

Sins In The Name of God

The Depravity of Man . . . The Deliverance of God – Part I
Romans 3:3-9

Introduction

Haddon Robinson wrote in “Focal Point” about the world’s most complicated clock, which stands in the town hall in Copenhagen. It took forty years to build, at a cost of more than a million dollars. The clock has ten faces and fifteen thousand parts. It computes the time of day, the days of the week, the months and years, and the movements of the planets for twenty five hundred years. Some parts of that clock will not move until the twenty-fifth century. The intriguing thing, according to Robinson, is that the clock is still not accurate. It loses two-fifths of a second every three hundred years. Like all clocks, made by human hands, this timepiece in Copenhagen must be regulated by the most precise clock known to mankind – the universe itself. The astronomical clock, made by the hands of God, with its billions of moving parts, from atoms to stars, keeps the most precise time and has never lost even one-fifth of a second. So reliable are the movements of the universe, that all time on earth can be measured against it.ⁱ

God’s created world is the standard of time. Likewise, God’s inspired Word is the standard for all of life. Right and wrong can be measured, in any century, with the standard of God’s Holy Word. Life itself can be measured by the canon – the measuring rod – of Holy Scripture.

The apostle Paul has declared to the Jewish nation, in Romans, chapter 3, verses 1 and 2, that their highest privilege has been to be the recipient of the Holy Words of God.

However, Paul has explained, in previous verses, that even though the nation of Jews received the Words of God, they were not exempt from having to

obey and follow them. Even though they were sons of Abraham, they were not exempt from the penalty of the Law.

I like the way one commentator illustrated this very point. He told the story of a twenty one year old son of a European ambassador to the United States. The young man was in repeated trouble with the law. On one occasion, he struck and killed a woman with his car. He was charged with vehicular homicide, but when he claimed diplomatic immunity, and proved who his father was, the charges were dropped. He was arrested four more times in the space of two years, but each time, he claimed diplomatic immunity and was released. Because the young man’s father was an ambassador, he could not be brought to judgment in the United States for his offenses.

Paul has been delivering the verdict of guilty to people who assumed that, in the end, they were protected by virtue of who their father was – Abraham. They were sons of Abraham, sons and daughters of the covenant, therefore, even if guilty of sin, they could claim spiritual immunity, and the charges would be dropped.ⁱⁱ

The apostle Paul delivers the stunning, shocking news that the moral man, the immoral man, the religious man – best revealed in the life of the faithful Jew – were all alike in their guilt. It did not matter who their father was. It was a personal matter of the heart – and everyone has a guilty heart.

Paul will eventually, summarize his verdict by declaring, in Romans, chapter 3, verse 23,

for all have sinned and [all] fall short of the glory of God

But Paul is not quite there yet – and neither are we.

Three Objections to the Gospel

In verses 3 through 9, of Romans, chapter 3, the apostle anticipates and voices three more rather interesting objections to the gospel and puts them in the form of questions. Let me state the question first and then we will look at the text.

If God is going to judge the Jew, does that mean He is not keeping His covenant with them and therefore, is breaking His word?

1. The first question is, if God is going to judge the Jew, does that mean He is not keeping His covenant with them and therefore, is breaking His word?

Notice Romans, chapter 3, verse 3.

What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?

You could expand your translation, within this context, to read, “What are you saying then? If some Jews are unfaithful in their belief, is their unfaithfulness going to wipe out the covenant of God with the Jewish people?”

In other words, if God judges us, then He is unfaithful to His promises. He must have been lying when He said, “We were His people and He would never cast us away!”

This is a good question. Did God erase His covenant with Israel because they did not believe in Christ as Messiah?

Will He restore the throne of David and the land to the Jew and set up His kingdom on earth, as He promised through His prophets?

Will the promise of Zechariah, in chapter 12, verse 10, come true? Zechariah prophesied that God will one day,

. . . pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced.

