***Sinning to Make God Look Good
RO19-01***

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Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 3:5.

In the opening part of Romans; that is, from Romans 1:1 all the way through Romans 3:20, the apostle Paul is seeking to demonstrate that every person who does not have Christ as Savior, who has ever been born into the human race, is doomed to hell. Paul says that whether you're immoral; moral; or, religious, without Jesus Christ, you are condemned and lost. But the grace of God has made it possible for all three of these classes of unbelievers to enter eternal life.

**The Religious Man**

We have come to this third category, the religious man (religious, but unsaved), and we have been studying him. We have come to Romans 3:5. In Romans 3:5, and the verses which immediately follow, the apostle Paul is dealing with the claims of this religious unbeliever. What Paul has tried to show him here is that merely being born a Jew into the religious system of the Mosaic Law would not ensure eternal life for a person. A lot of these Jews (vast numbers of them) are actually counting on just that: "I've been born into the line of Abraham. I'm under the Mosaic Law system. Therefore, eternal life is ensured to me." Paul pointed out to them that that is not true.

This was the first argument of the rebellious Jew. His first argument against Paul was, "I don't care what you say about God condemning me. I am part of the Jewish Commonwealth. Therefore, I am under the special favor and blessing of God. I'm going to heaven." Paul says, "That is not so. Just to have been born a Jew is not to have made you a genuine Jew in God's eyes, because only those who are born-again, as Abraham was born again – those, in God's eyes, are the genuine Jews.

So, the religious Jew now raises a second question, having had this one rejected. He brings a second argument, and that is that God has made certain eternal promises to the Jewish people, and that He cannot go back on His word. He says, "Even if some of the Jews were unfaithful, it makes no difference. God cannot be unfaithful. He's going to be faithful to His word."

What the Jew is claiming here is that the unbelief of the Jews is not going to nullify these covenants that God has made with the Jews – that the promises of God are sure. Well, Paul does concur that God is going to be faithful, but God is going to be faithful to those unconditional covenants, but not to something that He did not promise the Jew; namely, that He would give him personal salvation without his receiving and trusting in Christ as Savior.

So, this was a very clever argument on the part of this Jewish religious unbeliever. God is going to keep His promises and those covenants to the letter. But those individual Jews, without faith in Christ as Savior, are going to end up in the lake of fire while the covenants are going to be fulfilled.

Paul's point to this Jew is: "Don't count on the fact that God is truthful, and that God is faithful, to keep you out of the lake of fire. God indeed is truthful. He is faithful. But the promises that He has given you do not include taking you to eternal life without your acceptance of the substitute He has provided."

So, this is the background of the attacks by this religious, unbelieving Jew. What we see is true of him as a Jew, of course, is Paul's way of illustrating what is true of all religious people (of all religious unbelievers). The same thing applies to them.

Now we come to another counterattack attack. This is a third argument which this religious Jewish unbeliever brings against Paul's declaration that he is under divine condemnation. It begins with the word "But." This word is the Greek word "de." It's an adversative. What this little world is doing is introducing this unbeliever's objection. The Jews had the Old Testament Bible, and yet they wandered in spiritual darkness.

So, Paul says that they are under the wrath of God, but this man resists that warning. The Jewish unbeliever knew that Paul was right about their negative responses to the Bible. Their rejection of doctrine was historically well-known, and they excused themselves because they were, in effect, saying that their faithlessness to God's Word to them brought God the opportunity to be faithful in spite of them. Therefore, it made God's faithfulness stand out. These unconditional covenants were there, and God was faithful to them.

So, the religious Jew is claiming that his very sin, and the very rebellion of the Jews against divine viewpoint made God's righteousness stand out in bold relief. This is just as he had previously argued that he had made God's faithfulness stand out in bold relief.

