

# ROMANS

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED

## I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING

**Text:** Romans 3:1-8

**Main preaching point:** God's faithfulness and righteousness are unimpeachable.

### INTRODUCTION:

The message this morning is entitled, *I Know What You're Thinking*. Let me give you a heads-up on where we are going in this chapter. This chapter has three parts to it. **Part one is in verses 1-8.** We will see some objections that Paul deals with and some answers that buttress the argument of the previous chapter. **Part two is in verses 9-20.** It is designed to prove to us *by the Scriptures* that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin and guilt. It deals with the doctrine of *total depravity or radical inability*. Finally, **part three covers verses 21 to the end of the chapter.** Here we will discover *the glorious unfolding of God's provision of righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ*. Three parts in this chapter, and this morning I would like to consider only the first part in verses 1-8.

Why is it that most students of any age cringe at the thought of *asking questions*? One of the common reasons is that they do not want to appear *dumb or shallow*. However, one of the most effective teaching methods in the ancient world was a method called a *diatribe*. Ancient philosophers used this technique where a series of imaginary arguments were raised and then answers were given. In it, the teacher would set up a dialogue with his critics or students, first posing and then answering their questions.

Sound commentators believe that the imaginary objector is Paul himself, reconstructing arguments the Jews had flung at him during synagogue evangelism. As a former unconverted Pharisee, Saul probably had some of these questions himself. Imagine the Apostle face-to-face with a heckler who is no dummy. The heckler puts forth his strong and thoughtful question and then receives his answer, sometimes equally strong and brusque. Paul uses this technique to show us that every argument man raises up against the knowledge of God is actually a false argument, and it's man's way of keeping himself at a distance from God. This is the form of debate that Paul expresses in the first part of chapter 3.

In it, we will learn that *God's faithfulness and righteousness are unimpeachable*. However, we will also learn that at the end of the day, *sinner don't want to believe; they are determined not to believe*.

### OUTLINE:

I want to give you the four arguments upfront, then we are going to go back and consider each one carefully and make personal application.

- The first argument is found in verse 1—it is **a question of value**. The question really is, *is there any benefit to spiritual privileges?*

- The second argument is found in verse 3—it is a **question of ability**. And what the imaginary critic or the person arguing with God is really asking is, are humans able to frustrate the plan of God? Are we able to cancel out the promises of God?

The first argument is a *question of values*. The second argument is a *question of ability*.

- The third argument is found in verse 5—and it is a **question of ignorance**. What the person is asking in verse 5 is this: if, by comparison, our sinfulness shows God's holiness, then how can God judge us if we make Him look good? It is a question of ignorance.
- The fourth argument is found in verse 7—and it is a **question of sinful human logic**. It makes a statement—if my sin makes God look good, then isn't it logical that the more I sin, the more God is glorified?

These are the four arguments that the religious person brings. The first is in verse 1, the second is in verse 3, the third is in verse 5, and the fourth is in verse 7.

## EXPOSITION:

### A. QUESTION #1—VALUE (vv.1-2)

<sup>1</sup>Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

In other words, if Jews are judged just like Gentiles, and God's covenant, along with its signs and seals, does not protect them from judgment, what advantage is there in being a Jew? Today, it would be like the religious person asking, "If coming to church, knowing my Bible, taking communion, giving and serving in ministry don't give me any special advantage at the judgment, and guarantee a place in heaven for me, what good is it?"

The answer is given in verse 2.

<sup>2</sup>Great in every respect.

They were expecting Paul to say something different, but he didn't. He says that being a Jew and being a religious person who is exposed to the Bible is a good thing. He explains the Jews' case first.

First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

The benefit for the Jews is that they were **"entrusted with the oracles of God."** The benefit was that they knew what God required and provided. They had the knowledge of God's will. And isn't it better to know God's will than to not know it? Isn't it better to know what the Lord wants and provides and have a chance of doing it and experiencing His blessing, than to be totally ignorant of it?

The word **"advantage"** in verse 1 means aid in Greek. The advantage or aid that the Jews were given had not been given to anyone else at that time. It had real value, but not the kind of value that protected or secured them from judgment.

An illustration just leaped to my mind. Chief Long and Captain Davis are both firefighters, as many of you know, and they put those little firefighter decals on their cars. That decal is supposed to identify them as firefighters and bring some type of benefit, but it doesn't protect them from getting a ticket.

If a police officer pulls them over and sees the decal, he might take some things into consideration, but he also may not. That decal doesn't give them an exemption—right? They can still get a ticket and get in trouble.

The Jews thought that because they were Jewish, they had some type of *special protection that exempted them from judgment*. You might think that coming to church, reading your Bible, or serving in ministry should protect you in some special way. God says, it may help you, but it doesn't secure or give you an advantage at the judgment. So, how is it great in every respect?

The value of being a Jew was that the Old Testament **“oracles of God”** (v.2) contained shadows and types of the Gospel that *prepared* them for Christ and the New Covenant. In addition to this preparation, the advantage of being a Jew is that it *helped deliver them from certain depraved, sinful actions practiced by the Gentiles*.

