

## **Romans: Objection Overruled (2)**

**Romans 3:5-8**

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If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn to Romans, chapter 3 and verse 5 as we continue working through the book of Romans together. Let me remind you that in Romans, chapter 1 the first verse through the 17th verse, the apostle introduces us to the theme of his book. He focuses on the person, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Romans 1, verses 3 and 4, he gives us a synopsis of the theme of His argument in the book. In verses 16 and 17, and then immediately in Romans 1:18 to the end of that chapter, he begins to explain why the Gentiles need the gospel. The gospel is not just something that's for the Old Covenant people of God, it's not just something for people are the natural descendants of Abraham. It's not just for the Jewish people, it's for everyone. It's for the Gentiles, and he explains why the Gentiles need the gospel in Romans, chapter 1.

Then, in Romans, chapter 2, beginning with the first verse and all the way down to the last verse of the chapter the apostle is concerned to show why the Jews need the gospel. It's not just something for the Gentiles, it's for the Jews. They must embrace the Messiah of God as promised in God's covenant with Abraham, if they are to enjoy the blessings of the fulfillment of the Covenant of Abraham for good. And so Paul, throughout the chapter we have seen, undercuts wrong bases, wrong arguments for assurance that has been set up the Jewish people of his day. He has said in response to their appeal, "Well, look, we possess the law of Moses." Paul says, "That's right. You do possess the law of Moses, but you don't do it. You're just as guilty as the Gentiles are of disobedience." And they say, "Yes, but we have a divine calling, given by God to be a light to the nations." And Paul says, "That's true, you do; but, because of your disobedience, God is actually blasphemed among the nations." They have reminded Paul that they have the covenant of circumcision, and he says, "Yes, that's true, you do have the covenant of circumcision", but in the final verses of Romans, chapter 2, he says, "What we need is heart circumcision, not mere flesh circumcision."

And he draws a very interesting distinction between inward righteousness and outward righteousness. Those people who have real righteousness that is brought about by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the heart which transforms our attitudes, our actions, our lives, contrasted to a merely ritual and

superficial obedience of God.

And that final criticism that Paul had brought in Romans, chapter 2 verses 25 through 29, evoked a response, an objection to Paul's teaching. And basically we saw that objection in Romans, chapter 3, verses 1 through 4. There were two objections. The first was this. Paul, if what you are saying is true. If a person in order to have a saving relationship with God, in order to have a face-to-face fellowship with the one true God, if a person needs to have inward righteousness rather than outward righteousness, then all of the things which God said to us in the Old Testament as privileges, the privilege of being His chosen people, the privilege of receiving the law of God, the privilege of the sign of circumcision. All those things, they're worthless. And Paul's response is, "Oh, no, they're not worthless at all. You're misunderstanding my argument." In fact, he goes right to that central blessing of the children of God receiving the oracles of God. God's revelation of himself. And he says, "That, in and of itself, proves the value of the blessings that God extended to you in the Old Covenant.

But Paul presses on; you must not reject the promise on which all our hopes are based. And the promises focused in Jesus Christ. Then, another objection came. And that objection is this. Look, isn't God's faithfulness called into question if you are saying that some and even many, of the Jewish people have rejected the Messiah, they have refused to believe in Him, and by their unbelief have not received the promises that God made to us in the Covenant with Abraham, doesn't that call God's question? Doesn't that call God's faithfulness into question? And Paul's response again is, "Hardly," because God's faithfulness can be manifested in two ways. It can be manifested in blessing on those who embrace His promises, or God can be faithful to punish and to judge those who reject His promises. And so the apostle Paul says, "God is faithful either way. The question is, will you enjoy your faithfulness in blessing, or will you endure His faithfulness in cursing?" I love the way that Ralph Davis is able to turn phrases, and he describes this very well. He says, "Paul's point is to say, 'Great is Thy faithfulness, and it will kill you.'" That is, God, when we reject His promises, will be faithful to judge. He promises us that He will be faithful to judge if we reject His overtures of mercy. And that's exactly what Paul says to these who are objecting to his teaching.

