

What About...
Romans 3:1-8
1-22-2026

Several years ago, Ted Olsen, editor of Christianity Today Magazine wrote,

Among the oddest items recently sent to Christianity Today for review, are Pocket Deities, Chronicle Books religious figurines of Francis of Assisi and the Virgin of Guadalupe. "Tuck one of these portable boxes into your pocket or bag and take the protective spirit of these deities wherever you go," says a press release. Chronicle's Debra Lande later explained to CT that the company changed the name from pocket deities to pocket saints when we realized that St. Francis and the Virgin of Guadalupe were not technically deities. We think that the deities and saints will sell equally well however."

They were selling God all figured out and under control.

Packaged and promoted like any other product to appeal to self interest and an eye on what can I get out of it.

some of Paul's readers thought they too had not just life, but God all figured out and under control.

Believing he was there to take care of them and their needs.

To be taken out when they wanted something then stored away for future use.

And as Paul began the book of Romans, he was challenging everything they had come to believe and rely on.

He opened his letter with a sobering message, saying look around you, the world is a mess but don't blame that on God.

Paul tells us in 1:20, in creation he has clearly revealed himself, his invisible qualities, eternal power and divine nature, so all people are without excuse.

Instead, he states that the mess we are in is of our own making

Mankind tells God we don't want or need you, we want our own way so God says okay.

If you say you don't want God in your life, he won't force himself on you

BUT that also means you will have to face the consequences of your choices.

It's called free will.

Henry Nouwen said, "One of the greatest gifts you can give to others is the gift of freedom, where we allow the other person to take responsibility for his or her own responses, choices and future."

And that is just what God does with each of us.

3 times in chapter 1 Paul says man chose to reject God so He gave us over to our sinful desires with the consequence that we have made a mess of our lives and the world we live in

Paul wrote that if people want a world where man, instead of God, is at the center, one governed by human desire, :24 says God will give us over to the sinful desires of our hearts and we will then find ourselves in a world of Epstein files and \$100 billion per year porn industry and growing numbers of lives and reputations ruined by online deepfakes.

Paul continues, if people want a world with no boundaries and where anything goes, verse 26 says again, God will let us have our freedom and give us over to our shameful lusts and we will find ourselves in a world where people are defined and their worth determined on the basis of things like sexual orientation and lifestyle choices, rather than being loved by God, created in His image, and one's for whom Jesus died

And if people want a world where God has no part, then :28 Paul says God will give them over to a depraved mind. And we will find ourselves in a world of unrestrained greed and the raping of the environment in the name of profit, corruption and violence towards the poor and outsiders, endless conflict and ethnic hatred, where the truth is too often sacrificed at the altar of power and personal ambitions, where might makes right and to the victors go the spoils. All the things Paul mentions in verses 29-31 and which fill our news reports every day.

We see the consequences all around us of mankind telling God I don't want you.

The message of Romans 1 is basically; we have a world of our own making.

As Paul said in Galatians 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

Fortunately, that is not the end of the story.

As Paul will continue later in Romans, in spite of mankind's rebellion and sin, God never gave up or stopped loving us

Instead through the sacrifice of his own son, he provides a way back to him, a means to restore what was lost at the fall, and clean up the mess we've made of his good creation.

Some who heard Paul's condemnation of the Gentile world wouldn't have had any problems with it

they were quick to point fingers and pass judgement on others, literally believing God had a double standard, one for the Jews and one for everyone else so

They believed they were safe because of their heritage as Jews and therefore heirs of His promises, their moral superiority because they had His law, and their special status and privileges before God because of His covenant with them as seen in the practice of circumcision.

So in chapter 2, Paul told them don't be so smug.

The law, his promise, and circumcision would not save them because they were just as guilty as everyone else and therefore, they too would face judgement.

it's not how we look on the outside but what's in our hearts that matters to God.

In 1 Samuel 16, God had even scolded the prophet Samuel for looking at outward appearances to determine someone importance. Telling him, "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Without a living and vital relationship with God through Christ, we become merely empty shells, form without substance.

"having the appearance of godliness but lacking its power," as Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:5

some would have taken issue with Paul about this because it undermined what they had been raised to believe

As he begins chapter 3, he deals with 3 objections that he knew would come as a result of what he had written.

