

THE ADVANTAGE OF GOD'S FAMILY, ROM.3:1-8

Pax Romana #5

◆**Intro:** You talk to your neighbor about God and discover that he too affirms a faith in Jesus. You ask which is his home church and he says he doesn't have one. You invite him to Sunrise and his response is a little chuckle as he declares that you don't have to go to church to be a Christian. He's right of course. You don't HAVE to. Merely going to church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than going to McDonalds makes you a hamburger. Nonetheless, we all know that it's normal for a person who really loves Christ, to also love the Bride of Christ, namely the Church. People still argue, "If my faith is an inner thing, it's between me and God. None of that activity, or religion matters, and it makes no difference." That's somewhat like the arguments going on in this passage.

◆I have to tell you right off, this is a difficult text to make sense of. One writer puts it, "there is a certain terseness and "jewishness" to this section that makes it somewhat baffling at first glance." Another said, "this is not one of the easiest passages to understand." So lets go back to the train of thought in Paul's letter so far to see what's happening. Paul is writing the the Roman church about the gospel: the good news that God can give you righteousness through Jesus, the power of salvation to those who believe. Next he points out the lostness of all people, both the immoral sinners, as well as the moral sinners; the irreligious as well as the religious. Here then he anticipates some objections or foolish conclusions which someone might come up

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with, like: *if both the godly and the ungodly still equally need the grace of God, why care about godliness.* Put it another way, "If the religious and the irreligious are equally in need of forgiveness, then why care about being religious. This basic, and clearly foolish question is broken into three objections in our text.

◆ **Objection 1:** IF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS INTERNAL (in the heart), THEN WHY CARE ABOUT ANY EXTERNALS LIKE RELIGION, CHURCH, CEREMONY? v1-2

◆A. We might expect at this point for Paul to agree, and say, "That's right! Throw it all out! There's nothing special about God's history with the Jews as his chosen people. There's no point in having the mark of God's family. True faith is an inside thing." But he doesn't. Instead he tells us there's all kinds of advantage to association with God, not the least of which is that the Jews had the oracles of God! v2. Paul is likely referring to all of the Old Testament, every piece of wisdom God had shared with man. Later in chapter 11 Paul will expound on more advantages and blessings the chosen people of God had in history. But for now let's consider the remarkable gift of having God's words and revelation near us in life.

◆B. Whether or not faith is an inner thing, and whether or not God's law can be kept completely by any of us, God's laws are still right and true for everyone. For example,

◆God told Israel not to eat hog meat, and it saved them many diseases they didn't even know about. God told Israel

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to circumcise boys on the 8th day after birth and not before. Does anyone know why? We know today that the new born baby boy lacks sufficient vitamin K for the blood to clot and is especially in danger of hemorrhage between the fifth and seventh day after birth. There is only one day in the males life when the body actually produces more than 100% of needed levels, the eighth day, making that day the perfect day for surgical procedures. They didn't know what we know. But God did.

◆*"The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring for ever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous... By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."* Psalms 19:9-11, NIV.

◆C. We have another perfect example of how connecting with God is to our advantage, in the sacrament of baptism which corresponds to the OT sacrament of circumcision, the marking of a child as belonging to God's covenant family. What's the point? Paul essentially said in chapter 2 that it's not circumcision of the body that makes you a Jew, it's having a clean heart. v28-29. How do we know if a baby has a God-fearing heart? People ask the same thing about baptism.

◆Compare this text to that about circumcision. Does this sound remarkably similar?

◆*"and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"* 1 Peter 3:21, NIV.

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◆ So we may ask, why baptize someone if the water doesn't save them? Well, (beside the fact that Jesus commanded us to) baptism, like circumcision, is more just out pledge. It is making a statement to the world that God preserves life, and washes away sin where there is faith in him, and that God is gracious to children of believers too and blesses them. That grace and blessing (advantage) is to be had in association with the family of God. Think of Abraham who had all his servants circumcised as well. Could Abe have had a servant that didn't believe in YHWH? Sure. But God said, circumcise them too. It was first God's statement. His blessings will be over them as well, by association with Abraham! That's how God is, he punishes sin, but he pours out love all the more!

