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Romans

For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?

Romans 3:3

This verse, following immediately after verse 2 should be looked at in conjunction with verse 2 in order to find proper context -

Paul, in verse 1, asked what was the value of being a Jew and having the sign of circumcision. After this, he stated what that value is. That "to them were committed the oracles of God."

As the stewards of God's oracles, they have a special part in God's dealings with the world and the implication is (and which is explicitly stated throughout the Bible) that God will deal with them in a way which will always preserve them as a people. If this is so, then what if "some" of them did not believe? Paul is being gracious here because the vast majority of the nation rejected Christ just as they rejected their Lord throughout their history, thus resulting in judgment and exile. What about this? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God null and void?

On the surface, this question seems clear and accuses God of being unfaithful. It is an argument which Paul had probably heard time and again. Those looking to find fault in God will propose such a thought in order to excuse their own unbelief. However, the question contains flawed human reasoning which Paul will clearly refute as he lays out his argument.

Throughout chapter 2, Paul showed that a believing gentile is in better standing with God than an unbelieving Jew. He also demonstrated that the sign of circumcision is pointless unless it is accompanied by living out what the sign is intended to convey - a relationship with God. Those who are uncircumcised and live in faith will have their uncircumcision counted as circumcision while those who are circumcised and don't live in faith will be as if they are uncircumcised. But if their circumcision, which is the sign of

the covenant, doesn't save them then doesn't this nullify God's faithfulness? This is the argument and is what Paul will cover in the verses ahead.

Life application: One of the things lacking in the daily lives of people is clear thinking. It is something that requires training and must be developed through practice and study. Without clear thinking, arguments which are otherwise convoluted may seem right. It is hard to defend against such an argument unless the flaw can be pinpointed and shown as fallacious. Take time to study critical thinking, either through self-study on the internet or by enrolling in a college course which deals with the subject. You will be surprised how pertinent your studies will be to your daily life.

Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written:

**“That You may be justified in Your words,
And may overcome when You are judged.” Romans 3:4**

This verse is in response to 3:3 - "For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?" The answer rings forth clearly - "Certainly not!" Others translate this as "God forbid," "Of course not," "Not at all," "May it never be," "Absolutely not," "That would be unthinkable," "By no means," "No indeed," etc. It is an expression that translators seem to enjoy trying finding a new and exciting yet clear and acceptable translation just to be unique. The term in Greek is *me genoito*. Albert Barnes says it is telling us to "let not this by any means be supposed."

Instead of us supposing that God's faithfulness is tied to man's actions, we are to hold fast to the conviction that He is a perfect and unchanging Being and therefore that which is found in Him is absolute truth. As this is so, all that is true stems from Him and there is nothing untrue which can be attributed to Him. Because of this, even if every Israelite was unfaithful, it would have absolutely no bearing on whether He was faithful or not. In a judicial proceeding, His innocence would stand while the all others would receive a guilty verdict.

To substantiate this, Paul returns to Scripture - the law itself - and states, "As it is written." The Greek is *gegraptai* and it carries the weight of saying "this was written then and it still stands today." God's word is fixed, firm, and unchanging. What it states stands forever. What Paul cites is from the 51st Psalm -

For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin is always before me.
Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Your sight—

That You may be found just when You speak,
And blameless when You judge. Psalm 51:3, 4

This amazingly emotional Psalm was written by David after he was confronted by God's prophet Nathan. David had committed adultery with a married woman and subsequently murdered her husband. He acknowledged that his faithlessness in no way compromised God's righteousness. And this is true even though he was not only an Israelite, but God's anointed King of Israel. The sin that David committed was against God and only God. Because of this, God is found both just and blameless in the presence of David's unrighteousness. If this is so with David, Israel's King, then it must be so with all people.

Returning to Albert Barnes, He sums up what we should learn from this - "How happy would it be, if all people would regard this as a fixed principle, a matter not to be questioned in their hearts, or debated about, that God is true to his word! How much doubt and anxiety would it save professing Christians; and how much error would it save among sinners! Amidst all the agitations of the world, all conflicts, debates, and trials, it would be a fixed position where every man might find rest, and which would do more than all other things to allay the tempests and smooth the agitated waves of human life."

Life application: God is absolute truth and therefore, when He judges it is done in a morally perfect way. When tragedy comes our way, we have absolutely no right to place the blame on God. Let us be careful to never question His goodness, truth, or wisdom in how He conducts the affairs of the world, but let us rest in the fact that He will bring all things again to a state of goodness and perfection for those who have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Romans 3:5

Today's verse is going to take several more verses to fully comprehend. Paul says, "But if our unrighteousness..." This is the sin of man in general, and more to the point the Jew who he has been speaking about in detail. The Jew has been given the law and yet they have been unrighteous before the law in many ways. They have neglected it; they have used it as a point of pride when comparing themselves to other "sinners;" they have willfully disobeyed it; and they have missed its spiritual meaning and application because they rejected Jesus who is the fulfillment of it.

