

Objections!

Romans 3:1-8

- 1 What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?**
- 2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.**
- 3 For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?**
- 4 Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged."**
- 5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.)**
- 6 Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?**
- 7 For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?**
- 8 And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"?--as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.**
- 9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.**

Whenever you talk to an unbeliever about the Gospel of Jesus Christ (and I hope you do!) what does that conversation look like? If you are like me then often a Gospel conversation leads to objections in the form of questions. It usually happens when you begin to pinpoint our sinfulness and separation from God and the reality of eternal condemnation. Maybe the objection come when you show that there is no acceptance with God apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

Then it happens. Though you had directed the conversation on the gospel, the person sensing the weight of conviction and the solitary way to God through Christ alone balks. He doesn't tell you that he balks but he does so by asking question that divert the attention away from his own sinfulness.

That's when you begin to get questions about evolution; about why Christians killed people in the Crusades 800 years ago; about the tribes of people in Africa, South America, and Asia who have had no chance to hear the Gospel; and even occasional theological diversions about election or hell or judgment.

Now asking these kinds of question is not wrong and there are good biblical answers to them. But think about it for a moment. Is it the case that these questions have been burning in that person's mind for years, and now that he has a genuine Christian's ear, he can now unload and find answers that have troubled him? Most of the time I have noticed that's not the case; rather it is more likely that he feels the heat of the gospel and is groping for anything to chill conviction and turn the conversation.

Now, what does this have to do with our text in Romans 3? Paul wrote this letter to real people. In his defense of the gospel Paul deals with objections that I am sure he heard

many times as he preached both to Jews and Gentiles. Here in chapter 3 Paul deals with the objections raised by the religious Jews.

Remember where we are in Romans. In chapter 1 Paul set forth his thesis that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to all that believe—Jew and Greek; and that the righteousness of God is received by faith in the gospel alone. So next Paul set out to prove that everyone needs the gospel of Christ. He does so by demonstrating that all are sinners and are deserving of God's judgment. Here Paul's indictment of the human race is nearly complete. He has shown that all people are under the wrath of God. In Romans 1:18-32 he proved the Gentiles are sinners. In Romans 2:1-16 he proved the Moral People are sinners. Then in Romans 2:17-29 he proved that even the religious Jews are sinners. Thus the whole human race stands condemned before God.

But before Paul can present the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ later in chapter 3, he must deal with the objections. If those objections are allowed to stand, his conclusions cannot be valid.

Although this passage itself is somewhat difficult, the flow of the argument is not hard to follow. There are three objections offered and three answers given. The objections are really designed to get us off the hook as sinners. To get the gist of the argument, we could put the phrase "If I am a sinner ... " before each objection. I am indebted to Ray Pritchard for this outline.

The Jews did not object to the notion that the Gentiles were sinners; nor did they object to the theoretical notion that they were sinners. But they could not and would not accept that they were condemned before God on an equal basis with the Gentiles.

Objection # 1: Why Be Religious? (Romans 3:1-2)

At the end of Chapter 2 Paul had shown that true "Jewishness" is not an external matter but a matter of the heart. So because of their conduct, the Jews were no better off than the Gentiles. Indeed, their guilt seems greater, because the truth they received from God in the Law was much more complete.

The Jews objected to Paul's teaching about universal sinfulness because in their minds it destroyed their special standing with God. **"What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?"** The Jews felt that because they were God's Chosen People, they stood in a special relationship to God. Part of that was certainly true. The Jews were God's Chosen People.

In essence the objection goes this way, "If we're sinners like the Gentiles, why bother being Jewish? Why keep the Law? Why follow the Ten Commandments? Why offer the sacrifices? Why circumcise? Why not just give it all up?" To say it another way, the Jews were arguing that *Special Favor with God Means Special Privilege with God*.