They are saying, "Well, if God's faithfulness is manifested in punishment for unbelief, isn't that calling into question His faithfulness and His promise to bless us?" Paul says, "No, no. You missed the point. It doesn't call His faithfulness into question at all. The problem is yours, not God's. When you reject the promise, you are under judgment."

And so Paul continues to hear objections to his teaching in the passage that we will look at today. Let's turn to Romans 3, verses 5 through 8 and hear God's word reverently and attentively.

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) May it never be. For otherwise how will God judge the world? But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? And why not say as we are slanderously reported, (and as some affirm that we say, "Let us do evil that good may come")? Their condemnation is just.

Amen and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add his blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we praise You for Your word. We thank You that Your word uncovers the secrets of our hearts. And as painful as it is sometimes to see our sin, we know that You unveil our sin to us with the intention that we would receive mercy, having seen our sin, having given up any thought of saving ourselves, we flee to Christ for grace. And in mercy You receive us as the Father received the prodigal. Unveil our hearts to us this day, we pray, in Your word. Enable us to see it, to understand it, and to respond in such a way, not only that You are glorified, but that we become the benefactors of Your eternal and saving mercy. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Paul, in this passage, receives two more objections to his teaching. And you will have noticed that as these four objections in Romans 3, verses 1 through 8 proceed, they get weaker and weaker. In fact, these objections don't even contest Paul's main point. I don't whether you have ever watched debates, but if one team is being beaten really badly, good debaters have all sorts of techniques whereby they attempt to obscure the fact that they are being beaten. They will try and change the subject, they will try and discuss something which totally befuddles the judges and those on the other side; perhaps, you've even seen a lawyer who's being badly beaten in his closing arguments, go to things that are utterly irrelevant to the case, in the vain hope that the jury will be distracted from how badly he is losing his case. And that's what we often do when we are confronted with our sin. We want to talk about anything else but that issue. We want to talk about the weather, or we want to talk about something that the person who's confronting us has done wrong. We want to change the subject. And that's exactly what's happening here. Paul has convicted a people, and the response is to try and change the subject. "Let's talk about something else, Paul. Let's talk about a theological problem that your view brings about." Why? Because the truth has gotten very close to home. It's hit home to the heart. And the unbeliever, the very last thing that the unbeliever wants to do is to deal with his or her sin.

And so Paul in this passage is going to receive two objections to his teaching. Two more objections to his teaching. And in the course of responding to those two objections, he's going to teach us two very important truths. So, I'd invite you to look at verses 5 and 6 at the first objection, which we see in this passage.

## **I. God is righteous in His judgment.**

And the objection runs something like this. Paul, if God's justice is magnified in the wickedness of humans, is it really right for God to pour out His wrath? You remember that Paul has just argued in Romans 3, verses 1 through 4 that God's righteousness stands out all the more against the backdrop of human sin. And that assertion gets him this objection. The objection says that if God glorifies Himself through my sin, isn't it unfair for Him to judge me for that sin, too? I mean if God is making use of the unbelief of the Jews in order to magnify His faithfulness, isn't it unfair for Him to go ahead and judge it, to punish them for their unbelief? This person is saying Paul, on the basis of your doctrine, since man's unrighteousness brings out more sharply God's righteousness, shouldn't the Almighty be happy about that turn of events? After all, he's being glorified in His faithfulness by their unfaithfulness. And Paul, you see here, is facing people who would rather rationalize than repent. He's convicting them of their sins. He's pressing them about their sin. And they'd rather talk about anything else. They would rather find some theological point to nitpick with the apostle Paul, rather than deal with the charge that he's making.

Paul emphatically rejects that kind of reasoning. Look at verse 6. He does two things in response to it. First of all he gives us an emphatic negation. Not at all. God forbid. That's hardly what I am doing. Paul rejects outright the suggestion that it is unjust for God to judge those who have sinned, even though in His judgment His faithfulness is magnified.

