

Is God Glorified in Our Sin?

Romans 3:1-8

Pastor Jason Van Bommel, Forest Hill Presbyterian

But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world? But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? - Romans 3:5-7, ESV

How can God judge and condemn everyone in the world? True, no one is perfect, but doesn't our horrible imperfection just show more clearly how perfect God is? After all, doesn't everything in God's world bring Him glory, either by reflecting His goodness or else by magnifying His goodness by contrast?

These are the questions Paul is wrestling with at the beginning of Romans 3. He has already painted a very bleak picture of God's judgment against human sin. He has already made it clear that both Jews and Gentiles- both those who have the Law of God and those without it- are guilty before God. He's going to come back to this universal sentence of condemnation against all humanity, but first he pauses to deal with some important questions:

1. Is there any advantage to being a Jew? After all, if both those who have the Law as God's covenant people and those who worship idols are guilty before God, what is the benefit of belonging to God's holy nation? Paul says the advantages of the Jews are "much in every way." Specifically, Jews do not need to rely on the foggy and unreliable guide of our conscience. (vv. 1-2)

2. Does the ongoing failure of God's people reflect poorly on God? "What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar." - vv. 3-4. In other words, our failure to keep God's word doesn't mean that God has failed, it means that we have failed!

3. Is God actually glorified by our sin, because our sin highlights His righteousness? Paul doesn't ever directly answer this question, as far as I can tell, but his response is something like, "Even if that were true, it is still proper for God to judge people who break His law." Otherwise, if God were obligated to release us from judgment because our badness magnifies His goodness, it would be right to do as much evil as possible, in order to glorify God as much as possible. This is utter nonsense and blasphemy, of course! (vv. 5-8)

These opening verses of Romans 3 remind me of two important principles:

1. We should always be thinking carefully about our theology and its implications. Paul never seems to advance a theological point without carefully weighing what it means and doesn't mean. We'll see this again and again in Romans.

2. People will always try to twist God's truth into knots of self-justifying lies. People are always looking for the loophole, and in seeking one, we often twist and turn God's truth into utterly unrecognizable shapes.

How can we tell if our theological thinking is faithful or faithless? We need to stick closely to the whole counsel of God's word, seek the glory of God in our thinking, rely on the Holy Spirit for discernment and walk in the wise counsel of the godly. We need to also make sure we're not seeking to glorify or justify ourselves. This doesn't make everything easy, nor does it solve every problem, but it's the best path to walk as we seek to know and love God better.