

Sermons through

Romans

Is God Unjust

Romans 3:5-8

With Study Questions

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But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? *Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.)* ⁶ Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? ⁷ For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? ⁸ And *why not say, “Let us do evil that good may come”?*—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just (Romans 3:5-8).

Review

Let us review the situation. God had made a promise to a community of people (Israel) and instituted a sign of that promise (circumcision) which was to be administered to those people (Genesis 17:10). Paul is now writes that that sign doesn't count for anything **“but only faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6)**. Those people perhaps responded to Paul by questioning the faithfulness of God.

They wanted to know if there was any advantage at all of being part of that community—the people of God's promise. Paul assured them that there was—to them were committed the **“oracles of God” (Romans 3:2)** that is, the declarations of God—the historical manifestations of God's word **“the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises” (Romans 9:4)**.

But these oracles would only be a testimony against them apart from faith in the One to whom all these oracles point, who is Christ (Romans 10:4). If an individual is among a community of people who are told the truth, that individual is all the more accountable before God if they refuse to embrace it.

But instead of believing/repenting, it would appear that these people were seeking to accuse God. We must understand the logic (limited and perverted as it is) of their reasoning. They understood themselves to be God's family—it would be like a father whose children bear his very name telling his children that they are not his after all! In human terms (Paul does, after all, use

the phrase **“I speak as a man.”**) this would be an indictment against any father.

But in an effort to illustrate the ties that bind the family of God, Jesus does not so much redefine but clarifies. When told that His mother and brothers were seeking to speak with Him, Jesus replies:

“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”

⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:48-50).

In a strict sense, in a real regenerative sense, one is not born into the family of God but reborn into the family of God (John 3:7). And the status of inclusion among the true family of God should give our hearts pause:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1).

As joyous and remarkable as it is to enjoy the birth of a baby, it pales in comparison to the rebirth of a lost soul.

Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10).

But instead of repenting, receiving Christ, believing in His name and being given the right or authority to be called a child of God (John 1:12), they refuse to let go of their sense of entitlement and finagle yet another way to excuse their own behavior.

We discussed last time how Paul quotes Psalm 51 in an effort to explain how David’s sin was not an indictment against God but against David. David knew that his behavior had given occasion for **“the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme” (2 Samuel 12:14)**—that it was an embarrassment. But David also acknowledged that the problem was with him, not God.

In fact it would be God's just judgment of him that would extol God—so God took opportunity to declare His righteousness by exposing the unrighteousness of David. The acknowledgement that a person has done something wrong means that we know that something is right. And if this is true in any authoritative sense, there must be a source of what is right. And how can that source be anything or anyone but God?

Still, rather than merely embracing what they knew to be true—for God has revealed Himself to and in the heart of every man (Romans 1:18, 19) they continue in their theological chicanery.

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? *Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.)* ⁶ Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? ⁷ For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? ⁸ And *why* not say, “Let us do evil that good may come”?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just (Romans 3:5-8).

Truth Increased Through a Lie

The twisted reasoning goes like this:

- Even though we are faithless sinners, clearly we are God's people—that is our non-negotiable presupposition.
- We have now learned that God is glorified via our sinfulness. That explains a lot.
- Since it is the chief end of man and God that God be glorified, God would be unjust to inflict wrath upon us. We're doing just what He wants when we sin.
- Since God's truth is increased (made more manifest) through my lying life, how can I be blamed?
- As a matter of fact, I should do more evil so God will look even better!

Paul gives two rather brief responses to this brand of theology which seeks to justify sin and faithlessness. One is the rhetorical question: 'In light of this perverted reasoning (that it is good to sin) **"How will God judge the world?"** Paul's presupposition is a little different than theirs. He assumes God will judge sinners. His other response brings the crosshairs of God's judgment into focus. The people who are teaching this —**"their condemnation is just."**

Not to jump too far ahead, but broadly speaking it must be noted that God will not be mocked.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life (Galatians 6:7, 8).

Men will manufacture creative theologies that mitigate, ignore or justify their sin and faithlessness. They may fool other men, but God will not be fooled.

Sin will be judged—sinners will be judged. Inclusion in a covenant community is of no salvific value apart from faith in the God of that covenant.

