

Romans 3:1-8

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[0:00] So Romans chapter 3 verses 1 through 8 will be our text today. My hope for this morning is to keep my comments brief, as I know many of us have good post-church plans, and so we're going to get right into it. But I do want to say, as I was joking about rebuking fathers, that I am generally and largely encouraged by the fathers of our church.

It doesn't go unnoticed that you men are working hard to lead your families well. We always have improving to do, certainly things that could be addressed, but broadly I just want to say, keep it up. Keep pressing. Rely on the grace of God to parent well in your homes.

So we're going to continue in Romans chapter 3. I have a sabbatical plan for July, and Lord willing, we will finish Romans chapter 3 before I leave for that. And so today we're going to look at the first eight verses.

Before I read them, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us, that it was written for his glory and for our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

And Paul writes, 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.

[1:29] 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 some people slanderously charge us with saying, Their condemnation is just. In today's text, Paul anticipates and responds to three potential objections to the doctrine he has taught in chapters 1 and 2 of his letter to the Romans.

Paul has a wonderful way of doing this all throughout this letter, as we'll see again and again. And just coming to the first occasion of it, right, his anticipation of objections to what he's saying, it just causes me to pause and consider the grace given to such a man as Paul.

[2:51] His unique ethnic background, his training in the scriptures, and his intellect and ability to write. I just hope for a moment you can appreciate, too, Paul himself and the way that God used him as he's laying out this treatise on the Christian faith.

He's in his own mind going, oh, people aren't going to like this, and I know exactly what they're going to say, and more than likely had experienced these objections. And so he's answering them right here in the text for his original readers and for us.

Moreover, his anticipation of objections causes me to pause at the grace given to us, as we have the opportunity to study this letter together.

God is just truly gracious to his people. I'm thankful for the clarity of the Bible and the labors of its writers moved by the Spirit to help us to rightly understand all that's necessary for life and godliness.

So, in a sweeping summary fashion, there's a bit of me that wants to totally go through chapter 1 and 2 again to help you understand why Paul will bring up these matters, but we can't do it with great length.

[4:13] So, in a sweeping way, let's think together what Paul has taught so far that might elicit some objections. Let's do so by reading a selection of verses from chapter 1 and 2, and you may want to flip back pages and follow along with me.

We do well to begin with Romans chapter 1, verse 16 and 17. I have said this is the thesis statement for the entirety of the letter.

There 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. Paul is proud of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.

Not the law, but this good news of Jesus Christ. This power is not limited to Jewish people only, those of Jewish descent, but it is also efficacious for other ethnic groups as well.

[5:26] The Jew first and also to the Greek would have been a broad extension of the gospel to all peoples. And we see in just these two verses that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

This is the total theme of the book of Romans. So he lays it out quick. He's really unpacking the argument found in these two verses all throughout the rest of the letter with their implications.

So he goes on, Romans chapter 2, verse 12 and 13. Here he says, For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law.

He's there talking about those who are non-Jewish people, who weren't aware, didn't have the Torah. And all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

Verse 13, chapter 2, For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. Declared righteous before God.

[6:32] Those who perfectly keep the law. And he's established at great length through the last half of chapter 1 and into the beginning of chapter 2 and on to its end that no one has kept the law perfectly.

Next week's text, he's going to continue to drive that very point. You must keep the law with perfection in order to be justified. We have justified before God and we can't.

And it leaves us in a great problem. Romans chapter 2, verse 25. There he says, For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law.

But if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So if you have Jewish ethnicity, if you've been circumcised, it's of value to you if you have perfectly kept the rest of the law.

But if you have not, then it becomes uncircumcision, as if you're not God's people. Skip down to verse 28. There he says, For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.

[7:43] But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Spirit, not by the letter. However, his praise is not from man, but from God.

And this is what leads him here to the beginning of chapter 3. To begin with the question then, what advantage has the Jew?

Is there any advantage of all? If circumcision is a matter of the heart, then is there any advantage?

And Paul here, as the great apostle to the Gentiles, will take up this defense of the Jewish nation quite regularly throughout this letter, as he's arguing that the gospel goes beyond just ethnic Israel.

He'll also say, but let's not forget about the Jews. So the three potential objections that Paul anticipates and responds to are as follows.

Has Paul offended God's people? That's number one. Has Paul offended God's people? And I mean that broadly.

[8:49] Certainly individuals were offended, but I mean broadly. Is he speaking antagonistically against the Jewish people? Secondly, has Paul offended God's promises?

And thirdly, has Paul offended God's holiness? He knows his readers, at least his initial ones, well enough to think these are the kinds of questions that are going to come to their mind.

Let me just go ahead and address them. So firstly, has Paul offended God's people? He says, then what advantage has the Jew?

Or what is the value of circumcision? It's as if he is saying, you will say to me then, which he actually says later on in the letter.

