

Romans 3:4-8

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[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word, which I hope you have with you today, and turn to the book of Romans, chapter 3. I'm thankful that you're all here today. I'm thankful that Ruby Lou is here. I have wondered if I had shaky googly eyes and did this a lot, if I would be easier or harder to pay attention to.

I hope harder because I don't have shaky googly eyes. Romans, chapter 3. Let's read verses 1 through 8 together. Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

What if some were unfaithful? 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 people slanderously charge us with saying, their condemnation is just?

[1 : 26] Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you very much for your holy word. As difficult as these words are at times, thank you that you've blessed us with its profundity, that we might study it and know you more through it.

Thank you, Father, for the blessings we have in Christ, the ability to discern your word by your spirit, which is bought by Christ on the cross. And we pray this in his name.

Amen. All right. So last week we talked about why it is that God inspires hard texts. And that idea that was fueled by this text itself, which many have said is at least one of the most difficult paragraphs in the New Testament.

But before we begin talking about it, I want to back up just a little bit, remind you where Paul has been so far in the book of Romans, what it is that he's talked about in the first two chapters, the case he's made for us, and then show you these objections, these things that, these questions that have been brought up.

In his mind. And I don't believe they're brought up in his mind because he was particularly astute and just could predict what people might say to what he was teaching. But that this was a case.

[2 : 38] What he has said in the first two chapters was something he was teaching over and over and over again. Paul had preached many sermons before he wrote the book to the Romans. And so he knew the questions that the Jews would ask because they had been asked of him.

He even says there in our text, verse eight, as some people slanderly, slanderously charge us. So this has been happening to him. So as he's writing to them, he knows that some listener, somebody who's going to hear the reading of this letter, was going to ask this question in their mind.

And he wants to answer those questions before he moves on. He answers them in brief in this spot, but continues later to give us more. He unfolds some of this more.

So this morning, we're going to kind of skip a stone off the answer because it's what Paul does here. Later, chapters 11, chapter 9, we're going to get a little bit deeper into the answers to these questions.

But he feels the necessity to deal with them so that he can continue on with his argument. So if you flip back a page or however many pages for you, in chapter 1, kind of to read to you the thesis, the theme of the book of Romans, verses 16 and 17.

[3 : 47] Paul says, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it, the righteousness of God is

revealed from faith for faith.

As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. So he had already begun to assert that it wasn't those who had the law and obeyed the law under their own power that were righteous before God. It was those that had righteousness that came from faith in the good news, in the good news of Jesus Christ. He's laid that out for us very clearly right up front.

He goes on in the rest of the chapter to talk about how no one has any excuse. Everyone in the world is aware of the glory of God. They have seen it in created order.

No excuse whatsoever. He turns in chapter 2 then to the Jews, those who had the law, had religion. Chapter 2, verses 12 and 13.

[4 : 48] He says, Verse 13.

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. And we know, because we have a survey, we understand our scriptures, that we're only capable of doing good, of being righteous in Christ.

By our own best efforts, there is no way we can fulfill the law. Because that ability in us was utterly spoiled by original sin. Our nature is corrupted.

We are sinful at heart. But we cannot please God apart from Christ. So then he takes his argument a little bit further for the Jewish, for the religious. Verse 25 and then 28 and 29.

For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law. But if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. Verse 28. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor a circumcision outward and physical.

[5 : 58] But a Jew is one inwardly. And circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man, but from God. So those outward signs of keeping the law are of no value if you don't actually keep the law.

How does that relate to us as a, I would assume, entirely non-Jewish audience? Does coming here to church make you righteous before God?

Absolutely not. Does sharing your faith or being involved in one-on-one discipleship make you righteous before God? Does tucking your shirt in and wearing your fanciest shoes make you righteous before God?

None of those things do if we're not actually keeping the law. If we're not actually made righteous by Christ. Okay? So he turns. He knows there's going to be objections to this.

He knows that the Jew is sitting in this audience. This book is being read to them. They're going, but wait a minute. We're God's special people. The Old Testament speaks of that. It's everywhere in the Old Testament. We know that God had made a covenant with Abraham for us as a people.

[7 : 05] What are you talking about? You've totally nullified all of that. We ought to take the Old Testament and throw it away. So he addresses the first objection.

Verse 1. Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? These are the questions that he's been asked and he's hearing them being asked at the reading of this letter. So the first question I want to ask, did Paul attack God's people? In his writing so far, did Paul attack God's people?

