezk. 44:9; Rom. 2:28-29).
- ✓ Combine all these thoughts and you capture a sense of what potentially was on the minds of the readers in Rome. Where is the advantage and benefit of being Jewish now?
- ✓ We might have similar thoughts:
  - If "religion" and "baptism" and "church membership" don't save, what's the use of being good?
  - If God counts every sin, then we are all hopeless, why bother with all this work?

• The solution: God has given Jews many benefits, beginning with Scripture (v. 2)

- ✓ What you will notice as you read the question(s) in verse one is that you expect Paul to say, “None. There is *no* benefit to being a Jew.” But he says just the opposite.
- ✓ In fact, he says the value and benefit is ***great in every respect***. The Jew doesn’t have just one or two benefits, but in virtually every way he can conceive it, Paul sees advantages for them. This phrase seems to anticipate what Paul will say in 9:4-5 —
  - They are ***adopted as God’s sons*** (Ex. 4:22)
  - They have the ***glory*** of God (Ex. 40:34-35)
  - They have the ***covenants*** (Gen. 12:1-3; 2 Sam. 7:16; Jer. 31:31ff)
  - They have the ***giving of the Law*** (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy)
  - They have the ***temple service*** (Heb. 9:1, 6) — that service would point to Christ
  - They have the ***promises*** (Dt. 30)
  - They have the ***fathers*** (Lk. 1:54-55)
  - They have ***the Christ...*** (Dt. 18:15, 18; Mt. 16:16; Mt. 22:42; Jn. 4:29; 7:26)
- ✓ As Paul thinks about the benefits of the Jew in chapter three, he evidently is anticipating a list something like that because he says ***in every respect***. That suggests that he’s going to give a list. And then he says, ***first of all***. That again suggests a list (though it could also mean “primarily,” or “chiefly,” which may well be Paul’s intent). There is one thing above all else that is a benefit to the Jews, as Paul thinks about them.
- ✓ The advantage of the Jews is that ***they were entrusted with the oracles of God***.
  - They have been given a gift and position as a stewardship (the basic meaning of ***entrust***).
  - What they have received is the ***oracles of God***. That’s a unique term; it likely refers to the entire OT — they have all the benefits that can be found in the Scriptures — all the commands (which were a protection), all the promises, and all the revelation of God that can be known on earth.
  - The word ***oracle*** for the Gentile might also make him think about mysteries that have been spoken in the past and are puzzling and have been hidden. The Jews were entrusted with the responsibility of preserving those truths until the key that would unlock all the truths would come and be revealed (e.g., 11:25-27; 16:25-26).
- ✓ What is the benefit of being a Jew? They have the Scriptures available to them. They have the revelation of God and insight into knowing Him —

They, and they only, amongst all mankind,  
Received the transcript of His Eternal Mind;  
Were entrusted with His own engraven laws,  
And constituted guardians of His cause;  
Theirs were the prophets, theirs the priestly call,  
And theirs, by birth, the Saviour of us all. [William Cowper]

- ✓ Of all the advantages that Paul might have identified, he pointed to the Scriptures. And the great benefit of the Scriptures is that by the Scriptures salvation is given (**2 Tim. 3:15**). The Jews were the first to have the truth and provision of salvation revealed to them — a great advantage indeed! And it is by the Scriptures that men receive all they need to be complete and mature (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 5:12; cf. also 1 Pt. 4:11).
- ✓ Now the stewardship of the oracles of God was given to the Jews, but we also have received of that benefit, having been saved by Christ and given the gift of the Book. Do we see that as an advantage?
  - Consider all your benefits of being in Christ (there are many!); do you consider the gift of the revelation of God in His Word a primary, chief, and “first” gift? (Does the time you spend in that Word demonstrate that you believe it to be primary?)
  - Is that work doing its work in your life? The Jews were **entrusted** with the oracles not only to protect them, but to *obey* them. Are we being faithful to do what this book says?

## Q2: If God Judges Jews, is God Unfaithful to His Promises? (vv. 3-4)

### • The problem: If Jews do not believe, then it seems that that God hasn't kept His promises (v. 3)

- ✓ Paul asks about the **unbelief** of some of the Jews:
  - The word “unbelief” is from the root word *pistis*, which is usually translated, belief, trust or faith. There is some difficulty in understanding this word — does Paul mean “unbelief,” as in a rejection of God and Christ, or does he mean “unfaithful” to the Law but not rebellious? Either are possible; the meaning is difficult because a form of the word is used 4x in vv. 2b-3.
  - It is best to take this word as “unbelief” because it is the way Paul uses the word the other times he uses it in Romans (4:20; 11:20, 23) and because a “believing faithlessness” is nowhere in view in these chapters; Paul is writing about rebellion, disobedience, and rejection.
  - Now Paul's point has been that the unbelief has been their disobedience to the Law
  - Stott has a helpful translation: “If some to whom God's promises were entrusted (*episteuthēsan*, 2) did not respond to them in trust (*ēpistēsan*, 3a), will their lack of trust (*apistia*) destroy God's trustworthiness (*pistis*, 3b).”
  - But also says, **if some** did not believe — that is, some didn't believe, but some did believe. In other words, he is not talking about every single Jew, but about individuals within Judaism who did not believe. Certainly some did (as the disciples and Paul and others did).
- ✓ The question Paul raises about that unbelief is, “if they don't believe, that **will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?**”
  - Paul is talking here about God's faithfulness to His promises to Israel as His covenant people.
  - To nullify God's faithfulness would be to render it ineffective and inefficient. It wouldn't work.
  - So Paul's argument is something like, “If some don't believe, does that mean that God who promised to redeem Israel for Himself is incapable of keeping that promise?”

