

Questions relating to the sins of the respectable Jewish world

Possessing the Word of God is a privilege

- Priority and opportunity

Unbelief does not make God unfaithful

- The unfaithfulness is wholly on the Jewish side

- God remains faithful

- His faithfulness is not changed by man's sin

- When we lose out, we do not blame God; we blame ourselves

Sin cannot be denied

Paul has dealt with the sins of the depraved pagan world^{□1} and with the respectable world, especially the world of Judaism^{□2}.

Now Paul wants (1) in 3:1–9a to answer some questions. He has several of them in 3:1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8, 9a. (2) He wants to show that the Old Testament Scriptures accused Israel of the sins he has mentioned^{□1}. The last question^{□2} flows into another matter on his heart. He wants to show his readers that the Old Testament accused Israel of sin. (3) Thirdly, he comes to a conclusion in 3:19–20.

Possessing the Word of God is a privilege. The first question is in 3:1–2. ¹*What advantage then does the Jew have? Or what is the value of being circumcised?* ²*Much in every way. First they have been entrusted with the oracles of God.* After all that Paul has said, we might ask: is there any value being Jewish? Paul's answer is that the main great privilege the Jew had was their priority over all other nations in being given the word of God, the first part of the written Scripture. It gave the opportunity to come to faith in God's future Saviour and it gave great instruction and wisdom once the person had come to faith.

Unbelief does not make God unfaithful. The second question is in 3:3–4. First-century Christians were often perplexed by the failure of Israel to receive Jesus. Had God been unfaithful to Israel? Paul answers that question by asking some questions of his own. ³*But what if some were unbelieving? Will their unbelief and unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God?* Paul then answers his own question: ⁴*By no means. Let God be true, and let every person be a liar.* What if a lot (but not all) of the Jews do not believe? The fact that they are unfaithful does not mean that God is or will be in any way unfaithful to his promises. The unfaithfulness is wholly on the Jewish side. In fact God will not give up on Israel and will go on being as faithful as ever. Verse 4 asks: Will you ever find God being unfaithful once he has committed himself? Perish the thought! I hope – says Paul – that you will regard God as utterly true, even though all of his people and the entire human race prove to be liars and let God down time and again. No one should ever make you think that God will give up on what he has committed himself to. You remember – says Paul – how David once fell into sin and wrote a psalm of confession^{□1}: . . . *as it is written: that you might be justified in your words, and shall overcome when you are on trial.* David acknowledged that the fault was altogether on his side. But God remains faithful. God's faithfulness is not changed by man's sin. God is not vindictive. God's character will not change. God's 'closed' decisions are not changed. No oath of God is ever abandoned.

God tells things the way they are. He does not twist or misrepresent anything. We miss God's blessings because of our lies. We do not face ourselves. The Jews rejected Jesus. But now they blame God for the fall of the nation. But it was not God's fault! Paul quotes Psalm 51:4. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and got involved in a trail of deceit and lies. He had to blame himself not God. It is the same with us. When we lose out, we do not blame God; we blame ourselves. Then there is a way back to blessing.

Sin cannot be denied. Romans 3:5–8 raises further objections. The next two questions are similar^{□1}. People in Paul's day tried to argue that

□1 1:18-32

□2 2:1-29

□1 3:9b-18

□2 3:9a

□1 Psalm 51

□1 3:5-6 and 3:7-8

sin is not very serious or can be justified in some way. ⁵*But if our unrighteousness recommends the righteousness of God what shall we say? Is God unjust in inflicting wrath on us? Is God fair? If he is determined to show us grace and prove to us how gracious he is, why does he send any kind of judgement at all? Paul does not give this question much time or argument. He simply insists. God is gracious, and will not abandon his faithfulness, but he reserves the right to judge his people without favouritism. Is God unjust? ⁶Let it not be! says Paul. For how, then, would God judge the world? God will judge the world in righteousness. No evasion of the judgement of God is possible.*

• *No evasion of the righteous judgement of God is possible*

• *The fact that some good happens as a result of sin does not alter the position*

• *Sin will be fully condemned*

• *Paul declares the truth dogmatically*

• *Discussion and debate are pointless*

Paul takes up another objection. ⁷*And if the truth of God abounds to his glory through my lie, why am I being judged as a sinner?* This is really a restatement of verse 5. Our sin – in this case our sin of deceit – displays God’s truthfulness. So surely sin results in something **good** happening? Again the argument is: God cannot judge it. ⁸*And why not conclude – as some slanderously charge us with saying – ‘Let us do evil things in order that good things may come’?* Again it gets a very sharp answer. *Their condemnation is just.*

We always try to find a way out of the charge of sin. We tend to look for ways of playing it down. But it will do us no good. Sin will be fully condemned.

When you are in a discussion and people bring up arguments like the ones Paul refers to in Romans 3:3–8 you would be wasting your time to give a lot of attention to them. Paul simply asserts dogmatically and without discussion what he thinks of them, simply laying it down that God is faithful, God is righteous, sin is wicked and nothing can justify it or make it good! I don’t think Paul is reasoning a case in these particular verses. There is no point in going into detailed debate. Often debate is a means of avoiding the truth. Paul will present very logical and careful argument when he needs to, but that is not appropriate here. ‘Their condemnation is just!’ That’s all the argument they are going to get!

Everyone needs a Saviour

• *The conclusion: The entire human race is under sin’s power*

Everyone needs a Saviour. Romans 3:9a comes back to the question of verse 1. We may translate: *What then? Do we Jews have an advantage? Not in every way. Do the Jewish people have any advantage? Yes, they had the privilege of possessing the Old Testament Scriptures. But they are not in a position of advantage in every way. There is certainly one major way in which they have no advantage at all. Paul explains: For we have already accused all people, whether Jews or Greeks, of being under the power of sin.* Everyone is ‘under sin’. Sin is a domineering master over them. The entire human race is in a slavery. Everyone needs a Saviour.



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