

### ***Deuteronomy 4:5-8 (Opening)***

*<sup>5</sup> See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>6</sup> Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' <sup>7</sup> For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? <sup>8</sup> And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?*

## Introduction

Some things are harder than others.

I always thought I was a smart kid. I was second in my senior class in high school, and missed first by less than one tenth of a point. I never really had to study in high school, I just got things. I'd read it once and I had it.

My first semester of college was my wake-up call.

I decided I knew better than my advisor, so I signed up for both physics and calculus, two classes I really didn't need as a computer science major. Boy was I in for a rude awakening.

The first few weeks were OK. Then things started to pick up speed. Suddenly, in my physics class they were using math formulas I'd never seen or heard of before. I was seeing more calculus in my physics class than I'd covered in my calculus class, and there was no way I could think of catching up with where they were coming from.

Suddenly, for the first time in my life, I felt like I wasn't going to do well in school. Sure, spelling was never my strong suit in elementary school and junior high, but that was always offset by my other grades. This time, there was nothing to keep me above water. I was drowning in science and math, my two best subjects for the previous 12 years.

I knew people were doing OK in those classes; well, at least in calculus. In the physics class people were happy to get a 50 on a test and were hoping for a huge curve on the final grades. But I knew that wasn't going to help me. I was past the point of no return. Not only did I not have a paddle, I didn't even have a boat, I was neck deep in the creek, and had rocks tied to my legs.

I'm not saying all this as some sort of confession, although I will tell any of the kids here that when they go to college, studying is important.

Here's what I'm getting at: some things are just hard to understand, including scripture.

I've said a few times, I can re-read a part of scripture, and something new will jump out at me; something I've never seen before. Maybe it's a new understanding of something I read before. Maybe it's seeing something new in a scripture that I've just glossed over so many times.

To be honest, this is not one of those times.

We're starting back up in Romans again, and we're in Romans chapter 3. Let's turn there and read through verse eight.

### ***Romans 3:1-8***

*<sup>1</sup> Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup> What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>5</sup> 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.) <sup>6</sup> By no means! For then how could God judge the world? <sup>7</sup> But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? <sup>8</sup> And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*

This is one of those notoriously difficult parts of scripture. On the surface it makes some sense, but the deeper you dig into it, the more you look at it, the harder it is to understand and the more confusing it gets.

Paul seems to be good at writing things that confuse people. Peter even mentions it in his second letter.

## ***2 Peter 3:14-16***

*<sup>14</sup> Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. <sup>15</sup> And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, <sup>16</sup> as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*

If you don't understand something, it's easy to confuse yourself and others with bad explanations and interpretations. Kind of like using calculus that you don't understand in your physics class that you can't get a good grade in. I think that's one of the reasons this sermon was so difficult for me to write.

### **The oracles of God**

So, what is Paul saying to the Christians in Rome? Well, first off, he's defending the Jewish nationality (not just the Jewish religion). We already know that there's no advantage of being in the Jewish religion over being a Gentile. Paul laid that out for us back in chapter 2. Both the Jew and the Gentile are condemned without Christ.

So what's the value of being a Jew? If the Law condemns you, why bother even thinking about? Paul points out that it was because of the Jews that we have the Law and understand about who God really is. Paul says in verse two that the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. In our opening scripture this morning, the last verse of the reading points out that no other nation had laws and statutes as righteous as the Law given to the Jews, directly from the hand of God.

### ***Deuteronomy 4:8***

*<sup>8</sup> And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?*

Stephen, when he was in front of the Sanhedrin, also said that the Jews had been entrusted with the oracles of God. Look with me in Acts 7:37, 38.

### ***Acts 7:37, 38***

*<sup>37</sup> This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ <sup>38</sup> This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.*

Without the Jews, we wouldn’t understand God. We wouldn’t be able to read our Bibles today, because there wouldn’t **be** a Bible written down! Of all the human writers the Holy Spirit used to write down the entire Bible for us, only one was **NOT** a Jew, and that was Luke.

Because God entrusted His word, His oracles to the Jews, we have it today to study and learn from. God trusted His word to the Jews; that was an advantage of being a Jew.

### **God is Faithful**

Verses three and four seem to question God’s faithfulness. Basically saying that if we’re unfaithful, does that mean God’s unfaithful, too? The short answer to that of course is “NO!” God is not unfaithful, and can never be. We should never think that just because we’re weak in certain ways that God is weak like that, too. God is not weak in any way.

Think of all the times the Jews turned away from God, but God never turned away from them. Not just the Jews as a whole, but individually,

too. Paul brings up David as an example here when he quotes from Psalm 51, the Psalm David wrote about dealing with his sins involving Bathsheba.

