

When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"Don't Diss Your Advantage"

3:1-8

Have you ever engaged in role playing as an educational tool? It's when you rehearse a scenario that you might encounter in the real world in order to learn and practice necessary skills in a less stressful environment.

For example, at our Law Enforcement Chaplain training seminars we role play things like death notifications. The person being trained assumes the role of Chaplain while trainers and other trainees get assigned various survivor roles.

This next section of Romans, verses one through eight of chapter three, reminds me of a role play. We might call it an apologetics role play. Paul asks anticipated real-world questions then answers them.

I'm sure that these were questions he had encountered from Jews as he taught in their synagogues. Here in his letter to the Romans he anticipates them and asks and answers them as if he were actually there.

The questions are arguments or complaints a devout Jew might ask in light of Paul's teaching in chapter two. He had established that being born a Jew, and having God's Law, and being circumcised, did not save anyone. He would go on to clearly state that "there is none righteous" - neither Jew nor Gentile. If anyone is to be saved, God must declare them righteous, which He does when a person believes in Jesus Christ.

If a Jew is just as lost as a Gentile, then why did God make such a distinction between Jews and Gentiles? If there was some definite advantage to be found in the nation of Israel, and in the fact that the Jew was marked-off by the command of God by the cutting of the flesh to symbolize the covenant, how could Paul say that circumcision had brought nothing to the Jews unless there was a corresponding spiritual cutting of the heart?

Romans 3:1 What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?

The fact that there are none righteous doesn't mean Jews had no advantage over others. The Jew, in fact, had a great advantage over the Gentile and it is expressed in verse two.

Romans 3:2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.

Paul will later expand on the advantage of the Jewish people in Romans 9:4, explaining that Israel also had the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises.

By "the oracles of God" Paul means the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. Paul doesn't need to say too much about why this was an advantage because he had alluded to it in the previous chapters. There we saw that the Gentile has the witness of creation and conscience. If he will respond to the limited witness he has, God will see to it he receives greater, special revelation - namely, the Word of God in some form.

The Jew already has God's special revelation of Himself! Obviously this is a tremendous "advantage" over the Gentile.

The Word of God wasn't simply available to them. It was "committed" to them. It was theirs to read, to study, to proclaim.

Think of it this way. Is it better to have in your hands a complete Bible? Or would you be just as knowledgeable if you had only a small portion, a page or two, like many believers in countries like communist China?

OK, there definitely *were* advantages to being a Jew. They had the special revelation they needed to be saved. But Paul had pointed out that many Jews remained unsaved. Doesn't it therefore follow that God had failed? Had not God made certain unconditional promises to Israel - even indicating 'all Israel would be saved'?

Romans 3:3 For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?

Paul used the word “some.” In fact, as to the coming of Jesus Christ as their Savior, the leaders of the nation of Israel and most of its citizens rejected Him and “did not believe.”

It seemed to make God ineffective in reaching them. It seemed that His plan of salvation was flawed.

Even today there are folks who suggest that it shows some sort of failure on God’s part if a person Jesus died for ultimately rejects Him. They thus suggest that the Lord did not die for everyone - only those who He knew would be saved. They limit the scope of the His work on the Cross to include only those who actually believe. Their teaching is called “limited atonement.”

We disagree with them. We would say something like Paul did in verse four.

Romans 3:4 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."

We like the animated movie, *Megamind*. There’s a line of dialog spoken by Megamind to his helper, Minion. He had been wrong but he couldn’t quite bring himself to admit it. He says to him, “You were right. I was... **less right.**”

Whenever there is a question whether God or man is right, always proceed on the basis that God is right and every man is not just “less right” but, by comparison, a liar.

Charles Spurgeon said,

It is a strange, strong expression; but it is none too strong. If God says one thing, and every man in the world says another, God is true, and all men are false. God speaks the truth, and cannot lie. God cannot change; his word, like himself, is immutable. We are to believe God’s truth if nobody else believes it. The general consensus of opinion is

nothing to a Christian. He believes God's word, and he thinks more of that than of the universal opinion of men.

God is faithful. Unbelief within the elect nation does not render His Word or His plan ineffective.

Paul doesn't stop there. He doesn't just say, "God is always right. Period. That's the way it is." He could have stopped there, but he added something. "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged."