Paul doesn't deny that the Jews stand in a special relationship with God. He answers in verse 2, **Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.** He turns their objection on its head: Special Favor with God does not mean special privilege with God. *Special Favor with God Means Special Responsibility Before God*. God expects more, not less from the Jews because they were given so many favors by God. As Jesus said, "To whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48).

Paul is saying, "It's still better to serve God and keep the Law, but that doesn't give you any special favors from God. Your privileges don't get you off the hook; they get you on the hook!"

Ray Stedman offers a helpful illustration. Let's imagine a remote island permanently shrouded in darkness. There is only one way off the island of darkness—by means of a long narrow footbridge that stretches across a deep chasm. Now suppose that everyone on the island is given a tiny penlight, so small that it can only shine through the darkness for one foot in any direction. But one special group of people are given a powerful searchlight, with a beam so strong it can cut through the darkness for miles and miles. The searchlight was given to this group in order to help them find the bridge and so that they might help others find the bridge. But instead, they use the searchlight to look for needles in haystacks.

What would be the judgment on the people with the searchlight? That they wasted the light they were given. That's what the Jews did. The Law was like a searchlight to help people find God. But the Jews, instead of lighting the way to God, were using it to argue over trivialities. They argued about how far you could walk on the Sabbath. They argued about whether it was a sin to spit on the Sabbath. They argued about who they were justified in hating. That's what they used the Law for.

The Jews were doubly guilty. They didn't obey the Law themselves, and they didn't use it to help other people. So the objection falls to the ground because the Jews weren't meeting the responsibilities that came with their special favor from God.

Objection # 2: Why Not Give Up On God Since He Has Given Up On Us? (Romans 3:3-4)

This objection follows directly from the first one. "Paul, if what you are saying is true that we Jews are sinners just like the Gentiles, then what about all those promises of God to Israel? God made covenant with us and according to you, we failed to keep our part of it. Doesn't that mean God won't keep his part either?"

It's perfectly true that the Jews didn't keep their part of the bargain. They sinned repeatedly, turning away from God to run after pagan idols. So if God's promises all depend on the Jews being faithful, then God's promises mean nothing.

Here's the objection and Paul's answer: **"For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: 'That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged.'"**

In simple terms, the objection says, "God gives up on people when they sin." To be truthful, many people feel that way. When they look at the evil they have done, they sincerely feel like they are too wicked to be forgiven. They conclude that their sin disqualifies them from God's grace.

Listen to Paul's answer again: **Let God be true and every man a liar.** God is never unfaithful. His promises are always true! There is nothing you can do that will cause God to fail. If there is, then your sin is greater than God's grace. This doesn't make sin any less sinful, nor does it excuse your disobedience, but it does mean that no matter what you've done, you can be forgiven. God's promises are not dependent upon man's faithfulness, but on God faithfulness, and so God's promises cannot be thwarted by our unfaithfulness.

In order to prove his point, Paul includes a quotation from Psalm 51, the great Psalm of confession composed by David after his terrible sin with Bathsheba. The verse Paul quotes is one where David is proclaiming that what happened to him demonstrated God's justice. David sinned, God judged him, thus proving that God is righteous in

everything he does. After God judged him, he also forgave him, proving that God's grace is greater than man's sin.

The point is clear: God is always willing to forgive! The application is also clear: The unbelief of some Jews could not cause God to break His promises. In fact even if every man in the world turns out to be a liar (and they do by the way), God will still be true to His Word!

David is a particularly good illustration of this point. After all, David was an adulterer, a liar, and ultimately a murderer. And God forgave him. If God can forgive David, he can forgive anybody!

Objection # 3: Why Bother Being Good? (Romans 3:5-8)

The third objection goes like this. "Well now, Paul, you've played right into my hands. You are saying that David's sin gave God a chance to demonstrate both His justice and His grace. If David hadn't sinned, God would never have had a chance to judge him or forgive him. So in a sense, David's unrighteousness showed God's righteousness. If that's the case, then whenever I sin, I'm also glorifying God. But if my sin shows God's righteousness and brings Him glory, how then can He judge me for being a sinner?"