This has not happened yet, and it cannot happen to the church either. We are not the house of David and we are not living in Jerusalem.

So, the Jew is asking Paul, “Listen, if we’re going to be judged by God, then God must not be keeping his word. What about the promise of Zechariah and others? What about God’s covenant with us?”

Let me pause long enough to say a few words about this. We will deal with this extensively in Romans, chapter 11, where Paul opens with the question, in verse 1a,

. . . God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!

Paul answers.

You might wonder, “Are all Jews individually saved for all time? Does the Jewish man or woman need to be saved through faith in Christ today? Or, does his special covenant with God override his need of faith in Christ?”

That was the confusion revealed in Romans, chapter 3, verse 3. Paul said earlier, in chapter 2 that the Jew was not getting into heaven merely by being the offspring of Abraham. Heritage on earth had nothing to do with a home in heaven.

So, the question remained, “If the Jew today could be sent to hell along with the Gentile, then is God discarding His future promise to restore Israel?”

Let me answer that by saying that first, you need to understand the difference between the future national salvation of the Jewish people and the present salvation of the Jewish person.

The national salvation of Israel in the future, is different than the present salvation of the Jewish person. While God, in another period of time, will restore Israel’s land, throne, and kingdom, personal salvation for every Jew in this period of time, or what we could call a “dispensation,” requires faith in the One who was pierced.

The Jew must be saved today, just as the Gentile has to be saved, and that is by faith in Christ. That is Paul’s point, in verse 9 of Romans, chapter 3.

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all: for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin

Look at verses 21 through 22.

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

What does he mean, “. . . there is no distinction”? He means that there is not one plan of salvation for the Jew today, and another plan of salvation for the Gentile; there is no distinction.

Continue to verses 23 through 24, which is addressed to Jew and Gentile alike.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus

While God has temporarily set aside the restoration of Israel and the literal fulfillment of His covenant to David – He will reestablish that throne in the future. It will begin in the tribulation period, as Israel is revived and restored as a nation, according to the book of Revelation.

Now, follow me with this – even though the covenant with David is set aside and there is no throne in Jerusalem, the covenant has not been abandoned. The promise of Zechariah and others will literally be fulfilled, just as God promised.

Why the big deal? Who cares whether some covenant with David about a throne in Jerusalem comes true? That stuff is centuries old – give me some current news. I want to know stuff about the Christian life in the here and now. I wish you would preach sermons on practical things, like how to make more money or how to get my husband to take out the trash.

This is a big deal. What if Paul gets stumped on this, and says, “My goodness, that’s a tough question – maybe God won’t keep His promise to Israel.”?

My friend, if God does not keep His covenant with Israel, what assurance do you have that He will not discard His covenant with you, through Jesus Christ? That is why this *is* a big deal!

How do you know that God, one day, will not say, “Okay, you guys, I’ve had enough of you. I’m changing all the rules. I’m tired of you. I’m starting a new game – and you’re not in it!”

Have you ever played a game, as a kid or maybe recently, and someone you played with made up some new rules, only to decide to change them later? Then, when you complained, they said, “Hey, I made up the rules . . . so I can change the rules.”

How many of you think your husbands do that? How many of you think your wives do that? You men, who raised your hands, are just now realizing you should not have!

Is that what God did? The Jew in the first century wanted to know – did God change the rules? And I want to know, in this century, if God is going to change the rules on us!

Did you know that one of the ways you can know that God will not discard you in the end, is because He will not discard Israel in the end. One of the greatest passages on eternal security that you will find in the Bible is in the Old Testament. How can it be in the Old Testament? Because eternal security in the Old and New Testaments entirely depend upon God keeping His word.

Look at Psalm 89. David is writing in anguish, beginning in verse 38, about the fact that the throne was desolate, the crown dashed to pieces, the city of Jerusalem destroyed . . . the covenant spurned by God. He says in verse 46,

How long, O Lord? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire?

In spite of God’s temporary judgment, notice verses 30 through 37.

