

**Romans 3:1-8**  
**(Jeremiah 9:23-24; Matthew 5:17-20)**  
**“What Does It Matter?”**

## **Introduction**

In the previous verses (chapter 2, verses 17-29), Paul exposed four presumptions of both Jewish and Christian people in seeking to establish for ourselves a way of being right with God that rest upon what we do rather than upon what God does for us. Paul always exposes our attempts, however subtle, at self-salvation, and shows them to be at the heart of our rebellion against God and the reason that our righteousness is often a greater danger to us than our sin.

Putting his argument in Christian, rather than Jewish, terms: Some think that a Christian family can save them, others think that religious knowledge – studying the Bible and theology – can save them, while others think that performing Christian service can save them, and still others think that baptism can save them. No, Paul argues, the only thing that ultimately makes us right with God is something God himself must do in our hearts by his Spirit (2:29). We must, to use Jesus’ language, be born again, born from above, born of the Spirit.

*But that raises a serious question:* If these kinds of things so valued by both Jews and Christians cannot save us, is there any value to them, and is there any advantage to being raised in a Jewish or a Christian home? In answering that question, Paul realizes that he has raised another question, and with each new answer comes yet another question, until he chases us down, corners us and exposes the hypocrisy of the questions we ask, not seek God’s truth, but rather to avoid it.

Listen to the four questions Paul poses here – questions he had certainly encountered in his debates with his countrymen, and questions that he himself had probably once asked in the days when he opposed the Christian faith.

## **Body**

- 1. Q: If neither family, nor knowledge, nor service, nor ceremony can make us right with God, what does any of it matter? If there is no advantage to it, why bother with any of it (3:1)?**

**A: Just because these things cannot in themselves make us right with God does not mean that they are not of value. The greatest gift of being part of the covenant community is that we do not have to search to know what God desires: we have been entrusted with the Word of God and are being instructed by those who know that Word (3:2).**

**2. Q: But, what does it matter that we have God's Word if his promises cannot be trusted, since they apparently depend, not upon his faithfulness, but upon ours (3:3)?**

**A: This is to misunderstand the nature of God's promises: they always rest upon his faithfulness, not ours. Think, for example, of God's promises to David and all that led up to his writing Psalm 51, which Paul quotes here (3:4).**

**3. Q: But, if God gets greater glory from the stark contrast between his faithfulness and our unfaithfulness, is God not wrong to condemn us for our sin (3:5)?**

**A: If that were true, then God would also never judge the unrepentant wicked of the world, since even their rebellion will ultimately glorify him, nor would the cry of the oppressed, abused and mistreated ever be heard, and the demands of righteousness and justice would never be satisfied for all eternity (3:6).**

**4. Q: Let's ask that same question with a different application: If God gets greater glory from the stark contrast between his faithfulness and our unfaithfulness, then why should we not continue to be unfaithful and do evil so that God gets even greater glory (3:7-8)?**

**A: Such a question is so blatantly self-serving and so completely flies in the face even of this world's view of right and wrong that it only deserves to be dismissed with contempt. Imagine making such a defense before a merely human judge (3:8).**

## **Conclusion**

What Paul will go on to show in this letter, as in all of his letters, is that only God's grace can save us, a thought that at once humbles us and fills us with joyful confidence, and that his grace also empowers us to begin living in a new way. The presumptions that too many professing Christians depend upon to make them confident in God's love must become, instead, the grateful responses of those who, even while still lost in sin, have been well-loved by their heavenly Father, redeemed by their elder Brother, and empowered by his Holy Spirit. The gifts of a godly family, biblical knowledge, Christian service and baptism into the community, are great blessings that give those raised within the community of God's people a huge advantage. But it is all of grace, and that grace must never be used as an excuse for living as though we had not been set free from guilt and shame and entrusted with the good news of salvation, and the joyful task of loving others even as Christ has loved us.

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