Secondly, he goes on and gives a positive argument based on the idea of God's just judgment. And though we could understand it in two or three different ways, the basic point is absolutely clear. Paul says that the God of the Bible is beyond questioning in the righteousness of His just judgment. God is a just judge. But Paul may mean this. He's speaking to Jewish people who believe in God's judgment, and they believe in a final judgment. And perhaps he's saying to them, "Look, if you think that God might be unjust in His judgment now, how can you think that He's going to be just in His final judgment, which we all agree is going to occur?" Or Paul may be saying something like this, "If you are saying that sin ceases to be sin and ceases to require judgment, because God overrules it for His glory, then there's no sin that can be punished, because God overrules every sin for his glory." That doesn't make it any less punishable though. It doesn't lessen the requirement of God to bring about justice for that sin. And if you argue that way, then no sin can be judged.

But Paul's point, over and over, is that the God of the Bible is beyond questioning in the righteousness of His judgment. Notice how, when faced with the judgment of God for sin, these people immediately want to ask the abstract question, is it right for God to judge, rather than the obvious and concrete question, okay, I'm a

sinner; I deserve judgment; how do I deal with that? They would rather go to some sort of abstract theological question which is frankly preposterous; the idea that God's judgment is unjust, than deal with the fact which is close at home that they are sinners in need of God's divine mercy. And so often when we're in gospel conversations we run into that very thing. When you have taken many months to screw up the courage to go and talk with a friend, or perhaps a friend whose made a profession of faith, but who is living in sin. And you want to confront that brother or sister with that sin, and suddenly that person has all these intricate theological questions that they want you to answer. Well, before we get to that, I've got some questions about angels that I need you to straighten out. Or help me with predestination, I don't understand that. Or what about the existence of God? Suddenly, there's this great interest in various speculative theological issues. Why? Because, you're getting close to home. You're wanting to deal with sin. And sin is willing to accept anything except repentance. And it will do anything to stay alive. And so the favorite thing to do for the unrepentant unbeliever is to run away from the question at hand, sin, and go to some abstract theological question.

And by the way, this is done in various ways. One way that I see it done here in Jackson very often is when Paul hits a little too close to home, people will say, "Well, that's Paul, not Jesus." Have you heard that around here? I've heard it over and over. People say, "Well, Paul said that, not Jesus." As if somehow that gets you off the hook. Oh, well, Paul may be wrong. But Jesus, you know it's only the red-letter stuff that counts. That argument boggles my mind. And I want to pause right here because I've heard it so many times, and because I've heard so many of you tell me that you have heard this so many times.

And I want to tell you eight reasons why that thinking is wrong. The first reason is this. That's a no man's land kind of argument. Liberals aren't going to be satisfied with that kind of argument because they don't care what Jesus says either. They're not sure whether the stuff that's written in the gospel, Jesus ever said. So distinguishing Jesus and Paul isn't really going to help you with an honest-to-goodness liberal, nor is it going to help you with a conservative because a conservative believes that the entire Bible is inspired. Whether Isaiah said it, or whether Moses said it, whether David said it, whether Paul or Peter said it, whether Jesus said it, it's all the inspired word of the living God. And so that problem, if you try and solve the problem of something you don't like in Paul's teaching by saying that's not Jesus, that's Paul, it doesn't get you off the hook with either liberals or conservatives. You're left in a no-man's land by yourself.

Second problem with that argument – it ignores Paul own strong claims. Think for a minute what Paul says in I Corinthians 1:1. He says that he's an apostle, not by the will of man, but by the will of God. In I Corinthians, chapter 7, verse 12, he has the audacity to say, "I say, not the Lord." In other words, Lord Jesus didn't speak to this issue, but this is the way that I say you need to deal with it. Furthermore, later in that chapter in I Corinthians, 7:17 he says, "Thus I direct in

all the churches." In other words, the way I say it ought to be done, it ought to be done in every church. And then in I Corinthians 14, towards the end of that chapter in verses 37 and 38 when he's dealing with that very tricky issue of prophesy and tongues, he says, "Listen, if anyone who hears this thinks that he's a prophet, then he needs to recognize that these are the words of a prophet. They are the words of God and they are authoritative. And if they do not recognize this word, then they themselves are not recognized."

And, of course, Paul, in I Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 13 can commend the Thessalonians with this word. He'll say, "I thank God that you received our words for what they were, not the words of men, but the words of God." And later in that Book in II Thessalonians in chapter 3, verse 14 he can say this: "If anyone does not obey the instruction of this letter, let him be put out of the church." The apostle Paul had no conception whatsoever that his words were on a lower level of inspiration that were the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because he was inspired by the third person of the trinity when he spoke them. They were God's words. That's the second reason why this argument won't fly.