But Paul, people might say, the Jewish people are God's people. What do you mean a Jew is one inwardly and circumcision is a matter of the heart?

[9:51] Jews, after all, are an ethnic group. They're descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. The ones to whom the promise came.

Abraham, the recipient of the grand promise of God to make a mighty nation of his descendants, is their forefather, right? They saw themselves as those descendants.

That promise of God. Their mind may have gone, as Jewish readers, to all sorts of texts. Let me just give you two.

Deuteronomy 10, verse 14 and 15. Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.

Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them. You above all peoples, as you are this day.

[10:50] But wait, Paul. Well, isn't our ethnicity significant in God's plan for his people? Elsewhere, Psalm 78, verse 5 and following.

There it says, God established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

A thing that has been established to be passed on from generation to generation to generation. Are you saying now that's of no value at all? And of course, Paul says, no.

Does the Jew have an advantage? Yes, he says in the beginning of verse 2. Much in every way.

And then he gives us one and the most significant advantage.

To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. This is an advantage to ethnic Israel.

[12:02] Paul will develop this case further throughout his letter, but he begins significantly with this, entrusting with the oracles of God. An incredibly significant thing.

The word here translated oracles is a diminutive of the word logos, which is often translated word. This diminutive form emphasizes the supernatural nature of what they have been entrusted with. So the point he's saying is that it is an inspired word. It's a miraculous thing that they have this word of God. Oracles makes it feel rather mystic.

Greek. I'm not sure it's the word I would have chosen, but I'm also not a Greek scholar. But it has that sense to it, this form of that word, that it's a miracle.

It's an incredible thing that men were carried along by the Spirit to give to them the Old Testament scriptures. They had the Old Testament, all of which designed to point them to this coming Messiah, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13:16] They had the very utterance of God for their benefit. They were taught it. From babies, they were told, like, look for this Messiah, for this Christ.

They were told to put their faith in the future hope that Christ would bring. Now, how can I know that Paul is referring to what we call the Old Testament, which is not what it had been called in his day? Bear with me for just a moment and I'll show you. I want you to have a confidence in the canonicity of the Old Testament. This is what Jewish people held as their scripture.

So, Jesus validated the Old Testament's inspiration by quoting from all three sections, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. You can see this in Luke 24, verse 44.

He endorsed the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament in detail. Matthew 5, verse 17 and 18. What is he specifically talking about?

[14:20] Well, we have a significant clue that the Bible of Jesus' day was our Old Testament. And we find it in Luke 11, and verse 49.

I invite you to join me there if you would like to. Certainly don't have to. Well, I drink water. Luke 11, verse 49. There Jesus says, Therefore, also the wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and

apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be charged against this generation.

So, pause for a second. This is the point of what he's doing here in this text, is he's placing the guilt of the persecution of the apostles on the generation that he's speaking to.

So, the primary thing he's doing is that. But then he says something very interesting in verse 51. So, it's the blood of all the prophets from the foundation of the world charged against this generation from, verse 51, the blood of Abel, the blood of Zechariah, who, a specific Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.

He's giving us a clue there from Abel to this specific Zechariah who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. He says, yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.

[15:57] So, he calls Abel the first prophet. This is the Abel of Genesis chapter 4. There in verse 10 we can see, and the Lord said, what have you done?

The voice of your brother's blood, the blood of Abel, is crying to me from the ground. Here, Jesus is saying that that was a prophetic work of Abel, his blood crying out guilt against his brother Cain.

Okay, so there's Abel the prophet early, early in the history of the world. But then we have this Zechariah, and he's the bookend of Jesus' speech in verse 51 of Luke 11.

He says, from Abel to the blood of Zechariah. But why? Why is he the bookend? We can read of him in 2 Chronicles chapter 24, verse 20 through 21, where it says, the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, the priest, and he stood above the people and said to them, thus says God, why do you break the commandments of the Lord so that you cannot prosper?

Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you. But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord.

[17:18] This is where he dies there between the altar and the sanctuary. Now, chronologically, the last martyr of the Old Testament was Uriah, whose death is described in Jeremiah chapter 26.

So, why does Jesus not say from Abel to Uriah, but from Abel to Zechariah? I hope you already know.

I hope you're going, oh, I know the answer to this. It's very cool if you don't. So, you're going to know it at the end of today. The Jewish Bible of Jesus' day was ordered differently than ours.

Historical fact. Our Old Testament is grouped by literary type. Jesus' Bible was ordered differently. 1 and 2 Chronicles were one book just called Chronicles and was written as an overview of Israel's history with a particular emphasis on David and the temple.

It was placed at the end of Jesus' canon to help God's people look forward to a better David and a better worship. They read it from Genesis through the book of Chronicles.