Now, his third argument is going to be: "Well, I'll tell you something, Paul. It's just because we have been such sinners. It's because we have been so stiff-necked and hard-backed and resistant to God. It's because we have been such rebels that God's righteousness stands out in such stark relief." His argument goes like this, if I may illustrate it. If you were to go to a jeweler to buy a diamond, and you would ask him to show you a display of diamonds, you know how he does it. The first thing he puts on the counter is a black velvet. Then the diamonds are placed on that. Why? In order to make the diamonds stand out in contrast; to make it stand out in bold relief; and, to make the beauty of the diamond to be enhanced because of the black velvet background.

That's the line of argument of this resister. He's saying: "Our sin is so black that God's righteousness just glows like a shining light upon it. God would never look so good if it were not for our sins." Therefore, the rationale of this man is: "This being the case, how can God really condemn us as unbelieving religious Jews? How can He condemn us to hell when our sinning has brought glory to Him? How could He condemn us when it is the very sin that we have been guilty of that has brought such brilliance to the righteousness of God?" That's what he means in verse 5: "But if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God."

The next word is "if." It's the Greek word is "ei." This is a first-class condition "if." But sometimes the first class condition, while it does normally reflect what is true, sometimes the first class condition just assumes that a thing is true. That's what happens in this case. What he is saying is not actually true, but Paul, for the sake of argument, is going to assume that this is true. He's going to assume that the Jews dark sinning has created a black velvet background for displaying the righteousness of God. So, this "if" is in fact not true, but he's going to assume it's true for the sake of argument.

The word "our," of course, refers to these unbelieving religious Jews, and the same thing would apply to the religious, unbelieving gentile or Jew today: "But if our unrighteousness:" The word "unrighteousness" is the Greek word "adikia." "Adikia" is the Greek word that is the most comprehensive term for "wrongdoing." So, we translate it as "iniquity." It's just the overall, general, solid word for wrongdoing. It refers to everything that pours out of the old sin nature of a religious unbeliever. It refers here, of course, to the historical rebellion of the Jews against the Word of God, both their national rebellion and the personal rebellion. And it has the definite article before it. So, it is "*the* iniquity," and therefore it is referring to this specific quality in the Jewish people of being rebels against the Word of God.

So, he says, "What if our iniquity?" And then he uses the word "commend." The word "commend" is the Greek word "sunistemi." This comes from two Greek words. The first one is this word "sun." That means "with." The second word "histemi" means "to stand." So, literally this word means "to stand with" or "to set together." What this word signifies is to set one person or one thing against another by way of presenting them to each other, or by way of commending them to each other. So, the word that generally will describe this is the word "demonstrate." And that's the idea here. The word "sunistemi" is used here in the terms of "to demonstrate." The point here is that the religious unbeliever has used his sin to demonstrate the righteousness of God, like the diamonds on the black velvet background. He thinks that his sin (and that's what he's claiming) has done something wonderful for God.

This verb is in the present tense. So, it means that every time he sins, God is constantly glorified. It's active. It's his choice as an individual to sin to the glory of God. It's indicative. It's a statement of fact.

You can see that we've got some really perverted thinking here – that only the darkness of the unregenerate, unsaved, old-sin-nature mind could come up with. What this man is saying is that I sin to the glory of God. This is an idea which has not left us to this day. There are still some people who like to get cute about the fact that they can sin and use 1 John 1:8 as believers to get back in fellowship. So, they can persist in sin, and God is honored by the fact that they claim the promises of 1 John 1:9. But they forget that God also deals with the attitude behind our sinning and behind our confessing, and that He disciplines us accordingly. But this is an old idea: "I'm sitting to the glory of God."

Sometimes the sin is spelled out in some specific way. A person is guilty of doing something, and he'll name that thing. I've heard people say, "I do this. It's a wrong thing, but I do it to the glory of God." That's what this old sin nature mind of this man, that Paul is speaking about, actually did.

**Does Unrighteousness Demonstrate the Righteousness of God?**

So, it says, "If our unrighteousness (our iniquity) demonstrates the righteousness of God." This is the word "dikaiosune." That's the way the word "righteousness" looks in the Greek. This is the word that connotes the quality of right actions. This is just being right. Today, we would say, "Do right" – the idea of doing right. It refers here, of course, to a little more in the fact that it is referring to God.

