



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Volume 9 Issue 16

May 21, 2010

## In Defense of the Gospel, Part 3

Romans 3:1-8, Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup> What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup> By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,

“That you may be justified in your words,  
and prevail when you are judged.”

<sup>5</sup> 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.) <sup>6</sup> By no means! For then how could God judge the world? <sup>7</sup> But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? <sup>8</sup> And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just. <sup>1</sup>

## Misunderstanding and the Gospel

1 Corinthians 1:18a, “For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness...”

One of the truths we learn from this verse is that to the mind of the worldling, the kingdom of God is

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Romans 3:1–8). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

foreign, mysterious, and for all sakes and purposes, foolishness! And that is why it is no surprise to find that the body of Christ, on account of the word, has been the brunt of many attacks throughout the history of the church. For example, in 200 AD a man by the name of Minucius Felix, writing in the *Octavius*, severely criticized the early church on account of its “perversions.” In it he charged the church with “perverse lust” and “cannibalism.” Perverse lust, because the early Christians referred to each other as “brother” and “sister.” Cannibalism- because in the communion service of the early church the words of Christ were repeated, “Take, eat; this is my body,” (Matthew 26:27).

On account of the “otherness” of the kingdom, the gospel and its people have been sorely misunderstood by the world!

1 Corinthians 2:14, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

Romans 3 is an example of this misunderstanding. In the opening chapters of this epistle Paul devotes his efforts to showing that salvation is by grace through faith because ALL people, Jew & Gentile alike, are sinners (Romans 1:17; 1:18-2:29)! Now this caused a lot of misunderstanding. When the Jew received the message of the gospel what they heard was that:

- The promises God made to Abraham were now abrogated!
- The faithfulness of God was nullified!
- The integrity and the character of God were violated!

Accordingly in Romans 3:1-8 Paul sets out to defend the gospel against three common objections in his day. Having considered the first two, we are going to look at the third objection Paul addressed in defense of the gospel. It does not invalidate the righteousness/fairness of God!

### **It does not Invalidate the Righteousness of God, Romans 3:5-8.**

Paul anticipated this objection. Here he addresses the issue with three different but related questions. Notice the first question.

Romans 3:5a, “But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God...”

We could translate this, “if our wickedness commends, proves, or demonstrates the inherent equity of God.” This was raised on account of Paul’s defense in Romans 3:4 where he quotes Psalm 51 to the effect that David’s confession of sin heralded to everyone, everywhere that God is righteous and just.

David, a covenant child, an heir of the promises given to Abraham, had just suffered at the hands of God. His son died and his kingdom was set on a path of destruction. Now to the outsider unfamiliar with David, the accusation in this case could have been raised:

- “Is this a just God?”
- “Hadn’t He promised to bless Abraham’s offspring?”
- “How could He do such a terrible thing to David?”
- “Is God able to be trusted when it comes to His promises?”

David, recognizing these potential accusations, confessed his sin to demonstrate the integrity of God's character!

Psalm 51:4, "Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge."

Now Paul wisely saw the objection that his reference in Psalm 51: 4 could have raised in the mind of the unredeemed, an accusation which also was raised when it came to the gospel. If by David's sin the integrity of God's character was heralded in a way that otherwise would not have been known, and it was, AND HE WAS FORGIVEN.

If in the gospel God is shown to be righteous or true by virtue of Israel's sinfulness, and it is, then, how can God justly punish a covenant child for their sin? Based on Paul's teaching, Israel is as David. He wasn't condemned. So why the change?

Romans 3:5b, "...What shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He?"

If sin can advance God's purpose in any way, then it doesn't seem right that God should punish an "instrument" of His glory, the sinner! Yet God does, right? Recall all that Paul has said in Romans 1:17-2:29! Based on this, the implication is quite obvious, if Paul's gospel is true, then God must not be righteous!

What has been written here is damnable if it were believed. That is why Paul quickly qualified what he wrote with.

Romans 3:5c, "I am speaking in human terms."

Paul is saying that "I am speaking/reasoning from a human standpoint." Christian, don't miss it! God's character is of such a serious nature that to raise even a hypothetical possibility of Divine injustice requires an explanatory apology! How it behooves us that we cultivate such a regard when it comes to our relationship with God.

That is the first take when it comes to Paul's anticipated objection; does the gospel make God unrighteous? Before we examine Paul's response, notice that he continues in Romans 3: 7-8a where he brings the objection one step further.