[18:28] It was setting them up to expect this coming Messiah. So, in Luke 11, when Jesus says, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, he's indicating the generation that he is in for the death of the prophets of his Bible.

They knew exactly what he was talking about because they had read that canon, right? They knew who these prophets were. Abel all the way to this specific Zechariah who died in this particular way, right?

He was indicting them for all of those. This was the Bible of Jesus' day, right? So, if you believe Jesus at all, you have to believe in the Bible of Jesus, which is our Old Testament, right?

This is what the Jews had. These oracles of God, they were entrusted with this very particular special word for them.

But just because they had God's word did not mean they listened to or obeyed God's word. There's much evidence of this, tragically.

[19:36] A couple of evidences of Jesus' day. In Mark 12 and verse 24, Jesus says to the scribes and the Pharisees, is this not the reason you are wrong? Because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God?

You have them, but you do not know them? Or in John 5, verse 39 and 40, there 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.

Beloved, it is altogether possible to have a Bible, to read that Bible, to attend church and listen to

the Bible taught, to listen to sermons from the Bible throughout the week, to read articles and listen to podcasts that discuss the Bible, and to not heed its warnings, believe its promises, or obey its commands.

The Bible itself will not save you. It's telling us a story and a message that we must place our faith in and ultimately in a person that we must place our faith in.

So, Paul offended God's people. Is he saying that God's people don't have a special place in God's redemptive history? No, absolutely not.

[20:59] And we'll get to see more of this, particularly into chapter 11. So, a year from now, I'm going to guess. He'll continue to work this truth out for us.

But I appreciate Paul is going to get it in there, right? He's not going to let somebody linger until chapter 11. He wants to be sure. No, no, God's people. God's people, much in every way, they were entrusted with God's word.

Secondly, though, has Paul offended God's promises? Beginning in verse 3, what if some were unfaithful? He's talking here about the Jewish people. Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?

If some of those declared God's people showed themselves not to be God's people, does that make God unfaithful? And he says, by no means, and he's going to say this phrase over and over again throughout the letter, *me denoito*, is the strongest of negative Greek expressions.

He's saying, rather emphatically, impossible. Absolutely not. Just because those people of ethnic Jewish descent were unfaithful to God, he remains faithful.

[22:15] It's not possible that God would cease to be faithful to his promises. He goes on to say, let God be true though everyone were a liar. That is to say, if God were accused as faithless by every human who ever lived, God would be found true and everyone else would be found to be a liar.

As it is written, this is from Psalm 51 and verse 4, that you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged. God is true to his word all the time because he is God and he cannot lie.

We have to be so very careful that we don't personify God and think that it's even possible for him to not be true to his word. So how do we think then of these Jewish people that were unfaithful and how that relates to God's promises?

Now, God's promise to Abraham was an unconditional promise. If you will, please join me in Genesis chapter 15.

I'm going to read the entirety of the chapter so you may appreciate being there with me. I'll begin in verse 1.

[23:34] You'll be able to catch up to me. After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Fear not, Abram. I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great. But Abram said, O Lord God, what will you give me?

For I continue childless and the heir of my house is Eleazar of Damascus. He's already gotten this promise that God's going to make a great nation of him, but he has yet to have any offspring.

And Abram said, Behold, you have given me no offspring and a member of my household be my heir. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him. This man shall not be your heir, your very own son shall be your heir.

And he brought him outside and said, Look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness, his faith.

And he said to him, verse 7, I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess. But he said, O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?

[24:41] He said to him, Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon. And he brought him all these, cut them in half and laid each half over against the other.

But he did not cut the birds in half. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And we won't get into the details of all those animals and what they mean. But this was a common practice in the day of making a promise with somebody.

You would cut an animal in half and you would walk together between those animals. And it was saying, if I don't keep my end of this bargain, let me become as these animals have become.

So this is the significance of this affirming of the covenant that God has made. There's something very particular that happens that's unique in this case.

Verse 12, As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. So he's having now a dream. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.

[25:44] Then the Lord said to Abraham, Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs. There will be servants there and that they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

He's talking about their slavery in Egypt. Know for certain this will come to pass. Verse 15, As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried in a good old age.

And they shall come back here in the fourth generation for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

These things signified God himself. On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram saying, To your offspring I give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river to the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Pesaites, the Raphaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

This particular land, he's marking it off for him. And what God is doing here is he's saying that I will make of you a great nation and you will dwell in this land and I am going to accomplish it.

[27:00] Notice that the fulfillment of the promise is out beyond Abram, even his life. God is going to do this thing. It is not conditional. For the nation, it's going to happen.

This in totality is going to come to pass. And praise be to God that it also comes to pass in the inclusion of the nations amongst those peoples, those stars, too many to number.

That's part of the fulfillment of this unconditional promise. But, individually, there is a conditionality to God's promises.

