

PARADISE LOST

"LOOKING FOR LOOPHOLES"

ROMANS 3:1-8

True confession seems to be tough sledding, to be avoided at all costs. When confronted by our failures and foibles, our sins and transgressions, we human beings tend to lie, deny, and cover up, and when that doesn't work, to make excuses or blame others. Only when all else fails do we accept responsibility for our actions. And even then, we often describe what we did in words and ways that we can hide behind. We revert to words like "mistake," "oversight," and "poor judgment" or make toothless non-confessions like "I messed up," "My bad," or "Here's what really happened." And if that weren't enough, we sometimes top things off with a last-gasp attempt at self-flattery, declaring smugly, "I assume full responsibility for my actions."

Too bad; without true confession there can be no true forgiveness. In our everyday walk with God, the beloved disciple tells us, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1Jn 1:9). And in our everyday walk with others, James adds, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (5:16). Confessing and forgiving are the hallmarks of healthy relationships—both with God and with others. Just as God loves and forgives us, he calls on us to love and forgive the people around us, family members included. When we have sinned against one another, we must confess. And then, though it can be difficult, we must also forgive, because we are commanded to "love one another" (Jn 13:34; cf., 1Jn 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12).

God will be God, whatever man says.

— James D. G. Dunn

This Week's Core Competency

Humanity – I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

In any "He" said, "he" said situation, namely any situation that pits God's word against any human being's word, Paul says, "Let God be true and every human being a liar" (Ro 3:3). One commentator puts it this way: "The truth, or faithfulness, of God is to be believed, even though maintaining it leads to the conclusion that all men are liars" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 63).

To bolster his point, Paul quotes Psalm 51:4a (cf., Ps 116:11), penned by the psalmist "When," according to its superscription, "the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba." You're no doubt familiar with the story told in 2 Samuel 11:1-27—only five verses of which are devoted to the sin itself (vv. 1-5). David sees Bathsheba bathing, soon afterward he sends for her and sleeps with her, then weeks later, she sends word to him that she's pregnant. The other twenty-two verses are devoted to David's cover-up (vv. 6-27). First, he brings her soldier husband home from the front, but Uriah unexpectedly refuses to "go to his house to eat and drink and lie with his wife" (v. 11), choosing to sleep at the entrance of the palace instead (v. 9). So, David gets him drunk in the hope that he will relent and go home. When he doesn't, David sends him back to the front with a letter addressed to Joab telling him to, "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die" (v. 15), which the captain did. After the time of Bathsheba's mourning over Uriah passed, David brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But that was not the end of the story, not by a long shot,

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for the narrator adds this postscript, "But the thing David had done displeased the LORD" (v. 27).

His words set the stage for the climax of the story, namely David's rebuke. After the baby's birth, Nathan comes to David and tells him the story of two men, one rich and one poor. In a nutshell, when a traveler comes to the rich man's house, the rich man does not want to serve up one of his many sheep, and instead "takes the little ewe lamb that belongs to the poor man and prepares it" (12:4)—the same sweet lamb that grew up with the pauper's children, "shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms" (v. 3). Immediately, David's anger against the wealthy man burns red hot. He says to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die!" (v. 5). Then Nathan delivers the memorable words, "Thou art the man!" (v. 7 KJV).

Psalms 51 records David's confession. About it one commentator writes: "Psalm 51 stands as a paradigm of prayers for forgiveness of sins . . . The message of this psalm is that the vilest offender among God's people can appeal to God for forgiveness, for moral restoration, and for the resumption of a joyful life of fellowship and service, if he comes with a broken spirit and bases his appeal on God's compassion and grace" (Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 832). David's confession is found in verse 4a of the psalm. "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." That confession is followed in 4b by a purpose clause, "so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge." David does not argue with divine justice. He doesn't try to evade the charges; he doesn't make excuses. "His complete acceptance of God's verdict (4b) is matched in the New Testament by the penitent thief (Luke 23:41) and quoted in Romans 3:4 in its LXX [Greek Septuagint] form ('when thou art judged'). In that form it makes the point with maximum force, but it is still the same point as in the Hebrew here: that no-one could find fault—even if it were our place to do so—with God's judgment on the sinner" (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, TOTC, 208). As Paul says, "Let God be true and every human being a liar" (Ro 3:4).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 3:1-8

1 What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? 2 Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

3 What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? 4 Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written:

"So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

5 But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) 6 Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? 7 Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" 8 Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "then" indicating *result* in v. 1.
- * Circle "Jew/s" in vv. 1, 2.
- * Bracket "First of all" in v. 2.
- * Bracket "very words of God" in v. 2.
- * Draw a line from "unfaithfulness" in v. 3 to "unrighteousness" in v. 5.
- * Draw a line from "faithfulness" in v. 3 to "righteousness" in v. 5.
- * Circle "unjust" in v. 5.
- * Underline the parenthetical statement in v. 5.
- * Bracket the quotation in v. 8.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. The two questions joined by "or" in verse 1 mirror one another. Identify the *synonyms* in the second question corresponding to "advantage" and "Jew" in the first question.
2. Explain what prompted the twofold question in verse 1.
3. Being "entrusted with the very words of God" was the first and foremost advantage of the Jews. List some others (see Romans 9:4-5).
4. Explain the point of the questions in verse 3.
5. The words of Ps 51:4b, quoted in verse 4, follow David's confession of adultery in Ps 51:4a. Explain how this quotation supports Paul's plea, "Let God be true, and every man a liar."
6. Paul asks questions (v. 5) probing the possibility that Jews might escape the wrath of God. On what basis?
7. Verse 6 says: "If *that* were so, how could God judge the world?" If *what* were so?
8. The wrongheaded argument against "being condemned as a sinner" (v. 7) assumes "the end justifies the means." Explain.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about whether you think salvation by grace, through faith *alone*, amounts to a license to sin.

Chapter 3 follows hard on Paul's previous remarks in 2:25-29 questioning the value of circumcision and value of being an ethnic Jew "in the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed" (2:5). If God's righteous judgment is based on what people—both Jews and Gentiles—do (v. 6) and "God does not show favoritism" (v. 11), and if the value of circumcision depends on observing the law (v. 25) and being a true Jew depends on "circumcision of the heart by the Spirit" (v. 29), what's the value of simply being a Jew, an ethnic member of the Jewish nation? The question is put as follows in the opening verse: "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?" A quick reading of verses 1-8, reveals that Paul's point develops around his answer to several questions posed most likely by himself or perhaps by an imagined dialogue partner or interlocutor. "Paul is not so much reproducing for his readers an argument between himself and another person as he is posing questions and objections to himself in order to make his views clear to the Romans" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 181)—still a use of diatribe style.

To the first question, Paul replies, "Much in every way!" and then identifies the first and foremost advantage of the Jews, "They have been entrusted with the oracles of God" (ESV). The term "entrusted" means more than "given." It means they were responsible for the preservation and propagation of the very words of God. What's more, their stewardship responsibility entailed an obligation to obey what had been entrusted to them. Paul lists additional advantages of the people of Israel in 9:4-5: "Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."

To the second question, Paul replies, "Not at all!" to affirm that the unfaithfulness of the Jews will not nullify the faithfulness of God. Paul has in mind mainly the Old Testament covenants, promises, and prophecies. Neither Jewish disobedience to the law nor Jewish rejection of the Christ will result in either God washing his hands

of his fickle people or rescinding his promises to bless them, namely to save them and establish the kingdom (see chaps. 9-11; cf., Lk 1:30-33). In other words, "As God remained faithful to his covenant with Israel in the past, despite Israel's unfaithfulness, so he will remain faithful to Israel in the present and future, despite Israel's continuing unfaithfulness in rejecting the gospel" (James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol.38a, *Romans 1-8*, 139). The quotation from Psalm 51:4 serves to verify that God is true to his word or better yet, reliable.

To the third question, Paul replies, "Certainly not!" to debunk the wrongheaded notion that God might be wrong to judge unrighteousness when it serves his purpose. One commentator explains: "The supposition that human wrong could serve to display the righteousness of God may have been suggested by the passage from Psalm 51 that has just been cited. [There David's unrighteousness served as a foil to God's righteousness.] Is it not possible (so the question goes) that since human failure can bring out more sharply the righteousness of God, the Almighty ought to be grateful for this service and soften the judgment that would otherwise be due the offender? The question is one a Jew might well resort to in line with his thought that God would go easy on his covenant people" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Bible Expositor's Commentary*, 10:36). Paul likely still has Jews in mind at this point in his argument. But that line of thinking is precluded by the fact that God will judge of the world (v. 6).

To the fourth question, Paul replies, "'Why not say . . . Let us do evil that good may result?'" to make plain the incriminating nature of the such a thought. *The end justifies the means*. The very idea! If anyone, including the Jewish nation, thinks that God should overlook sins because in some imagined sense they glorify God, that person or nation deserves condemnation (v. 8) What's more, Paul has never taught such a thing.

To sum up Paul's argument, God remains faithful to his people in spite of their unfaithfulness to him; nevertheless, his faithfulness doesn't mean they will avoid his righteous judgment for their unrighteousness.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Although God is faithful to his word regarding his unfaithful Jewish people, he is also just in condemning and not excusing their unrighteousness.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the message of Romans 1:1-7 and your response to it.

Identify an implication of the message of this passage for gospel sharing.

Jews are tempted to take heart spiritually in their identity as Jews. What are non-Jews similarly tempted to take heart in?

Describe how you might respond personally to the message of this passage.