Romans 3:7, "But if through my lie [the ultimate sin of Judaism, Romans 2:21-23] the truth of God abounded to His glory..."

This is just another way of asking the question raised in Romans 3:5, yet with obvious precision and implication! Through the gospel the falsehood and sinfulness of man is set in stark contrast to the integrity and reliability of God. Now as this is true, the natural question is this:

Romans 3:7b, "...why am I also still being judged a sinner?"

If I have been called to exalt and glorify God (which is what Paul says in Romans 1:21-23 and Romans

2:17<sup>2</sup>), and I do that through my sinning, how can I be judged a transgressor?

Romans 3:8a, “And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say)...”

The book of Romans wasn't the first time Paul heralded the gospel. He had shared the teaching of this epistle throughout the ancient world as he preached from synagogue to synagogue! As such, the objection he is dealing with here reflected not a theoretical guess as to how a Jew might respond to the gospel, but that which Paul no doubt faced on numerous occasions! Because of the slander that was being circulated about Paul, the Christian leaders in Jerusalem spoke this to Paul,

Acts 21:23a, 24b: “Therefore do this that we tell you... and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.”

So Paul indeed sustained much slander on account of the gospel (Romans 5:20-21; 6:1). What specifically were people saying about Paul and his teaching? Simply this:

Romans 3:8b, “And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come?’...”

Listen, if all things are for the glory of God including the salvation and reprobation of man, then again what does it matter whether we do good or evil? In fact, doing evil is easier and more enjoyable than doing good. So why not do evil that good may come? That is the objection Paul is addressing here. With that notice his response; it also is twofold. We pick it up in Romans 3:6.

## The Disciple's Response

Romans 3:5-6a, “But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He?... May it never be!”

We saw this expression last time in connection with Romans 3:4. This phrase is the strongest negative in Greek language denoting a “recoil of abhorrence.” It carried the implication of impossibility, and so is translated, “Let it not be!” or “Never!” or “God forbid!”

Romans 3: 6b, “...for otherwise how will God judge the world?”

The objection raised in connection with David's rebellion, that God must therefore not be just, contradicts a more fundamental doctrine that both Paul and his Jewish audience professed to be true. God is the judge of the World.

Psalms 50:6, “For God Himself is judge...”

1 Samuel 2:10, “...the Lord will judge the ends of the earth...”

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<sup>2</sup> Recall the t the name “Jew” is derived from the Hebrew, “to praise.” Accordingly, the Jew understood themselves as the people who alone honored and glorified God. This is why Paul's charge/question in Romans 2:23 was so serious.

Now Paul knew that a reference to the Old Testament doctrine of judgment by which God is said to be the Judge of the world would end the accusation raised on account of Psalm 51. See in the mind of the Old Testament Jew, an unjust judge was an oxymoron.

Deuteronomy 16:18-20, "You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe perverts the words of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

From their earliest memory, justice and judgment were co-mingled in the mind of the Jew. That is why the presence of unjust judges in the Old Testament is such a telling statement as to the extent of the apostasy of Israel at the time! Thus to reference God as "The Judge" was to establish the integrity of His character to every Jew.

Genesis 18:25. "...Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

Job 34:12, "Surely, God will not act wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice."

Isaiah 11:4, "But with righteousness He will judge the poor..."

On account of these and many other passages, for God to be the judge of the world and yet be unjust was a contradiction in terms! It was axiomatic that God is not just The Judge, but The JUST JUDGE! Every Jew had to agree with this. When God deigned to punish David for his rebellion AND the king boldly and publically confessed his sin that God might be shown to be just and true, God indeed was glorified! Yet this didn't involve a flaw in the character of God. The Lord didn't compromise truth or justice. Everyone, everywhere can see this!

You say, "O.K. I see it in relation to David, but what about the gospel?" If in my sin I exonerate God such that He is shown to be true, shouldn't that mean something? Ought not God show me some regard for bringing glory to His name in my sin?

Notice Paul's answer.

Romans 3:8, "And why not *say*..., 'Let us do evil that good may come'?... Their condemnation is just"

For any seriously to conclude that their sin ought to be overlooked because it demonstrates God's righteousness is to betray a perverse and evil heart. Yet that is what many a Jew concluded when they came face to face with grace. And so it is in our day as well.