So, what this word "dikaiosune" here means is a particular kind of righteousness; namely, the absolute righteousness of God, because God is absolutely right in all He does. And God's righteousness, because it is absolute, always condemns sin.

So, this man here is saying, "But if our iniquities demonstrate the absolute righteousness of God." In this case, the Greek does not have the definite article "the." So, it is righteousness in general – not specific. It's simply the quality of the essence of God – of absolute righteousness. The word God is "theos." It also does not have the definite article. It is not the righteousness of *the* God, so it is the Godhead in general which is viewed. It is the totality of the trinity that this man is dealing with.

So, what we have in this verse is the declaration by this religious unbeliever to challenge Paul. His third attack against Paul is: "I'll tell you this, Paul. Our iniquities (all this stuff that pours out of our old sin natures) actually demonstrates the absolute righteousness of God." Because of what? Well, because God says, "I'm going to judge sin. I'm going to deal with sin. I'm going to confront sin."

One of the things that could have been in the mind of this unbelieving Jew is the record here that they had in their Old Testament Scripture, back in Deuteronomy 31, where God made a declaration to Moses on the eve of the Jews entering the Promised Land. At the end of the 40 years of wandering. Moses is about to die. They are about to enter the Promised Land. And God, through Moses, gives this final warning to the people of Israel concerning what's going to happen when they get into the land if they are not positive toward the Word of God and toward the doctrines (the instruction and the commandments which they have received.

So, in Deuteronomy 31:16, Moses says, "And the Lord said unto Moses, behold, you shall sleep with your fathers." That means he's going to die: "And this people will rise up and play the harlot after the strange gods of the land." And as you know, I think you understand enough about the Baal cults now, and about the ancient practices, that sexual immorality was always involved in the worship of the ancient deities. That's what it means: they played the harlot. They did that literally: "They will play the harlot after the strange gods of the land to which they go to be among them, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them."

Here you have a description which the Jews in the New Testament (in Paul's time) knew full well had been exactly fulfilled as God predicted. It was a prediction that the people would go into sin, and that they would violate the standards that God gave them. Then God told Moses what the consequences would be.

Verses 17-18: "Then My anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them. And they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Are not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' And I will surely hide My face in that day for all the evils which they shall have brought, in that they are turned onto other gods."

What God has said to them is that: "When they do this, I will turn from them. And they will discover as they cry out to me in their pain and their agony that I will not be there to hear them. History has very amply demonstrated this.

This was true in the days of the attacks upon the people under the Philistines. This was true in the days of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of the land. This was true in the days preceding the New Testament era under the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanies, who took a pig and slaughtered it upon their altar. This was true in the days that Titus was conquering Jerusalem, slaughtering one-and-a-half million Jews who had been driven, because of the siege of Jerusalem, to the desperation of eating their own children, which God again had told them they would do, and which they did on about three occasions in their history. This was true throughout the Middle Ages as they were under the attacks and the persecutions of governments. This was true during the Spanish Inquisition, which began as an attack upon the Jews themselves. This was true as the Muhammadans swept across the land of Palestine and built their mosque on the site of Solomon's Temple. This was true in our own modern times with the Holocaust that Hitler brought upon their heads.

Everything that history has demonstrated to us of persecution upon the Jews is the fulfillment of this prophecy. God says, "When you abandon My righteousness, and when you turn from the Word of God, I'm going to bring the house down upon your head." And that's exactly what happened.

So, these Jews in the New Testament times knew the Scriptures. They knew what God had said they would do. And sure enough, they were just as unfaithful to Him as they could be. And sure enough, God had brought judgments upon them. But in spite of this, there was one thing that they pointed out to Paul: "We're still here. We're in hour land. We're still a nation. A Jew is still a Jew. And in spite of our sin, God has been faithful, and God has somehow dealt with His righteousness.