- It's asking whether God is a promise breaker.
- And notice that unlike the question in v. 1, this question anticipates a negative answer: "No!"
- So just how is it that God can condemn Israelites and still be faithful to Himself and His promises?

• The solution: God is always true to Himself and will be vindicated for His actions (v. 4)

- ✓ The idea that God could be unfaithful to His promises is abhorrent to Paul, so he declares, "May it never be!" Paul is passionate about this truth (and he will use this same phrase 10x in Romans).
- ✓ ***Rather, let God be found true*** is an imperative that means something like, "Let God be true." God is true and we must understand Him in that way; there is nothing false, incorrect, or unrighteous within Him. He is true; everything He does is in accordance with truth; and everything He reveals is true. He can only be true. It is impossible for Him to be false.
- ✓ Paul also denotes the significance of God's truthfulness when he says, ***though every man be found a liar***; in other words, even if all men lie with their lives by rebelling against God's Word and God condemns them all to Hell, that does not mean He is unfaithful to Himself or untrue. Even if all men are consigned to Hell because all men are rebellious against God, He is still true and faithful (Neh. 9:32-33).
- ✓ And to make his point, Paul then quotes from David in Psalm 51:4 (David's confession of his sin with Bathsheba) — ***That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged***.
  - In Ps. 51, David is asserting that God is just in either extending grace (v. 1) or condemning sin (v. 4). In fact, God is just in condemning sinners (and note that this is King *David* of Davidic Covenant, 2 Sam. 7:16) because all sin is fundamentally against Him (51:4a).
  - David does not argue any special relationship with God to keep from experiencing God's wrath but he accepted the potential of God's wrath as being just. When God speaks words of wrath and condemnation against sinners, He is a just God. He is right in doing so.
  - God is just in condemning Jews because His promise with Abraham was not to every single individual Jew, but to the nation, a promise that will yet be kept (11:22-24)
  - And that is Paul's very point in Rom. 3:4 — God is always just in condemning sin, even when it is the sin of His covenant people (Israel, or even David). When God condemns the Jews for their sin, even though they are His covenant people, God is not unfaithful to Himself. In fact, when God condemns sin, He is completely faithful to Himself. God, in His wrath, is fully righteous.

When God calls us to account for our lives, he will be perfectly justified in sending us to hell forever. If we do not realize that, then we have never really dealt with our sin, nor do we really know who God is, or his holiness. If we were to die tonight and wake up in hell tomorrow morning, we would be most unhappy, but we would know that the fact that we are there is just. That is what Paul is saying here. [Sproul, *Romans*]

- ✓ And then Paul adds, ***And prevail when You are judged***. That is, if there were ever a trial to examine what God had done in relation to the Jews, He would be victorious and be proven to have been right in everything He had done.
- ✓ In the end, those who reject God are shown to be wrong, and God is shown to be right in everything.

**CONCLUSION:** Several commentators I read this week said that 3:1-8 might be the most difficult section in Romans to interpret. I was glad to read that, because I was finding it difficult!

Part of it is hard because it is about God's wrath. It's hard to read about God's judgment. It is harsh. And yet the more I studied this passage this week, another theme arose for me — the greatness of God's nature.

This passage isn't as much about the sin of the rebellious Jews as it is about the nature of God.

- ✓ In verse 1 we have the covenants of God implies in His relationship with the nation of Israel — He is a God who initiates promises and makes covenants that are dependent on Him to keep (Abraham could not keep them, nor could any other man).
- ✓ In verse 2 we have the **oracles of God** — the spoken and written Word of God by which He reveals Himself to mankind. He is not required to reveal Himself and yet in grace He does, and He does so supremely in the person of Christ (Jn. 1:1-4).
- ✓ In verse 3 we have the faithfulness of God. He is faithful to Himself (2 Tim. 2:12-13).
  - His faithfulness even extends to His willingness to condemn individual sinners who are recipients of His covenant with Abraham. And that is a good place to say that if you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, you have no special privileges to call on to save yourself. If King David thought he was worthy of condemnation, then you and I certainly have no hope. If you are not a follower of Christ, I compel you to confess your sin to Him, ask Him for His mercy (Ps. 51:1), ask Him to change your heart and mind so that you can begin obeying Him, and learn to find your joy in Him. That's what it means to believe in Him, and all men *must* believe in Him.
  - And of course another component of His faithfulness is that if you belong to Him and are His son, He will also be faithful to keep you to the end (e.g., Jn. 10:27-29).
- ✓ And in verse 4 we have the truth of God. Everyone else may lie by their words and life, but God cannot and will not. He will always be true and right.

Friends, this passage is a great passage of the magnificence of God and Christ and a revelation of His character. This passage is about the greatness of the God we serve, His stability and immutability, and His trustworthiness. You can depend on Him.

- ✓ You can depend on Him to condemn all sin in all sinners.
- ✓ And you can depend on Him to save to the end all those who trust in Christ.

**BENEDICTION:** Rom. 16:25-27