

The Book of Romans

I Object! (Part 1)

Romans 3:1-8

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Well this morning, I want you to turn with me to Romans 3. The first three chapters of the Book of Romans play out like a courtroom drama. You have God Himself sitting as the judge and then there's Paul who, in this drama, serves as the relentless prosecuting attorney. In chapter 1 Paul won a guilty verdict against all pagans, all of those who are idolaters, all of those in the world who failed to acknowledge the true God of the Bible. In chapter 2 Paul mounts argument after argument to win a conviction against the Jews. By the time chapter 2 is done he's proven that every physical descendant of Abraham is a sinner who needs the gospel every bit as much as the Gentiles do. Their privileged position will not protect them at the future judgment.

Now, with the beginning of chapter 3, to which we come this morning, in this courtroom drama, for the first time we hear from the defendant. The defendant speaks up in his own defense. In chapter 3 it's as if the Jews stand up in response to Paul's indictment in chapter 2 and say, your honor, we object. We learn, in the first part of chapter 3, the Jewish objections to Paul's arguments to the gospel he preached and then we hear a brief response from the apostle himself to each of those objections, a response that he will fill out in the rest of the letter.

So let me remind you of what transpired in chapter 2, because it really sets the stage for the objections that come in chapter 3. In chapter 2 verses 1 to 29, the entire chapter, Paul indicted the Jews who, in spite of their external connection to the true God, were still lost. They weren't lost in idolatry, they were lost in self-righteousness. They were lost in their religion. After 29 verses, Paul's conclusion at the end of chapter 2 is crystal clear, the Jewish people will not escape God's future judgment just because they are the physical descendants of Abraham.

You see, Paul's point in this entire section is that even the person who claims to worship the true God, the God of the Bible, that person is still a sinner. He has violated God's Law written in the Word, the substance of which is written on his heart. So he's a sinner, having violated God's Law and, at the same time, he lacks the positive righteousness that God requires of all who would enter His presence.

Those are our two great problems. They're your problems. They're my problems. We have sinned against God. We have broken His Law. And in addition to that we lack the positive righteousness God requires of anyone who would enter His presence. So just like the pagan, the person connected to the true God is guilty and desperately needs the gospel of justification by faith alone. In today's terms we would say that chapter 2 then addresses everyone who claims to

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worship the true God. That would be the Jews, Gentile proselytes to Judaism, and, worldwide, many professing Christians. It confronts all of them with the need for justification by faith alone.

Now, Paul directs his indictment toward everyone who has attached to the true God in some way but has never seen his own desperate need for the gospel of grace. People who are religious. People who talk a lot about the Bible. People who think of themselves as basically good moral people. But in chapter 2 Paul tells them that they are sinners in need of the gospel for three reasons, as we saw together as we worked our way through chapter 2.

In the first 16 verses he taught them that morality will not protect you from the future judgment. Knowing the wrong that others do and condemning it, as the Jews did of the Gentiles, is not going to help you at the judgment. Morality is of no value in your salvation. In verses 17 to 24 we learned that knowledge of the Scripture, having the Scripture, knowing the Scripture, is of no value, ultimately, if you haven't kept it. That is a futile place to put your hope of heaven. In the last paragraph of chapter 2 we saw that claiming faith in God and performing religious rituals that, sort of, attest to that profession, as circumcision was, that too will not help you at the judgment. So by the time chapter 2 is done Paul has shown that moral religious people who are attached to the true God need the gospel every bit as much as pagans do.

Now, it's not surprising that the Jews in Paul's audience didn't take his indictment of their sinfulness and their need of the gospel sitting down. They didn't receive it with great joy and excitement. As you would expect, they had significant and serious objections to Paul's indictment of them as hell-deserving, gospel-dependent sinners. And we don't have to wonder what their objections were because Paul tells us. He's just told his Jewish audience that their Jewishness will not ensure their ultimate salvation. And like all good debaters, like all good teachers, Paul anticipates the arguments that he's going to get in response.