If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments,

If they violate My statutes and do not keep My commandments,

Then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes.

But I will not break off My loving kindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness.

My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.

Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David.

His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me.

It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful.

Selah.

In other words, just as the movements of the sun, moon, and planets in the sky, are so precise in their movements that you can set your clocks by them, so the promise of God is so unchangeable and steadfast that you can mark your life by it and trust your eternal destiny to it.

Even when you fail Him; even when you sin against Him, if you have received His Son as your Lord and Savior, there is nothing you can do, good or bad, to keep Him from fulfilling His promises to you.

Will God break His word? Notice Paul’s answer in Romans, chapter 3, verse 4a.

May it never be!

You could translate that, “No way! Not a chance! That’s impossible!”

Your translation may read, “God forbid.”

This double negative appears fifteen times in the New Testament – ten are in the book of Romans. It simply means, “That will never happen.”

Now notice what Paul says next, in verse 4b.

Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, “That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged.”

In other words, if all of humanity got together and decided that God was lying, they, in fact, would only reveal that all of humanity is lying – for God cannot contradict His holiness; He cannot tell a lie.

Now, this is the point to their first question and Paul’s first answer – the faithlessness of Jew and Gentile alike demonstrates the faithfulness of God.

- Do you know what your faithlessness reveals about God? That He is faithful to you.
- Do you know what your inconsistency in love and passion for God reveals about God? That He is consistent in His love for you.
- Do you know what your sinfulness toward God reveals about God? That He is sinless and holy toward all things.
- Do you know what your unrighteousness reveals about God? That He is righteous!

If the disobedience of the Jew reveals the faithfulness of God, why would He judge those who reveal His faithfulness?

2. That leads us to the very next objection that Paul anticipates, in verse 5.

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? . . .

In other words, if the disobedience of the Jew reveals the faithfulness of God, why would He judge those who reveal His faithfulness?

Paul goes on to say, in verse 5b,

. . . I am speaking in human terms. . . .

That is, “I’m speaking from the vantage point of your own argument – as plainly as I possibly can.”

Continue to verse 6.

May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

Every Jew believed that God would judge the world. Paul says, “If you say that since sin reveals the perfection of God, then the Jew should go free, then God would have to let every sinner – the whole world – go free, right?”

But since God would not do that with the world – and the Jews knew He would not – the Jew cannot hide behind that escape clause either.

Since sinning makes the glory of God more wonderfully apparent, why not sin all the more?

3. Paul then encounters another argument – one that is truly evil in its thought. Notice verse 7.

But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

In other words, since sinning makes the glory of God more wonderfully apparent, why not sin all the more?

If sin highlights the grace of God, then let us live in sin. If sinning gives God a chance to reveal His glory and grace in forgiving us, let us give Him every opportunity we can!

Paul was actually accused of teaching this, as people misunderstood his message of God’s grace and salvation by faith, independent of good works.

Notice verse 8a.

And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”?

In other words, if God is able to take our sin and bring good out of evil, then let us give Him all the evil we can, so He can display sovereign purposes.

Wouldn’t it be foolish to do something evil and wicked, just so you could experience something good? Imagine – if your wife says to you, when you get home from work, “What did you do today?”

You say to her, “Well, I did something really terrible. I killed my boss. But, on the way home, I asked forgiveness and, oh, it feels so great to know that God has forgiven me.”

Let me illustrate this logic in an even sillier way.

Can you imagine someone sitting down and eating and eating and eating – just stuffing

themselves with food. Finally, you go over and ask, “Why are you doing this to yourself?”

“Oh,” they say, “because I love the relief I feel with Alka-Seltzer. I just love the relief it gives me.”

Can you imagine voluntarily getting the flu – headaches and fever. Why? “Because,” you say, “the medicine is so wonderful, I want to get sick again just so I can experience the cure.”

You never do something bad in order for something good to come of it.

