

Paul at this point in the book of Romans has now shown us that we all stand under sin. The nations of the world are condemned because they suppress the truth in unrighteousness, and the Jews are also condemned for their unbelief. But there's just one more question that remains, one more question that somebody might bring up. What does all of this say about God? Is God unrighteous for condemning us all in this way? That's a question that our time especially struggles with, but it's a question we have to be careful with, too. Because as Paul says, "I speak in a human way." We're asking a very human question. But it's a question that puts us in a place where we are judging God, and that's something that we just don't have a right to do. But it is still a question that many struggle with today, and so it's a question that Paul wants to answer in what is admittedly a difficult reading. So the question that we want to wrestle with is: is God being inconsistent or contradicting himself when he condemns us for our sins?

Because in the previous section, Paul has shown very clearly that even the Jew is being held to the same judgment as the rest of the world. Having the Law and having circumcision is not going to automatically get him into heaven. Just having these things are not a free pass to God. Without faith, he too stands condemned for his sins. And the same, of course, is true for us, who have the Word and the Sacraments. If we don't have faith, we cannot simply expect to be in the good graces of God.

But that leads to a very natural question, then: "Well, is there no point then to being a Jew? Is there no advantage whatsoever? Is circumcision totally worthless? Is the whole Old Testament pointless because of what Paul has said?" He says, "Not at all. In fact, there is still a great advantage. Because to them God gave the Word first. Out of all of the nations in the world, God gave them his Word, and that is still a very great blessing." Just like for us if we come from a Christian family. That is also a great blessing.

But at bottom, this question is really a question about God. Because it's really asking: does God say one thing and do another? Because consider what he says in Deuteronomy 14, speaking to Israel: "You are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." So was God not telling the truth, then, when he said that to Israel all those years ago, if Paul is now saying that they're all just the same? And if God isn't telling the truth, what does that say about God? Is he being inconsistent by saying one thing and doing another? Paul says, "Not at all." He did speak the truth. Israel was a chosen nation. Israel was a treasured possession. Israel were the ones through whom salvation came to the entire world. And what God says is true, and it will always be true, even if he condemns Israel for their unbelief. So God is still God, righteous in all the things that he has said and consistent in the things that he speaks.

But someone might say, "Okay, fine. But what if some of Israel did not believe? Does that destroy the faithfulness of God?" Again we have another question about who God is. And it basically is: "Did God fail to deliver on his promises? Did he say he was going to do something for Israel and then it didn't happen, because now most of them don't actually believe the Gospel? Has God failed to do what he says, as if he wasn't able to keep his promises? And if that's the case, why should we trust him?" But Paul says that this isn't true either. "Let God be true though everyone were a liar." Even if no one in the world believed in God, that does not mean that he's somehow not going to keep his promises. Because God's promises don't depend on us and our

faithfulness. God's promises depend on him. And of course, that's the story of the whole Old Testament, right? How often God was keeping his promises even as his people turned away from him time and time again. So God is not being inconsistent in this either. God is still God, righteous in all the things that he has promised. And he's going to do what he says.

"Okay," someone might say. "Well, if that's the case then, if our sins show how great God is, our faithlessness shows how faithful God is, that seems to suggest that God needs us to be sinners somehow. So that we can show how good he is by showing how bad we are. And if that's the case, then, isn't God being inconsistent again for condemning us? For condemning the very thing that shows how great he is?" Now, I admit that this is kind of a complex question. Paul is presenting an issue here that he's going to get to later in the book of Romans, and will unpack in much more detail. But the question is one we encounter all the time, Christians. People might say, "Well, it doesn't matter what we do, because we're not going to save ourselves anyway, so why not just do whatever you want? Why not just live however you want? Why not sin boldly so that we can show just how great God is?" This is a sin that is often called antinomianism. Anti meaning "against," nomian meaning "the law," so "against-the-law-ism," something that Paul is going to come back to later on. But the issue at hand here is what this has to say about God and his righteousness. Because if sin is something that makes him appear greater, because he's still faithful despite our sins, why should he condemn us at all? Why should he hold us accountable for the things that we're doing? Wouldn't it be more consistent, we'd say, for him to just let everything go?

Now, you see this sort of thing all the time. People who will say that there isn't a judgment, for example. Or people who will say that God just accepts you the way that you are, that your sin isn't actually a sin. That you can just come on in. God loves you. He's going to overlook it all. But that's not true. God will still condemn us for our sins. And even if our sins show how great he is, even if our sins magnify his grace, that doesn't excuse us. God is still going to judge the world, and he has every right to do so. And he is consistent when he does so.

But a question that we might encounter a little bit more often in our day, Christians, is something like this: "Isn't God love? The Bible says, 'God is love.' The Bible says, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,' right? So why, then, does God condemn us for our sins? Why does God still judge us if he is love? It seems inconsistent. It seems like he's contradicting himself." This idea that God is love is twisted to take away all judgment, that God is not angry with anyone, and God is just totally ignoring our sins. God is love, so why would he judge us?

But this totally ignores the fact that God is also just, Christians. God is perfectly just. God always does what is right. And the justice of God means that something has to be done about our sins. He can't just ignore it. He can't just turn away from it and say, "Oh well, I'm going to forget about it." Because that would be wrong. That would make him unjust. It would make him contradict his own nature. So God is love, yes, but he is also just. He is also righteous. And God would still be love even if he condemned the whole world for its sins. So God is still God, consistent when he judges us for our sins.

Or one more question that might come up: "Didn't God create us? Isn't he our Creator? Didn't he make us this way? So how, then, can he still condemn us?" And this is also used to justify sin

too. People will say, "Well, God made me this way. He doesn't make mistakes. So he's not going to punish me for what he has made. It would be inconsistent if he did so." But yes, Christians, God did create us. That is true. But we turned away from him. Our sin, our corruption is our fault, and we stand accountable to our Creator. We will stand before him at the judgment as his fallen creatures. So God is still God, righteous in bringing wrath upon us and perfectly consistent when he does so.

So all in all, then, Christians, God is not doing something wrong when he condemns us for our sins. God is not being unrighteous. God is perfectly consistent to do so. Because all of us have fallen into sin. All of us have turned away from him. And Paul quotes a very long list of Old Testament passages to show just how much that is true. We are rightfully condemned before him for the things that we have done. And as Paul goes on to say, every mouth has been stopped. Every mouth has finally been shut before him. Because no one can speak against him. No one can speak up in their defense. We all are silent before the judgment of God. And God is perfectly just and consistent to hold us accountable in this way. God is still God, righteous in all the things that he does.

But Christians, God is also righteous when he saves us through his Son. Because no one is saved by what they do. No one is able to speak back to God. But yet Christ has come to save us and to forgive us our sins. And when we believe in him, we are saved from the wrath we so richly deserved. And God is not being inconsistent here either, saying one thing and doing another. God pays the entire debt of sin in his Son, Jesus Christ. The demand for justice has been satisfied. And God has done what is right in condemning our sin in Jesus. But God has also done what is right in showing us mercy through his Son.

So we must not think, Christians, that God is somehow inconsistent or contradicting himself. God has every right to condemn us all for our sins. We all stand equally under judgment because of the things that we have done. But God has every right to show us mercy, because Jesus has paid the price for our sins. God is still God, righteous and holy and good and consistent in everything that he does.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, though we deserve punishment for our sins, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, to forgive us. Help us always to trust in you in him. In his name we pray. Amen.