

The Good News

Week 5 - Romans 3:1-18

Objectives:

- To gaze at the beauty of God's character
- To view God's faithfulness/righteousness in light of human unfaithfulness/unrighteousness
- To explore the depth of our need for the gospel and its goodness

After reading Romans 1 and 2, we might be left asking this question: is the situation hopeless? Is human unfaithfulness a reflection of God's ability to make and keep promises? In this first section of Romans 3, Paul assures us that God is different from us and his character is not diminished by our sin. On the contrary, it is His character that makes the gospel reliable and beautiful – truly Good News!

? Tell about someone who is dear to you. What is this person like? How did you get to know them?

A Faithful God

Read Romans 3:1-8 ESV:

¹ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ 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."

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

? After reading this passage, what attributes of God stand out to you? How are these characteristics meaningful to you?

Possible answers: Holy, righteous, just, immutable (unchanging), wrathful, compassionate, merciful, patient, true, or any others that you can think of together.

? How does beholding the character of God impact you?

Possible answers: It reveals God's righteousness and our unrighteousness. For the unbeliever, this can bring a desire for repentance and salvation; for the believer, this should prompt us toward further dependence upon God as we are sanctified, or made more into the image of Christ.

? At the beginning of this passage, Paul anticipates a question his readers might be asking at this point in the letter. What advantage is there in being a Jew – is there any at all? His clear response is “much in every way.” They were entrusted with the very words of God! What a treasure! And God was faithful to reveal himself to Israel, even in the midst of their deep unfaithfulness. How does this encourage us today, as the Church and as individual believers?

Possible answers: Like Israel, we also have been deeply unfaithful to God and fall entirely short of his requirements for righteousness. If God was faithful to Israel in the past, we can trust that he will also continue to be faithful to the Church—and to us—in spite of our failures, for the sake of Christ.

? In the second part of the passage, Paul anticipates another question for us: if our unrighteousness highlights God’s righteousness, is it unfair for him to judge us for our sin and disobedience? Paul’s answer is once again clear. “Their condemnation is just.” There is tension here! How does God’s character motivate us toward living in obedience to him?

Possible answers: Like dearly loved children desire to please and obey their parents, believers—who are beloved by God—are motivated to obedience by their love for him. If he is holy, we want to be holy like him. If he is merciful, we desire to show mercy and forgiveness to those who wrong us. Additionally, the more we yield to the work of the Holy Spirit, the stronger our desire for obedience grows.

? As fallen people, we are unable to meet God’s standard of righteousness. If unrighteousness highlights God’s righteousness, do you think it is unfair for him to judge sin and disobedience? Why or why not?

Possible answers: God cannot be loving and good without also judging sin. His wrath is a natural outpouring of his love for his children – sin hurts his children, and as our loving Father, it is good that it makes him angry! But as believers, we no longer face God’s wrath because it has been absorbed and paid for in full by Jesus Christ as he hung on the cross. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1)

Paul makes use of an ancient literary device called a **diatribe** throughout this passage. In a diatribe, writers use a fictional dialogue between themselves and the proponent of another viewpoint to instruct and persuade their audience.

An Unfaithful People

Read Romans 3:9-18 ESV:

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” ¹³ “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” ¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” ¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.” ¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

? At first glance, Romans 3:9-18 seems to contradict Romans 3:1-8. Paul now claims that Jews have no advantage – how can this be, if he just said they had much as stewards of the very words of God?
Possible answers: The problem is that the Jews had the covenant promises, but lived as though they did not have any obligation to God because of them. They did not allow the Law to serve its purpose in exposing their sin, moving them to repentance, righteousness, and relationship with God. Instead, they twisted the Law to elevate themselves over those around them.

? List the descriptions of all human beings’ behavior in this passage. What do you notice about this list? How does this list compare with the characteristics of God that you came up with earlier?
Possible answers: The guilt that Paul describes here indicts both Jews and Greeks – in other words, “all.” Can be grouped by sins of the mouth/speech, actions/choices, and sight/attitudes. This list should emphasize our need for God’s gracious rescue because we are so separated from him and what his character represents.

God’s Characteristics	People’s Behavior

? Paul is speaking primarily to those who already follow Christ, reminding them that they do not deserve–nor are they entitled to–God’s grace in the gospel, no matter who they are or what credentials they possess. What response is Paul calling us toward by reminding us of this? How does this draw you to deeper worship?
Possible answers: Humility and submission to Christ; dependence upon his salvation

? How does beholding God's infinite goodness in light of the reality of our need give us a better understanding of the gospel as "good news?"

Possible answers: We cannot fully grasp the joy that is ours in Christ unless we first know the depth of our need. In other words, we need to remember what it is like to be dead before we can walk in the freedom and life that Christ provides!

New Life in the Spirit

Praise God, our unrighteousness and hopeless state is not the end of the story God is writing! As Christ-followers, our faith regenerates us to new life, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The result is a completely changed life, resulting in good fruit.

Read Galatians 5:22-24 ESV:

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

? Compare the description of fruit of the Spirit in the life of a believer with the description of the fruit of human nature in Romans 3:10-18. How does this drastic change come about? Why is this good news? *Possible answers: The indwelling of the Spirit, which happens through faith in Christ, changes our fleshly, sinful desires and aligns us increasingly with the heart of God. This is good news because we cannot achieve it on our own, and we cannot do anything to earn it! In his mercy and grace, God has sent his Son to provide the remedy for our hopeless state, if only we are willing to accept and submit to him.*

Fruit of the Spirit in the Life of a Believer	Fruit of Human Nature

? How can we as the Church encourage one another to continue walking in the fruit of the Spirit, resisting our fleshly urges and the temptation to return to our sin?

Possible answers: providing accountability with one another in authenticity and love; praying for one another; worshiping corporately, etc.

For Discussion and Accountability

- ? Have you ever withheld the gospel from someone because you felt they did not deserve it?

- ? How can we encourage one another to resist the temptation to know the gospel but live as if we did not, or twist it to elevate ourselves above others?