Thirdly, this kind of reasoning ignores the claims of scripture about itself and about the nature of inspiration. Paul, for instance, writes in II Timothy, chapter 3, verses 14 through 17 that all Scripture is given by inspiration. And yes, he was especially talking about the Old Testament. But by extension, his words apply to all Scripture, both Old and New Testament. It's all inspired by God. It's all God-breathed And Peter tells us what that means. He means that holy men were carried along by the Holy Spirit in order to give what God intended, not their own private interpretation. Peter tells us that in II Peter, chapter 1, verses 19 through 21. And therefore, the author of Hebrews can say in Hebrews 4:12 that the word of God is powerful and active, and it's sharper than a two-edged sword. That's what the word of God is. And so teaching which says, "Well Paul said that, or Job said that or Jonah said that", as if Jesus didn't say it and it doesn't count, ignores what the Bibles says about itself.

Fourthly, let me say that this kind of statement, Paul said it, not Jesus, contradicts what Jesus thought about the Bible. In Matthew, chapter 5, verses 17 through 20 Jesus said that not a jot or a tittle of the word of God, of the law of God revealed. Especially again he's speaking of the Old Testament. Not a jot or a tittle of it would pass away until it was all fulfilled, and that those were greatest in the kingdom who keep and teach that words. And those are least in the kingdom who do not teach or keep that word. Furthermore, Jesus would say in John 10:35 that the scripture cannot be broken. And in John 17:17 He would remind even in the prayer that He was lifting up His heavenly Father, He would remind His disciples that God's word is truth, and that is how we are sanctified. That's how we grow in grace, is by God's word. And so for us, as evangelicals, our view of the Bible is itself an act of devotion. We believe in the inspiration, the authority, the inerrancy of God's word because Jesus believed in it. Furthermore, this type of an argument creates an enormous and unsolvable problem. It's what

I might call the pick and choose dilemma. If some parts of the Bible are inspired and some are authoritative and others are not, who gets to choose? Who is appointed the Pope to determine which parts are right and which parts are wrong? We all become our own little popes. And today we can excise this part, and tomorrow we can excise that part. Furthermore, this view negates the historic view of the canon, held by all Christians in favor of an arbitrary red-letter edition view of scripture. Christians have always recognized that the books of the Bible all bear the marks of the canon, that is they are authoritative, they are prophetic, they are apostolic. They show the marks of inspiration. This argument fails to appreciate the correspondence between Jesus and Paul's teaching. We have noticed as we worked through Romans how closely tied to the teaching of Jesus are Paul's arguments. Even his argumentation bears very close resemblance to Jesus' arguments in His earthly ministry.

And finally let me say that the desire to distinguish Jesus and Paul originated in the liberal attempt to demythologize Christianity. The idea of the liberals was that Paul is the person who really invented Christianity. He came up with the idea of the virgin birth, he came up with the idea the deity of Christ. He came up with the idea of the substitution atonement, and the idea is those ideas have not been around before Paul. And so you need to understand that when people make a distinction between Jesus and Paul, they are actually falling into the trap which had been set for them by German rationalists a century ago. And that idea again simply will not wash. So for all those reasons, when we have that kind of a deflecting comment, but Paul said that, not Jesus, recognize that you are seeing a manifestation of a heart that has gotten uncomfortable with a godly idea and thus has tried to obscure the real point.

The point of this passage though is that because God is the Judge, because God does judge, and because God will judge, He is irreproachable in His justice.

Do you take seriously God's judgment? We better, we better, because it's certain, and it will be right. Paul is reminding us here that those who do not deliver themselves into God's hand for mercy cannot be delivered from His hand for justice. It's one way or the other, God's mercy or God's justice. And God's judgment here is not arbitrary vengeance. It is the due process of moral providence. It is absolutely just. And the apostle reminds us that here. That's why we need the gospel, because God will judge. Over and over people would say to Paul that they did not need the gospel. That they didn't need the grace of God. That they were in and of themselves perfectly ready to face God in their own righteousness. And over and over Paul says back to them. Fine. If you can face God's judgment, apart from Christ, apart from grace, apart from mercy, apart from the gospel in your own righteousness, go ahead and do it; because God is just, and if you are righteous, I promise you He will acquit you.

