

# NO FEAR OF GOD

Romans 3:1-20

John complains, “I simply cannot resolve this calculus problem.” Sarah offers a solution: “Let’s read some Shakespearean sonnets.”

I’ve got a problem with my car: it won’t start. But no problem: I know what to do. I’ll go and practice my guitar. That will fix it.

My cakes always used to fall when I took them out of the oven. But my friend showed me how to fix the problem. He showed me how to adjust the timing on my car engine.<sup>1</sup>

This is how D.A. Carson begins his article, [The Hole in the Gospel](#), in order to illustrate how ridiculous it is to solve a problem with the wrong solution. The article is a review of the book titled, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, which concludes that the missing piece of the puzzle of the gospel in our day is the need to address global poverty. In other words, we tell people that Jesus died for their sins but are we doing enough for their real needs in this life. Carson reports that “some studies have shown that Christians spend about five times more mission dollars on issues related to poverty than they do on evangelism and church planting.” And he concludes by saying, “Judging by the distribution of American mission dollars, the biggest hole in our gospel is the gospel itself.”

I would take it a step further and I am confident that Carson would not disagree. The hole in our gospel is not necessarily the good news of salvation in Christ alone but rather the bad news of the ravages of sin. Most people reject the solution of Christ’s atoning death because they first rejected their need for this solution. To them it makes about as much sense as fixing your car by playing the guitar. We need to recover the Biblical emphasis on sin. If you have been with us since we started Romans you will know that this is precisely what Paul does in the first 3 chapters. What he has done is to drive us to the cross. But it’s not just the unsaved pagans and Jews who need the cross. You and I need it every day and a thorough understanding of our sin is meant to take us there.

Then **what** advantage has the Jew? Or **what** is the value of circumcision? 2 Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3 **What** if some were unfaithful? **Does** their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? 4 By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,

“That you may be justified in your words,  
and prevail when you are judged.” (Psalm 51:5)

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? (I speak in a human way.) 6 By no means! For then how could God judge the world? 7 But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, **why** am I still being condemned as a sinner? 8 And **why** not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

9 **What** then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, 10 as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

11 no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;  
no one does good,

not even one.” (Psalm 14;103; 53:1-3)

13 “Their throat is an open grave;  
they use their tongues to deceive.” (Psalm 5:9)

“The venom of asps is under their lips.” (Psalm 140:3)

14 “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” (Psalm 10:7)

15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

16 in their paths are ruin and misery,

17 and the way of peace they have not known.” (Isaiah 59:7)

18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Psalm 36:1)

19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

As you can see, Paul teaches us by asking lots of questions He does this frequently but in here he asks eight questions in a span on nine verses. He does this for 2 reasons. First these questions are no doubt actual questions that he has been asked by skeptics and scoffers. We are all used to clicking on the FAQ sections of a website but Paul was doing this 2000 years before Al Gore invented the internet.

The second reason for farming this chapter with questions is because it is an effective teaching tool. The nine questions can be simplified into five main questions. Let’s take them one at a time.

1. Then **what** advantage has the Jew? Or **what** is the value of circumcision?

This question is important based on the end of chapter two where Paul wrote, *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.* This is a very

logical question because the Jew wants to know why circumcision was given to the Jews in the first place. Is there any advantage to it?

Paul's answer is given in verse two. *Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.* Paul wrote, "to begin with" as if he had been planning on giving a long list of advantages instead of just one. I believe his list was finished in chapter nine when he was answering a similar question. *To whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.* (Romans 9:4-5) This is quite a list of advantages but Paul argues both in chapter three and chapter nine that even all of these advantages do not bring a person into the Kingdom of God.

Paul has his own separate and longer list, didn't he? *If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless* (Phil 3:4-6). But all of these advantages were not sufficient to save him because he was depending upon his own righteousness and not God's righteousness.

This advantage for a Jew is a bit like the advantage of being an American instead of a Muslim in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, you are very unlikely to hear the gospel. About as likely as an OT pagan hearing about Yahweh. But in the U.S., you will almost certainly hear the gospel in some fashion. So this is an advantage but by itself, it cannot earn you salvation. You must act on it.

Paul's next two questions go hand in hand.

2. *What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?*

Even though being a Jew was an advantage, many Jews were not faithful to the Lord. Since the Jews were God's chosen people and since so many rejected the Lord, what does this ultimately say about God's faithfulness?

Do you know how we can modernize this question? "If there are a bunch of hypocrites in the church, does their hypocrisy nullify God's faithfulness?" You have got to love Paul's answer. *By no means!* This is one of Paul's favorite ways to answer his own questions. He uses this phrase a total of eight times in the book of Romans. NASB has it closest to the literal meaning—may it never be. It's a bit like saying 'impossible' but almost more emphatic than that even. It's not just impossible that God could be faithless, but Paul wants even the thought of such an idea to perish. May it never be. Perish the very thought of such blasphemy.

