

The Faithfulness of God

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[0 : 0 0] You may be seated. Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today.

A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

This week we are continuing our series in the book of Romans, and before we jump in, I want to make a couple corrections from last week. A couple of you reminded me that Daniel, in fact, does not appear in Daniel chapter 3.

It's just Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And it is Moses, not Abraham, who's almost killed for failing to circumcise his son. So I'm going to keep on the straight and narrow path.

[1 : 1 2] This morning I got into the shower. I still have my glasses on, so I'm just trying to make it here, you know. We are continuing our series in the book of Romans, and you'll remember that the book of Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s A.D., and it is called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it is written to the churches in the city of Rome.

This letter is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And Paul's hope, as we saw in chapter 1, is that those who receive this letter would be established in the gospel.

Paul will make many applications, as we've already seen, as we go throughout this letter, but he is especially focused on the mission and the unity of the church. And while we will go on many spokes, we're going to go on many different side quests like we did last week, we will be constantly returning back to the hub of the gospel.

It is tempting, as I've said many times now, to come to passages like the one we come to this morning and believe this is a random section of Scripture making random points. But in fact, Paul is actually making one argument from chapters 1 through 3 of Romans, and it's summed up in verse 23, which we'll get to in just a couple weeks, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Chapter 1, he's establishing that non-religious people fall short of God's glory. Chapter 2, he established that religious people fall short of God's glory. Chapter 3, he's been responding to some potential objections from chapter 2, and soon he will tie it all together.

[3 : 0 1] This week is our last week dealing with these objections before he really ties it together for us in chapter 3. Following up from last week, remember we talked about the fact that the Bible is this great blessing, that one of the greatest privileges of growing up in the church is having access to the Word of God.

And so another objection then rises up that Paul wants to respond to, and it's this, if the Bible is such a great blessing, why do so many Christians fail?

The Bible is such a great blessing, why do so many Christians still fail? And on that theme, is it actually fair for God to judge the world?

So with those two questions, I invite you to turn with me now to Romans chapter 3. We're going to start at verse 3, and as we come there, remember that Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5, tells us, every word of God proves true.

He's a shield to those who take refuge in Him. And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 3, starting at verse 3. What if some were unfaithful?

[4 : 20] Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means. Let God be true, though everyone were a liar, as it is written, that you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged.

But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? I speak in a human way.

By no means. For then how could God judge the world? But if through my lie, God's truth abounds to His glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?

And why not do evil that good may come, as some people slanderously charge us with saying, their condemnation is just.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we do again praise You and we thank You that You have given us Your very words, that You as a loving Father instruct Your children, that You guide us and direct us.

[5 : 40] Even more than that, You show us the great mercy and grace that You offer us through Your Son. We ask that You would do that again this morning, that You would pour out Your Spirit here among us, that You would make Your Word clear and alive to our hearts and our minds, and most of all, that You would show us, Jesus, that we would see Him in all His glory and beauty and authority and holiness and majesty and mercy and grace and love.

We ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Just a few weeks ago, on October the 3rd, the New York Times published an article with this title, Around Dallas, the church scandals seem to have no end.

And then the subtitle was this, In this part of Texas, a pastor with a clean reputation is not to be taken for granted. The article then goes on to discuss the number of scandals that have happened in Dallas over the last year.

They tell us that there's a radio station in Dallas that has been keeping a tally, and it now contains 17 names, including five involving criminal charges.

Now, those sorts of articles raise a lot of questions for us. One of them is this. It seems like the Bible perhaps is not so great after all, and perhaps God isn't so faithful after all.

[7 : 37] Because, of course, if the Bible was and if God was, how in the world would this be happening? Is God actually true to his word?

Paul here in this section of Romans 3 is responding to an almost identical objection. Verse 3 here, he says, What if some were unfaithful?

Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? Last week, we talked about the fact that the Old Testament was this tremendous blessing to the Jews, and I told you it was a blessing ultimately because it showed them Jesus.

If God's word is so powerful, Paul is saying, why did the Jews fail so magnificently?

