

Romans
Message 32
The Morality Cults 09, Jews and Gentiles03
Rom 3:1-9

- 1 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?
- 2 Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.
- 3 For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?
- 4 God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.
- 5 But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)
- 6 God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?
- 7 For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?
- 8 And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.
- 9 What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; KJV

Introduction:

As I looked at the questions Paul was asking I realized that he was challenging certain ideas with those questions which the Roman Christians were receiving and considering. A couple of the really good commentaries suggested that he was ‘anticipating’ positions that some people might take and answering those. I must object to that line of thought for a couple of reasons. First of all, if we consider scripture inspired, no writer is ever ‘guessing.’ They always deal in concrete realities. Also, if the Holy Spirit is inspiring the writer, his approach is always ‘dead on’ target.

So, if this is the Word of God as we claim to believe, these comments address directly some group of people either inside the church or close enough to it for their opinions and teachings to be seriously affecting the church. So, we can take the questions and work them backward, a sort of ‘reverse engineering,’ and try to specify the opinion that was being addressed.

Where did these ideas come from? Were they from outside the church or from some of those wandering heretics who were pretending to be Christian and seemed to be targeting every new Christian church? Or were they from within the church itself? It does seem, as we look at the topics, that at least some of those ideas were originating in the church... but maybe through some in the church being exposed to heretical ideology.

Look back to chapter 2.

- 3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? KJV

This was expressed as a challenge to hypocrisy and a rebuke of hypocrites (there must have been some in Paul's audience... maybe influential ones). This is of the same sort and style as Jesus' challenge to the Pharisees.

Matt 23:4

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. KJV

Matt 23:23

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. KJV

They literally did criticize others while violating the very Law of God which they pretended to uphold.

This seems to have been a common quirk of Jewish thought and was a troubling element affecting the theology of Jewish Christianity. Paul was challenging them to have and maintain integrity as they made moral judgments and spoke to others about sin and repentance.

What do I mean 'integrity' in this sense? It means that we cannot consider ourselves as obedient to any law unless we obey both the letter and the spirit of it, that we grasp the spiritual principle of any of God's commands and fully embrace it. And, for sure, this must be done before ever we lecture someone else about violations of that law.

We can't cheat on our taxes and criticize others about stealing.

We can't entertain immorality in our minds and judge others for being immoral.

We can't fail to obey God and look down on others for failing to love Him.

All of this principle is contained in that little question. "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"

What we find as we follow these questions through is that there was a profound lack of understanding concerning Redemption, Grace and the Work of Christ in the early church to the degree that it should not surprise us when we go back and review something that Paul said in the introduction of the letter to the Romans, a statement that is somewhat confusing unless we realize what he was dealing with.

Rom 1:15

15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. KJV

It may be that the questions were used so as to soften the blow a little that he was literally

questioning whether they even understood the gospel and some of them obviously did not.

It should be crystal clear that anyone who judges the wicked (1:23-32) but continues in some way to practice those sins *does not* understand the gospel.

Look at another question.

Rom 2:4

4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? KJV

What Paul said in another place shows that some of these also did not understand the Law of God.

Gal 3:24

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. KJV

We must jump ahead in our study for a moment to see the conclusion to which some had come.

Rom 6:1

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? KJV

One great function of God's Goodness was to bring men to Repentance. But they, or at least some influential ones of them, had assumed that Forbearance and Longsuffering meant approval and so they concluded that it is perfectly acceptable to continue in at least *some* sin because the more we sin the more of His Grace is required to pardon them and so, then, the More of His Glory abounds. Sick thinking for sure but it certainly seems to be clear that this was the mind-set Paul was addressing.

They were assuming that Repentance and Holy Living were unnecessary since God is Good and Gracious. The same thing, by the way, is being assumed by many today. I truly hope you are not one of them.

Rom 12:1-2

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

And this attitude was a result of thinking too highly of themselves and failing to be humble, almost always a sign that one but poorly understands God's Salvation.

Rom 12:3

3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to

think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. KJV

And then this was a result of some having disdain for others within the body.

Rom 12:4-5

- 4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:
5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. KJV

We do not have the time to read the whole passage as well as the others of this same sort but if you will follow out the references in your Bible you will see that this was a commonly occurring attitude in the churches.... as it still is.

