

Fidelis

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Unashamed - A Study of Romans / Romans 3:1–8

God's covenant faithfulness does not rise and fall with the faithfulness of His people. Human unbelief cannot overturn His promises, nor can human sin be twisted into an argument against His justice. The God who gave His word remains true, even when every other voice proves false.

Introduction - Charlie Brown compilation video “Football Fails”

- Poor Charlie Brown.
 - Every time, he believes her.
 - Every time, Lucy promises she's going to hold the football.
 - And every time, Charlie Brown ends up flat on his back, staring up at the sky while Lucy walks away with the football.
 - Now, after you've watched that happen enough times, you start wondering why he keeps trying.
- But maybe the better question is this:
- What happens when you've been disappointed so many times that you stop believing promises altogether?
 - Because life has a way of training us to expect disappointment.
 - People fail us.
 - Friends fail us.
 - Churches fail us.
 - Leaders fail us.
 - Sometimes, if we're honest, we fail ourselves.
- And after enough broken promises, it becomes natural to assume that every promise comes with an asterisk attached.

- Every commitment has an expiration date.
- Every assurance eventually gets yanked away like Lucy pulling the football.
- Which raises a much deeper question:
 - "*What about God?*"
 - What happens when God's people prove unfaithful?
 - What happens when we doubt?
 - What happens when we fail?
 - Has God changed His mind?
 - Has God abandoned His promises?
 - Has our failure somehow ruined His faithfulness?
- Those are exactly the questions Paul hears in [Romans 3](#).
 - And his answer can be summarized in one word:
 - Fidelis.
 - Faithful.
- Because unlike Lucy, God never pulls the football away.
 - And unlike Charlie Brown, we are not trusting in wishful thinking.
 - We are trusting in a God whose faithfulness does not depend on ours.

Scripture Reading

Romans 3:1–8 ESV

¹ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?

² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?

⁴ By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”

⁵ But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)

⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world?

⁷ But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?

⁸ And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

- Every May and June, we enter into Supreme Court Ruling season.
 - It’s the time of year when the court releases most of its rulings for all of the major cases it has heard during the court’s last term.
 - When these cases come out, you’re talking about pages and pages of opinions and rulings.
 - Most of us need someone to interpret those opinions for us because there’s so much material.
 - It is very safe to say that the justices issuing those rulings are thorough.
 - They have to be. If people can go back and pick apart their rulings, then it just leaves room for chaos later on down the road.
- The first two chapters of Romans has been the equivalent of a legal case.
 - And Paul’s primary objective is to make sure that everyone understands their guilt.
 - We’re all guilty of universal crimes against God and every last category of person is guilty before him.

- From the godless pagan to the religious zealot.
- And it is safe to say that Paul has made a very thorough case.
- If we've read this and understood this correctly, then we're absolutely left ruined.
- But Paul isn't finished, because he now brings in his own kind of Devil's advocate.
 - He provides an imaginary interlocutor who attempts to pick apart Paul's arguments.
 - And he does so by asking three critical questions.
 - These are all questions that Paul anticipates people might ask in light of the argument he has just made.

Then what was the point? (vv. 1-2)

- This is a fair question.
 - We talked about this last week...if these external signs don't count for anything, then what's the point of these external signs?
 - It's easy to see why this question would be raised.
- After all, we tend to gravitate toward pendulum swings.
 - If these signs don't matter, then just throw them all out.
 - If this were today, the sign in question might not be circumcision.
 - Instead, he might choose baptism or church membership.
 - What advantage does the church member have? What is the value of baptism?
 - They don't save us or even contribute to salvation.
 - In fact, they might even be problematic because they give people something to trust in OTHER than Christ.

- So we either put too much trust in these signs or we get rid of them all together.
- But Paul isn't a radical who wants to throw out everything. Instead he sees tremendous advantage for the Jews.
 - Turns out the signs can be of benefit EVEN IF they don't lead to salvation.
 - What is this great advantage?
 - The ESV says that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.
 - The CSB says it more plainly...they were entrusted with the very words of God.
- Paul isn't saying that the Jews were automatically saved - possession of the Word did not equal a free ticket to heaven.
- Paul isn't saying that the Jews got to be graded on a curve - the reality is that they were held responsible for knowing the Word that they possessed.
- He is making the point that they were entrusted with something - they were stewards of the Word.
- They had an advantage over every other nation.
 - Nobody had God's word spelled out for them.
 - Nobody had the prophets' thunderous voices declaring "Thus says the Lord."
 - This isn't a New Testament insight Paul invented on the spot. Moses said the same thing centuries earlier, looking at the same privilege:

Deuteronomy 4:7-8 *ESV*

⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?