**Now what about you?** What advantage does the religious person who has had exposure to sound doctrine or good Bible teaching have? What advantage do you have?

1. One is that even if God never saves you by drawing you from the darkness of your sin to saving faith in Jesus Christ, you will at least sin less because of these advantages, and therefore, you will be punished less severely.
2. If you are unsaved, the advantage of being exposed to Bible teaching is that God causes people to be born again by the work of the Holy Spirit operating through the truth of the Gospel. God uses the Word of God like seeds that are planted in your heart, and as you are living life, suddenly, something happens! God, by His Spirit, begins to water those seeds and you find yourself being drawn to Jesus Christ, and your spiritual eyes are opened. You see your sin as offensive to God, your heart is wounded and pierced, you see the inner defilement, the rebellion, the unbelief, and you desire to turn from it and come humbly to Jesus for forgiveness.
  - **1 Peter 1:23**—for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is, through the living and enduring word of God*.

What has happened? God is using the truth of His Word and His Spirit to bring you to Himself. It is a great advantage of being under the truth. No one gets saved without the truth and so being under it is a good thing.

## **B. QUESTION #2—ABILITY (vv.3-4)**

<sup>3</sup>What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?

The argument or question raised here is, how could God now judge Jews for their unfaithfulness when He promised in Abraham that He would bless them? Paul has in mind the Jew who would quote Genesis 17. If you read the Old Testament, you discover that many Jews then did not believe, and even today, most Jews do not believe in the Messiah. This imaginary critic is saying, does the faithlessness of the Jews cause God to be unfaithful? The word **“nullify”** (*katargeo*) means *to cause something to be idle, inactive, inoperative, and useless*. In other words, does their unbelief cancel out the promise of God?

Paul's answer is...

<sup>4</sup> May it never be!

Paul uses the strongest language he can use in the Greek language. We can translate this, "Not in a million years!"

Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar,

There are two things the Apostle would have us understand about God. *First, God's faithfulness is seen in His promises to judge the wicked as well as to bless those who believe and love Him (Ex.20:5-6). Second, God's faithfulness to keep His covenant can never change because God cannot and will not change (Mal.3:6; Heb.13:8).*

*We change, we shift, we grow. God doesn't grow because He is already perfect.* He knows all things and his faithfulness is immutable.

Man in his sinfulness always seeks to blame someone else for his own sinfulness. Just because man is a covenant breaker, it does not mean that God is. The Bible teaches that God will not break His covenant. He is faithful even if it means everyone on earth is a liar. Paul quotes Psalm 51:4 to say in essence, this is nothing new.

as it is written,

"THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS,  
AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."

God is always *right*, both when He *speaks* and when He *judges*. We don't have the ability to change who God is in His words or His judgments.

### C. QUESTION #3—IGNORANCE (vv.5-6)

<sup>5</sup> 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.)

The argument is this: if the more we sin, the better God's grace appears, why would God inflict judgment on us for something that He uses for His advantage, or to make Himself look good? To put it plainly, the person is saying, aren't we doing God a favor by sinning?

Now you say, "Pastor, I would never use an argument like that!" Well, we may not put it in those terms, but sometimes we try to make it seem as if God sanctioned our unbelief because He was going to be glorified through it. Paul feels the same way we do when he hears this, and qualifies it by saying, "**I am speaking in human terms.**" In other words, this is how *a fallen, ignorant sinner who doesn't understand God's character speaks*. Paul then answers in verse 6.

<sup>6</sup> May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

Again, the person who thinks this way reveals that they do not know God or anything about His character or wrath.

If we could use this argument that the main result of sin is to advance the purposes of God, and therefore, God is unjust to punish sin, no one would ever face judgment, because we have all sinned. But Paul says, judgment is not a fairy tale, it is a reality. It will happen. God will judge the world in righteousness.

- **Psalm 98:9**—Before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth;  
He will judge the world with righteousness  
And the peoples with equity.
- **Acts 17:30-31**—Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

R.C. Sproul once said, “If our unrighteousness were justified on the grounds that it makes all the more clear and vivid the righteousness of God, then God would have no reason to judge us. Instead, He should reward us and compliment us.”

#### **D. QUESTION #4—SINFUL HUMAN LOGIC (vv.7-8)**

<sup>7</sup> But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? <sup>8</sup> And why not *say* (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”?

The argument here is, the end justifies the means. What Paul is posing is that the imaginary objector says, “If the worse I am and the more wicked I am show how glorious God is and how merciful He is, then shouldn’t I just keep on sinning?”

Paul does not even dignify such sinful human logic with an answer. He declares at the end of verse 8,

Their condemnation is just.

In other words, *you’re going to get what is coming to you*. You deserve what you get. Evil never promotes the glory of God. If you think that sinning benefits God, it reflects *the twisted thinking that sin has produced in your own mind*. This sort of self-evident perverseness does not even deserve an answer.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Let me close with a word to unbelievers and a word to believers.