The answer is no. The answer to all the questions I'm going to ask today are no. Verse 2. He goes on to say, what is the advantage of being a Jew? It's much in every way.

To begin with, which is such an interesting phrase. We talked about this last week. To begin with, would imply that he's going to begin to go on and make some sort of a list. Right? Firstly, and then he would say later.

[8 : 03] Secondly, he doesn't. He just says to begin with. Of most importance, the greatest advantage to being a Jew is that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. They were given the very words of God.

Now this word oracles is used four times in the New Testament. It's not simply the word logos, what we get our logos questions from, that means word.

It actually means wisdom. The word oracle, translated here in Greek, means wisdom. And he's not trying to set some kind of different thing. Like everyone else, we have the word of God, but the Jews have the oracles of God.

He's not trying to do that, draw a distinction between the two. But what he's trying to see is point out the importance of what was given to them. Right? The words of God, which were the very wisdom of God for salvation.

That's what the Jews had. What an advantage they have had over the Gentiles. Now we know, sadly, that many Jews, not as a nation, but many Jews, have rejected the word of God.

[9 : 13] When the Pharisees tried to back Christ into a corner, a couple occasions, he spoke to this. Mark chapter 12, verse 24, says, Is this not the reason you are wrong?

Because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. You know of them, but you don't understand them or the power of God. And then in John chapter 5, verse 39 and 40, he says, You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

And it is they that bear witness about me. Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I imagine that there was desperation in Jesus' voice as he said that to them.

You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. But they speak of me. And I'm standing in front of you. And I'm here for you to hold and to learn from and to place your faith in for righteousness, for salvation.

And you're missing the point. Brings our second objection. Verse 3. What if some were unfaithful?

[10 : 19] Some Jews were unfaithful. Some Jews did reject the truth of God given to them in the scriptures. Does their faithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God?

Does the fact that some Jews were unfaithful make God unfaithful in his promises to the Jewish people? Did Paul attack God's promises?

That's my question, which the answer to is no. Look what he says. Verse 4. By no means. It's an interesting little phrase. It is the strongest negative Greek expression.

I'm going to try to pronounce it. Me genoito, I think. The strongest negative expression possible. And it literally carried with it a note of impossibility.

So it's as if he says at the beginning of verse 4, they ask this question. Does their faithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? He goes, impossible. It can't happen. There's no way that man can affect the faithfulness of God.

[11 : 24] And then he says this very interesting, at times frustrating phrase. Let God be true, though everyone were a liar. Let God be true, though everyone were a liar.

I'm going to give that to you in Nathan language. If God were accused as faithless by everyone who had ever lived because they rejected the truth given to them.

Everyone who ever lived rejected the oracles of God entrusted to them. It wouldn't say that God is faithless. God would be found true and everyone else found a liar.

That's what he's saying. If everyone else accused God of being faithless because some were unfaithful. They would all be liars, but God would still be true.

He goes on to say. As it is written that you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged. Psalm 51.4 is what he's quoting there.

[12 : 28] Which is, Psalm 51 is David's psalm of repentance after his great sin, Bathsheba killing her husband. This is his coming back to God.

And before that, in verse 4, he's talked about his own sinfulness and the evidencing it gives. What it actually does. It makes God a righteous judge because of his actions.

Because of his sinfulness. So that's what Paul's getting at when he says that. Now the problem with this Jewish question, the what if some were unfaithful?

Does the unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? Comes from their understanding of the covenant. God's covenant with Abraham.

Which was an unconditional covenant. We find it in Genesis chapter 12. We're not going to go there. But it was an unconditional covenant. God made the covenant and he said, I will accomplish this thing. But they didn't have a clear understanding of what that thing was.

[13 : 29] They thought as a nation. They were God's people. If I have Jewish heritage in my lineage, therefore, I will be saved.

I am one of God's chosen people. We're going to get into this more in chapter 11. I'm honestly dreading it at this point. I hope I'll be very excited by the time we get there.

We'll get there. But the promise never was for the individual. It's never for the individual. Let's look at a conditional phrase.

Isaiah 55, 6 and 7. Go ahead and turn there with me. Give me a break to breathe. Isaiah 55, 6 and 7. So we see the unconditional covenant God made with Abraham.

He would bless the nations through Abraham's lineage. We know that Christ comes from there. The promise of the gospel has extended beyond just the Jewish nation to the church.