◆ *"And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." Exodus 34:6, 7, NIV.*

◆ Baptism is of course also making a statement to the world that we belong to Jesus, that we love God back, but more important is the statements God is making to us. In addition, I believe it's a statement made to the spiritual world as well in ways we may not understand. God is marking his territory. Many of you know Marylyn Lazlo, Wycliff Bible Translator missionary to Pau Pau New Guinea. She spent 30 years in a village that eventually became

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all Christian. She told us many an amazing story of the power of God, and once she shared that since the village became filled with Christians, the witch doctors had to go at least 10 miles away from that village to be able to cast a spell! So don't underestimate the power in associating with God's family, even if you can't see it immediately.

◆ Why care about the practicing of your faith, the church, it's sacraments? The bible says draw near to God and he will draw near to you. -jms 4:8

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◆ **Objection 2:** IF GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE FAIL DOESN'T THAT MEAN THAT GOD IS IRRELEVANT, OR INSUFFICIENT AFTER ALL?
v3-4

◆ **A.** Paul here raises another possible reaction to his preaching that the Jews, God's chosen, had missed the righteousness-gift from God, by thinking that because they did religious Jewish things, they were fine. That's not so, say's Paul. No one can consistently to right on their own. No one jumps high enough to enter heaven on their own. God's people missed this truth. "So," someone might say, "because some of God's people failed to pass the test, doesn't that show that God fails too? He must not be that good a teacher. Or sometimes his ways work, sometimes they don't. Following God must be kinda hit-or-miss. It's not dependable. He's not dependable."

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◆ Now, you and I play this illogical conclusion today all the time as well. We say, "look at that Christian who messed up. Obviously everything she ever said is wrong and messed up too. I reject it all!" (When my parents divorced, one of my brothers said exactly that.) Or they say, "I know Christians who are not nice, therefore their God is not nice either." Or they claim, "Yeah, I tried the Christian thing, the God thing, but it didn't work, so now I'm just doing my thing." Or "I prayed for my son, but he died anyway. So prayer doesn't work and I'm not going to talk to God anymore." Or "My folks got divorced, obviously their faith is based on falsehood."

◆ **B.** Paul's answer to all this is essentially, "That's just crazy talk! preposterous!" It's an understandable emotional reaction but it has no grounds in reality. Because your father doesn't give you what you ask doesn't mean that talking to your father doesn't work. It means he disagreed with your request, or maybe your timing. Neither does it mean that your Dad doesn't really exist because you didn't get what you want. That's just silliness. Because you attempted to follow Dad's instructions (laws, rules) and the birdhouse you were building looks more like a fire pit, that doesn't mean there was a fault with the directions. Of course, this is our first assumption, right? WE didn't make a mistake!

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◆ No. Paul asserts essentially that there is a God. v4 "Let God be true and every man a liar." All things answer to him. He does not answer to us. God's does allow his chosen ones to fail, but God cannot fail. The fact that his own family messes up and gets punished points to his justice. That's the point of his quote from Davids 51st psalm.

◆ *"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. 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." Psalms 51:3, 4, NIV.*

◆ In other words, "the bottom line on whether something is right or wrong is you, God. Not what I think, or how anyone else feels about it."

◆ In sum then, the poor performance of God's people has nothing to do with the truth of God. God sovereignly allows human opportunity to cooperate with him or not. That's actually a gracious honor! [But Christian, by the same token, remember that because it is so easy for men to make such conclusions, your behavior goes a long way in showing God's reality as well! Not every Jew of the OT failed to follow and understand that God wanted their hearts. Many of us are in the family of God today as a result.]

◆ **Objection 3:** IF SIN LEADS TO GOOD THEN DOESN'T THAT MEAN IT CAN'T BE ALL THAT BAD!