Undoubtedly, he'd heard these very objections many times himself as he taught in the Jewish synagogues. In fact, it's possible that the objections Paul lists at the beginning of chapter 3 were his own before his conversion. Maybe these are the very arguments he used against the early Christians, trying to convert them from their belief in Christ back to the Judaism he embraced. It may be that in these verses we have what one commentator called, a debate between Saul of Tarsus and Paul the Apostle.

But regardless, Paul here abridges the Jewish objections to the gospel. Objections that undoubtedly he had heard for the more than 30 years he had been in ministry, and he abridges all of those Jewish objections to the four most common. Not only does he identify these common objections but he briefly answers them here. I say he briefly answers them because he really just gives a passing shot. He's going to come back to each of these issues and address it at length later in the letter.

Now, these objections are very much appropriate for us. You know we're studying this passage, many of us here are not Jewish, and so it could seem like this is a distant passage to us, but in fact, what's interesting about this passage is these same objections are still the ones that are in the minds of many moral religious people when you tell them, you're a sinner and you need the gospel. The objections Paul ran into in the first century from the Jews are the same objections in kind that we run into today. And so they're very appropriate for us to understand.

So we're going to examine then these four common objections of the Jews, and ultimately of all moral religious people, to their own sinfulness and to their need of the gospel. Let's read this paragraph for the first time, Romans 3:1-8. You follow along as I read.

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be *found* a liar, as it is written,

“THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS,
AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED.”

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I'm speaking in human terms.) May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come?” Their condemnation is just.

Now, even as I read that, you may come to the same conclusion that one commentator did, who said that this paragraph is one of the most difficult in the entire epistle. Why did he say that? For two reasons. One, because as you saw, it consists of a series of, sort of, rapid fire questions as Paul articulates the objections that the Jews had to his message. And in addition to that, it's a bit difficult because Paul's arguments here are so tightly condensed. With a minimum of words he encapsulates the flow of his argument. In fact, he's simply touching on questions here that he plans to address later in much more fullness.

Now, ultimately all four of the Jewish objections to Paul's gospel claim that Paul's gospel is, in reality, an attack on the character of God. That lies beneath this entire passage. Paul, what you're saying is really an attack on God; it's an attack on His character. So, in this section then, Paul answers these four specific objections to the gospel, objections rooted in arguing that the gospel is an attack on God's character.

Here's how the passage unfolds. Let me give you the outline and then we'll come back and begin to look at it more carefully. First of all, in verses 1 and 2, objection number one that the Jews had to the gospel is, the gospel undermines God's integrity. In verses 3 and 4 they will argue that the gospel actually undermines God's faithfulness, His promises and His keeping of those promises. The third objection comes in verses 5 and 6. They will argue there that the gospel undermines God's justice. And then in verses 7 and 8, their final objection that, sort of, summarizes their responses to Paul, is that the gospel undermines God's holiness.

Now, in each two verse couplet the first verse is the Jewish objection and the second verse is Paul's answer, except for a slight variation of that pattern in verses 7 and 8; I'll point it out when we get there. But by and large you can think of it this way, you have Paul articulating with his own words the Jewish objection in the first verse and then his response to that objection in the second verse. So let's begin then to look at these objections.

First of all then, objection number one. This was the first one that surfaced wherever Paul went. The gospel, we cannot believe it Paul, because it undermines God's integrity, verses 1 and 2. Now, notice their objection then in verse 1. Again, this is the Apostle Paul articulating with his own words, their question, their objection to what he's taught. "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?" You see, Paul has just made the point that being a physical descendant of Abraham, being circumcised, will be of absolutely no value at the judgment. Look back at verse 28 of chapter 2,

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, [*that is, in his physical descent*] nor is circumcision that which is the outward keeping of the ritual in the flesh. But he is a true Jew who is one inside, [*in his heart*] and circumcision is that which is done to the heart by the Spirit of God.