**First, a word to unbelievers or the unsaved.** Some of you are listening to me right now and I know what you are thinking. You’re thinking, “Pastor, I have a lot of questions for God that He isn’t answering. And until I get answers to all my questions, I am not going to believe.”

My friend, I want to say to you as gently as I can—*that’s not even practical*. You don’t even think this way about the most ordinary things in life. When you leave here in just a moment and go to lunch, you’re not going to sit down at the table and say, “*Unless I understand all the ingredients of this meal and understand how my digestive tract works, I am not going to let a bit of food pass by my lips.*” You don’t say that do you? No, you don’t.

You might look for a reasonable explanation of what's in the food to make sure it's safe and that it's going to agree with your system, but then you take it by faith. We can marshal arguments like this for your computer or iPhone use, travel, and many other things.

Here is what you need to KNOW. You must understand that God calls you to act based on the truth He has revealed in His Word. Yes, there are mysteries we don't understand, and there are questions that no one can answer.

- **Deuteronomy 29:29**—"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."

We have enough truth revealed in the Word of God to know about God, sin, Christ, and what God requires in our response to be forgiven, cleansed, and saved today.

I wonder how many of you are arguing with God today. You're seeking to make God answer your questions. You're acting as if God needs to satisfy your little arguments. In a diatribe in Romans 9, Paul says,

- **Romans 9:20**—On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

What you don't understand is that if God showed up on the scene and addressed you directly, you would fall on your face, prostrate before Him, and put your hands over your mouth like Job did. Job could not speak because there was nothing to say. All he had to do was repent.

Dear friends, don't argue with God. As religious people, we can come to God with these little questions, wanting everything to be explained. *But the Christian doesn't live by explanations; we live by faith.* If God's Word says it, that settles it. Believe it or not. God calls us to believe His Word.

**Now, a word to believers.** When some people are asking question after question, we can often think they are on the road of coming to faith in Christ, but actually, what they are doing is stiff-arming God with all these questions instead of believing what they know to be true. Let me be quick to say that there are some legitimate, honest, and sincere questions people have about difficult issues, and we need to understand this. There is even a theological word for this—it's the word *theodicy*, where we're trying to explain why a good God would permit evil in the world.

When people are having questions about *who Jesus is* and *what it means to repent and believe*, we owe it to them to give a clear, solid, biblical answer. But don't be thrown by diversion tactics. When people ask questions like, *who is Cain's wife* and *what about the dinosaurs*—or *what about other religions*, or *what about those who have never heard*—the proper answer is, I appreciate the question, but I would like to ask you a question: have you ever heard the Gospel? And *what are you going to do with Jesus Christ?*

Professor Donnelly once said, "A fool can ask enough questions to keep a hundred wise men busy for a hundred years." The question is, what about you? Do you and do I believe God's Word about His faithfulness?

There are three truths we must never forget. 1) God's character is always under attack. Satan used this weapon to trip up our first parents and he uses this same weapon today. 2) Satan promotes lies about God. He wants us to think that God doesn't really mean what He says. He wants us to believe the lie about the consequences of sin and disobedience—that if you go against God's Word, nothing will happen.

3) Satan wants you to believe that God doesn't care about you—and if He did, He wouldn't restrict you. He would just give you what you want. God doesn't care about you; He only cares about Himself.

But there is good news. Jesus Christ came to destroy the lies of the devil (*John 10:10*). His coming proved that God loves us. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son., that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (*John 3:16*). By our Lord's teaching, He destroyed the lie about the character of sin. By His miracles, He destroyed the lie about the consequences of sin. By His death, He destroyed the lie about the condemnation of sin. By His resurrection, He destroyed the lie about the confusion of death and the afterlife. Jesus reveals the truth of God because He is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (*John 14:6*). He is God in the flesh.

And therefore, God's faithfulness is something we can always count on.

- **Deuteronomy 7:9**—Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments;
- **2 Timothy 2:13**—If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

Faithfulness is one of the attributes of God with which He is clothed.

- **Isaiah 11:5**—Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins,  
And faithfulness the belt about His waist.

How far does the faithfulness of God go?

- **Psalms 36:5**—Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens,  
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

Far above and beyond what people can understand, we find the unchanging faithfulness of God. God never forgets. He never falters. He never fails. He never forfeits His Word.

- **Numbers 23:19**—"God is not a man, that He should lie,  
Nor a son of man, that He should repent;  
Has He said, and will He not do it?  
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

Let us always remember: *God's glory is always promoted by good and not evil*. God's glory is the sum of all His perfections. God's holiness is His beauty. It is manifested in *His works*. It is manifested in *His law*. But it is most wondrously manifested *at the cross*. At the cross, we see the holiness, mercy, grace, and glory of God.

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ, my God!  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.<sup>1</sup>

It's alright to ask questions, but whenever you start to doubt God, all you have to do is look at the cross. It is here the Scripture shuts our mouths so that we might trust in Him.

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible: 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Watts, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, 1707.