



## Objection Overruled

Romans 3:1-8

Rev. Fred Greco

---

We've completed our journey through chapters 1 and 2 of the book of Romans, and we start this morning with chapter 3. We'll look at the first eight verses of chapter 3 in which Paul deals with some objections to what he has been teaching us in the first two chapters. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely without error, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 3, beginning at verse 1:

*"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 every one 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."*

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we come to you, for you have the words of life. Lord, we ask this morning that you would bless us, that you would point our hearts toward the Lord Jesus Christ, that by the power of your Holy Spirit your Word would take deep root within our hearts. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

This morning as we begin chapter 3, we see Paul dealing with objections. Whether they come from a specific person at this time or not we don't know, but Paul would have considered these objections that would have been thrown in his face after the lessons of chapters 1-2. These objections come in three ways to us this morning, three questions.

The first objection is, "What advantage is there to the Jew?" The second objection comes in the question, "Doesn't unbelief nullify God's faithfulness?" Doesn't the fact that there are unbelievers stand in the way of God's faithfulness? Then thirdly and finally, the question is, "Isn't God unrighteous to judge?" Isn't this whole thing of God judging unrighteous? These are the three questions and objections we will look at this morning.

As I thought about these objections, thinking about it in the context, as you may recall, of my former life as an attorney, this is an objection you might see from someone. I thought I would try to delve into the world of legal accuracy and depiction at a very high level. I would like to paint a picture to you from that wonderful

film *My Cousin Vinny*. You may recall that my cousin Vinny was, like me, a lawyer and, like me, Italian and, like me, from New York, but I think that's where it ends.

He was attempting to defend his cousin and his friend from a murder charge. When he first arrived on the scene, it was his first case. He didn't really know what was involved or what to do. His first couple of objections to the judge were not well received at all. He didn't know what he was doing. Then there came a point where there was an expert witness called to the stand, and Vinny was ready.

He said to the judge, "I object to this witness being called at this time. We've been given no prior notice that he'd testify, no discovery of any tests he has conducted or reports he has prepared, and as the court is aware, the defense is entitled to advance notice of any witness who will testify, particularly those who will give scientific evidence, so that we may properly prepare for cross-examination as well as give the defense an opportunity to have witness reports reviewed by a defense expert who might then be in a position to contradict the veracity of his conclusions."

The judge looked at him and said, "Mr. Gambini?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Mr. Gambini, that is a lucid, intelligent, and well thought out objection. Thank you."

If you haven't seen the movie, you have to understand he's grinning from ear to ear now, because he's sure he has won. The judge's next word is, "Overruled." In other words, "Sit down." Just because you think you have a good objection doesn't mean you do. Just because you can raise an objection to a point doesn't mean you win the argument.

That's what Paul is dealing with here this morning. Just because someone can raise objections to his teaching... Paul is not going to sit on his hands. He's not going to allow this to go forward. He's not going to be defeated. No. Paul is going to handle these objections in a very strong and efficient manner.

### **What Advantage is There?**

The very first objection that comes to Paul is "What advantage is there to being a Jew?" We need to remember the flow of Paul's argument. Each week we keep going over this. I know at times it seems like, "Is it necessary to go over again the flow of the argument?" We have to remember we are not going through independent units of text. We're instead looking at useful segments of Romans, and they're all tied together in a unified whole. That means we have to understand the whole if we're going to understand each part.

So what is the flow of Paul's argument? Paul's argument is that everyone needs the gospel, but the problem is that many people object. They say, "No, I don't, Paul. I've got it just fine. I'm all together." So Paul started

with those who do not understand about the things of God. In chapter 1 he dealt with the Gentiles, those who did not have God's Word, who did not have the worship of the temple.

Then he moved in chapter 2 to those who were religious: the Jews. He systematically took away every support they had to assure themselves they were fine. After all, they had the possession of the law. They had the election of their nation. They had circumcision. All of these things they were sure made them fine. Paul systematically took those supports away from them. Now Paul faces a series of objections. As we've seen before and will see in the future, Paul anticipates these objections.

It's not that someone is arguing with him right now, but Paul does not assume everyone will just agree with him. Surely he met these kinds of objections when he was reasoning from the Scriptures in the synagogues, as we see him doing over and over again in the book of Acts. The first objection is that Paul's argument has proved too much. By that we mean the objector says if what Paul argues is true, then it leads to an obvious problem, so that means it *can't* be true, because the problem shouldn't be there.

They are saying to Paul, "You're saying God treats Jews and Gentiles alike. They both stand equally before a holy and just God, and the Jews can't trust in what makes them different. After all, Paul, you also said circumcision itself is not what's important but, rather, the inward nature of the heart. You even said in chapter 2, verse 27, that the physically uncircumcised would judge the circumcised. If all of this is true, then what advantage is there in being a Jew?"