You are cleansed and changed by the Spirit of God in your heart, not some external ritual kept according to the letter of the Law. What he's basically said is, when you show up at the judgment, which is the theme in many ways of this whole chapter, he's saying when you show up at the judgment you're not going to escape without a judgment, as verse 3 seems to say that the Jews thought. No, your Jewishness won't help you with the judgment is what Paul has just said.

Now, if that's true, the Jews argue in response to Paul, then what you're really saying is, there's no spiritual advantage to being Jewish. Look at verse 1. "Then what advantage has the Jew?" The word advantage, the Greek word, literally means to surpass. They're saying, Paul, if what you're saying is true, then in what way does the Jew surpass the Gentile? He goes on in verse 1, "Or what is the benefit of circumcision?" That's just another way to ask the same question. Circumcision was just a sign; it was a sign that they belonged to the descendants of Abraham and were heirs of the promises made to Abraham.

So they're saying, what value is being Jewish, is bearing the sign of being Jewish and a descendant of Abraham? There's no benefit. Now, you can understand how the Jews listening to Paul would come to this conclusion. They argued that if their Jewishness and their rituals wouldn't produce salvation then what good were they? Think about this. If my being Jewish, if my being a descendant of Abraham won't help me when I stand at the future judgment, it's not going to contribute to my salvation, then what value is there in it? No real spiritual advantage, no real spiritual benefit.

Now, there's another part of their argument here. Yet, on the other hand, they argued, the Old Testament made much of the advantages that the Jews enjoyed. So many places in the Old Testament. Turn back to Exodus 19. Exodus 19, Israel is at the foot of Mount Sinai after God, in verse 4 we're told, "bore them out of Egypt on eagle's wings and brought them to Himself." Here we find the Jews at the foot of Mount Sinai; God is about to institute the constitution of the new nation. And notice what He says to the Jews in verse 5, "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples." You'll notice in the New American Standard there's a marginal note there by "My own possession." Literally, it's you will be "My special treasure." You will be My special treasure, you, the Nation of Israel,

among all the peoples, [*I've chosen you as my special treasure*] for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.

What does that mean? It means, you're going to be like My priests to the rest of the world. You're going to be My representatives. You're going to be My witness nation. You're going to be My mediating nation to the rest of the world. What an amazing privilege. God chose the Jewish people as His special treasure, to be His witness nation to the world.

That's not the only place this great privilege the Jews enjoyed is made known. Turn over to Deuteronomy 10. After the 40 years of wilderness wandering, Moses is speaking to the children of Israel who have survived all of that, on the plains of Moab as they prepare to go into the Promised Land. And he articulates again this immense privilege that's theirs. Look at Deuteronomy 10:14. "Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it." God is over everything and all peoples. "Yet," think about this privilege, "on your fathers did Yahweh set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, *even* you above all peoples, as *it* is this day." That was an exalted position.

Turn over to chapter 14 verse 2. As Moses articulates the responsibilities of being God's people, the commands that God has of them, he comes back again to argue on the basis of this privilege. Look at Deuteronomy 14:2, "For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God," and here's why, "because Yahweh has chosen you to be a people," here's that same expression again, "for His own possession," that is, for His special treasure, "out of all the peoples who are on the face of

the earth.” You have an immense place of advantage and privilege, that’s what Moses is saying. This is the same message throughout the rest of the Old Testament. In Psalm 135:4, “The Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself. Israel for His special treasure.”

Now, do you see where the Jews are coming from? They read those verses and then they listened to the Apostle Paul, and they said, okay, either the Old Testament is right and there are immense advantages to being Jewish, or Paul is right and there are no advantages. But think about where that goes based on what we’ve just read together. If there are no real advantages to being Jewish then the Old Testament authors and ultimately God Himself were either flat wrong or they were deceptive, because the Old Testament says we have a high and holy and special place and Paul’s saying, it doesn’t matter. In other words, if Paul is right about their Jewishness not guaranteeing their salvation then God’s very integrity is undermined. That’s the essence of the argument, the objection. How do you respond to that?