If God's word is so powerful, why did the Jews fail so magnificently? If it was such a great privilege, if it was such a great blessing, why didn't they do better?

[8 : 45] And you just have to think back to our previous sermon series, right in the book of Judges, what did we see time and time again, if not God's people failing over and over?

Not just the Old Testament. We could also talk about the New Testament. If the Jews were so blessed, if this was such a great thing for them to have the oracles of God, why did so many of them reject Jesus when he came?

If the great blessing of the oracles of God, if the great blessing of the word is that it shows Jesus, and yet the people who have it reject Jesus, how can you say that God is actually faithful?

That doesn't sound like a blessing. It sounds like a waste. That's the objection that Paul is raising here, and he immediately gives a response in verse four.

And he says essentially this, God's faithfulness shines brightly even in man's sin.

[9 : 56] God's faithfulness shines brightly even in man's sin. Verse four, he says, by no means let God be true, though everyone were a liar, as it is written, that you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged.

And he's making a quotation from the Old Testament there. He's quoting from Psalm 51. And if you're familiar with the Psalms, you know that Psalm 51 is King David's psalm of repentance after his great sin with Bathsheba.

He's been exposed. He's in a sense this religious leader, this king of God's people, who's been caught in this extramarital affair. And he says, look, when God has condemned me in this, he's actually being faithful.

He's faithful in his judgment. He's faithful in his punishment. We saw the same thing. Deuteronomy chapter seven, which Jim read for us earlier this morning, God makes these promises of faithfulness, promises of his steadfast love.

And then he also makes promises of punishment. Both of those things are part of God's word. And so whichever one falls, God is being true to what he has said.

[11 : 08] And so Paul's making a simple point. Whether God shows mercy or he shows judgment, God is still faithful.

Whether God shows mercy or judgment, he is still true to everything that he's promised. Even in and as he judges, he's showing that we can trust his character.

And so as we go back and think about these churches in Dallas, we can ask, how was God faithful? How is he faithful? I'm sure there's a number of ways we could answer that.

I'm going to give you three examples of God being faithful to his promises. First, he's faithful to Jesus' promise in Luke chapter 12. Jesus says this, nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known.

Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

[12 : 20] Why is it that we know about these 17 pastors and their failure? We know because God has honored his promise that what has been whispered in private rooms will be shouted from the rooftops.

God's faithful to his people. He's kept his promise. He's kept his promise in Galatians chapter six. Do not be deceived. God is not mocked.

For whatever one sows, that he will also reap. We see this failure, right? We see these things being brought into the light.

That too is an expression of God's faithfulness. That too is God doing what he said he would do. And in the midst of that, we might think, okay, good, God is being faithful.

He's saying that he's going to bring things to light and he has, but what about his promise to the church? We could look again, Matthew chapter 16, verse 18.

[13 : 20] Jesus says this, on this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

How can God be faithful? How can the word be so powerful in the midst of such failure? And the answer is this, God's kingdom continues.

17 pastors are not powerful enough to derail the mission of the living God. Let God be true, though everyone is a liar.

Paul's reminding them, God is faithful in every situation. God is faithful in every circumstance. Nothing can thwart his purposes.

Nothing can stop his promises. God is faithful when he shows mercy. He is faithful when he shows judgment.

[14 : 29] We've talked before, 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 20, reminds us all the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus Christ.

Romans chapter 8, which we'll get to, you know, in a few decades, reminds us, it says, look, if God gave us his own son, will he not also with him give us all things?

In other words, in the midst of the imperfection and scandal and sin of God's people, he will build his church.

The gates of hell will not prevail against it. Let God be true, though everyone were a liar.

There's a deeper point here for us as well, that God will accomplish his purposes no matter what. One pastor has put it this way, you cannot stand in the way of the freight train of God's kingdom.

[15 : 50] Your imperfection and sin and failure cannot thwart or stop God's purposes and his plan. Your flawed and imperfect parenting is not powerful enough to block God's work in the life of your child.

Your trauma from your past is not so powerful to stop God from using you as his instrument in this world.

And pastor's failures are not so great that God has been blocked somehow from working his will in the city of Dallas.