As a matter of fact, we might say there's an argument that it would be a *disadvantage* to be a Jew, because Paul implies in his argument the Jews will be held to a higher standard because of their knowledge of God. Circumcision puts an obligation on the religious Jew. It highlights their need to have a heart for God. You know what it is like to have a supposed advantage turn out to be a disadvantage. Either this has happened to you or you have said this to your children.

A child is involved in doing something they shouldn't with some friends, and you say, "You're going to have to be punished for that." They look at you and say, "But Bobby did it too. But Suzie did it too." What does every parent since the beginning of time respond? "I don't care what Bobby does. I don't care what Suzie does. I care what *you* do." Why? "Because you ought to know better. I've taught you." So there's actually a disadvantage to knowing better, if you look at it from the perspective of punishment.

The objector comes to Paul. He's saying, "Tell me where this great part about being a Jew is. All it does is gets me more punishment and better criticism. Why did God bother to set apart the Jews from other people? Why did God give us circumcision? If, Paul, you're saying these things don't save, they're not a big deal, why did God do this?"

You have to understand why the objection is being raised at this point. The objection is not being raised because they are trying to accuse God of doing worthless things. The attack isn't on God; it's on Paul. The point is the objector knows God doesn't act without a purpose. The objector knows God doesn't do pointless things, so his argument is, "If what Paul says makes God out to be pointless and purposeless, Paul must be wrong. His argument proves too much. It goes too far."

Paul is ready for this objection. He's going to show he's not arguing that being Jewish is worthless. All he has done is put God's acts of calling a people to himself and giving them the covenant sign in a context for them. When God did this it was meant to show the true work of God in the lives of his people. So Paul answers this objection boldly.

I want you to notice Paul doesn't give any ground at all here. He doesn't say, "You know, I think you may have a good point here" or "Let's talk about this and see where we can agree." No. How does Paul answer? He says, "Much in every way." "You think there's no advantage to being a Jew? No, there's much advantage in every way." He's ready to show he doesn't consider being Jewish or having circumcision of no value.

There's no buildup to his answer. I think we're all familiar with this rhetorical technique that goes from the lesser to the greater. We start with our least important points and build up to a crescendo and save our most significant point for last, kind of as a capstone. That's not what Paul does. Rather than do that he starts with his strongest point and says, "First, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God."

This itself is curious, because when we hear someone say "First," what do we expect to hear at some point? "Second," maybe "Third." Do we see that here? No. Paul gets so carried away with "First" he never gets to "Second." That's why some translations try to make this sound a little bit better to our ears. They'll say something like "Chiefly" or "First of all" or "To begin with," like our translation gives.

All of these are fine translations, but you have to understand this is not Paul's only point. He's just rather excited about this point. As a matter of fact, he will come back to this. We're going to have to wait probably about six months to when he comes back to this point in chapter 9. He'll start to list off other advantages the Jews have. They have the adoption as sons. They have the covenants. They have worship. They have the promises.

Paul doesn't want to deal with any of those things yet because he wants to focus on the one great advantage the Jews have: God's Word. He takes them to God's revealed Word. After all, that is the greatest treasure anyone can have. God's Word is what makes the promises of God valuable and accessible to us. God's Word is what gives meaning to the sign of the covenant. God's Word is actually what gives content to our relationship with God.

In using this phrase the *oracles of God*, what Paul means is much more than just some prophecies. He actually means the entirety of written revelation, all of the Old Testament, essentially the Bible that the Jews had. The Bible is essential to a living relationship with the Lord. That's because the Bible tells us who God is. It tells us about God, what he loves, how he relates to his people. The Bible also tells us about ourselves. It tells us who we really are, what our true needs are, and where our hope can be found.

The Bible gives us encouragement when we don't know what to do or where to go. Finally, the Bible is what gives us power to turn away from sin and toward God. Now, I want to be very clear here. Do not think there is no advantage to being a Christian. Do not think there is no advantage to being in church. The greatest advantage you have is the availability of the Bible, the book that is crucial for all of life. This is what Paul tells us. There is clearly an advantage, and he dispels the first objection.

### **Doesn't Unbelief Nullify God's Faithfulness?**

The next objection that comes to Paul is a pragmatic one. We see it in verse 3. "What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?" This goes something like this: If God really gave the Jews an advantage through his Word, why doesn't it work? If God's Word is so powerful and so important, shouldn't it work, and shouldn't it work all the time? Otherwise, isn't it really of no effect?