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 2 **first of all** Cf., 9:3-5. "By the phrase First of all Paul suggested that he was going to list a number of items, though actually he stated only one. He did this same thing elsewhere (1:8; 1 Cor. 11:18). In this case the item he stated is the most important and in a sense includes any others that could have been mentioned" (John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 448). The first advantage listed is called "all-inclusive" by one commentator (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 62).

v. 2 **very words of God** Cf., "oracles of God" (ESV). "By [ta logia] (only here in Paul) Paul means the utterances of God, given through Moses and the prophets (he makes no closer specification) and now constituting the holy scriptures (1:2)" (Dunn, 130-31). "The phrase 'oracles of God' refers to special revelation. The word 'oracles' (Gr. logia) stresses the fact that the Old Testament, and the messianic prophecies in particular, were the very utterances of God preserved and handed down by earlier generations (cf. v. 3; Acts 7:38; Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 4:11)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 46, www.soniclight.com).

v. 3 **unfaithful, unfaithfulness** Cf., "What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith . . ." (NIV 1984); "If some did not believe, does their unbelief . . ." (NET). "This verb 'did not have faith' also means 'be unfaithful.' This is preferred since the same verb is rendered 'entrusted' in verse 2" (Witmer, 448). "Although most modern translations understand the first verb in this verse in the same sense as the TEV, were not faithful, it is possible to take this verb with the meaning of 'did not believe' (see Goodspeed 'has shown a lack of faith'). The context seems to support the interpretation given by the TEV, since Paul is making a contrast between the Jews who were not faithful to the covenant they had made with God and God who was faithful in keeping the covenant" (Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 52-53). "To understand the passage as referring to want of faith in Christ, seems inconsistent with the whole context. The apostle has not come to the exposition of the gospel; he is still engaged in the preliminary discussion designed to show that the Jews and Gentile are under sin, and exposed to condemnation; an exposure from which no peculiar privilege of the former, and no promise of God to their nation, could protect them," (Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 71).

v. 5 **unjust** Or, "unrighteous" (ESV). The meaning of verse 5 is clarified by the GNT: "But what if our doing wrong serves to show up more clearly God's doing right? Can we say that God does wrong when he punishes us? (This would be the natural question to ask.) By no means!" "The only way to make sense of the sequence of thought, then, is to view the issue in v. 5 as the 'justness' of God's condemning Jews for sins that manifest his righteousness. This 'justness' is not God's conformity to some external norm, but his acting in accordance with his own character . . . [Paul] affirmed that the judgment of God will be just [2:5], being based on the works of each person. Now the question is posed whether this principle can still hold when the sinful works of God's people manifest his own righteousness" (Moo, 191). Paul answers the question he asks in verse 5 this way: "God will not show favoritism to the Jews, even though by their unfaithfulness they glorify the faithfulness of God. If He did so, He would be partial and not qualified to sit in judgment on humankind ('how would He judge the world!)" (Constable, 47). "We know for a fact that God is the judge of the whole earth, and we can be confident that the judge of the whole earth will do right" (Barrett, 64).

v. 5 **I am using . . .** "Evidently Paul felt constrained to explain that he was 'speaking in human terms' or 'using a human argument' because he, representing an objector, had suggested that God was unjust. Paul did not want his readers to conclude that he really thought God was unfaithful to His own Person and Word. He was just saying that for the sake of the argument" (Constable, 47). "This objection seems so foolish to Paul that he apologizes for mentioning it. The answer is plain: God is the moral Governor of the universe, the Judge of all the earth; how could He exercise that function which is inseparable from His Godhead if He did not exact retribution for sin" (Bruce, 96).

v. 8 **Let us do evil . . .** "Clearly Paul's teaching on God's righteousness from faith to faith was coming under attack as being in effect an encouragement to sin, and Paul's feelings were rather sensitive to the jibe: he describes it as a slander, a deliberate turning of white into black; the very suggestion that the could consent to elide so completely the difference between good and evil (cf. 2:9-10) he thinks is so manifestly unjust as to be self-condemned" (Dunn, 143).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

In the preceding two chapters of our Romans study, Paul has been addressing the issue that all people are sinful and separated from God. It makes no difference if one is a Jew or a Gentile. Everyone needs Jesus as Savior. At this point in our text, Paul asks the anticipated question from his audience. "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew?" (verse 1) In today's terms we might ask if there is advantage to growing up in a Christian home if we are all sinners and come to Christ by grace alone. The answer is YES! As believing parents we have an abundance of advantages to pass along to our children. (1) We are prayer warriors for them. From before their birth, we pray over our children and place them at the Lord's feet. (2) We live by the principles in God's Word. We have access to the Bible and can begin reading stories to our kids from their earliest childhood. (3) We have a testimony. We have been redeemed by Jesus and have a story of transformation that we can tell over and over. (4) We are surrounded by a community of believers. Raising our kids in church allows them to see the Body of Christ in action. While none of our actions can save our kids, we can position them close to the Truth that the step to trust Christ is an easy one to take.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 3:1-8

1. What does Paul say is the value in being a Jew?
2. Does our lack of faith mean God is unfaithful?
3. Does our sin glorify God?

What Do You Think

1. What are some ways you make excuses for your sin?
2. How does it make you feel to know that God is always faithful?

What R U Going To Do

One of the great privileges we have is owning a Bible and being able to read it. Are you reading it every day? Make a plan to read God's Word every day this week. Do you have extra Bibles around your house that aren't being used? Give them away!

Core Comp

Humanity - I believe God loves everyone and we all need Jesus as Savior.

Memory Verse

Romans 2:8 - *But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be anger and wrath.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed Scrolls _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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