## **Catholic's Response to the Gospel**

One of my earliest memories of controversy surrounding a sermon I preached was raised by a Roman Catholic who was visiting a family member in our church. After I preached the gospel the visitor came up and said, "In essence what you are saying is that no matter how great a man's sins may be, God will forgive him!" I said, "That is correct! The cross-work of Christ is not limited when it comes to a person's sin." For I was preaching on the magnitude of God's grace which will be the basis of our worship in

heaven.

He then said, "If that is true, then I am going to sin all I can. Because the more I sin the more I will be forgiven, and the more God will be worshipped in heaven."

Now that was a perverse response! Now I don't think the individual was serious. But if he was, he would have betrayed a reprobate mind. Imagine these scenarios:

- Drunk Driver. After killing a man and later being asked by the Judge as to how he pled- responding with these words: "I plead not guilty because the man I killed was terminally ill and no doubt going to die a slow and painful death anyway?"
- Drug Dealer. When after selling a drug to a teenager who later died of an overdose and a Judge later asking him how he pled- saying, "I plead not guilty because the youth was a member of a gang, and no doubt would eventually have killed someone. So in a way, I stopped a crime."

To these and more, I doubt there is any sane individual who would not say, "Their condemnation is just." So it is with every person who walks away from the gospel saying, "Let us do evil that good may come!"

So is God unjust because he is glorified when a sinner sins? Paul's emphatic answer here is nothing less than this: "God forbid!" "May it never be!" "Perish the thought!"

And so it must be our answer as well. NOT JUST to the formal question raised in the context of evangelism, BUT the question which from time to time pops into our minds during difficult or bitter providences. What is that question? Is God just/fair? In the words of Genesis 18:

Genesis 18:25b, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"- or fairly!

## Job

Think of Job and the valley of the shadow of death into which he descended. For many years Job served the Lord and God blessed him. Then for seemingly no reason at all, at least from Job's perspective, God turned his world upside down. This didn't seem fair to him. And so he began to raise the question of the fairness of God. In fact listen to the rebuke Job received from one of his friends.

Job 8:1-4, "Then Bildad the Shuhite answered, 'How long will you say these *things*, and the words of your mouth be a mighty wind? Does God pervert justice or does the Almighty pervert what is right? If your sons sinned against Him, then He delivered them into the power of their transgression.'" - IOW, "Job, don't question the fairness of God. Your children got what they deserved!"

See the entire book revolves around a blameless and upright man- and Job was (Job 1:8) grappling with what seemed to be an unfair God! In fact consider Job 3:25. prior to his affliction, Job struggled with the issue of God's fairness.

Job. 3:25-26, "For what I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, and I am not at rest, but turmoil comes."

This is such a far cry from Psalm 131! Recall that Job and his friends lived by the motto, "God helps

those who help themselves.” In other words, God is not a God of grace, but a God of blind, cold justice! No one experiences anything bad that they haven’t themselves earned or deserved.

I hope you see that to live in such a world is to live in constant dread and fear, for who among us is perfect? What if we haven’t done enough good? What if somehow or in some way we have failed and so angered God? That was the fear that moved Job throughout much of his life. In fact, the word used in Job 3:25 for “dread” refers to “the apprehension aroused by the wanton hostility of a mighty foe.” It is the dread of the other shoe coming down! That’s how Job conducted himself throughout much of his early life. John Hartley said of this verse:

This statement reveals that before his trial Job had dreaded that some ill might befall his household. His apprehensive nature was evident in his offering sacrifices periodically on behalf of his sons in case they had cursed God in their hearts (1:5). (Hartley, 1988, p. 100)

Now family of God though we know God is a God of grace AND of justice, nevertheless we often times can be found living like Job as though God weren’t just, but capricious one day deigning to bless us and the next day changing His mind and so cursing us on a whim. And though at first we might assume we’ve done something to deserve it, in the end with Job we realize that it is God who is the problem. Right? What earned God’s approval yesterday today incites His wrath! It’s not fair!

In fact I want you to see that the inclination to question the “fairness of God” is something we come by honestly. Do you remember in the Garden of Eden prior to the fall, Satan tempted Adam and Eve by raising the possibility that God was withholding something desirable from the two? To the woman’s explanation of the consequences for eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Satan said this:

Genesis 3:4-5, “You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Notice the response wasn’t to say, “God forbid that you would insinuate anything of the kind in association with God.” In fact, it was just the opposite. Adam and Eve entertained the hypothesis.