[14:28] We are now Israel. Here's a conditional. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon. That's the individual. So here we have Isaiah, a Jewish prophet, calling the people back to God.

And here's the conditional promise. God will be what? Faithful. He will have compassion. He will abundantly pardon the man that returns to him.

That places his faith in him for his righteousness. So the Jewish people had a poor understanding, generally speaking, a poor understanding of what the promises of God meant for them.

More of that to come in chapter 11. So it was for the nation of Israel, but never the individual from Israel. So then the third objection, verse 5.

[15:35] So we had, did Paul attack God's people? No. Did Paul attack God's promises? No. The last one is, did Paul attack God's holiness?

He sees the question this way. Here's it being asked. But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, which is what we've seen to be true from the psalmist, what shall we say?

That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? And then Paul inserts, I speak in a human way, or I speak with human logic, or I speak insanelly.

It's another way of rendering that text. I speak as a man, not as one who's spiritually enlightened to the truth of God. All right? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us.

So did Paul attack God's holiness? And in verse 6, he says once again the same phrase, by no means impossible. How is it possible that God could be unrighteous?

[16:37] For then how could God judge the world? Now, Jesus had a very clear understanding of God as judge. In Genesis 18, 25, he is called the judge of all the earth.

The psalmist repeatedly referred to him as judge. Psalm 50, 58, 94. The major theme of nearly all the prophets is that of God's judgment.

Past, present, the imminent judgment, and out far in the future, the judgment of God. The Jewish people entirely understood when he said, how could God be unrighteous for judging us?

Because if he is, then he can't be a perfect judge. That's his very simple response to a very complex question. Verse 7, he goes on.

But if through my lie, God's truth abounds to his glory. Through my lie, God's truth abounds to his glory. So if my sin shows God faithful in delivering me, his grace is abounding when I'm found unfaithful, when I'm a sinner, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?

[17:54] Isn't it good that I prove God faithful? That's what he's saying. And why not do evil that good may come? A common question there. We're to glorify God in what we do, and God is very glorified when he shows grace to sinful man.

Why not continue sinning? That's a great idea, right? We can keep drumming up grace. We can keep on making God look really good and gracious to his people. What a fantastic idea.

It says then, As some people slanderously charge us with saying, their condemnation is just.

Jude, verse 4, Jude writes to the church of Corinth, For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality, sensuality, or licentiousness, and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

So what is Jude talking about? He's talking about the very same person that would have this objection, or use this objection to justify their sin. He's talking about these people that have slipped in, who have snuck themselves in to the church at Corinth, and have said, If God is so gracious, we can do whatever we want.

[19:17] It's fantastic. And they've turned it into sensuality or licentiousness. It's basically sexual sin. So we can do these things. It's good because God will forgive us because we're His children. Romans chapter 5, verse 20, and then chapter 6, 1 and 2.

Paul writes this, Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. Seems to agree with this philosophy. Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

Chapter 6, verse 1. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. There's that phrase again. It's impossible.

How can we who died to sin still live in it? We have been delivered by the grace of God from sin. As new creatures, why would we continue to sin?

That's not God glorifying. When I sin, does God's grace abound in my life? Absolutely. Do I prove God faithful all the time? Yes. But should that be my aim?

[20 : 25] Absolutely not. My aim should be to obey Him. To walk obediently by His grace. And honor Him in that way.

There's a great famous debate between John Bunyan, the writer of Pilgrim's Progress, and some other guys that were in prison for the same reason, for preaching the gospel without being sanctioned.

But they had very different theological perspectives. And they had been thrown kind of into the deepest, darkest parts of the dungeon. And what's the most intelligent thing to do when you're down there is to debate theology. That's how I would probably pass the time.

And what they kept saying to him was, Bunyan, you can't keep telling people how much God loves them. If you're telling people how much God loves them all the time, they're going to do whatever they want. They would have had this objection to Paul's teaching.

That type of thinking. That would have been the objection that's coming up here. Wait a second. If what you're saying is true, then we should actually sin. Because that makes God look great.

Because He's gracious to us as people.

[21 : 29] Bunyan's response to them, which I think was very carefully worded and poignant, was, No. If I tell God's people about God's love for them, and he's excluding this group of men from this equation, if I tell God's people about God's love for them, they'll do whatever He wants.

See the difference there? See how He excluded them from even being God's people? Even thinking that that's right and proper? That it's even okay for a Christian to sin?