Well, Paul answers in Romans 3:2. Now, before you look at verse 2, let me just ask you, in light of our journey through chapter 2, in light of all that we learned about what Paul said regarding the Jews’ lack of salvation as a result of their Jewishness, that that wouldn’t matter, their circumcision wouldn’t matter at the judgment, if you hadn’t read Romans 3 and I were to ask you this question, how do you think Paul will respond when asked the question, is there any advantage to being Jewish? Based on what we’ve seen so far, what would you think? None, none at all. But that’s not what Paul says.

Notice what he says in verse 2. He says, listen, you have misunderstood me. My point in chapter 2 was that being Jewish contributes nothing to your personal salvation on the day of judgment. But that doesn’t mean that being Jewish doesn’t have its advantages. In fact, he says there are huge advantages to being Jewish. Look at verse 2. What advantage? “Great in every respect.” Paul’s answer is that the Jews have many varied and vast privileges and advantages over the Gentiles.

Now, later he’s going to come back to this question and he’s going to address those advantages more fully. Let me just give you a little glimpse. He’s going to do this in chapters 9 through 11, but just turn to one text. Turn over to Romans 9:3. As he begins to deal with Israel, he says,

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites.

In other words, Paul says, okay, I’m talking now about the physical descendants of Abraham who are outside of Christ, who are unbelievers. Notice the advantages they have in verse 4, “to whom belongs the adoption as sons.” Here he is not talking about the individual adoption of every Israelite like we enjoy in the New Testament church, where if you’re a believer in Christ you have personally been adopted by God into His family. Rather, he’s talking about the

adoption of the nation as God's people, as His children, through whom He would put Himself on display, "the adoption as sons."

"And the glory," that's probably a reference to the Shekinah glory, that visible blazing display of the glory of God. Think about it. There was, for a time, in the Temple in Jerusalem, a visible manifestation of God's glory. What it would have been like to have gone there. God, of course, can't be contained in a temple. He can't be contained "in temples made with hands." Rather, that was simply His address. He dwells in all of the universe and beyond. He can't be contained by the universe, but His address, where He specially manifested Himself, was in Israel. You could go to the Temple and see God. You could see a manifestation of God. What a privilege. Nobody else had that.

And also notice verse 4, "theirs was the covenants." Again and again in the Old Testament, God made, entered into, legally binding agreements with this people. And the giving of the Law at Sinai, God came to the top of Mount Sinai in His person. He spoke with Moses. He actually verbally spoke to the nation where they could hear Him and He gave them His Law. And to them, verse 4 says, was "the temple service." Imagine what a privilege it was to have all of the sacrificial system and the feasts and how those illustrated the coming Messiah.

What it would have been like to have laid your hands on the head of an animal and then have cut its throat with your own hand and seen that animal's smoke go into heaven as a picture of the satisfaction of God's justice on your behalf. All the feasts that pictured what was coming. What a privilege, what advantage. "And the promises," that's probably a reference to the promise in verse 5, "from whom is the Messiah according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen." In other words, the Jews were chosen by God to be the people through whom His Son would come. What advantage. What privilege.

Now go back to chapter 2. Paul will eventually get to articulating those in chapter 9, but here in chapter 3 and verse 2, he just articulates one advantage. Notice what he says, "They have great advantages in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God." Now, by "First of all," Paul may be, and some commentators think that Paul is cluing us in, that he's going to give us a list of advantages. If so, some say, well, you know Paul, he never quite got to that, he got distracted and moved on. Others would say, no, he's going to give us that list in chapter 9, as we just saw a moment ago. But it may be that by "First of all" Paul doesn't mean, I'm starting a list. He may simply mean, chiefly, or speaking of the highest advantage. In other words, he may be saying, here is the supreme, the greatest advantage of being Jewish. It's being part of the nation to whom God entrusted His very words. That's an immense privilege.

Notice, Paul says, "they were entrusted." That doesn't mean Paul's claiming he's not Jewish. He's saying that because he's talking about unbelieving Jews. He's talking about the spiritual advantage of those who haven't believed. They still have an advantage because "they were entrusted with," notice, "the oracles of God." The Greek words translated "oracles of God" are

literally, if I literally translate the words into English it's, "the words of God," they were entrusted with "the words of God," in secular Greek, as well as in the Septuagint.