Let God be true, though everyone were a liar. Now I'm not saying there aren't real, deep, and painful consequences.

I am not saying it doesn't matter how you live. What I am saying is this. God is faithful to his word. He's faithful to his people.

[17 : 03] What I reminded you of multiple times during the series in Judges, 2 Timothy 2, verse 13, if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

Nothing's changed since Paul wrote Romans chapter 3. God was faithful to his people then. God is faithful to his people today.

God gave us his son, Romans chapter 8. Will he not also with him give us all things? Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

In the midst of man's failures, God's kingdom marches on. God's faithfulness after addressing that, Paul goes on to lay out another objection.

Okay, Paul, if man's unfaithfulness shows God's faithfulness, isn't sin kind of a good thing?

[18 : 30] That's what's happening here in verses 5 and 6. Verse 5, but if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?

In other words, hey, look, you've said here that when we sin, it shows God's glory somehow. It shows that he's faithful. Great. Let's sin more so we can show his faithfulness more.

Now, if that doesn't really make sense, I want you to think about it this way. Many pastors will explain the gospel like this. The gospel is this bright diamond, and diamonds look best on a black background.

Right? So what you want is you have to understand that the gospel is beautiful against the background of our sin, the backdrop of our sin. Now, one of the most interesting jobs I think that someone could have, maybe it's a boring job, I'm not sure, it's to pick the names of paint colors.

Right? Who is it that imagines up all of these things? And I looked into this, there are actually a variety of shades of black that you can get. You might be thinking, well, if it's a shade of black, then it's gray.

[19 : 44] False. Okay? Here's a list. You have obsidian black. There is ink black. There's also jet black, coal black, and leather black.

And so what Paul's objectors are saying is, look, the more we sin, the darker the shade of black. And the brighter the diamond shines. So let's sin more.

The more we sin, the brighter that diamond is. So why would God judge us? We're helping him. We're making God's jewels look great. He shouldn't judge us.

We're making his diamond shine brighter and brighter. Wow, God, you're welcome. Aren't you so glad for having people like us?

How can you punish us for making you look so good? Paul in verse five, at the end, starts his response.

[20 : 41] He says, I speak in a human way, which is his way of saying only a human could say something that stupid. And then he goes on in verse six, by no means, of course, this can't be true.

Why? For then how could God judge the world? In other words, if you follow that logic out, no one will ever be judged. You might think that Paul here would defend the idea of judgment, but he doesn't.

He's speaking to a Jewish audience who are all in on the concept of judging the Gentiles. And so Paul's saying, your beliefs actually don't match up. You want the Gentiles to be judged, then you can't make this argument end of discussion.

If we follow it through, then we end up with zero judgment. And of course, you, my Jewish receivers of this letter and me, Paul, know that that's not going to work.

Now, that might not be as obvious to us today because most of us are in fact not Jewish. And in our culture, we are not committed as people were in Paul's culture to the idea of a judgment.

[21 : 52] And so this argument is not necessarily, at least on the face, of it as powerful to us as it was to them. It ended the discussion for the Jews.

It may not end it for us. However, I'd like to suggest this. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we also believe in judgment.

If we're truly honest, whether you're a Christian or a non-Christian, you believe in judgment. You might say you don't. You might say that as your stated belief, right?

And yet, you cannot live consistently with that. Just think for a minute about the way people talk about their political enemies. Think about the way people talk about other people who vote differently than they do.

We hear this all the time. These are words filled with judgment, right? Filled with judgment. We all make sorts of moral valuations, on the one hand, claiming that we're more merciful than God, and then the other hand, when someone crosses us or violates us, our anger rises up.

[23 : 05] We actually, deep down, long to see justice done. Whether we admit it or not, all of us believe in judgment. We are closer to first century Judaism than we'd like to admit.

Now, this is on the back of your worship guide, speaking of Paul's words here. Paul asks us to imagine a world where there is no judgment, no accountability, and no recompense for evils that are done.

Such a world is intolerable and senseless, degrading our humanity since what we do with our lives would be insignificant and have no moral value.