This is taken from Psalm 51:4, the psalm in which David is repentant for his sins of adultery and murder. Despite David's massive failures, God remained faithful to His Word and to His overall plan for the nation of Israel.

God had made a promise to David, that of the fruit of his body he would set upon his throne; that the Messiah should spring from him; that he would of his seed raise up unto Israel a Savior. David sinned. But it did not make the Word of God ineffective. Not at all. God's plan remained intact.

David declared God was "justified in [His] words." What words? His promise that through him Jesus would be born. Then David declared of God that He would "overcome when [He is] judged." "Overcome" can be translated *pure*. God may be "judged" by men, but He will remain pure in His faithfulness to keep His promises despite the fact men still sin.

Hmm. I wonder, then, if it's a good thing that I sin so that God can put His grace and mercy on display? And if it is - why does God judge me at all?

That's the question (complaint, really) of verse five.

Romans 3:5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.)

If our "unrighteousness," our sin, demonstrates the "righteousness," the holiness, of God, then it seems unjust for God to judge us for it. If God is in control of everything, doesn't it follow I am merely His puppet?

Paul quickly adds “I speak as a man,” meaning that this is an argument, a complaint, in this role play - **not** a valid conclusion.

Romans 3:6 Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?

God does not encourage or condone sin to bring glory to Himself. If He did, He would have no basis upon which to judge men at all. The Jews could not deny the revelation of Scripture that God definitely would judge sin - so this argument **must** be wrong.

Romans 3:7 For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?

This is another way to state the same argument. If sin brings glory to God, if my “lie,” for instance, reveals His glorious truth - how can He judge me as a sinner?

Romans 3:8 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.

Taking this even further, if my sin brings greater opportunity for God to be revealed in His holiness, then why not really go for it and sin as much as possible!

By the way, one way of examining a teaching or a theology is to take it to its logical conclusion. If you arrive at something odd and unbiblical then the premise of the teaching is flawed.

Sinning so that grace might abound was what the Jews always accused Paul of teaching. Because he emphasized the grace of God, and because they did not understand grace, they said he was not just condoning sin but actually encouraging sin.

Paul says simply that this was slander. He nowhere taught that you should sin so that grace might abound. Rather, since sin abounds already, grace **must** much more abound if you are ever to be saved!

His answer to this last set of complaints was “Their condemnation is just.” He was referring to sinners and saying that it is “just” for God to condemn them.

God **must** condemn sin and sinners. He is holy. But He is also love and not willing that any should perish.

That’s where His grace comes in. Grace is the only method by which to resolve the problem of how a holy God can receive sinners.

God can be both *just* and the *justifier* of sinners because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. His grace-gift of Jesus provides the only possible solution to sin. On the Cross sin is judged AND sinners are saved.

To suggest that grace condones or encourages sin is to totally misunderstand sin, the Savior, and salvation.

If we find ourselves sometimes accused of preaching a gospel that is “too open” and too centered on faith and grace and God’s work to the exclusion of our works then we find ourselves in good company with Paul.

- In Romans 6:1 Paul wrote, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” Having just proclaimed that where sin abounds, grace does much more abound (Romans 5:20), Paul confronts the argument that he is preaching that we should go ahead and sin considering that God’s grace is greater.
- In Romans 6:15 Paul wrote, “What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? God forbid.” Paul preaches so much of God’s grace as being different from God’s law that he is often accused of being soft on sin due to his heavy grace preaching.
- In Romans 7:7 Paul wrote, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid.” Having preached about the power of the law to incite sin, Paul is accused of preaching that the law is a bad thing. He refutes that with this argument, going on to state that the law is “holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Romans 7:12).

I ran across this quote about grace. “Once you are justified by faith, you can do what you want. **But if you want to do all the things you did before you knew Jesus, you don’t understand grace.**”

The message of grace balances itself. Titus 2:11 says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.” God’s grace trains us to “renounce ungodliness.” Grace itself becomes our instructor.

You and I do not live by rules. We live in relationship to Jesus Christ.

Some one compiled the following, which I found in a sermon by D.L. Moody.

The Law was given by Moses.
Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

The Law speaks of what man must do for God.
Grace tells of what Christ has done for man.

The Law addresses man as part of the old creation.
Grace makes a man a member of the new creation.

The Law says - This do, and thou shalt live.
Grace says - Live, and then thou shalt do.

The Law demands holiness.
Grace gives holiness.



