



Help for the Journey: Sermon Resources and References

January 4, 2015

“The Greater Faithfulness: Traditions and Symbols” (Romans 3:1-8)

Steve Hawkins, speaker

Paul follows up on his discussion of symbols and traditions. Having argued previously that outward symbols of faith have no intrinsic value of their own, Paul now addresses the question of whether they have any value at all.

Central Text:

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

³What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness? ⁴Not 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.”

⁵But 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.)⁶ Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? ⁷Someone might argue, “If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?” ⁸Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—“Let us do evil that good may result”? Their condemnation is just!

Further Reading:

[YouTube Video by Jefferson Bethke, “Why I Hate Religion but Love Jesus”](#)
(This is the video we used in the service)

[Follow-Up Article in Gospel Coalition Blog about Jefferson Bethke’s video](#)

[Gospel Coalition’s Response to the Above Post \(Very unusual and healing!\)](#)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What exactly is religion? What is the difference between religion and the Gospel? Does the Gospel deny every aspect of religion or that it can be abused or misused? What can be dangerous about religion?
2. What did Paul criticize about Jewish religion in the previous passage? Why might Christians today conclude there's no value in religious tradition, rituals, symbols and institutions? What might some unbelievers perceive about these things? What is your experience?
3. The text leads us to consider how God is faithful when we are not. How was God faithful to the Jews with circumcision and the Word even though they were unfaithful to them? How about the church as an institution today? How do we see and experience God's unrelenting faithfulness through the sacraments, corporate worship, scripture and doctrine?
4. How does the unfaithfulness of people and the church to God's Word impact you? How about your own unfaithfulness? Dwell on the promise that God is faithful to His Word even when we are not. How can you reinforce that in your heart? What might it motivate you to do or pursue?
5. Why is Paul quoting David in Psalm 51 in verse 4 here? What is the context? How did David's sin further highlight God's justice and righteousness? How might that encourage you? How does it further show that God is faithful when we are not? Could that help when you struggle with the sins of others as well as your own.
6. How does the good news include not only a cleansing of our unfaithfulness but an empowerment to become more faithful? How do we see God's faithfulness in the Gospel and in Christ most clearly?

Gospel Practice:

What lessons could we learn from this passage about God's discipline of us as believers? Why do we find ourselves sometimes discouraged by God's discipline? Why should it actually point us to His faithfulness and reinforce our own faith? What would change in your life if you saw even God's rebuke and discipline as Good News in your life and as signals of His favor, faithfulness and love toward you? Pray, asking God to show you how you respond to His discipline, and ask for God to help you grow in seeing His discipline as a blessing.



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