Without judgment, everything would be permitted. Nothing would be verboten, and goodness would vanish into the midst of nothingness.

In other words, do you believe in goodness? Then you believe in judgment. Do you believe that your actions in this world matter at all? You believe in judgment.

[24 : 22] Are there moral things that you find reprehensible and believe should be punished? you believe in judgment. I speak in a human way by no means, for then how could God judge the world?

We all want judgment. We all want justice to come if we're truly honest. In fact, we demand it, right? What are protests about if not a cry for justice?

The only problem is this. The catch is this. We want justice for other people, not for ourselves. We want to be the dispensers of judgment, not the receivers of judgment.

That's the catch. That's the dark backdrop against the diamond of the gospel, right? That is what Paul is trying to push us towards. Back all the way in chapter one where he says there's a righteousness that comes from faith, for faith.

Judgment is coming not just to those who have hurt us, but to us as well. And so there must be another answer. We want, we demand to live in a world with judgment.

[25 : 43] We just don't want to receive judgment. Paul then goes on to push things one step further. Verse six, how could God judge the world?

Then verse seven, he says, hey, if you think that your sin shows God's glory even more, then let's take that to its logical conclusion. But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?

And why not do evil that good may come? As some people slanderously charge us with saying. Okay, so first he responded to this objection.

Every time we sin, we're helping God, so why stop? Next, okay, let's continue it. Every time we sin, we're helping God, so let's sin more and more.

Let's do it. Let's do as much as possible because every time we do it, the more we do it, the greater God appears. and Paul basically says this, if you argue for that, you are arguing for evil.

[26 : 55] If you're arguing for that, you're arguing for evil. You're not on the side of the good, you're on the side of the wrong. It's a very simple argument. Paul doesn't spend much time responding to it.

He concludes with this, their condemnation is just. He's saying, look, your argument's so bad. It's self-condemning.

I'm not going to waste time responding to it. If that's what you think, then judgment is coming for you. Remember, I've been telling you that Paul here is responding to this idea since chapter 2 from the Jews that somehow they can presume on God's grace that since they're God's chosen people, they have access to circumcision and the law.

There's nothing else that they need to worry about. And Paul again is telling them as he's told them many times before, no. No, you can't presume on that.

You will show God's faithfulness whether he has mercy on you or whether he judges you. You cannot presume and live however you want. I've also been telling you that this Romans is the fifth gospel.

[28 : 09] that what Paul teaches Jesus taught first. In Matthew chapter 3, John the Baptist comes to prepare the way for Jesus and he says this, Do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father.

For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now, the axe is laid to the root of the trees.

Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. God's glory is shown in his mercy.

His glory is shown in his judgment. And so to tie all of these things together, I'll simply say this. No one wants to live in a world without judgment.

And no one is prepared to face God's judgment. Say that again. No one wants to live in a world without judgment. No one is prepared to face God's judgment.

[29 : 20] We want to be the ones dishing it out, not the ones receiving it. That second point drives us back to the first point. Our only hope is this, that God is faithful no matter what.

That's the only way we resolve those things. How do we handle it that we can't live without judgment and we can't face it? Our only hope is in Jesus and Jesus alone.

After John the Baptist introduces him, Jesus goes on to say this, John chapter 3, again, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

God's judgment is coming and it is just. God's justice is shown in his mercy and his justice is shown in his wrath. Do you believe in the Son?

Do you have eternal life? If you do, then you can sing with us in our closing hymn.

[30 : 40] We're going to say exactly what it is that's our hope. Those he saves are his delight. Christ will hold me fast.

precious in his holy sight, he will hold me fast. He'll not let my soul be lost. His promises shall last.

Right? Let God be true through everyone be a liar. Bought by him at such a cost, he will hold me fast. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you and praise you that you are true to your words.

That your faithfulness is proved no matter what man does. We ask that you would, for those of us who are Christians, that you would establish our belief in the Son who has eternal life.

For those of us who are not, you would show us the contradiction that we want judgment but we can't face judgment. That we would run to the only one who's offered to take it for us. We ask all of these things in his name, the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

[31 : 48] Amen. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.