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◆ Here the objection to Paul's preaching goes something like this: So the moralists are unrighteous and need grace, and the immoral pagans are unrighteous and need grace; everyone has the same problem of unrighteousness, but big deal. Why should we care that much about doing wrong things. Doesn't even our unfaithfulness make God look all the better in his faithfulness? So if you think about it, it's actually a good thing to do bad things,... right?

◆ A. Well we haven't made much progress over the years, have we? We have a perpetual tendency to not take, at least our own evil, seriously. "It's a good thing to do bad things, right? The end justifies the means, right? Sometimes you have to break the law to uphold the law, right?" Cop shows love to use this plot. The evil guy will get away with it unless the honest cop turns dishonest this one time. But it's for a good reason! However, it's then a small leap to thinking that pretty much most of my reasons are good ones. And I'm really not that bad. Sure I do some wrong things but they don't really hurt anything, and I can't really help it, and I'm basically a good person. God understands. He knows I'm weak in that area." Any of this sound like something you've said or thought?

◆ B. Paul's answer drops the argument at this point. Such thinking is so far gone. Verse 8: *their condemnation is deserved.* And what shall we conclude? Listen people, God doesn't get used to our sin because you and I get used to it. Evil is no joke. It is

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a moral universe we live in. Evil is going to be condemned and righteousness is going to be rewarded. You're just hurting yourself to try to excuse your wrong or pretend its not really that big a deal. And you'll never appreciate the righteousness from God by faith in Christ if you don't start to realize this!

◆**Conclusion:** Let me see if I can capture a bit of our foolishness in a parable. Suppose there was a distant island on which were marooned many different groups of people. It was difficult to survive on this island and food supply was not plentiful. It came to pass long long ago, an angel had come to the island and given one tribe a sacred book. The book contained the secrets of survival as well as a way off the island to a greater land that everyone seemed to have an idea of, but no one had ever seen. The angel said, "To you are given the secrets of survival and life. You are to be the keepers of the book, and you are to share with all the other tribes these secrets." (Josh 1:8)

◆There were a great many things in the book. Ideas about what to eat and what not to eat. What would kill you and what could heal you. How to raise a family that wasn't rebellious, and the kind of attitudes that will certainly lead your children into rebellion. How men could actually get along well with women, and one tribe with other tribes. And especially there were instructions about how to get off the island and reach the Great Land from which the angel had come, but this could not be done by any person in their own life-time. The Book taught that all

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tribes should follow the rules of the Great Spirit, The Island Creator, and the Emperor of the Great Land. And that if they gave their love to him, when they died, they would come alive again on the Great Land, no longer limited as they were on their castaway island.

◆As you can imagine, not everyone followed the book. The Keepers of the Book didn't always try hard to tell anyone else about it. Mostly they liked to say that they had the sacred book, so they would surely get to the Great Land someday. Some of them didn't even bother to read it. Just having it made them feel safer than others. Other tribes didn't like the Keepers of the Book at all. Having a book about how to live made it seem like they weren't smart enough to decide for themselves what was best. And they preferred to decide for themselves.

◆From time to time some folks from pretty much every tribe attempted to swim to the Great Land, which no one could see. Some didn't even make it a mile from shore before drowning. Other's were impressive, trained well and made it 30 or 40 miles out to sea. But no matter how much better they swam than other people they couldn't swim the ocean. Even people from among the Keepers of the Book tried to swim it, but none who left the beach were ever heard of again.

◆"What good is it to have this silly book if it doesn't make us perfect swimmers?" said some. "Oh well, we have the book, so surely we'll end up on the mainland when we die." said others,

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although they didn't necessarily read the book. Some did read it, and they lived differently than the rest. They would tell you that, while they may not look like grand folk, they were certainly more healthy than they would have been if they didn't follow the book. But none of those who read and believed the book ever tried to swim to the Great Land on their own. They knew that wasn't going to work. They trusted the angel's story instead, because the other things in the book also showed themselves to be true.