Let me give you one example. Isaiah 55, verse 6 and 7. Verse 7, 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.

[28:00] We must believe that God will deliver us from our sin. And we now, standing in the position we are today, know that it's by believing in the completed work and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, there's an individual conditionality to this. Is every Israelite ever born justified before God? No. They are not.

Right? So, to his very question at the beginning, if some were unfaithful, does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? Absolutely not. God always keeps his promises.

God's promise to Israel as a nation will be fulfilled. Again, chapter 11. We'll pick up that more. But that promise never extended to specific individual Jews.

Jews. So, has Paul offended God's promises? No. No, he has not. Lastly, has Paul offended God's holiness?

[29:08] Verse 5, he says, but if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?

And Paul inserts this, I speak in a human way. It's as if he's saying, I know this sounds dumb. If our disobedience displays God's perfect nature, if when we don't hold up our end of the bargain, God's hold up his, then is God unjust?

If our unfaithfulness puts on display his faithfulness, isn't that a good? Isn't that honoring God? Doesn't that make him look great? Well, it does.

And then the question follows, then why would God punish us for such a thing? If his glory is achieved, then why are we held accountable for that action?

And once again, we see this strong phrase, *may genoito*, by no means at the beginning of verse 6, for then how could God judge the world?

[30:14] If God is unrighteous in his judgment, then he is not a fit judge. He is God, therefore he must be a perfect, righteous judge.

Now, the Jews understood God as judge. In Genesis 18 and verse 25, he is called the judge of all the earth. The psalmist repeatedly referred to him as judge.

Examples like Psalm 50, Psalm 58, and Psalm 94. The major theme of nearly all the prophets is that of God's judgment.

Judgment past, judgment present, judgment imminent, and judgment in the distant future. So all Paul is saying is it's not possible that God would be unrighteous in his judgment of our unrighteousness, even if it serves to show the righteousness of God.

Because then God would be disqualified from being a judge. And the reasoning goes on, verse 7, but if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?

[31:24] And why not do evil that good may come? As some people slanderously charge us with saying their condemnation is just.

So the reason goes, if my sin ends up bringing God glory, then why is my sin considered sin? this presents to us one of the apparent paradoxes of the Bible.

And I say apparent because it seems so at first consideration. But we will see in future study that this isn't a paradox at all. Paul will address this potential objection again in this letter.

And let me just give you two examples of where he does so. 1st Romans chapter 5 and verse 20, he says, Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

So here we see this. The law comes so that the trespass increases, and when the trespass increases, grace abounds. And this seems like a good result, right? This is good in the end. And then just a few verses later at the beginning of chapter 6, he says, What shall we say then?

[32:33] Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Should we go on sinning so that God can show himself to be gracious? And then again, chapter 6 and verse 2, *May genoito*, by no means.

How can we who died to sin still live in it? Understanding that we justly deserve God's wrath for our sin, and having been delivered from it, why would we want to go on living in it?

And he'll make the case that God continues to show his graciousness towards us in that he helps us not to sin. We'll get all into that at the end of chapter 7 and into chapter 8.

Another place, Romans chapter 9, verse 18 through 20. In this chapter, Paul has previously cited the Old Testament seven times. Direct citations.

Seven times up to this point. And then in verse 18, he says, So then, he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. And here, Paul anticipates the objection.

[33:40] You will say to me then, why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will? And this is my favorite of all of Paul's responses to these potential objections.

He says, But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Who do you think you are? Is what he says. To even ask these kinds of questions.

I have just told you from the Old Testament seven different times. And I say to you, he who has mercy on whom he wills, he hardens who he wills, and then at the end of verse 20, he says, Well, what does molded say to its molder?

Why have you made me like this? You are clay. You have no right to ask of the potter. Why did you make me in this way?

In Jude, verse 4, here Jude is writing, speaking of the church at Corinth. He says, 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 or licentiousness, and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

[34:52] Christ. So, whose condemnation is just? That's the question that we might ask, right? There at the very end of verse 8 of Romans chapter 3, these people slanderously charge them with saying, Why not do evil

that good may come?

Here, Jude finds himself having to address some people who had come in at the church of Corinth, making that very case. Ungodly people who pervert the grace of God into sensuality.

This is what they're doing. They're asking and answering that question in the affirmative, right? We should live however we want to live because then God's grace would abound. So, whose condemnation is just?

Those who play with the words of God. So, Paul, in just such a great labor, an inspired labor to be sure, but I imagine his pin hand growing tired to be careful to be sure that we have a good and right, clear understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's a gospel that goes to all peoples but has not forgotten the ethnic Jew. So, has Paul offended God's people?

[36:07] Has Paul offended God's promises? Has Paul offended God's holiness? And the answer is an affirmative no. Let's pray together.

Let's pray together.