Circumcision was a covenant sign. It was a sign of the promise of God, and that promise of God was, "I will be your God, and you will be my people." The problem is that creates a difficulty for us, because not everyone obtains the promise of God. We see this throughout the Bible itself. For every David there is a Saul. For every Joshua and Caleb there is a generation of Israelites that do not seize the promises of God.

Paul has just told us in chapter 2 that through unfaithfulness, through unbelief, many religious people do not receive the promise of God. Now let's think about that difficulty in our modern context. It's a problem we have with baptism. The covenant sign of baptism is given to someone, and yet not everyone who receives the covenant sign is faithful. Some are baptized and hate God. They run from God. They refuse to read the Scriptures. They refuse to pray.

So what do we do with this challenge? Some try to overcome this objection by saying baptism always and fully saves the person except for it's not permanent. It's sort of temporary. It saves you, but you can get unsaved. That's how they deal with some who are baptized and fall away. Others, instead, take a different route. They try to make baptism just a sort of testimony. It's all about me and what I did, so if that proves untrue it's all my fault.

It seems much safer in this context to wait until someone can make a public testimony of faith in Christ, and then we baptize them. That reduces the odds someone will fall away, but there's still a problem with that, because no matter how long you wait or how good the testimony is there are people who still fall away from the faith, who prove their baptism was not of the heart.

The problem we have is that the Bible doesn't talk about baptism in either of these ways, as a temporary full salvation or as something that is just about me. No, the Bible talks about the covenant sign of baptism as a sign of what God does, not what I do. What does it mean, then, when baptized people later reject God? Even those who wait for a profession of faith have this problem.

Essentially, the argument is that if some don't have faith then God has failed. He must be the unfaithful one. He must be the one not keeping his promise. They say, "Paul, you just told us many of God's people rejected him. Doesn't that make God's promises useless? If you can reject the promise of God, what value is it? God can't really deliver on his promises. He can't really deliver on his plan. Isn't God really a liar when he says something like, 'I will be your God, and you will be my people?'"

Again, we see another form of this objection in our current day in the visible church. If we look at the visible church of God, we see a mess. We see churches that deny God's Word. We see churches that deny the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. We see churches that deny the need for salvation, the very promises of God. Doesn't this show that God is a failure if his church itself is not faithful?

Paul has an answer to this objection as well, and his answer here is even stronger than to the last objection. Last time he started with "First" and got so excited he never got to "Second." This time he uses the phrase that is the strongest denial found in the Bible. Some translations have it as "Not at all!" or "Absolutely not!" or the RSV's "By no means!" In this occasion, I think the old King James has hit the tone just right: "God forbid!"

Paul refuses for even a moment to entertain this objection. This Greek phrase that is used here is a translation of a Hebrew type of oath. It expresses a strong rejection of an idea or a statement with the context that God should never allow this. He would never allow such a thing. We see it in the Old Testament, for example, in the book of Joshua.

You remember at the end of Joshua when Joshua said to the Israelites, "You have to choose this day whom you will follow. Will you follow the Lord or will you follow the idols of the land?" The people responded, "Far be it from us [God forbid] that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods." "May God forbid it that we should ever serve other gods."

When Abraham was speaking to the Lord about the coming destruction in Sodom, he said, "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" The idea here is that Paul absolutely refuses to accuse God. He would actually rather have it that every man in existence would be a liar than that God would be untrue.

You see, God is not judged by people or by events external to himself. This is critical for us in our day and age, because how often do we hear things like this? "Well, I can't imagine a God who would do that" or "I couldn't believe in a God who wouldn't allow me to do *this*." God has to fit into *our* standards, *our* setup. Paul says, "Stop judging God according to your standards." God is who he is and who he revealed himself to be. God is as he has revealed in his Word.

If you stack up every single person in the world on one side of the equation, God would still win. If everyone else said, "This is true" and God said, "No, it's false," God would be right. Paul gives us an example to help us. He takes a statement from Psalm 51. You may remember the context for Psalm 51. David has sinned with Bathsheba, and because of that he has murdered Uriah the Hittite. Nathan confronts David with his sin. He shows him he has violated God's law and sinned.

David repents of that sin and goes to the Lord for forgiveness. The interesting thing is David doesn't try to minimize his sin. Isn't that often our case, whether it's kids in our household or maybe you with your boss at work or with a professor in class? You say things like, "Really, this wasn't that big of a deal. Not that much bad was done. Nobody was really hurt." You know the statement on the television commercial: "No animals were harmed in the filming of this commercial." "It's not a big deal."

David does the exact opposite. David doesn't say, "Well, this was just about Bathsheba, and I can take care of her," or "Okay, I did bad by Uriah." No, what David says is, "Against you and you only have I sinned, Lord." David realizes his sin is against God and that is so significant it makes everything else seem like nothing.