You might remember the story of how wicked John Newton was. He was the captain of a ship and was despised by his crew for his evil character and his drunken fits. One day, in his stupor, he fell overboard. The crew threw a whaling harpoon at him, which caught him in the hip and went right through it. They pulled him back on deck like a whale. He later came to faith in Christ. Eventually, he wrote hymns for the church, including his most famous one, “Amazing Grace”. It began with the wonderful first line, “Amazing grace! how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!”

Can you imagine me speaking to one of my sons and encouraging him to go into the navy and drink it up – to live a vile and wicked life – because one day I want him to experience the wonderful grace of God and then become a hymn writer?

I have used some rather silly illustrations, but why don’t we move closer to reality?

This kind of logic, by the way, is what we call “situation ethics” – the end justifies the means; it is right to do something wrong, as long as it turns out right.

This argument is used today, to promote gambling and casinos. How many politicians and educators have sold their soul on the altar of situation ethics by saying, “Gambling will bring money into our state and we can use it to build new schools and give our children a better education.”

Who will argue against better education?

Humanity wants to research and use embryonic stem cells; they want to harvest and sell the bodies of developed aborted babies and use their tissue for medical purposes. Their argument is to consider the medical cures that will come from it. This will cure diseases. This will make it possible for others to live. Who would argue that killing is bad if it allows someone else to live?

And why the rush to clone human beings? Could it be because humans beings do not want to die? To

have the potential of the availability of genetically identical organs – eyes, limbs, heart, kidneys and liver – would mean life could be prolonged.

My friend, even if it is possible, it is never right to do wrong, even if something right comes out of it.

A few years ago, I read of a man in Europe who was dying of kidney failure. They artificially inseminated his sixteen year old daughter, with the help of her physician. Seven months into her pregnancy, the child was taken by C-section. Its kidneys were removed and transplanted into the father and the infant was left to die of ureic poisoning.

Would you notice that this is the one argument that Paul does not even take time to answer? He simply writes, at the end of verse 8,

... *Their condemnation is just.*

Observations About the Nature of Man

Let me draw some observations for you from this passage. I believe this teaches several things about the nature of man – and it is not a pretty sight.

The mind of man creatively justifies his sin rather than admits his guilt

1. First, the mind of man creatively justifies his sin rather than admits his guilt.

I recently heard a female rock star asked about the way she dressed – and how it may be affecting the young girls who idolize her. She responded by saying, “My mother taught me that God gave me my body and that I’m not to be ashamed of it.”

That was clever, but wicked. In fact, it was doubly wicked, because she has attached the name of God to her sensuality.

The heart of man develops reasons to sin, rather than reasons not to

2. Another observation from this passage is that the heart of man develops reasons to sin rather than reasons not to.

In other words, man not only comes up with ingenious excuses for sinning, he develops reasons to sin even more.

Read the newspaper and just look at the lengths mankind goes to in order to justify sin, rather than repent of it.

The verdict of man would find God guilty of sin, rather than acknowledge his own guilty heart

3. Third, the verdict of man would find God guilty of sin, rather than acknowledge his own guilty heart.

If we are going to blame somebody about even our sin, we will find it to be God's fault.

Have you ever heard someone say, "That's the way God made me!"

I listened to an actress, one time, say in an interview, "It was so cruel for God to create something so beautiful as sexual intimacy between two people who love each other, but then to create diseases to accompany it."

That is the logic of the world. They will not admit they are sinners and what they are doing is sinful. Then, when they admit they might be sinners after all, they find someone else to blame for the consequences of their sin, even if it means they blame God.

Applications For Believers – Three Warnings

What can the believer glean from this passage? Is there anything for us, who believe in Christ, in these verses? Let me give you three warnings that I have gleaned from my observations.

Be careful not to use God's grace to justify your lack of conviction and holy living

1. First, be careful not to use God's grace to justify your lack of conviction and holy living.

Just because you became a Christian, does not mean you lost the urge to sin and then find excuses for it!