I. The first objection, What about the Jews

Reflects the belief that because they were his chosen people, no matter what happened or how bad things got, heaven was assured because they were descendants of Abraham and heirs to Gods promises

But in declaring them guilty and subject to judgement, Paul was calling this into question. If heaven wasn't assured, then what's the point of being a Jew?

As he puts it in verse 1, "*What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?*" (Romans 3:1)

Why bother?

And if you look at their history and all they have endured, we might be inclined to think there has been no advantage to it.

They spent 400 years in slavery in Egypt followed by 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. When they finally did enter the promised land they had to fight for it and continued to fight to keep it. They were divided by civil war, decimated by Assyria, taken captive by Babylon, conquered by Greece, ruled by Rome under whom tens of thousands were publicly crucified.

In Caesarea in 68 AD, approximately 20,000 were killed and more sold as slaves. Around the same time in Damascus another 10,000 had their throats cut on a single day.

In 70 AD the Romans general Titus Vespasian destroyed Jerusalem, its temple and most of its citizens. According to Josephus, over 1 million Jews of all ages were mercilessly butchered and 100,000 of those who survived were then sold into slavery or sent to Rome to die in the gladiator games.

In AD 115, Emperor Hadrian destroyed 985 of their towns and killed at least 600,000 Jewish men. Thousands more died of starvation and disease. So many were sold into slavery that the price of an able-bodied male slave dropped to that of a horse.

In 380 AD, Emperor Theodosius declared by law that the Jews were an inferior race, something which permeated Europe for the next 1000 years and still persists in many places today.

During the first Crusades, crusaders slaughtered countless more on their way through Palestine to liberate Jerusalem.

In 1254, King Louis IX banished them from France. 50 years later, King Philip the Fair expelled another 100,000. And in 1492 as Columbus was crossing the Atlantic, they were expelled from Spain and only 4 years later from Portugal.

Thousands were massacred in the Ukraine in 1818, and of course in the 1940's 6 million were killed in the Holocaust.

They have been the most abused and persecuted people in history and the one thing that kept them together was the belief that they were special, that in spite of it all, God was on their side and in the end would make it right. Heaven was assured.

Yet now Paul says that they too would face judgement just like everyone else. So why bother. Why go through all of that if there was no advantage, no benefit, no profit in being a Jew?

That's even what people were saying in the prophet Malachi's day.

““You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?’” (Malachi 3:14)

What did we gain? What's in it for me?

Their faith wasn't about loving God and their neighbor, serving God and others, being light to the nations through whom all people would be blessed, but rather what they thought they deserved and would get out of it

What motive they had was a profit motive

The belief that the value of being a Jew meant because of the law, the promise, and the covenant, they had a get out of jail free card and would not have to face judgement but instead go straight to heaven.

Of course, we still deal with this idea when people treat the sinner's prayer like fire insurance, say the words and get into heaven regardless of what you do or how you live after because God now owes us

And the attraction of so many popular teachings in the church today is on false promises which reflect a purely profit motive, what do I get out of it and what's God going to do for me. Salvation becomes about the blessings not the service, claiming our rights rather than giving our lives

What advantage is there to being a Jew, Paul says here in verses 2, “Much in every way! First of all (Above all), the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.” (Romans 3:2)

In being entrusted with the very words of God, they were the recipients of God’s special revelation of himself

And through them had direct access to the heart and mind of God, insight into knowing his will and his ways as no other people had

the advantage was not the blessings but the responsibility

how do we treat Gods word? Merely as a collection of promises and blessings owed to us or as insight into the heart and mind of God

do you realize what a blessing it is for you and I to have God’s Word, to be entrusted with knowledge of him and his heart.

His word which is meant to be shared not kept to ourselves

That through sharing it and the gospel it contains, we too may be a blessing to the nations

What a privilege it is to be able to read and study it on our own while most of the world throughout most of history has had little or no access to it?

We are, just as they were, saved to serve not to be served

II. A second related objection was, What about Gods Promises

“What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness? 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.”” (Romans 3:3–4)

They were accusing Paul of questioning Gods faithfulness

because they believed Gods promises were absolute and weren’t dependent on them, yet if as Paul claimed, God would judge them for their lack of faith wouldn’t that mean he can’t be trusted to keep his word?