I want you to understand what seems like nothing: adultery, murder. I don't know that you can commit a worse sin against a person than murdering them. David says, "Compared to the sin against God, this is nothing." So God would not be faithless in not showing mercy. God would actually be faithful in judging David's sin and punishing him.

There are two ways for God to be faithful. God can be faithful in showing mercy and God can be faithful in giving judgment. Both show him as being faithful. Both are God's perfect response to dealing with sin. The difference is in the belief of the sinner. We often think the only way God can be faithful is if he's merciful to us. We don't want to think about judgment because we don't want to experience it, but what Paul and David are both telling us is God is not to blame for the lack of faith and repentance of sinners. He is faithful to do exactly what he has said: to judge sin.

### **Isn't God Unrighteous to Judge?**

We now come to the third objection, which is the weakest of all of them. Look at verse 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?" This objection is saying something like this: If our sin shows the righteousness of God, isn't he

wrong to punish us for that? All of this comes out to good in the end. Why shouldn't God be glad that I sinned?

The reasoning might be something like this: "If I didn't sin, then there would be no need for Jesus, and if Jesus would never have come, God would not have been glorified in the person and work of Jesus. So isn't it a good thing that I sin? Why would God punish me for something that worked out so well?" If you are sitting there scratching your heads right now, it's okay. Paul himself doesn't think this is a reasonable argument. He says, "I speak in a human way." In no way would he imply this is a good argument.

It does sound crazy that God should be glad for my sin because it gives him a chance to show his righteousness, as if God couldn't show his righteousness apart from my sin. Does God really need me in this sense? This objection calls into question God's role as judge. Why is God judge? Is it solely to reveal his glory or isn't there something else objective about his judgment?

God would be fair to judge sin, not because it is to his advantage but because he is righteous and true. This objection also calls into question the condemnation of my sin. It makes my sin a good thing. So then, shouldn't we want more of that? After all, why wouldn't we want to add to God's glory? That's exactly the point Paul picks up in verse 8. "And why not do evil that good may come?" If my sin brings about good, I want more good. What do I need? More sin.

"It makes perfect sense to me. The more I sin, the more God can be glorified, the more God can forgive. Come on. Let's all go out and start sinning like crazy, all for God's glory. The more evil we do, the more good will come of it." As you can imagine, Paul has the least patience for this objection. His answer is that this denies what God has revealed. He answers again in the strongest possible terms. He says, "God forbid!" "By no means!"

The interesting thing is he doesn't even launch into a long refutation of this objection. He doesn't deal with it point by point. He just says, like in *My Cousin Vinny*, "Overruled. Sit down." That's it. Paul appeals to the fact of God's judgment because this was acknowledged by his objectors. He says, "How could God judge the world, then?" The objectors knew God would judge the world. They were counting on it. They wanted God to judge the Gentiles for all of their wickedness.

The problem is if God is unfair in judging now, what would make him fair judging later? If more sin is good now, why wouldn't more sin be good later? You can't eat your cake and have it too. Right? The real truth Paul is getting at is that God is not obligated to forgive us if we continue in sin. Now whenever the gospel of free grace is preached, this is the objection that is raised: "How can God just forgive those people? Won't they just keep on sinning over and over again? Won't they take advantage of God?"

This is the mindset of an unrepentant sinner. There have been solutions, so-called, proposed to this. The Roman Catholics made good works a part of salvation. That means if someone keeps on sinning he loses his salvation. It is faith plus works equals salvation, and if the works drop out salvation is lost. Others take the exact opposite tactic and say God has to ignore all future sin.

As long as someone makes a profession of faith, somebody prays a prayer, somebody walks down an aisle, they can do whatever they want the rest of their lives and God has to save them. They can abandon their family, abuse their wife, steal from the bank, never read a Bible, never pray. Because they prayed a prayer or walked an aisle, God is obligated to save them.

Again, the Bible says something very different. The Bible says when God forgives a sinner he gives the sinner a new heart and a new life. That's manifested in a changed life. The biblical formulation is *faith equals salvation plus works*. We are saved by faith alone, but our works are the evidence of the work of God in our lives. God has revealed to us that he is the Judge and that sin will be judged, and those who try to object to this truth will find their condemnation is just.

That's how Paul ends our text this morning. He says, "If you want to slander us and say that sin is a good thing, your condemnation is just. You get what you deserve." Paul never said being a part of the people of God was worthless. He never said there were not blessings to be found in God's covenant and in the covenant sign, but he does remind us that all of these blessings pale in comparison to the blessing we receive in Christ.

That is the message for us to hear today. That is the message for us to bring to others today: our blessings are found in Christ. That is what we seek. There are advantages to being a part of the people of God, because those advantages point us to Jesus. That is the hope of the believer.