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Sermon Notes

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God's Righteousness in Judging the World

Romans 3:1-8

I. Review

- A. The Gospel of God: Supernatural Power for Complete Salvation; KEY: "The Righteousness of God."
- B. The Wrath of God: God's Passionate Response to Evil
- C. The Central issue: Exchanging the Glory of God for an Image, the Truth of God for a Lie... Result, 21 Evils
- D. Warning Against Hypocrisy, Showing Contempt for the Kindness, Tolerance and Patience of God... storing up wrath for the day of wrath
- E. Judgment Day awaits... it will be a "judgment according to deeds"... It will result in eternal life for some and eternal wrath for others... and it will be done without partiality
- F. All humanity possess the law of God written in their hearts... so Jews don't have unfair advantage over Gentiles because they possess the Law of Moses
- G. Last week: Circumcision only has value for those who obey they Law... a "true Jew" is one whose heart has been circumcised by the Holy Spirit

II. A Very Difficult Passage

- A. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Preaching on Romans 3:1-8 called it "The most difficult in the letter to the Romans, and one of the most difficult in the entire Bible."
- B. Difficulty: Following Paul's train of thought... when he's speaking and when his opponents are speaking
- C. Question: "Why does God inspire difficult passages? Why isn't everything simple?"
- D. God is simple, God is complex
- E. Total dependence, prayer, hard thinking...

2 Timothy 2:15 “Study to show yourself approved by God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

III. One Central Charge, Two Lines of Reasoning

Jewish adversaries: “Your doctrine says God will judge unbelieving Jews. Your doctrine therefore makes God unrighteous. Therefore, your doctrine is **WRONG!**”

A. Accusation #1: “According to you, Paul, there is no advantage in being a Jew, and God will punish Jews just like Gentiles. But God made covenant promises to us, so God is unjust in punishing us!”

1. Underlying assumptions:

- a. God’s covenant guaranteed the salvation of the Jews
- b. God’s righteousness to that covenant was on the line if any Jews were judged

2. Proof of Paul’s “heresy”... it makes God an unrighteous covenant breaker!!

B. Accusation #2: “According to you, Paul, all God cares about is His own glory. Furthermore, our evil demonstrates God’s glory powerfully **BY CONTRAST**... so God is unjust in punishing us!”

Jewish misunderstanding of Paul’s doctrine

- God’s central concern is His own glory
- Anything which displays God’s glory accomplishes His intention
- Human sinfulness displays God’s glory by contrast
- Therefore, it would be unjust for God to judge sinful humans since they display His glory
- Therefore, your doctrine encourages humans to do evil for the glory of God!
- Therefore, your doctrine is **WRONG!!**

IV. “Your Doctrine Makes God An Unfaithful Covenant Breaker!” (vs. 1-4)

A. Jewish Objection: You deny covenant advantages

1. Romans 2: seems to level the playing field
2. Jews have no advantage because of the Covenant; Gentiles no worse off because they are not Jews

3. BUT... God clearly intended the covenant as a blessing

Exodus 19:5 “[God promised Israel]...out of all nations, you will be my treasured possession.”

Deuteronomy 7:6 “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”

4. Along with this elect position, God promised total covenant faithfulness

Deuteronomy 7:9 “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations...”

5. But you Paul... you deny any advantage whatsoever!

A Gentile dog is as good as a child of Abraham! How can that be? Did God lie to us? You have departed from the covenant, Saul of Tarsus!

You make God a covenant breaker... for He will judge children of the covenant no better than those who never had it!

B. Jewish Assumption: The Righteousness of God Guarantees Salvation for All Jews

1. God’s Righteousness: Total Faithfulness to His Promises

2. Three Key Words: One Central Concept

vs. 3 “God’s faithfulness” vs. 5 “God’s righteousness” vs. 7 “God’s truthfulness”

All three mean essentially the same thing to Paul’s Jewish adversaries: God always keeps His promises... the covenant promises in Abraham

3. Conclusion: God’s Character Guarantees the Salvation of ALL JEWS... whether they believe or not!!

Opponents’ conclusion: If one Jew is lost, God has been unfaithful to the covenant


C. Paul Asserts: Jews Have Covenant Advantages

1. Paul refutes his opponents’ claim that he’s saying being Jewish means nothing

vs. 1 “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew? Or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way!”