Genesis 3:6a, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise...”

In other words, she came to see the command of God in a whole new light. It wasn’t there for her protection, but there to keep her from something good! Do you see that from the very beginning the question of the fairness of God was tossed around a question which eventually led our first parents to sin against God?

Romans 3 revolves around the righteousness/justice/fairness of God. Academically we might theorize that the gospel as presented by Paul made God out to be unjust. Paul would say that was a lie. But practically, life in this state of sin and misery has a way of bringing this question to the forefront of our minds.

- *Lord, your providence doesn’t seem to be fair to me. I have done so much for Your kingdom. Why haven’t You reciprocated?*

- *As a sinner I have done much harm in this life. God therefore could not bless me. In fact all the ill I have experienced is payment for past sin.*

Christian, listen to the word of the Lord. Speaking of God, Moses wrote this:

Deuteronomy 32:4, “His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.”

Do you understand what is being stated by this passage? To say that God’s “work is perfect” is to say that it is complete, lacking in nothing. The word for “perfect” in the Hebrew is the word used for ceremonially clean animals. They have no imperfection. So it is with EVERY WORKING of God! Hence we conclude:

- There are no mistakes with God. What you are and where you’ve been is according to the wise, powerful, and good plan of God.
- There is no such thing as a mistake when it comes to God’s providence.
- To say that God’s “ways are just” is to say that they are perfectly upright and so in no way violate what is just or fair. The word is a legal term describing the regency/ruling/way of a king or judge.

Thus we conclude that the regency of God is completely and totally just. If you are a sinner, you must be condemned. If you are righteous, you must be blessed. At this point we say, “What I wouldn’t pay to be righteous before God!” Family of God, you don’t have to pay anything. That is what Christ did when He died on the cross! He paid for your sin. As such, if you have been saved by grace through faith in Christ, then you are righteous. And you will know only blessing in this life and beyond!

Ephesians 1:3, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ.”

As this is true, our commentary on any bitter providence in this life must change. While it genuinely is a trial and a difficulty, God has deigned to use it unto the richest blessings imaginable (Romans 8:28; 5:3-5; James 1:2-4)! To say that God is “upright” is to say that God is without an ethical or moral flaw. Thus all that He does is good, righteous, and morally blameless.

Hence we conclude:

In this state of sin and misery bad things happen to God’s people. But let it ever be known and understood, the Ruler of the universe is good and all that He does is upright (in fact, this is a mark of Christianity, John 3:33)! In fact if we take this description of God and His providences seriously, we conclude at least four things. First, God is not a capricious god like Zeus, Ammon, or Baal. God can be trusted to be and remain what He has always been.

Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today, *yes* and forever.”

Malachi 3:6, “For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”

When it comes to His children, God never gives them what they deserve, but that which has been



earned for them by Christ!

Deuteronomy 9:6: “Know, then, *it is* not because of your righteousness *that* the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.”

Truly all that we have and enjoy as Christians is granted on account of Christ’s merits not our own. That means if you did not earn God’s blessings, you can’t do anything to lose them either (cf. Romans 5:8-10). Every providence through which we are brought has both God’s glory and our good in mind.

Jeremiah 29:11-13, “‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. [What is that future and hope?] Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.’”

And thus we read the exhortation of Moses to the people of God.

Deuteronomy 8:2, “And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”

This earth is NOT God’s best for us. Like the wilderness for Israel so our time on this earth is granted that we might grow in our love, devotion, and trust in God.

Thus as we have been saved for an existence not of this world, our glory and joy revolves around Christ, His second coming, and the consummation of the ages. I remind you that “night” and “morning” in the Bible often times are metaphors for the passing age in which we live and the glorious age to come (Romans 13:12). With this in mind, notice David’s words:

Psalm 30:6b, “Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy *comes* in the morning.”

Do you understand that God’s best is reserved for the morning! That means that there is not a one here this day who has experienced it in this life. Now if we will let it, this will transform the way we live. Speaking of the “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time,” Peter wrote this:

1 Peter 1:6-9, “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”

What sort of people ought we to be? Men and women whose delight is the character of God and whose hope is not in gaining anything from this world, but that which is bound up in the New Heavens and Earth (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)!

In light of this, not only in our evangelism, but also in our ethical living may God grant us the grace to defend, protect, and never doubt the fairness/justness of God.

## **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on May 21, 2010. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.