I think those of you who have been with me some time understand what the Septuagint is. For those of you who are newer, let me explain. The Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. When you come to the New Testament times, most Jewish people didn't speak Hebrew. So they needed the Hebrew to be translated into Greek, the language they did speak. It was, sort of, the English of the New Testament era, the, sort of, marketplace language. And so, because of that the Bible, about one hundred years before Jesus, was translated into Greek. That was the Bible Jesus and the disciples quoted, for the most part, was the Septuagint, that Greek translation. When you look in the Septuagint, this expression, this Greek expression, particular this Greek word that's used here, is used consistently to refer to God's revelation inscripturated. In fact, in Psalm 119 the Greek word is used some 24 times to refer to the entire Old Testament.

So Paul argues then, that the Jews have one chief advantage. God has entrusted them with His very words. You see, the writers of Scripture, again and again, come back to this advantage. Moses, in Deuteronomy 4:8 says, "what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?" Nobody else has this, he says. Psalm 147:19-20, "God declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel." Listen to this, "God has not dealt thus with any other nation; and as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise Yahweh!"

Stephen, in his sermon before his martyrdom in Acts 7, comes back to this very point. In Acts 7:38 he says, "Moses received the living oracles," the living words of God, "to pass on to you." This is a holy and high privilege. But you know, it wasn't just that they had the Scripture and therefore they knew the mind and the will of God, it's that they had the Scripture that also led them to a knowledge of how to know the true God. It gave them a knowledge of personal salvation. That was the immense privilege that was theirs.

Turn to John 5. Our Lord points this out when he's speaking to the Jews. John 5:31, Jesus says, "If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true." In other words, if I'm the only one saying, I am who I am, then it doesn't amount to anything because the Old Testament Law called on two or three witnesses to validate the truth of something. So Jesus calls out witnesses. In verses 33 to 35, the witness of John the Baptist. John was a prophet. John says, "This is the Lamb of God. This is the One who existed before me." In verse 36 He calls out the witness of His works. He said look at the miracles I have done. They testify, they witness. In verses 37 and 38 it's the Father. The Father even, remember, on several occasions spoke out of heaven and said "This is My Son. Hear Him."

But then He calls a final witness, beginning in verse 39, and it's the Scripture, the Old Testament. Notice what He says, "You keep on searching the Scriptures because you think that

in them you have eternal life.’” You think that by keeping them on your own effort you’re going to gain eternal life. He says, you’ve missed the whole point. It is these Scriptures, it’s the Hebrew Old Testament, it’s the oracles of God, that testify about Me. Jesus is the theme of the Old Testament.

I’m thinking about, around Christmas time, teaching a series that I did many, many years ago and, sort of, changing and rearranging some things and adding some things, on Christ in the Old Testament, because most Christians don’t think Christ is in the Old Testament very much. You ask the average Christian, where is Jesus in the Old Testament? And they kind of stammer and stutter. Where is Jesus first in the Old Testament? Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” John tells us that it was Christ who created, “and without Him nothing was created that was made.” And He permeates the Old Testament.

Jesus says, “it’s about Me, but you’re unwilling to come to Me that you may have life.” Verse 45,

“Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, [*the first five books of the Bible*] you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

Jesus says, listen, the Scriptures talk about how to gain eternal life in Me!

Turn back a few pages to Luke 24. On the Emmaus road, you remember, our Lord spoke to these two disciples and He said to them in verse 25,

“O foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the Old Testament has spoken! Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses [*the first five books of the Old Testament*] and all the prophets, [*that’s the rest of the Old Testament*], He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”

Go down to verse 44, with the twelve, or the eleven,

He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in [*and here He breaks the Old Testament into three categories*] the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [*wouldn’t you have loved to have been there*] and He said to them, “Thus it is written, [*here’s what the Old Testament says*] that the Messiah would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Listen, it was a great privilege for the Jews to have the words of God because they pointed the way to salvation through the Messiah who would come.