God is Glorified

One final point that I think bears a little examination. What everyone seemed to accurately understand here (though drawing wrong conclusions) is that God is glorified even through the sin of man. We just had an election. Some people were happy with the results, others were sad, others cried themselves to sleep.

What I'm about to point out here should in no way be construed as to encourage apathy or lethargy on the part of those who zealously contend for their political convictions. Faithful Christians have a responsibility to bring God's word to bear in every venue of life. But when Joseph was sold into slavery or Daniel's entire nation found themselves in captivity, they continued to recognize that their God was the reigning King

(Daniel 4:35). And we shouldn't understand this as if that King is on vacation.¹

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable (Isaiah 40:28).

Some might be holding their breath for four years, in hopes that God will do something good in the next election—and in a certain sense that is understandable. I don't mean to be overly political here—this can apply to any evil, trial or difficulty we may be facing—we just want it over so that we can begin to glorify God and enjoy Him again. But like the Israelite that Paul was addressing, we have too small a view of God.

The glory of God and His love for His children is not held at bay by evil or calamity. It is God's calamity.

I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things (Isaiah 45:7).

What I'm suggesting is not merely using men's sin to glorify Himself the way people seek to make the best of a bad situation. No, though not the author of sin, God has ordained even the sinful choices of wicked men for His own glory. And He does this while holding men, as moral agents, culpable. It is basically stated in the Psalms:

Surely the wrath of man shall praise you (Psalm 76:10).

It is specifically stated to the wicked Pharaoh (which Paul will later reference—Romans 9:17),

¹ Some parables may present God as if He is in a far away country, but that is more to address His return in special judgments, e.g. "The Day of the Lord." In a providential sense, every day is the day of the Lord.

But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth (Exodus 9:16).

And to the ungodly kingdom of Assyria who God used as an instrument of His own indignation, even though they had no intention of serving God,

Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hand is My indignation. ⁶I will send him against an ungodly nation, And against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, To seize the spoil, to take the prey, And to tread them down like the mire of the streets. ⁷Yet he does not mean so, Nor does his heart think so; But *it is* in his heart to destroy, And cut off not a few nations.

We then read of the arrogant king's self-assessment.

⁸ For he says, 'Are not my princes altogether kings? ⁹Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus? ¹⁰As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, Whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria, ¹¹As I have done to Samaria and her idols, Shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?' " ¹² Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *that He will say*, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks." ¹³ For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done *it*, And by my wisdom, for I am prudent; Also I have removed the boundaries of the people, And have robbed their treasuries; So I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man*. ¹⁴My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people, And as one gathers eggs *that are*

left, I have gathered all the earth; And there was no one who moved *his* wing, Nor opened *his* mouth with even a peep.”

Then we return to how God sees the most powerful king on earth at the time.

¹⁵Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield *itself* against those who lift it up, Or as if a staff could lift up, *as if it were not wood* (Isaiah 10:5-15)!

And the list continues: Herod, Pilate, the gentiles, Israel

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place (Acts 4:27, 28).

There are all sorts of ways men want to justify God before other men when it comes to the truth of these statements. Those with whom Paul contended sought to present a god who would ignore sin and faithlessness because God can use it to His own glory. Or today, in a society of self-confidence, where self-esteem has escalated itself into virtue rather than vice, it is common for men to seek to shorten the arm of God (Numbers 11:23) through creative definitions of human will that can in no way account for the passages (and the numerous others like them) that we just read.

But if we return to Paul's point, it would appear he is exalting God alone. The whole world is a drop in the bucket; it is dust. If the entire world were faithless it would in no way impugn or diminish the faithfulness and glory of God. So, if I can put it in crass terms, will we hitch the wagon of our eternal hopes in wisdom, philosophy and innovation of man or will we, like Paul count it all

as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Philippians 3:8, 9).

Questions for Study

1. Review the context of this passage. What is the value of circumcision? What is the danger of circumcision? How were some of Paul's readers responding to his message (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss the twisted reasoning found in verses 5-8. How does Paul respond to this reasoning (pages 4, 5)?
3. Is God less glorified when evil things happen? Explain your answer (page 5).
4. Does it sometime feel like God is absent? Is He (pages 5, 6)?
5. To what extent is God in control of evil events? Do you find this comforting or distressing? Explain (pages 6-8).
6. What do you suppose Paul's point is in this passage (page 8)?