In Deuteronomy 31:21, we read, "And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness. For it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seeds. For I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I've brought them into the land which I swore to give them." They could point out to Paul that: "Even before God ever took our forefathers into the land, He knew they were already planning to be unfaithful to Him.

So, the Jews observed that they were still under God's blessing. On the basis of Scriptures like this, and on the basis of their condition in the New Testament times, the argument of this religious, unbelieving Jew was: "You can't say that God does not favor us, because even in face of the judgments that He told He was going to bring upon us, look how He has favored us, and look how He has blessed us."

That was a very clever line of argument: "But if our iniquity commend the absolute righteousness of God, what shall we say?" The word "what" is the little Greek word "ti." It is simply an interrogative word. "Shall we say" is the word "lego." This refers to the response that should now be made to the fact that the evil of the religious unbeliever brings glory to God. That has been his argument: "From ancient times, our people have been evil, and God has treated us in grace. Therefore, we have made God look good. We have brought honor and glory to God."

This is in the future tense. So, he is saying, "What shall we say at any time in the future? We're able to demonstrate the absolute righteousness of God and His treatment of us in contrast to our sins. It is active. It was Paul's own response here. It's indicative case – a statement of fact: "What shall we say?"

**Is God Unrighteous?**

Then Paul offers this question. "Is God unrighteous who takes vengeance? Is that what we are going to say about God?" There is no verb. This is a strong emotional statement, so there's no word "is." The word "God" is there again ("theos"). This time it does have the definite article: "*the* God." And the whole phrase begins with this Greek word "me," which is a negative. Anytime the Greek begin a question with "me," it indicates that the answer is "No." The Greek has a way of asking questions and telling you what the answer should be. We can't do that in English without using some extra words. So, we have to say something like this: "God is not unrighteous who take a vengeance, is He? This is indicating "No, He isn't." But here in the Greek, it's very clear.

That's what this unsaved Jewish man is saying. He's saying, "Now if, after all the glory we bring to God, and after all the marvelous reflection we have upon Him, He condemns us, that's unfair. That's cruel. God wouldn't do that to us. God would be unjust if, after we bring glory to Him, He condemns us." That's a human viewpoint logic, and that's what's behind these words.

"Is God unrighteous?" The word "unrighteous" is the Greek word "adikos." It's a little different than that one we had before. "Adikos" here means "unjust" or "wicked." This is an adjective. And the question is whether God is acting on unrighteously by condemning the sinning Jew, whose sinning makes God's righteousness stand out.

So, the question is: "Is God unjust, because He does what?" It says, "Who takes." The Greek word looks is "epiphero." The word means "to inflict" here. That's a better translation. The idea here is: "Is God unjust (unfair) when He inflicts vengeance upon those who disobey Him?" It is present tense. This is His constant action. It is active. This is God's personal act. It is participle. A principle is stated, referring to God's response to the evil of the unbelieving, religious person. "Is God unfair (unjust) when He imposes (when He inflicts) vengeance?" And the Greek word is "orge." It means "wrath" or "anger." It has the definite article in front of it, incidentally. It is *the* body. It is the definite, specific anger of God.

This word "orge" is an interesting word in the Greek language because it refers to an anger which has gradually developed, and then it is established, and it is an anger which has decided on a course of action to an end. The course of action here is going to be the judgment of God. There is a different Greek word that refers to an anger that just flows up on the spur of the moment, and it dies down, and that's the end of it. But this is a sort of a continual, building-up, mounting anger, as the patience of God waits until it gets to a high point, and then it goes to a predetermined end of the judgment of God upon this individual.

So, here is *the* particular wrath of God. We could translate this little part of the verse in this way: "The God who inflicts wrath is not unjust, is He?"

Here is what we have. The religious unbeliever assumes that God will not exercise His divine right on one whose sins unable God to reveal His own absolute righteousness. But it is the absolute righteousness of God which is the very thing that requires that He bring eternal death, and place this religious unbeliever in hell. Lost people of the religious type actually like to create their own delusions as to how God must act. So, they create their own ideas as to what would merit their going into the lake of fire. So, they conclude that, having established their own ground as to what should judge them and condemn them, God will hold them innocent. But God's righteousness is compromised when He permits the sinner to escape the lake of fire. God's righteousness is not compromised when He condemns that person to hell.