How many times have you heard a believer, or perhaps your own self, say, "That's the way God made me . . . I'm Irish, you know."

In the book of Jude, the writer says that the believers were caught up in, what theologians called, Antinomianism – the belief that sin reveals God's glory, so sin all you want and God will be glorified. Jude, verse 4, reads,

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness

...

Licentiousness is the opposite of legalism. Legalism, on the one hand, has its long list of do's and don'ts. Licentiousness, on the other hand, has thrown the list away. They take pride in the fact that they have no list of preferences of convictions.

Paul is addressing the licentious crowd in Romans, chapter 3, verse 8. They have nothing to offer the world, because they are like the world. And the more like the world you are, my friend, the less you will impact it for Jesus Christ.

How many Christians would never do the big three or the dirty dozen, but will live on the edge with non-distinctive, compromising lives – and if they are ever held accountable or questioned, will immediately say, "We're under grace."?

How many Christians will watch ungodly movies or television and they will surf the wrong places on the Internet? How many Christian men will drink and smoke with the crowd? How many women will dress immodestly, in a way they know will attract attention, when they go to school or work, or even when they come to church. How many Christians will swear and laugh at dirty jokes along with the rest of the crowd? How many will spend all their money on themselves and live for their next possession? And, how many of you, when confronted about it, as I am doing now, will say in your heart, "What is he, a legalist? Don't tell me not to do something, and don't tell me to do something. Man, I'm under grace."

You might just be ungodly! And this is your favorite excuse for unholy living.

Do not use God's grace to justify your lack of conviction and holy living.

Be careful not to use God's patience as an excuse for stubborn disobedience

2. Secondly, be careful not to use God's patience as an excuse for stubborn disobedience.

My friend, are you living for Jesus Christ? Is there something you should be doing or saying that you know He wants you to do or say? You know God wants you to do it, to say it, to change it, to begin it.

You say, "But, I'm just so glad God is patient with me!"

He is, praise God, He is. But do not use His patience as an excuse for your disobedience.

Be careful not to use God's forgiveness as a reason to overlook sin

3. Finally, be careful not to use God's forgiveness as a reason to overlook sin.

My friend, how often have you been tempted to sin – maybe just a little sin at that, if there were such a thing – and the thought crossed your mind, “Well, I know God will forgive me later.”

All you are doing is sinning in the name of God. And to attach God's name to your sin, your rebellion, your stubbornness, your immodesty, your lack of character and conviction, is to muddy the holy name of God and discredit His church.

Do not drag God's name into it! Do not use God's forgiveness as a reason to overlook sin!

I was talking to a couple the other night in their home. They have both come to Christ in recent months. She was expressing how sensitive she has become to even the small sins. The other day, the phone rang as she was getting ready to get into the shower. Her husband called out, “Honey, the phone is for you.”

“What do I do?” she thought, “I can't tell my husband to tell them I'm in the shower, because I'm not. Do I get in and then tell him, or take the call?”

I praise God for the dilemma in her life – it is evidence that she is growing in Christ. She is sensitive to anything that would not be a reflection of the holiness, purity, honesty, and righteousness of Christ.

Peter wrote, in I Peter, chapter 2, verse 9,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into a marvelous light

Did you notice that Peter did not say, “You are a special people; therefore you can do whatever you like.”?

No. He wrote, “You are a special people, now . . . reflect the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into the marvelous light of redemption.”

Share it . . . live it . . . walk it!

The One whose perfectly ordered universe helps us tell time and keep our clocks synchronized with the heavens, so much more desires that we synchronize our lives to the holy purposes of heaven.

Do not sin in the name of God, but serve, live, honor, uphold the wonderful, righteous name of God. That, my friends, is your high and holy calling.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/27/2002 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Hadden Robinson, “Focal Point,” Leadership Magazine, (Summer Quarter), p. 49.

ⁱⁱ David Jeremiah, Romans, Volume One (Walk Through The Bible Publishers, 1999), p. 100.