



7.
'Pummel the pastor!'
Romans 3.1-8

Background

Paul may have been an apostle, but he was also very much the pastor. As such he was instinctively aware of the questions which might be prompted in his hearers' minds by what he was saying: and as often as not he was quick, in anticipating such questions, to respond to them.

This passage at the start of Romans 3 is a case in point. Having just underlined that no matter how respectable and upright you may be (2.1-16) and no matter, even, how 'religious' you may be as a Jew (2.17-29), with a load of impressive credentials including the basic 'badge of belonging' (that is, circumcision) – you still need the salvation which God has effected in and through His Son Jesus.

What's the first question that's going to rise in the mind of a devout Jew? Something along the lines of, "It's a tough life being a Jew – and now you seem to be saying that all that counts for nothing: so what's the point in the pain of circumcision and the hassle of being a Jew?"

That's the first of three significant questions which he anticipates will be there in the back of people's minds. Some of the questions may be more genuine than others, certainly: there are those, after all, in every age, who throw their questions at believers simply in order to be difficult. But the questions Paul airs in this short passage are questions which, in one form or another, recur regardless of the context.

The first is 'pragmatic' and derives from the tendency we have to view life from a 'cost-benefit' perspective. What is the 'benefit', in other words, of bearing the cost of being a Jew (and it could be very costly, they were often a persecuted people), if that in itself doesn't secure you the favour of God?

The second question is more pastoral and would have been similarly pressing for a Jew: in essence it boils down to this. How faithful is God to His people if in the face of their unfaithfulness He gives them up?

And the third question is more theological, and stems from a common misunderstanding of grace, which is often framed like this – Isn't the message of salvation by grace likely to result in people concluding they have a license to sin? Here the question is framed slightly differently – but is answered by Paul equally emphatically!

Read all 8 verses, and if pressed for time concentrate on **'days' (1), (4) & (5)**.

1) Monday 19th February – empathy

Read [Romans 3.1](#)

“.. what advantage, then, is there in being a Jew? ..” (Rom.3.1)

The preacher must always be a pastor too. Paul puts himself into the shoes of his hearers and anticipates the questions they may have. Learn to do as Paul does here and empathise with others – understand the questions their perspective will create.

What are the questions which in your experience those who are ‘seeking’ tend to be struggling with and asking today?

Would there be value in there being the opportunity during a sermon for people to ask the questions – or would that simply be an unhelpful distraction?

Updating the question Paul raises here – if baptism doesn’t save you, why bother being baptised? How would you answer that question?

How would you answer a person who argued similarly that if being a church member doesn’t save you what’s the point in being a church member?

***Prayer:** Grant me wisdom and discernment by Your Holy Spirit, Lord, and help me to understand what the barriers are which keep others from entrusting their lives to You.*

2) Tuesday 20th February – privilege

Read [Romans 3.1-2](#)

“.. the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God ..” (Rom.3.2)

Being entrusted with the Word of God was the supreme privilege and the primary ‘advantage’ granted to the Jews. It gave them a massive “head’s start” in terms of knowing the Lord: but with privilege, of course, there always comes responsibility!

Scotland was known, for long enough, as ‘the land of the Book’: in what ways has that been a great privilege and a huge ‘advantage’ for us as a nation?

How has having ‘the very words of God’ so readily available to you been of benefit to you?

***Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for the gift of Your Word. Help me to cherish this gift as a sacred stewardship, to read it avidly, to trust it thoroughly, and to obey it constantly.*

3) Wednesday 21st February – unfaithful

Read [Romans 3.3](#)

“.. Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness ..” (Rom.3.3)

If the people to whom the Lord's promise was made lacked the faith to lay hold of His promise – can't you say that the Lord's not come good on His promise? If His people themselves are so faithless and flawed, what does that say about Him?

The Jews' unbelief saw the gospel being taken to the Gentiles: does that mean that God gave up on the Jews and stepped back from His promise to them?

How might you answer someone who had not time for Jesus because they'd seen so much hypocrisy on the part of His people?

Prayer: *Great is Your faithfulness, O God my Father – there is no shadow of turning with You! May that same constancy be found in my daily service of your Son.*

4) Thursday 22nd February – true

Read [Romans 3.3-4](#)

“.. Let God be true and every human being a liar ..” (Rom.3.4)

God's rich promises are matched by His sombre warnings. He remains faithful to both. However unfaithful, deceitful and wayward His people may be, He remains constantly true – in the blessings He graciously gives, in the judgments He rightly effects.

Read [2 Tim.2.11-13](#): what does Paul mean in that letter when he declares that *“if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot disown Himself”*?

Read [Ezekiel 33.1-9](#): is it valid to see the church as having a 'prophetic' ministry in warning people of the coming judgment of God?

God is true to His promises and His warnings: how can we as believers ensure that our society at large hears both?

For many people whose first (and often only) exposure to the gospel is in the lives of believers, a lack of faithfulness on the part of God's people leads them to conclude they don't wish anything to do with their God: is that fair?

Prayer: *Grant me grace throughout today to walk humbly with You, my God and King: make me as mindful of Your gracious warnings as I am Your merciful promises.*

5) Friday 23rd February – mindless

Read [Romans 3.5-6](#)

“.. if that were so, how could God judge the world? ..” (Rom.3.6)

How mindless and warped is the logic of our fallen humanity (“a human argument”)! Our sin, so the argument goes – our sin displays God's righteousness: why punish us, then, when we're doing Him a favour?! Such logic precludes any judgment at all!

‘God isn't fair,’ is a regular complaint which people make: what in your experience gives rise to such complaints, and how do you answer them?

How do you counter those who are persuaded that the notion of there being a final day of judgment is outdated, superstitious nonsense?

“Of course God will forgive me; that’s His job” (attributed to Heinriche Heine in the early 19th century): how would you answer those who adopt that view?

Short of being convicted of sin by the Spirit, our sinful natures mean we’ll always be trying to find excuses and to plead that it’s not fair: in our contemporary society are there things we may do to secure that work of the Spirit in convicting people of their sin?

Prayer: *All creation rejoices before You, Lord, for You come to judge the earth. May my living today reflect that truth, and may my heart ever rejoice in that prospect.*

6) Saturday 24th February – responsibility

Read [Romans 3.7](#)

“.. why am I still condemned as a sinner? ..” (Rom.3.7)

Our culture concludes that all of us are *victims*: pitiable more than culpable. There’s nothing new in that, of course: Adam in the garden tried that line – ‘*the woman You gave me ..*’. The sovereignty of God goes hand in hand with our human responsibility.

In what ways have you observed this ‘victim mentality’ finding expression in our contemporary culture?

How can you guard yourself against feeling aggrieved towards the Lord?

Prayer: *Forgive me, Lord. [My heart has been grieved](#), my spirit embittered and I have been as a brute beast before You. Thank You that You still hold me by the right hand.*

7) Sunday 25th February – holiness

Read [Romans 3.7-8](#)

“.. Their condemnation is just ..” (Rom.3.8)

Grace may be free – but it’s not cheap! The gospel isn’t a license to do as you like on the basis that the more you sin the greater God’s grace is seen to be; it’s a life-giving call from God into His kingdom. To think any differently only confirms your sinfulness.

How do you react when you are maliciously slandered, in the sort of way to which Paul alludes here?

Are there steps you can take to ensure you avoid misrepresenting others – or do you sometimes subtly portray others in a bad light?

Prayer: *Guard my tongue, O Lord, to keep me from slander and gossip and lies. May my lips sound forth the praises of Your Name: and I may seek to speak well of others.*