So, the apostle Paul, in order to take up this man's argument, says, "God isn't unrighteous when He takes vengeance on this person, is he?" And then Paul realizes that this is this is a stupid line of argument, and it's really a stupid discussion in his eyes. That's why he adds the words, "I speak as a man." And the word man is that Greek word "anthropos," which you may remember means mankind. It is humanity. So, what he is saying is, "I'm speaking here in human terms." We may translate it just that way.

So, Paul's response is now ready to be given. This man has given a third counterattack, and his counterattack attack this time has been that God would be unrighteous if He were to condemn this person, and if He were to exercise His wrath upon this person, because this person's very sin causes the righteousness of God to stand out in such brilliance. So, the Jew, on the basis of looking at his past history, where he says, "Now when you talk about unrighteous, my forefathers were unrighteous. But did God cast them off? Has God destroyed us as a nation as he brought great judgment upon us? Here we are. We're in our land. We're still a nation." And his line of reasoning was: "You're wrong, Paul. God has not rejected and cast us off just because we have a few foibles; just because we play around a little bit; and, just because we do some evil things. After all, that's what makes God so wonderful.

There are some Christians who are really foolish enough to delight in demonstrating the grace of God by the practice of evil. That kind of game will bring you under God's judgment and under God's severe condemnation.

So, Paul says, "What shall we say then? Does our unrighteousness make us look better? And how can we say then of God that He is just if He condemns evil?" This is a subtle kind of argument. That's what Paul is saying here in verse 5: "But if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unfair? He's unjust if He condemns sin?"

He responds to that question in verse 6 with these words that we've had before in Scripture. They are very strong words: "God forbid." The Greek words are "me ginoito." this is an idiomatic expression. "Me' is a very strong negative here. And "ginoito" is the word "to be" ("to become"). So, it's an idiom expressing strong rejection: "May it never be." What it is doing is denying what he has said in verse 5 as being a blasphemous assertion. It is pure blasphemy to suggest that if we sin, God's righteousness is caused to stand out in sharper relief.

Then he goes on to explain that. He says, "For then, how shall God judge the world?" And he's introducing a question here. We may translate this as: "Otherwise (or 'since'):" How shall God judge the world? And he's setting up a condition here which means, "Since (if that were true in verse 5) that when we sin, God is made to look more righteous, how shall He judge?" The word "judge" is the Greek word "krino." "Krino" means basically to determine something. Here it refers, of course, to God passing judgment against the sins of people. If God's action in condemning the Jew to hell is unrighteous because sinning makes God's righteousness more evident, how can He judge sin in anyone? And that's what Paul's question amounts to: "If what you are saying is true." And he says, "I talk as a man. Let's follow your line of logic. How can God judge sins?" And yet, the Jew knew that God was going to judge sin. There was no question about it.

This happens to be in the future tense – sometime in the future. It is active. God does the judging. It is indicative – a statement of fact. He judges specifically the world (the "kosmos"). That is the world of unbelievers (unsaved people).

So, what the apostle Paul says is, "If God is unrighteous to condemn anyone who makes Him look good, then who can God ever judge?" The Bible is full of the fact that God is going to judge sin. The Bible is full of the fact that sinning people under the condemnation and the judgment of God. And Paul says, "And yet, although the Bible tells us that God is going to judge sin, by your logic, He couldn't judge anybody." Do you see where this is going? Paul is a very clever debater, and he's following a line of argument, and He's gradually pushing these people into a trap. That's what so infuriated the Jews when he dealt with them. He led them down the primrose path, and then he let the guillotine loose right on their necks after he had them in the slot. What he is doing is that he's going to push them to a logical conclusion that even the Jew will have to recoil from.