Then he added more strength to his objection. *Let God be true though every one were a liar.* To modernize this phrase, we would say—even if the everyone in the entire world who called themselves a "Christian" were actually a blatant hypocrite, this could never change God's perfect faithfulness." Even if every man were a liar, God would still be true. Even if every man were 'faithless,' God would remain faithful. God is unchanging. God is perfect. He cannot change. God cannot get worse nor can he improve himself.

This is the answer to the massive hypocrisy of someone like Doug Phillips. It is discouraging for everyone to hear about moral failings, but the closer you are to it, the more difficult it is. If you never heard of Doug Phillips before, you would put him into the category of just another fallen Christian. If you were familiar with or benefited from some aspect of their ministry, then your astonishment and grief would be more than the person who knew nothing of Vision Forum. But if you were personally mentored and disciplined by the man, if you were committed to him for more than a decade and hung on every word, and if you were called a destroyer by the one you knew as your spiritual father, then your sense of betrayal and grief would run down to the core of your being. It will take years to get past the deception and duplicity and faithlessness of the one you loved.

Karen was very active in her Intervarsity chapter in college. For a while she was the main worship leader. Her chapter was led by a woman named Marilee. She was a good friend to the students and was an effective leader but she too had a moral failing. You don't tend to think of women having moral failures but it was quite a shock to Karen. There is a real feeling of betrayal when that happens to your leader. But the faithlessness of one man or one woman in no way changes the faithfulness of God. This is the kind of reassuring rock that people need when life crumbles around them. If your husband leaves you, Jesus never will. If your friend stabs you in the back, God perfect faithfulness will never change. If people around you walk away from Christ and deny the truth, God is still true, though every man be a liar.

Paul quoted from Psalm 51 to support his answer. "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged." Psalm 51 is David's psalm repentance from his sin with Bathsheba; In other words, David was saying that God was right and true in judging his sins, which is why he so desperately needed to repent and receive full forgiveness. This is the true beauty of repentance. You first of all state that God is right and just to judge your sin. You admit that your sin is a violation of his sovereign will. Then you ask him to forgive you.

This quote from Psalms helps lay the groundwork for the next question in verse five.

3. *But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?*

Paul emphatically denied the validity of this question. *By no means! For then how could God judge the world?* Do you see that even asking such a question admits that God is righteous in his judgment of the world? By attempting to twist words, the objector is admitting the downfall of his own argument. The next objection will make this even more clear.

4. *Why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come?*

Let me lay the argument out for you like this. Here are each of the statements laid out by the objectors.

1. We are all sinners.
2. God shows his righteousness in judging our sin.
3. God's righteousness increases his glory.
4. Increasing God's glory is a good thing.

So far, all of these statements are true and Paul would agree with all of them. And the final statement is the same as the fourth question. It appears to be very logical and it goes like this.

5. Therefore, my sin is good. My evil brings about more good and for this reason, you cannot judge me for my evil.

Can you see how someone could arrive at this conclusion? Admittedly, it does the statement does not sound orthodox, does it? It does not pass the theological sniff test—it just smells funny, but it does seem to fit the rules of human logic. It appears as if the conclusion is supported by things to which Paul wholeheartedly agrees. But upon closer examination, the logic breaks down. Statement #2 directly contradicts statement #5. If God shows his righteousness in judging our sin, then it is utterly impossible for him to also overlook our sin, the very thing the objector is asking for. By his own admission, God cannot overlook his sin. Therefore his objection is nothing more than a verbal slight of hand.

This is the only question that Paul did not really answer. Did you notice his reply in verse eight? *Their condemnation is just.* That is what I call one of Paul's non-answer answers. It's kind of like saying, "Your question is so ridiculous it really not worth my time to answer."

This person was not made up either because Paul said, "as some people slanderously charge us with saying." These people were putting words into the mouths of the apostles. But objections like this demonstrate how far people will go to justify their sin. Arguments that are logical and filled with truth can be dangerous weapons in the wrong hands. This is how cults and false religions promote their false doctrine and attract untold followers. Some of you have seen the beautiful building that the Jehovah's Witnesses have built just down the road from our house. This Fall they had hundreds of people working on it at a time. We may have accumulated more sweat equity hours in our building over a year's time but they clearly outdid us in a few weekends. There were rows and rows of cars and an incredible flurry of activity for 2-3 weekends. And they built a very attractive building. I don't like their sign, however. I think our sign is much nicer. ☺ As Chris Eisermann has said, "It's amazing what you can accomplish with a doctrine of works righteousness."