It's a slick argument, because the person who talks like this is really accusing God of using sin to His own advantage. That line of thinking leads to an absurd conclusion: "If our sin gives God a chance to demonstrate his faithfulness in judgment and His grace in forgiveness, why not sin more so God can forgive more?"

The basic objection is stated three different times in the text: Verse 5, **"But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?"** Verse 7, **"For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?"** Verse 8, **"Let us do evil that good may come."** (8)

The fatal flaw is easy to spot: When I sin, I'm doing God a favor! This of course is an old lie of Satan, that the end justifies the means. "If being bad makes God look good, then I'll be really bad so God can look really good." Or to say it in another way, according to this objection, "My sin glorifies God."

Paul's answer is revulsion: **"Certainly not!"** It's the strongest possible rejection of such teaching. It's like saying "God forbid!" or "That is so stupid!"

Paul argues that line of thinking cannot be right for two reasons: 1. If sin somehow glorifies God, **For then how will God judge the world?** (verse 6) If God will not someday judge the world, then we are plunged into an abyss of immorality, a sea of relativism and a bottomless pit of evil. There would be no difference between right and wrong, good and evil.

2. And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"?--as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. (verse 8)

The questioner seems to be saying, "Why does God have the nerve to judge me, after all the good I have done Him?" Imagine it, the sinner seems to be expecting a pat on the back and a word of thanks, rather than the death penalty!

Paul takes their proposal to its illogical conclusion. It was effective because Paul took their position to a conclusion which they had already rejected, evident by their accusing him of this very teaching (see verse 8). The error of his Jewish opponents would lead them to ask this question, "If a little sin benefits God, why not benefit Him even more

with an abundance of sin?" Why not make sin a lifestyle, and why not encourage others to join in? This was precisely where the thinking of Paul's opponents led.

Paul dismisses them with these words: "**Their condemnation is just.**" There is a big difference between a sincere seeker and someone who is just making excuses. Someday the excuse-makers will stand before God. When they do, they will discover that their excuses will not be accepted.

There is no such thing as "good" sin. Sin is the reason Jesus came to the earth. Sin is the reason he suffered on Calvary. There is nothing good about it. It's evil through and through.

Even so, God is able to bring about good things from our dumb mistakes. That's what the grace of God is all about. But listen. Just because God can bring good things out of bad choices doesn't justify sin! Sin is always sinful!

It's true that as a result of the personal pain of your divorce, you may now be able to touch people you could never touch before, but if your divorce was obtained on unbiblical grounds, it's still sinful.

After you cussed someone out you may have learned better how to handle your anger. But that does not excuse your sinful behavior.

It's like saying, "Pray for sickness so doctors will have a chance to heal people."

"Pray for more disasters so ambulance drivers will have something to do."

"Pray for more murders so judges can put more murders in prison."

It is an evil suggestion which springs only from an evil mind. But it comes closer to home than we would like to admit.

Two Facts to Keep in Mind

1. People have an amazing ability to justify their sin.

Excuse-making started with Adam but it didn't end with him.

2. When people turn from sin to faith in Jesus, God displays an amazing ability to forgive sin.

This is where the gospel message becomes so wonderfully relevant. David found out both sides of this truth. David acknowledged his sin, as God exposed and condemned it through the Law and through Nathan, the prophet. David admitted that God was completely just and justified in condemning his sin and that he had no excuse. But David also knew that God is gracious and compassionate. David knew that God not only judges sin but that He forgives sin as well. Because of this, David cast himself upon God and upon His grace. In so doing, he found mercy and forgiveness. You can find that same forgiveness by confessing your sin, and by trusting Jesus Christ, who died for your sin. How wonderful the justice of God is to those who have been forgiven and to those who would be free from the burden of their sin.

You can discover the truth but first you must tell the truth. If you're willing to do that, you can be forgiven.