So, in verse 7, he brings this logical conclusion to a climax. He says, "For," or "moreover." This is introducing a further explanation of the strong denial in verse 6: "For if the truth of God has abounded more." This "if" ("ei") is a first-class condition. Here again he is supposing that this is a reality. He says, "Suppose that this is the case – that the truth of God." The word "truth" here is the word "aletheia." This has to do with the reality about God, particularly about His promises of His faithfulness to the Jews. This truth of God, which belongs to God: "Have abounded more." There is our old word "perisseuo." The idea here is "to make more conspicuous" (more prominent).

So, he's saying, "What if (let's assume that this does happen) the truth about God; that is, His faithfulness to His promises, and all that He is in His feelings against evil, has been made more conspicuous through my lie." And the word "lie" is "pseusma." "Pseusma" is the Jews' unbelief and their rejection of God. Paul is assuming the attitude of the Jews. He says, "Suppose that I take your position that the truth of God will be made more prominent through my rejection (through my acceptance of evil, rather than of good). This word means "super abound:" "Through my lie unto His glory." This is that word "doxa," and that means God's perfections; His Holiness; and, the exaltation of God. What if the truth about God super abounds through my rejection of God's righteousness (my doing evil)?" What if this abounds more to His glory? "Yet, why," he says, "am I also judged as a sinner? I am still judged as a sinner." The word "judge" is again the word "krino." It is present tense. At that point, Paul says, "I am being judged as a sinner." And it's passive. It is being done to him. It's indicative – a statement of fact.

He said, "Why am I also judged as if I were a sinner?" The word "sinner" is a person who is missing the mark ("hamartolos"): "Why am I judged as if I were missing God's pleasure; God's satisfaction' and, what God wants me to do?" Paul says, "I am judged as a sinner. If I reject what God has said, and if I reject the truth of God, here I am, and God should not condemn me as a sinner because my sinning has made God's righteousness stand out in bold relief. Yet, I am here condemned as a sinner. Why am I being judged as a sinner?" And even these Jews were attacking Paul as a sinner.

Then, he adds something more in verse 8 that clinches it. He adds, "And not rather." Here's a conclusion to the line of reasoning that sinning makes God's absolute righteousness stand out: "And not." He denies it: "Just as (or even as)," and now he introduces in a parenthesis what people have been saying about the apostle Paul. The word is the word from which we get our English word blasphemy: "blasphemeo." "Blasphemeo" means "to slander." It means "to speak of contemptuously." It means "to defame." Here it means "to misrepresent." The apostle Paul says, "If sinning is so pleasing to God," and you can the logical conclusion that he's going to be pushing these people to. "As a matter of fact," he says, "some people have said this about me. They have slanderously declared this against me." This is in the present tense. It was an active situation with Paul at the time he wrote this letter. It is passive. They were doing this to him. They were saying things about Paul; that is, they were saying that Paul had said certain things which he had not.

This is an old habits with Christians as well as unbelievers. Here's a statement that's made in this context, and then the coral changes, or a different situation. Now the statement that was made here no longer fits in this coral. So, a different statement is made in a different context. But they're still operating up here, and they're holding this statement back here when the whole situation has changed. Therefore, they think that what they have on their hands is a lie, when all they have on their hands is a misunderstanding of the fact they have not caught up with the fact that the circumstances have changed. What was said on one occasion, within one set of circumstances, is now different in this set of circumstances.

**Grace**

The apostle Paul was the great proponent of grace. The apostle Paul was saying things within the context of the crowd of grace. But over here were legalists who were operating within the context of law. And they were taking Paul's remarks and sticking them down in here. They were inferring certain things that Paul had never intended by what he said, in their ignorance, and they had the audacity to take his words and to not relate them to a different situation and to put them in the proper perspective.