I was thinking about Jehovah's Witnesses recently and the thought occurred to me that their hard work at constantly witnessing to others could actually backfire on them. For example, since there are only 144,000 people who will be saved and since witnessing is mandatory if you ever want to be among the 144,000, doesn't it follow that the more people they get to convert to their religion the more people who might 'bump' them from their coveted spot? Their mandatory witnessing might be constantly working against them? Their beliefs are at the same time an incentive and a disincentive to witness to others. Am I right?

I mean if I were to design a false religion from the ground up I think I would design it like a multi-level marketing business. Anyone can get *into* the religion and everyone benefits, but those at the top of the pyramid will get the greatest reward. At least that makes more sense than the Jehovah's Witness religion, don't you think?

But the point is that people like to make god in their own image. We come up with strange ways to wiggle god into our own mold. And in so doing, we make the Bible say whatever it is we want it to say. You don't even have to change the meaning but merely change the emphasis. If you emphasize law over grace you have adulterated the Scriptures. If you always preach love and

skip over vital truth, you reduce God's word to mere morality and good advice. We all have filters and lenses through which we read, interpret and apply Scripture. Like Paul's objectors, we can twist truth to our own ends.

And since I have my own lenses and blind spots, this means that I am a heretic. Heresy is holding to and especially teaching false doctrine. Since my beliefs do not align perfectly with Scripture, by definition, this makes me a heretic. Please believe me when I say that I would never intentionally teach heresy. I strive with all my effort to accurately teach God's word, but since I am human and very fallible, you must never trust everything I say. You must check it against your own understanding of Scripture.

We have come to Paul's final question.

5. *What then? Are we Jews any better off?*

And his answer: *No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.* This is interesting when you compare it to Paul's first question. *Then what advantage has the Jew?* Paul declared that the Jew has many advantages because they were God's people who were given God's word. But in verse nine he emphatically denied that this advantage made them "better off." Jew and Gentile alike were all "under sin."

To prove his case, Paul then quoted from six different OT passages. Notice how the verses are framed together. He begins and ends with a summary statement. None is righteous, no not one/There is no fear of God before their eyes. In the middle he places all sins into two broad categories—sins of word and sins of deed.

Summary: *None is righteous, no, not one*

Sins of word

*Throat*

*Tongues*

*Lips*

*Mouths*

Sins of deed

*Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

*in their paths are ruin and misery*

Summary: *There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

Paul's point is two-fold. First, every part of every person is poisoned by sin. Sin does not infect just our mind, it gets into our heart. Sin is not just what we speak but it corrupts what we do—word and deed.

Paul's second point is that this teaching is consistent with the entire Bible. When you include the quotation from verse four, that makes a total of seven quotations from the Old Testament, all of which serve one purpose—to demonstrate that God's word has always condemned sin in sinful man. We are not sinners because we sin. But instead, we sin because we are sinners. Apart from Christ, sin is our nature. It defines both who we are and what we do.

That is bad news, is it not? The diagnosis of cancer cannot compare to the eternal cancer of the soul. The Jews wanted their cure to be their status as a Jew. The world wants the cure to be being a good person. Vast hordes of people outright reject the diagnosis. There is nothing wrong with them. Religion is just an opiate for the masses, a powerful tool to oppress the people with threats of eternal damnation.

But Paul summarized it by saying, *There is no fear of God before their eyes*. God is our maker and our judge and he wants to be your Savior.

Most of you already know Christ as Savior, so why do we need to continue to hear this bad news? Why all of this talk about sin? It's such a bummer. The better question is, How does this transform us? As we said before, it serves to drive us to the cross. Let me give you some applications.

Number one, gratitude. Mike Riley called me on Thursday to remind me that today is the tenth anniversary of his first wife's death. I will never forget when the doorbell rang that evening. I walked to the door, turned on the porch light and opened the door to see a broken Mike Riley standing there who simply said, "Doris is dead." She died suddenly in her early forties. I was able to lend a hand to then, which basically amounted to just showing up in his time of need. So Mike called to thank me for what I did for him.

Now what if instead of just helping him, I saved his life and the life of his family. Would he have been more grateful still? No question about it. What if I saved the life of his family twenty times? The gratitude would continue to increase.

But what Christ has done for us is infinitely greater than saving a life. When we understand the depths of our sin without Christ we begin to be more grateful for our life in Christ. This gratitude then spills over into worship.

Finally, at the cross we are reminded of the power we have been given to defeat sin. We don't have to be hypocrites and heretics. We don't have to continually sin in word and deed. Our sin nature is no longer who we are.

Rich Maurer  
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<sup>1</sup> [http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/the\\_hole\\_in\\_the\\_gospel](http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/the_hole_in_the_gospel)