2. What are these advantages? Paul begins a list...

“First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.”

- a. ‘ oracles, written promises of God
- b. incredible blessing... the God-breathed Scriptures!!... law of Moses, Prophets, Wisdom writings...
- c. tremendous responsibility, too! “Entrusted”... for safekeeping... had to copy & protect them... even more, had to live up to them
- d. NO OTHER PEOPLE ON EARTH HAD THESE ORACLES!!!

List completed in Romans 9:

Romans 9:4-5 “Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.”

William Cowper:

They, and they only, amongst all mankind received the transcript of the Eternal Mind; Were trusted with His own engraven laws, and constituted guardians of His cause; Theirs were the prophets, theirs the priestly call, and theirs, by birth, the Saviour of us all.

3. Tremendous advantages... but no personal guarantee on Judgment Day!!

- a. national covenant was conditional

Exodus 19:5 “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.”

Deuteronomy 7:9 “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him.”

- b. the covenant had BOTH blessings AND curses

Deuteronomy 27-28 [Blessings for obedience read from Mount Gerizim, curses read from Mount Ebal]

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live, and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.”

c. national election did not guarantee personal salvation... as we shall see with David

Since the covenant had more in it than just blessings, God is not unfaithful in bringing judgment on unbelieving Jews!! Paul sees God’s faithfulness as to His Word, more than to the Jews themselves... in perfect faithfulness not God the covenant curses down on the Jews, just like He said He would!

D. Paul Agrees: Human Unbelief Does Not Destroy God’s Covenant Faithfulness

vs. 3 “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness?”

NOTE: In Greek, question expects “NO!” answer...

NASB “What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God will it?”

1. Individual human sin does not destroy God’s commitment to His promises
2. The covenant remains unchanged if humans deny their faith
3. IRONIC: “Jews **ENTRUSTED** with the very words of God; but did not **TRUST** the very words of God!!”

E. Paul Intensifies: Nothing Man Can Do Will Change God’s Truthfulness

vs. 4 “MAY IT NEVER BE!! Let God be true, and every man a liar!”

1. Here, Paul goes beyond the Jewish opponents... and beyond most Americans
2. Lit. Let God be shown faithful, even if every human being on the face of the earth ends up in hell.”
3. Americans: totally human centered... everything is ME, ME, ME
4. Paul’s way of thought drops like a bombshell

Even if every single human being on the face of the earth disagrees with this doctrine, or disbelieves the gospel... even if they all end up eternally lost in hell, MAY IT NEVER BE that God be seen unfaithful!!

F. Paul Declares: Individual Human Sinfulness Justifies God's Judgment

vs. 4 *“As it is written, ‘So that you may be justified in your words, and may conquer when you enter into judgment.’”*

1. Difficult train of thought: how does this follow?
2. Old Testament Context: David's Psalm of Confession

Psalm 51:4 *“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.”*

- a. issue: **THE JUSTIFICATION OF GOD IN JUDGING A SINNER**
 - b. David vindicates God's right to judge any sinner any time
 - c. King David, one of the greatest Jews of all time, vindicates God's right to judge him for sin
3. Human beings constantly question God's judgment... we howl in outrage if God judges sin

Paul: The righteousness of God here is not covenant favoritism which overlooks the sins of Jews, but rather God's holy right to judge all sinners perfectly, whether they be Jew or Gentile, on Judgment Day. Later in Romans 3, Paul will show how the cross of Christ allows Him also to forgive repentant and believing sinners and still be righteous!!

In the end, God's righteousness is His perfect inclination to do anything which abounds to His glory... whether judgment or salvation.