So, here is what he's referring to in verse 8. He says, "And not rather, as we are blasphemed (or slanderously reported) by some." This is a rather important word. It's the Greek word "tis." It is an indefinite pronoun. It indicates a category – a category of unbelievers who take words and twist them, and slander the person who has said them. "We are slanderously reported, as some affirm that we say." "Affirm" is present, active, indicative. It's the Greek word "phemi." It's a little different word from what we usually have for "say." This word "phemi" means "by way of enlightening" or "explaining." Actually, when he uses this word "affirm," he says, "These people are going around to other people and saying, "Hey, I want to inform you about something. Do you know what the apostle Paul said? I want to tell you what this guy said." And they come up here, and they take his words of grace. They take what he said within the context of the Christian's freedom and liberty of grace, and then they stick them down in the restrictions of Law, and they interpret what Paul is saying from the disjointed viewpoint of Law. And what he said "affirm," he meant that they were going around the people, and they were discussing this with one another.

"Let us do." Here's what they said Paul was saying. Can you believe this? "Let us do." The Greek word is "poieo," indicating an action. This is in the subjunctive. Therefore, it is what we call an exhortation – a hortatory subjunctive: "Let us do." They said, "Do you know what Paul is saying? When he talks about grace, do you know what that means? He is saying, 'Let us do evil.'" The word "evil" is "kakos." This is evil in character. It's just plain old sin nature bad. This is in contrast with the thing that just has an evil influence (an evil effect). This is evil in character. This is stained within. This is most revolting. And it is in the neuter, so it is things: "Let us do the evil things. It is another whole category of the most base, degenerate, vile things.

What are they saying? The apostle Paul says, "Do the filthiest thing you can think of doing. Just sit down and think of the dirtiest, lowest, basest things that can come into the mind of a human being, and then perform those things." Why? He uses the word "that." The Greek has "hina." It's a signal that he's going to give us the reason. And what's the reason? "So that 'agathos' can come." And that is the Greek word for "good." That is good, but not in character. There's a different word for that. This is good in its effects. It is beneficial in its influence.

Now, what's the benefit of these pushing them to their logical conclusions? "Do you say God is made to look good when we do evil?" Well, then why don't we just say..." Then he stops and he says, "As a matter of fact, there are some people who have said that I have said this. Why don't we just take that to its logical conclusion? Let's do the dirtiest, filthiest, vilest, evil things we can think of in order that a deficit may come." What benefit? That God would be glorified. That God's righteousness would now stand out in bold relief against our evil.

A piece of dirty black cloth does not look very bad in a pure dark room. But if you fill that room (and illuminate that room) with light, and then that filthy rug looks horrid. And that's what he's saying. He will look at the light and say, "Isn't that great? Isn't that illuminating? Isn't that beautiful? How do I know? Well, look what it shows up here. It stands in such contrast." So, we will do evil. Why? Well, that's what they said Paul meant by being under grace – Christian liberty. That meant freedom to do evil.

Now, Paul never said any such thing. Paul said, "Christians, you're free. You don't have to worry about the Law anymore. You're out from under the Ten Commandments as a code of law." But he never meant that they were out from under the righteous standards of those commandments. And he never indicated that. And made very clear that the righteousness of the Law continues. What he was telling people was that: "You have such freedom in Christ that you're able to do what the Law requires you to do, but which he never could do."

So, Paul says, "I'll tell you where your thinking is going to carry you – to this point: Let us do vile evil in order that beneficial good may come, whose condemnation is just." Upon what people? This is going to come from the people who are justly condemned. And the word "condemned" is the word "krima," which is a legal term. It's the decision as the result of investigation. Today, we use the word "verdict" for this: "Whose verdict against them is just;" that is, it's fair. God is fair in condemning them?

So, here's what Paul is saying: "If you think that the end justifies the means, you're wrong. To do evil in order to gain a good end is condemned by God on every account. And if a thing is evil, and if a thing is wrong, then it is not acceptable with the almighty living God to gain anything that you may consider a good end. The end does not justify the means." And that's what he pushed these Jewish rejecters to, who just would not accept the fact that they were condemned by God, and they were going to be in the lake of fire. And they were thinking up all these excuses: "We make God look good. You can't condemn us." Paul said, "OK, let's take it to the end. The worse you are, the better God would love." So, this is Paul's answer to a very subtle line of attack.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1975

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