Paul argues this same thing in 2 Timothy 3:15. Speaking to Timothy, his son in the faith, he says, “from childhood you have known the sacred writings,” that’s a technical term for what we call the Old Testament, “which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” No wonder the Old Testament was such a privilege. No wonder the oracles of God were such a privilege. They pointed the way through the Messiah to spiritual salvation, to God. So Paul’s answer to their objection that his gospel means there is no benefit to being Jewish is, you’re dead wrong. The benefits of being Jewish are great in every way and the supreme advantage is that God decided to make you the recipients, the caretakers, the guardians, and the disseminators of His very words. What privilege!

Now, there are several ways that you and I need to apply Paul’s response here in verse 2. Perhaps you’re here this morning and you’ve attached yourself to the God of the Bible. You’ve attached yourself to the Christian faith, but you are still trusting in yourself. You’re still trusting in your own effort, your own works, your own obedience, your own rituals, some prayer you prayed. Your confidence is in something you have done or something that you are, maybe your baptism, some ritual you performed. Listen, Paul made it clear in chapter 2 that you need the gospel. You need the good news Paul preached. You are a sinner and none of your good works will save you at the judgment. Just as is true for all the rest of us.

Now, when you hear that you might be tempted to respond the way the Jews responded to Paul’s preaching of the gospel. You might be tempted to conclude that, if after all you have tried to do you still need the gospel, then there must be no benefit to attending church and being with God’s people. Maybe you should just go out and live like a pagan and just forsake it all. But if Paul were here this morning he would say to you, no, no, you have had immense advantages by being connected to the people of God even if you’re not in Christ.

And the greatest advantage is that you have had access to the Scripture. You have heard how to be right with God through His Son explained again and again. You know about Jesus Christ. You know that He was the eternal Son of God who took on Himself full humanity, who came into the world, who lived a perfect life in the place of those who would believe in Him, who died to satisfy the justice of God against the sins of everyone who would repent of their sins and believe in Him. You know that He was raised from the dead, that He is at the right hand of the Father, that one day He will return again. You’ve had an immense privilege. You know those things.

But let me share with you that with that privilege comes great responsibility, because sadly, if you refuse to believe what you have learned from the Scriptures your huge advantage will actually turn into a massive liability at the judgment. I plead with you, as Paul did in 2

Corinthians 5, I “beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” today. You can be reconciled to your Creator through His Son. I plead with you, don’t wait.

For those of us who are in Christ there are two primary applications of Paul’s response in verse 2 to his Jewish objectors, two applications. First of all, it should affect our evangelism. If it is an advantage for unbelievers to have the Scriptures, as Paul argues here that it is, that knowledge should shape how we share the gospel. You see, ultimately no one is going to be converted to Christ by your brilliant arguments or by mine. The only resource that the Spirit has promised to use in the regeneration of sinners is His Word. I’m not saying you don’t logically argue and argue the case for the Christian faith. I’m saying you do it primarily from the Scripture, because it’s the Word the Spirit will use. James 1:18 says, “In the exercise of God’s will He brought us forth,” He gave birth to us. How? “By the word of truth.” He brought about the new birth through the Word. First Peter 1:23 says the same thing, you have been born from above, “you have been born again not of seed which perishes but which doesn’t perish, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.” So it is an advantage for unbelievers to have and to know the Scripture because it’s the Scripture that the Spirit uses to bring life.

Now, what are the implications of that practically for us? Let me first start with you parents. Listen, there is great and immense advantage to your children being exposed again and again day after day to the Scripture. Your unbelieving kids need to hear the Scripture. You need to read it to them. You need to teach it to them. You need to have them regularly in church and sitting in Sunday School classes and sitting in the youth group. Why? Because it’s an advantage. It’s the Word the Spirit will ultimately use to bring them to faith. Seize every opportunity.