***Psalm 51:3, 4***

<sup>3</sup> *For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.*  
<sup>4</sup> *Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you may be justified in your words  
and blameless in your judgment.*

God is always faithful, and is always waiting for our repentance, for us to come back to Him. Jesus, in Luke 15, talking about repentance, shows us God's love and compassion toward us when we turn around and come back. In the story of the Prodigal Son, when the son decides he was wrong and turns back for home, the father doesn't just wait at the edge of their property for him to come home.

***Luke 15:20***

<sup>20</sup> *And he [the son] arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.*

God never abandons us, even when we abandon Him. He waits and wants us to come home, and runs to greet us when we get close.

**Darkness makes light brighter**

The last few verses of our text for today make logical sense, but kind of abuses God's good will for us.

Let's read them again.

### ***Romans 3:5-8***

*<sup>5</sup> 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.) <sup>6</sup> By no means! For then how could God judge the world? <sup>7</sup> But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? <sup>8</sup> And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*

I remember touring a cave once. One thing the guides do is turn off all the lights so you can see how dark it really gets inside a cave, where there's no natural light. If you light a candle in that darkness, it seems amazingly bright. That's the kind of comparison Paul makes with what he calls human logic. Our unrighteousness is the darkness in the cave, and because it's so dark, the righteousness of God, the light of that little candle, seems so much brighter.

Using human logic, it makes sense that our unrighteousness makes God's righteousness look more amazing. Compared to God, we're really messed up. So being messed up, we make God look better. So why should God punish us for making Him look better?

Because it's not about making God look better or making God look worse; it's about what's right and what's wrong. Our unrighteousness doesn't make God look better or worse. Our unrighteousness makes us out of step with God. If our unrighteousness is the darkness in the cave, God's righteousness is a one million watt spot light that blinds us all when it's turned on. God's righteousness is so bright, we can see it in the daylight. That little candle doesn't even come close.

There's nothing we can do to make God better than He is, or make God worse than He is. God never changes; we're the ones who change. The fact that God is constant makes this argument all the more irrational.

Our unrighteousness just makes us worse off with respect to God; it doesn't increase how much grace is available, it doesn't make God any more righteous than He already is. All it does is move us further away from God, and make us less like Him.

Moses said this in Deuteronomy 32:4

***Deuteronomy 32:4***

*4      "The Rock, his work is perfect,  
              for all his ways are justice.  
              A God of faithfulness and without iniquity,  
              just and upright is he.*

God can't be the true judge of the world if He were unrighteous. God is perfect, the definition of righteousness. Like Moses said, "Just and upright is He" by definition.

Paul tries another direction with his discussion. What about lying? If I lie, and God judges me because of it, that shows His truthfulness, right? So that's a good thing, right? If I'm showing that God is good through my lying, why do I get punished for lying?

That kind of sounds like child logic, doesn't it? You said I had to go upstairs, but you never said I had to go to bed, so sitting on the stairs should be OK. You didn't tell me exactly what to do, so I'm going to try to find the best loophole that fits what I want to do and do that. After all, I'm not really disobeying you, I'm just not following exactly what you said!

Obviously, lying doesn't make God more truthful. So let's try a different, but similar direction. What about evil in general? If I do evil things, does that make God better? Is that a good thing?

Paul will address this again in the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6, addressing Christians, and not Jews specifically.



### **Romans 5:20-6:3**

*<sup>20</sup> Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup> so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*

God's perfect law educated us on what sin was. Because of the law, sin was exposed. But because of Christ, grace covers those sins. Grace is a good thing, so let's keep sinning so there's more Grace! It all makes perfect sense now!

Did I mention this was difficult?

It all boils down to this. As a Christian, we should understand that the bad things we do have consequences. We should be doing good things, not because doing good things saves us, but because of the good things we do, we're blessed.

Paul explains it a little more clearly in Galatians 6:6-10.

### **Galatians 6:6-10**

*<sup>6</sup> Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. <sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

If we know what we're supposed to be doing, we should be doing that. If we don't know what we're supposed to be doing, we need to find out what God wants us to do.

And here's what God wants us to do:

***Hebrews 13:15-17***

*<sup>15</sup> Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. <sup>16</sup> Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

*<sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

Because we have the very oracles of God, we can know what God wants us to do. We can learn how to behave as Christians by reading His word, and following the good examples that are written down for us.

We're not always going to be perfect. That's where grace comes into play. Doing the wrong thing doesn't increase the amount of grace available, it just takes us out of God's will, by not doing what He's told us to do.

My challenge for you for this week is to work even harder to do things that are in line with what God wants us to do, and try to avoid those things that God doesn't want us to do.

### **Luke 12:42-48 (Closing)**

<sup>42</sup> And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? <sup>43</sup> Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. <sup>44</sup> Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. <sup>45</sup> But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, <sup>46</sup> the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. <sup>47</sup> And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. <sup>48</sup> But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.