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

- Moses asked it as a rhetorical question with an obvious answer: no nation.
- Paul is simply standing on Moses' shoulders.
- There's no greater gift this side of heaven than to possess the Word of God.
- And just as that was true for the Jews, it remains true for us today.
 - If we see things like baptism or church membership as analogous to Paul's use of circumcision, then it is easy to see how Paul's principle very much carries over to Christians as well.
 - We are given the word of God. And we are given stewardship over that Word.
 - Baptism and church membership have nothing to do with saving us, but they do identify us as part of this community and this community is defined by our fidelity to the Word of God.
 - But having the written word of God has some significant advantages...
- First, we have the written description of God's eternal nature.
 - Paul has already said that this is evident in Creation, but we have it spelled out specifically in the Word.
 - Because of the Word, we can know this God — infinite in every perfection, lacking nothing, in need of nothing.
- Secondly, we have a written understanding of our own purposes.
 - From the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, we know what God's purposes have been.
 - We understand something of what it means to be made in the image of God.
 - We understand God's purposes in marriage, God's purposes in work/vocation, God's purposes in worship.

- Thirdly, we have a written understanding of the Gospel.
 - We understand our corruption and have our depravity spelled out for us in no uncertain terms. If you don't understand it, just go back and listen to the last 4 weeks in this series.
 - But the Written word doesn't leave us broken without a cure.
 - It also tells us the great lengths that God went to to bridge the gap between our absolute depravity and his glorious holiness through the cross of Jesus Christ.
 - We can know much about God apart from the Word - but we cannot know the Gospel.
- So, yes - there are some really clear advantages to having the Word of God.
 - And being a part of the community of God's people, defined by his word, is a tremendous blessing - as long as we don't mistake our community for salvation.
- With his first objection taken care of, Paul moves into what he believes the second question will be.

Do my failures invalidate God's promises? (vv. 3-4)

- Paul's objector is basically asking, "Wait a minute. God chose Israel. God made promises to Israel. God gave Israel His Word. If large numbers of Jews are now under judgment, doesn't that mean God's covenant failed?"
 - I mean, if the very people that God entered into a covenant with failed, then that must mean that God isn't very trustworthy.
 - Even worse, does it mean that God broke his promises? Failed to keep up his end of the bargain?
 - But Paul won't hear of that objection.
 - He's very quick - By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar..."

- I think it's pretty easy to understand this argument once we put it into a more familiar scenario.
 - Mom is preparing dinner with a child watching nearby.
 - Mom tells the child that she will get burned if she touches the stove, but she will be safe if she keeps her hands away.
 - When mom turns her back, the child touches the stove and cries out in pain.
 - Did the mother's word fail?
 - Of course not - in fact - the child's disregard of the mother's instructions actually confirms the truth of the mother's instructions.
- Israel's failures were in no way a bad look on God's faithfulness.
 - Rather the consequences Israel suffered demonstrated the fact that God was telling the truth all along!
 - Paul doesn't just make this argument in Romans.
 - Writing to Timothy years later, Paul says it again, even more starkly:

2 Timothy 2:13 *ESV*
¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

 - Notice what that verse does NOT say.
 - It doesn't say "if we are faithless, he remains faithful, *as long as* we eventually come around."
 - It says he *cannot* deny himself.
 - God's faithfulness isn't a policy He chooses to keep. It is part of his very nature.
 - That doesn't mean there aren't consequences when we fail.
- Remember, back in chapter [Rom. 2:24](#) we encounter:

Romans 2:24 *ESV*

²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

- The Gentiles who lack understanding see the rebellion of Israel and argue that it must be a God-problem.
- God’s reputation is tarnished - but that’s not because God is worthy of a tarnished reputation.
- That’s because the Gentiles suppress the truth and the unfaithfulness of God’s people simply adds fuel to that sinful urge.
- Obviously, Paul is talking to the Jews immediately here in chapter 3, so it’s very easy for us to write this off and say, “This doesn’t apply to me.”
 - But the reality is that we’ve got just as much responsibility here as the Jews do.
 - And we’ve seen just as many examples of God’s people failing.
 - How many times have we watched Christian leaders and pastors fail in their ministry?
 - How many people have been let down by a Christian friend?
 - How many times has the church been guilty of intentionally or unintentionally bringing harm to someone?
 - All those times of failure? That must be a God problem.
 - Culture cries out - Christianity must be a farce, just look at these so-called Christians who can’t get their act together.
- But Paul’s addresses it with great clarity - every single human being on the planet can be a liar, but God is not.
 - The only thing the failure of Christians prove is this - sinners are sinners.
 - Our failure says nothing about God’s character, but it sure says a lot about ours.
- There may even be someone here today who is inclined to think that way.

- I would invite you to consider the argument that Paul is actually making.
- You're judging Jesus based on his followers.
- And let me tell you that you're going at it from the wrong direction.
- You'd better start judging Jesus' followers by the perfect standard that he has set.
- And you'll recognize how perfect He is and how imperfect we are.
- And you may be inclined, not to think about others, but to think about yourself in this moment.
 - How many times have you broken promises?
 - How many times have you failed to keep your commitments?
 - How many years have you wasted?
 - How many times have doubts assailed you?
 - You might be inclined to think, "Maybe God is done with me" or "Maybe God can't really be trusted."
- And Paul's point here is clear - YOUR inconsistency doesn't change one thing about God's character.
 - You may have times where it feels like you are faithless.
 - But God remains faithful.
 - There's no failure in the universe that is big enough to damage anything about God's character.
- Let's be perfectly honest about this...
 - Some of you have been disappointed by Christians.
 - Some of you have been disappointed by churches.
 - Some of you have been disappointed by pastors.
 - Some of you have been disappointed by yourselves.

- And after enough disappointment, it becomes tempting to wonder whether God can really be trusted.
- [Romans 3](#) reminds us that God's faithfulness has never depended on ours.
- But there is one more objection on the table...
 - Paul's imaginary opponent has just heard Paul make the case that human sin actually reveals God's faithfulness.
 - So, I must be doing God a favor by disobeying him.

Doesn't my sin make grace look better? (vv. 5-8)

- It is easy to get tongue-tied on these last four verses because Paul is stacking questions on top of questions.
- Put bluntly, the objection is this, "If God benefits from my sin, why am I the bad guy?"
 - Remember, human failures do not diminish God's faithfulness.
 - In fact, God's faithfulness becomes even more apparent against the backdrop of human failure.
 - So in an attempt to capture Paul's logic, the opponent jumps to the conclusion, "I'm actually helping out in my unrighteousness."
- Just look at the progression.
 - In v. 5, "If my sin makes God look good, then why punish me for it?"
 - In v. 6, Paul answers quickly, "By no means!"
 - This logic destroys the whole concept of justice.
 - Murders, thieves, liars, idolaters - they should all walk free because they're doing God a favor.
 - In v. 7, he makes the same argument with different wording.
 - But in v. 8, Paul finally exposes where this logic leads.

- Why not do evil that good may come?
- That's the inevitable conclusion.
- If God's glory increases whenever sin provides a darker backdrop, then sin becomes a ministry strategy.
- More darkness.
- More contrast.
- More glory.
- Let's get to work.
- And Paul recoils from the suggestion.
 - What's fascinating is that Paul doesn't spend much time dismantling the logic.
 - He almost treats it as self-evidently absurd.
 - He concludes with “their condemnation is just.”
 - Full stop. Case closed.
- Ultimately, Paul is telling us that this is a gross abuse of grace.
- Don't get me wrong - God is completely capable of redeeming evil.
 - When we look to the cross, we see the greatest act of injustice in history.
 - But the reality is that God took that grave injustice and brought about great good.
 - [Colossians 1:19–20](#) says it clearly

Colossians 1:19–20 ESV

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

- The crucifixion is the means by which God brought about the reconciliation of sinners to himself.
- That's the good that was wrestled out of evil.
- That's not Paul's point here.
 - God's ability to redeem evil never turns it into good.
 - The crucifixion is still evil, wicked, unjust, even though it brought about good.
 - The old hymn says it so well, "On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame."
 - The crucifixion is still evil and always will be.
- There are plenty of other examples
 - Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery.
 - His life was miserable for a season, before he was exalted in Pharaoh's house and was able to implement a plan to save the world from a famine.
 - When Joseph was reunited with his brothers, he said, [Gen. 50:20](#)

Genesis 50:20 ESV

²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

- They still sold him into slavery.
- Their crime didn't suddenly become less criminal.
- But even as we recognize God's ability in this, that doesn't excuse us to presume upon his grace.
 - We are always responsible for our own obedience.
 - God is the one who is responsible for outcomes.
- So what does this mean?