Maybe you have an unbelieving spouse. I know there are many like that in our church. Listen, encourage them, don’t nag them, but encourage them to come with you. Expose them to the truth in every way you can without preaching at them. Share what you’re learning, talk to them like you talk to your Christian friends about what you’re learning. Bring the truth of Scripture to bear in their lives because that’s the tool the Spirit will use. Invite your unbelieving family and friends to join you here at church or to join you in a Bible study, or anywhere where they’re going to be exposed to the Scripture being taught. Share books with them that you’ve read that have impacted you that will expose them to the Scripture.

There’s one other implication of this, I would say, encourage those you talk to about the gospel to read the Scripture, specifically to read the Gospel of John. Why do I single it out? Because it was inspired by God for this very purpose. In John 20:31 we read. You know, there are a lot of things I could have written, John says, that Christ did, but “I’ve written these so that,” one, “you may believe that Jesus is the Christ,” the Christos, the Messiah, “the Son of God; and,” two, “that believing you may have life in His name.” You know what that means? That means every paragraph in the Gospel of John serves two distinct purposes. It serves an apologetic purpose, it

argues for the deity of Jesus Christ. And every paragraph in the Gospel of John serves an evangelistic purpose, it argues for people to believe in Him. So encourage people to read it.

I'll have this conversation: So have you ever read the New Testament? Yeah, yeah, you know, I grew up in the church and I've read it many times. Have you read the Gospel of John lately? Well, no it's been a while. Well, let me encourage you to begin with prayer and just say, God help me to understand, and then read the Gospel of John. I encourage you to keep copies; the E.S.V. makes a little copy of John's Gospel that you can buy separately. Keep copies in your car, in your office, in your home. Pass it out, because it's the Word. There is an advantage to unbelievers to be exposed to the Word.

But there's a second application for us who are Christians. It should affect our love for and our treatment of the Scripture. Paul told the Jews that while they had many advantages, the chief, the supreme benefit, was having the Word of God. And in verse 2 Paul makes it clear that he and the other apostles, who were all taught by our Lord Himself, believed that the Scripture, in its totality, is the oracles of God.

In his classic book I would highly recommend to you, called *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, B.B. Warfield, Professor of Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1887 to 1921, says this about Paul's comment in verse 2 of Romans 3. Listen to what he writes, "we have unobtrusive and convincing evidence here that the Old Testament Scriptures were esteemed by the writers of the New Testament as an oracular," in other words, as an oracle, "which in itself not merely contains, but is the very Word of God," I love this, "nothing other than the crystallized speech of God." Think about that for a moment. You hold in your hand this morning, what Jesus taught His apostles and what they have taught us, is the very crystallized speech of God. What do you do with that? How do you even think about that? How do you treat such a treasure?

I don't think anyone has ever said it better than John Wesley said it. Listen to what John Wesley wrote about the Scripture. "I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God; just hovering over the great gulf; 'til a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, - the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach me the way. For this very end He came from heaven. He has written it down in a book. At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be a man of one book. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone; only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights: - 'Lord, is it not Thy word? "if any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God?" Thou has said, "if any be willing to do Thy will, he shall know." Lord, I am willing, let me know Thy will.'"

If you understand that that book you hold in your hand is an immense privilege and advantage, that it is, in fact, the very words of God, it is the crystallized speech of God, then John Wesley's beautiful prayer will be the expression of your own heart. "At any price, give me the book of God." "Let me be a man or a woman of one book." What an advantage! Let's pray together.

Our Father, we are incredibly rich. We thank You, O God, for the immense advantage that You have given us, that so many through human history, and many even today, don't have. You have given us Your oracles, the very words, the crystallized speech of Your mind.

Father, I pray for those here this morning who are not in Christ. May they turn to this book and find in it the way to heaven, the way to You through Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, may this week they open the Gospel of John and began with a prayer that You would open their minds to see and to understand, and then Father, I pray that, as they read, You would bring them to see that Jesus is the Messiah, Your only Son, and that they would come to believe in Him.

Father, I pray for those of us who are already in Christ. O God, forgive us for taking so lightly this supreme privilege. May we become men and women of one book. We pray it in Jesus's name, amen.