V. “Your Doctrine Encourages Evil for the Glory of God!” (vs. 5-8)

A. The Second Attack: If God is glorified by our evil, He is Unjust in Judging Us for that Evil

vs. 5 *“But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)”*

vs. 7 *“Someone might argue, ‘If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?’”*

B. The Goal of Paul's Opponents: Expose Paul's Doctrine as Heresy!

C. Their Method: Reduction to Absurdity... as follows:

- God's central concern is His own glory
- Anything which displays God's glory accomplishes His intention
- Human sinfulness displays God's glory **by contrast**
- Therefore, it would be unjust for God to judge sinful humans since they display His glory
- Therefore, your doctrine encourages humans to do evil for the glory of God!
- Therefore, your doctrine is WRONG!!

D. Paul's Response

1. An Emotional Response: Utter repugnance

vs. 5 *"I am using a human argument."*

- a. Paul can barely state this line of reasoning
- b. He puts in a parenthesis to clear his name
- c. Paul also responds emotionally in vs. 6

vs. 6 *"May it never be!!"*

2. God is NEVER unjust... whether He brings wrath or mercy
 - a. God is totally justified in judging sinners, as David said
 - b. If God were to judge the whole human race for sin, we would deserve it
 - c. If God were unjust in judging sinners, how could God judge the world??
3. Verse 7 again: same argument, specific example

NIV vs. 7 *"Someone might argue, 'If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?'"*

NASB vs. 7 *"But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?"*

- a. Paul here uses himself as an example... his opponents are claiming that he's lying about God
 - b. Paul says that by their logic even he as a false teacher would never be judged
4. Verse 8 finally: Paul's doctrine teaches antinomianism

vs. 8 *“And why not say—as we are slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say, ‘Let us do evil that good may result?’*

- a. Opponent's final attack on Paul: slanderously twisting his doctrine
- b. The more we sin, the more God gets glory... so God can't judge anyone
- c. Paul will deal with this more in chapter 6

Romans 6:1 *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”*

- d. The Gospel of Grace is ALWAYS misunderstood this way

“If everyone is equally sinful... if Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin, and if there is no one righteous, then everyone who is saved is saved only because of God's grace. But if God's grace covers all this sin, then it doesn't matter how much we sin... God's grace can cover it all.

So, we can sin as much as we want and still go to heaven, right, Paul?”

VI. Paul's Response: The Total Justification of God

vs. 8 *“Their condemnation is just.”*

- A. God is just to condemn sinful Gentiles
- B. God is just to condemn sinful Jews
- C. God is just to condemn people who twist his gospel to say something he doesn't
- D. God is RIGHTEOUS ALL THE TIME
 - 1. Everything God does is for the display of His glory
 - 2. The condemnation of unbelieving sinners brings Him glory

3. The salvation of believing sinners also brings Him glory

E. Unfinished business: How is it righteous for any sinner to be saved?

Key question: How can God be...

3:26 “...just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”

VII. Summary and Application

A. Summary

1. Romans 2: no partiality with God... unbelieving Jews will be judged
2. BUT doesn't that overturn the covenant God made with the Jews?
3. Paul's opponents: trying to prove Paul's doctrine is heresy
4. Attack #1: Your doctrine makes God a covenant breaker!
5. Paul answers: No it doesn't... King David himself said God is just in judging sinners like him
6. Attack #2: Your doctrine encourages people to do evil for the glory of God
7. Paul answers: No it doesn't... God is righteous to judge the world, even if that judgment brings more glory for Himself; the word games fail to disprove my doctrine, but they increase your condemnation!!
8. **Paul's doctrine: God is righteous all the time... whether judging unbelieving sinners (whether Jew or Gentile) or saving believing sinners (whether Jew or Gentile)**

B. Application

1. Difficult passages: humble yourself, pray, study hard, WORK ON IT... don't just give up
2. Understand: God didn't break the covenant with Israel... the covenant never guaranteed salvation for individual Jews
3. Understand: God will judge the whole world with righteousness... and everyone who is condemned will deserve it... GOD IS RIGHTEOUS IN EVERYTHING HE DOES
4. Fear God and Learn from Israel: Presumptuous sinning is evidence of unbelief... There are no comfortable guarantees for unrepentant sinners

5. Fear God and Learn from Paul's Opponents: DON'T PLAY WORD GAMES WITH DOCTRINES!!