This "unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God" though. The law is his standard and it shows His very nature. In other words, this isn't just speaking of His righteousness toward man, but His innate righteousness. The first is the result of the latter, not the other way around. The sins we commit are a violation of His moral purity and they therefore demonstrate His perfect righteousness - He is the

ultimate standard by which things are judged and His glory is seen more clearly when the sinner is compared to Him.

Imagine the purest diamond in the world. If there was nothing to compare the diamond to, then one wouldn't know how exquisite it truly was. However, when other stones of varying materials, quality, luster, etc. are placed next to it, the true majesty of this "stone of stones" is seen for what it is. The law which reflects God's righteousness is like the diamond and our transgression of the law is like the flawed stones.

So Paul now asks, because the greatness and majesty of God are seen more clearly because of our imperfections, then isn't "God unjust who inflicts wrath?" How can God judge us when He is shown more glorious through our sin. Doesn't our sin have a good purpose and doesn't our sin negate His right to judge us?

This is the question of the impenitent sinner. This is the question of the unreasoning animal. This is the question of the one who fails to contemplate the splendor of the Creator. Such a question reveals a lack of dignity for self and a lack of respect for God. As Paul says, "I speak as a man." His words are intended to reflect fallen Adam; the unspiritual, carnal man.

Life application: How do you perceive sin? If you believe that your sin, which demonstrates the righteousness of God, is excusable because God is shown holy through it then you have failed to take in the whole picture. Take a look today at the things you don't like in others, things that upset you. Then consider that you are comparing these things against... you. Now imagine your sin placed next to the Creator who is infinitely more pure than you. How should He respond?

Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? Romans 3:6

This verse is in response to the question Paul raised, "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?"

A resounding reply results - "Certainly not!" By no means could God be unjust. Paul doesn't even address "why" though. He takes it as an axiom that God will, in fact, judge the world. Sin doesn't determine God's righteousness. Rather how He deals with it does. Sin is a violation of His holiness. Therefore, dealing with the sin is something that must occur.

As the Creator, everything about God simply is. Because He created time, He is outside of time and thus there is no change in Him. As this is so, God is perfectly righteous - His righteousness is. Any violation of it must be judged – or He is not perfectly righteous. But He is and therefore His righteousness cannot be compromised.

Similarly, God is perfectly just. Because He is, the penalty for a violation of His righteousness must be perfect. The law demands that every violation be punished and “the wages of sin is death.” There is no way around this. We have earned death and we have earned condemnation. If we do not receive this, then God is not perfectly just, but He is.

God is also perfectly holy. Because we are made unclean from our transgressions against His perfectly holy nature, we must be eternally separated from Him – or He is not perfectly Holy, but He is. If a person only committed one moral transgression in his entire life, it is sufficient to eternally separate him from God. God cannot accept 1% unrighteousness. He does not weigh sins on a balance. Nothing but absolute righteousness and pure holiness can be accepted by God.

Adding to the problem is that God is absolutely truthful. He has spoken from His very nature what is and what is not acceptable for man. If God overlooks the words He spoke in absolute truth, then He is not truthful – an impossibility. However, God has promised to redeem His people. Because He has spoken, then it must be so, or He is not truthful – this is impossible.

On the other side of this is God’s mercy; He is absolutely merciful. However, if in His mercy, He overlooks our transgressions, then He violates His righteousness – it would be ridiculous to even consider. Further, God is perfectly gracious and longs to participate in fellowship with His people, bestowing infinite grace upon them. However, because He is perfectly Holy, this cannot occur with sinful man or He is not perfectly Holy; this is impossible.

And finally, God is also love. God loves each person perfectly, but He cannot fellowship with His beloved creatures because of their sins. If He were to do so, He would violate His just, righteous, and holy character. This is also impossible.

This leaves a tension between these characteristics of God and man who has sinned. More terrifying is that Adam sinned and his fallen nature is transferred to his descendants. We cannot go back in time before the sins we've committed, nor can we go back before Adam's sin. Time is moving forward and it is the medium in which we live and interact with God. The separation is complete; God's holiness has been violated; and there is nothing we can do - judgment must come. This is the certainty of the matter. Therefore, though our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, it in no way negates the judgment which must result.

Life Application: All sin must be judged. However, God in His wisdom and mercy has allowed the sin of man to be judged in a perfect Substitute. By judging sin in this way the tension between God's eternal attributes ends. God's perfect righteousness required a sacrifice for payment of our sins. His perfect holiness demanded that no iniquity could be found in that Substitute. His perfect justice says that no unrighteousness can come into His presence, but a perfect payment restores felicity when offered by Him and accepted by man. His perfect grace is demonstrated in the Gift which we don't deserve. His perfect mercy is revealed in not condemning us as we deserve; His wrath was instead placed on His own precious Son. His perfect truthfulness is upheld in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, by which every promise in every covenant to man is fulfilled in Him. And His perfect love is demonstrated in the giving of His own Son on our behalf. Take time today to think through the enormity of what transpired at the cross of Calvary.