The problem is, as he is going to point out later in this chapter, no one is righteous. It's not that God is unjust. The problem doesn't reside with the kind of

justice that God is going to meet out. He is not unfair. The problem resides with us. But over and over what does the sinner want to do? He wants to call in the question God's rightness, God's justice, God's judgment rather than deal with his own sin. The apostle Paul won't let him off the hook.

## **II. Just because God is fair and just does not mean that we can continue to sin and He must forgive us.**

Second objection that Paul gets in this passage you see in verses 7 and 8. And again, this objection is even weaker than the previous one. It goes something like this. If my lying, if my unfaithfulness highlights God's truthfulness, then why should I be condemned? Why not do evil that good may come. Now Paul gets this objection in several places in the book of Romans. Remember, in Romans 6:1 he goes this objection to his doctrine of justification by grace through faith. In Romans 9:19 he gets this same objection to his doctrine of election. And let me rephrase the objection. It goes something like this. Paul, your teaching leads us to the idea that we ought to do evil in order that good might come from it. Or Paul, your view of salvation means go ahead and sin to your heart's content in order that grace may have its chance to do its work.

But once again here you see the inveterate tendency of a depraved heart to do anything rather than to repent. The unbelieving heart will do anything so long as it doesn't have to repent. It will call in to question doctrine; it will call in to question God's fairness; it will call in to question God's existence; anything, as long it does not have to repent. And Paul considers the very suggestion that we do evil in order that grace may have a chance to do its work. He considers that very suggestion as blasphemous. And he announces here the justice of the condemnation of those who would say it.

Jesus ran into this kind of thing at the woman at the well didn't he? He's talking with this woman; he begins to talk with her about a sin that is very, very close to the center of her heart when he says to her, "Woman, go bring your husband." "Well, I have no husband." "You're right. The man that you're living with is not your husband, and you've had five previously." And immediately she becomes interested in having a theological discussion about worship. Well, let's talk about the theories of appropriate worship. It is here in Samaria or is it in Jerusalem? Immediately she wants to talk about something else.

Have you had that experience? Have you been in a conversation with an unbeliever about a spiritual issue, and suddenly they want to talk with you about angels or Calvinism or the crusades or anything else. The apostle Paul won't let us off the hook because there's no excuse for sin. There's no escape from its guilt, it's power or its penalty except through the gospel. The most stupendous blunder a man ever made was to think that he could gain anything by sinning. And, in fact, sin is double when we attempt to defend ourselves of it. When we



attempt to excuse ourselves from it. The apostle Paul is reminding us here that God's grace and His promises and His faithfulness and His ability to overrule sin in judgment to His glory, none of that excuses sin. And when the sinner tries to run anywhere else other than to the gospel to find relief from sin, he's running in the wrong direction. And so the apostle Paul has at every point cut off false assurance and false saviors from these folk and from you and me because he loves us. If you were running to a place that you thought was a refuge, but in fact it was going to end up being your destruction, a friend would tell you, don't go there. That's exactly what Paul is doing. As hard as Paul's words may seem to us, as hard hitting as they may feel to us, these are the wounds of a friend. He's telling us don't run anywhere else for safety, for refuge, for salvation except the gospel, because you're under sin, you're under judgment. The only way you'll experience blessing is embracing Jesus Christ as He is presented in my gospel. That's Paul word for you and me today. May God bless His word. Let's pray.

*Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your word. We ask that You would pierce our hearts with it. If we come to this place as believers today, build us up in the truth of the gospel, help us never to fool ourselves into running anywhere else for relief from sin in its guilt and power, except to the Lord Jesus Christ. If we have come to this place skeptical of Him, distant from Him, we pray that You would burden our hearts, convict us, that You would show us the truth about ourselves, and the greater truth about our Savior. Enable us by grace to run to Him and to trust in Him, to believe on Him for eternal life. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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