Shoots it down pretty quickly there, doesn't He? In brief, He quickly deals with these issues, these questions that are raised, so that He can move on. Glances off of them.

Says, Nope, nope, nope. Okay. Now let's keep reading the rest of chapter 3, and on to the end of the book. Whose condemnation is just?

It would be my last kind of question for you. The last sentence of that, He says, Their condemnation is just. Those who don't believe the Word of God, who play light with it, who ask questions with human wisdom, and don't look for scriptural answers, who flippantly ask questions, define who God is by their wisdom, are any of us guilty of that?

[23 : 03] I think I have been. In the past, I can't give you specific examples, but I'm sure that at times, I've applied my logic and said, Well, this doesn't make sense. I don't know that God would operate that way. So, I'm going to ignore that passage.

I'm going to move beyond that. We find this often as we look at the Bible teaching the sovereignty of God in all things, and the responsibility of man in his actions. Well, that just doesn't make sense to me.

So, that's alright. What is the argument Paul's made so far, up to this point? That God chose the people, Israel, to bring them righteousness by faith, made a unconditional promise to bless the nations, in Abraham's lineage.

And here we see the culmination of that. That some of them rejected the gospel. And the gospel message is now passing beyond the borders of Israel, and going out to the Gentile people, those who weren't Jewish.

To us. It's gone beyond that. It's accomplishing much more than the Jews ever even thought was possible. God has a covenantal people that he's calling, that he's reaching, that he's involved in bringing into the fold.

[24 : 27] But that promise is conditional for us, isn't it? Unconditional on one hand, because it's God's work in our lives, but conditioned on the fact that we live righteous. How is it that we do that?

How is it that we live righteous lives before God? Jesus Christ. That's the answer. With all of our effort, and all of our strain, we should work to do right.

We should read the commandments of God. We should be exhorted by them. We should be rebuked by them. We should strain to live holy lives. And when it happens, when it actually is happening in our life, we should all give all praise and honor to God.

It is Christ's work, the Spirit moving in us, to help us accomplish such things. Praise be to God that our righteousness before Him is not dependent on our action.

So righteousness, we're righteous in total because of Christ. We are clothed in His righteousness. We can pray. Today, none of us are going to be burned alive by God's wrath because we're seen

as righteous in Christ if we place our faith in Him.

[25 : 44] No matter what you did this morning, while you ought to repent and turn back and strain to do more and to do better and to go harder, you're still seen as righteous in God.

It's an amazing position we stand in to be so un-perfect and yet seen as perfect. To have both this unconditional covenant and a conditional covenant applied to our living.

I pray that none of us stand in this place, this place of objection.

Because if you do, your condemnation is just. You can't get on board with the fact that God is entirely sovereign in all things and yet you're responsible for your actions. You ought to live good lives, righteous lives before Him.

Your condemnation is just. It's a challenge, isn't it? Mentally. It's hard to deal with. That's why this text is such a strain for our minds. But it's true, nonetheless.

[26 : 47] Later on, as Paul deals deeper with this issue in chapter 9, the same question he brings up once again. And his response to it is this.

Who are you, oh man, to ask after God? That confusion of God's sovereignty, my responsibility, that's so confusing to me.

I want answers, God. I don't like it. I want to figure it out. He says, who are you, oh man, to ask after God? Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the great truths of your scriptures.

We thank you for your sovereignty that we can lean wholly on. I thank you, Father, that you have shown us the great weight, the cost of discipleship, the things that are required of us to do, to strive for.

I'm afraid, Father, that those of us who lean heavily on the sovereignty of God take very little responsibility for our own actions. And, Father, I want to be a people who takes those truths and sets them in perfect balance really understands what it is Paul is trying to say to us that get what it takes to live righteous lives in the evidence of them, the things we do, the actions we carry out, that we can also fully embrace the righteousness we have that Christ has purchased on our behalf.

[28 : 24] Find us humble this morning, Lord. allowing you to probe our hearts for the doubts, the questions we ask, that we ask in human wisdom, and don't look to the scriptures for the answers.

We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen. I'm a part of our service now where we celebrate the death, resurrection, ascension, and the eventual return of Christ, our Lord.

We read our wonderful statement of faith statement this morning about that, about Christ's return for his people. I just pray that you'll take it solemnly.

You will just be examined before you do and that ultimately you'll find joy in it. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[31 : 13] Amen. Amen.

Amen.

to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not like so many peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God in the sight of God, we speak in Christ.