They were trying to keep God in the box they had created, believing that they break faith but God couldn’t

They could do whatever they pleased, live how they liked, but God was required to fulfill his promises to Abraham and his descendants, lest he be proven as unfaithful as them.

Membership in the Church of Scotland plunged 22 percent between 1994 and 2002, but Daniel Hawthorne, pastor of the Belhelvie Church in Aberdeenshire Scotland, said it was time to drop a few more names from the rolls. In a letter to his 600 church members, only about 200 of whom ever attend, he suggested that those unwilling to attend, give, read the Bible, and evangelize should reflect on their commitment and decide whether or not they wish to remain members. He said the church would rather have a smaller role of people who take their membership and Christian faith seriously than a larger one made up of people who don't. This was very much in keeping with the church's official teachings and the Westminster Confession but his efforts were met with derision. As one member said, surely this goes against everything the church stands for.

For some, God's faithfulness can become an excuse for unfaithfulness, and Paul rejects that and any notion that he would ever question God's faithfulness

He said as much in 2 Timothy 2:13 when he wrote, even if we are faithless he will remain faithful for God cannot disown himself

God cannot deny who he is or act in any way which is contrary to it
God wasn't breaking his promises but being true to his nature which cannot abide sin
And he refuses to let his people wallow in it
That is why Jesus came and died and rose again, to break us out of the cycle of sin and separation it causes

God's word and His promises are based on His faithfulness not our bloodline
Like Abraham, we receive them by faith not by right or demand.
As Paul writes, **although everyone is a liar, God will be proven true.**

Despite what some were accusing Paul of teaching; we may fail but God wont.
Heaven and earth may pass away but his word will last forever

What about the Jews, what about His promises, and

III. A third objection some were raising was, what about the law

"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.)"

Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!" (Romans 3:5–8)

In his preaching of salvation by faith alone, some were accusing him of teaching that sin is irrelevant

It doesn't matter what you do or how you live because if God is going to forgive us anyway, why not just do as we please

Taking it one step farther, they accused him of saying sin actually makes God look good because it gives Him more opportunity to forgive.

reflects the belief that it doesn't matter what you do or how you live.

God will take care of it all in the end anyway so live as you please.

Faith becomes like Bill Murray in the movie Groundhog Day. He gets caught up in a time loop and no matter what he does today, when he gets up in the morning, nothing mattered because he just starts over.

This is a complete distortion of what Augustine meant when he said we are to love God and so as we please. What he meant was that if we truly do love God, what we want will be to please God, to live for his pleasure and glory rather than our own.

And this objection to Paul's teaching in turn calls into question God's purity.

Will He act according to his nature which cannot bear the presence of sin.

He doesn't excuse it but rather deals with it through the cross because, our behavior does matter.

Ultimately this passage is about God's faithfulness.

He will always be faithful to his people, faithful to his word, and faithful to his nature

Real issue is will we be true and faithful to Him

In his book *Authentic Faith*, Gary Thomas shares a story from WW1 about 2 American soldiers who bonded tightly as they talked about their home and families, their hopes and dreams for the future after the war, and their fears and the horrors they were surrounded by. One night the order was given to leave their trench and attack. The fighting was fierce and desperate and the two friends got separated. After a long and

difficult battle, the call went out to retreat back to the safety of their trench. When the one soldier returned, he began asking about his buddy, finally discovering that his friend was still out there, wounded and bleeding. Without even considering the danger, he announced that he was going back to get his friend. Absolutely not, his commanding officer replied. It's suicide to go back out there and it's not worth the risk. I've already lost more men than I can afford to lose.

The soldier waited till his officers' head was turned, then jumped out and crawled toward his wounded buddy. Immediately the shelling started and bullets began to whiz by him. Yet he persisted crawling through the mud and gore and finally reached his friend. They shared a few words and then he began pulling him back toward the trench. Somewhere between the time he reached his buddy and the time they both made it back to the trench, the wounded man died. With great sorrow, the friend pulled the precious corpse into the trench.

So, was it worth it? The officer barked, angry that his order had been disobeyed. Absolutely, the friend replied. My buddies' final words made it all worthwhile.

What could he have possibly said that made it worth risking your life to hear, the officer shouted. When I reached him, he saw my face and said, I knew you'd come.

"God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." (1 Corinthians 1:9)

He will always come!