- Some people hear that God is faithful and conclude that their choices don't matter.
- Some people hear that God is gracious and conclude that obedience is optional.
- Some people hear that God can redeem evil and conclude that evil isn't all that serious.
- Paul will have none of it.
 - God's faithfulness is not an excuse to sin.
 - God's grace is not a permission slip.
 - God's sovereignty is not a loophole.
 - The God who brings good out of evil still calls evil what it is.

Invitation

- You may have already made the connection.
 - *Fidelis*. Faithful.
 - It's the back half of a phrase you've heard before — maybe shouted across a parade ground, maybe stitched on the back of a hat, maybe spoken by someone you love who wore the uniform.
- *Semper Fidelis*. Always faithful.
 - It's the motto of the United States Marine Corps, and it's not just a slogan.
 - It's a vow that runs in both directions.
 - A Marine pledges lifelong faithfulness to Corps and Country.
 - And the Corps, in turn, pledges itself back to every Marine — past, present, future.
 - Once a Marine, always a Marine.
 - The bond doesn't expire when the uniform comes off.

- It's a remarkable picture of loyalty. Mutual. Earned. Carried for life.
- But it's not [Romans 3](#).
- [Romans 3](#) isn't a two-way pledge.
 - It's not "I'll be faithful to God if He's faithful to me."
 - It's not a covenant where both sides hold up their end or the deal's off.
 - Paul has just spent eight verses demolishing that very idea — that God's faithfulness could ever be contingent on ours, conditioned on ours, voted on by ours.
- God's fidelity isn't *semper fidelis* in the Marine Corps sense — a bond strong because both sides keep their word.
 - God's fidelity is something sturdier than that.
 - It's *fidelis*, full stop. Unconditional. Unilateral.
 - It doesn't run in two directions because it never needed your half to hold it up.
 - That's good news for some of you, and it's a warning for others.
 - So let's be honest about which one you need to hear this morning.
- Maybe you're someone who has been disappointed — by a church, by a pastor, by a friend, maybe even by your own repeated failures — and somewhere along the way, you started to wonder if God Himself comes with an asterisk.
 - If His promises have an expiration date like everyone else's.
 - If you've pulled the football away from yourself one too many times to believe anyone, even Him, would still hold it steady.
 - Hear this clearly: your inconsistency was never powerful enough to undo His constancy.
 - Not your doubt.
 - Not your failure.

- Not the years you wasted or the promises you broke or the times you walked away convinced He must have walked away first.
 - God was not waiting on you to be faithful before He decided to be faithful Himself.
 - He already was. He still is.
 - He never had a Lucy moment. He never will.
- But some of you need the other half of this message.
 - Maybe you've heard "God is faithful even when I'm not" and quietly turned it into permission.
 - If His grace gets the glory either way, why fight so hard against sin?
 - If He can redeem anything, why does it matter what I do with anything?
 - That's the exact logic Paul spent verses five through eight tearing apart, and he didn't argue with it gently — he called it what it is.
 - Their condemnation is just.
 - God's faithfulness was never a loophole.
 - His grace was never a permission slip.
 - The God who brings good out of evil still calls evil exactly what it is, and so should you.
 - So here's where this leaves us, whichever side of that line you're standing on.
 - Don't measure your faithfulness — or your failure — by the results it produces.
 - Some of you are tempted to think your obedience doesn't matter because God will be glorified regardless.
 - Some of you are tempted to think your faith doesn't matter because you've failed too many times for it to count anymore.

- Both of you are measuring the wrong thing.
- Measure your actions by whether they honor Christ — not by whether they seem to move the needle on God's glory, His plans, or His character.
- None of that was ever riding on you. It never will.
- What is riding on you is this: will you trust a God whose faithfulness was settled before you ever doubted it, and live in light of that settled faithfulness — not as a license, but as a foundation?
- He has never pulled the football away. He never will.
- Will you finally stop expecting Him to?