What I want you to see is that Paul was making doctrinal points with his questions. He was addressing doctrinal errors held by some in Rome, which then explains some of the things he said about some of the Roman Christians to the Philippians.

Phil 1:14-17

- 14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.
15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:
16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:
17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. KJV

There was a real mixed bag at Rome and some of them, maybe even some who were preaching, were barely Christian if at all. Should it surprise us, then, that this church would ultimately become the spoke in an enormous network of heresy and corruption?

End of Introduction

So, now let us look at the questions which open Chapter 3.

1 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?

Or, we might re-word the question a little. If a person is a formal Jew or has become a convert to Judaism, what benefit is that to him? Most of the reliable translations say practically an identical thing.

Let's reverse engineer the question. What error would he have been addressing? It seems obvious to me that someone was affirming "*There is no value at all in being a Jew (circumcised) or in being a proselyte (through circumcision).*"

Paul's answer was a disagreement with that position.

2 ***Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.***

Many advantages had come to this race of people because of their association with God, His covenants, His promises, His teachers, preachers, judges, prophets and Godly kings. But the uppermost, the chief and the grandest advantage, was that they were first given and made caretakers of the Oracles, the Word, of God.

No other race had ever been blessed in this way. Some of the nearby people groups, during the great days of David and Solomon, had become tag-alongs as Israel ruled over them and they lived in her shadow, but the richness of being blessed by the Grace of God was almost all the fortune of Israel, the Jews.

Even at that, however.

Rom 2:28-29

28** **For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29** **But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. KJV

As rich and grand as the blessing was, there was never, ever, any spiritual acceptance of anyone by God unless his spirit had been circumcised, his deepest self had known Repentance and the picture of it, circumcision, had become a reality.

Now, look at the question in 3:3.

3 ***For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?***

What do we get when we deconstruct these questions? “The unbelief of the great number of Jews, as the Gentile believers saw all around them, meant something negative about whatever they mean’ when they said, “the faith of God.” It indicates that there was some very serious and profound questions in the mind of some concerning this whole theology.. Maybe He did not keep His promises to them.

There will be a very large discussion in chapters 10,11 about the fact that some of the Jews did not believe. It is obvious through the whole book that this thing of the ‘Unbelieving Jew’/ ‘Believing Jew’/ ‘Believing Gentile’ and the interworkings of those relationships and the gospel.

In order to understand this verse we must settle the issue of “the faith of God” and what it actually means. Well, first of all, it does not mean Faith that God has in anyone or anything. There is nothing to trust outside of Himself for nothing else is self-existent. Nothing can keep itself in existence except Himself so there is no one for Him to trust.

I hear people and see people saying things about God believing in something or someone but that

is simply ridiculous.

And, we do not think the question concerns personal faith because these people have already been described as unbelievers. Their unbelief making believing in God useless? Don't think that works.

So, it seems to me that the only issue that might be under consideration is the System of Faith, the religion of the Jews. If many Jews did not follow their own religion does that make the religion itself (we are talking about the True Faith of the Jews, that which descended to them from Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, Abraham, etc.) worthless, fruitless and of no effect? I think this is actually what is being described. "If it is a valid religion why are they turning from it, why has it not saved them?"

Look again at Paul's question and how he answered it and see for yourself if this is what is being addressed.

3 *For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?*

Many translators want to make this "the faithfulness of God," but one of the most respected concordances (Strongs) renders it, "NT:4102 the system of religious (Gospel) truth itself." (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

To remember the whole setting here, it is the gospel itself, which Paul is coming to proclaim that is in question, not the faithfulness of God to His Word.

Men were trying, even as Paul labored, to separate the gospel and the New Testament message from the Jewish faith of the OT. What if I told you that there was a man who would be born about 20 years after this book was written who would come to Rome and be a leaders in just such a project?

His name was Marcion and he lived from 85 to 160 leading one of the most powerful movements that affected Early Christianity. One might, after carefully considering what Paul is writing, think that Marcion was convinced by some who were already at Rome perverting the gospel.

He created his own canon of scripture, accepting Luke's gospel and rejecting the others while accepting Paul's letters and not the others. He also seems to have edited the writings he taught to be faithful. But he was very much into separating New Testament Christianity from the Orthodox Jewish faith.

Rom 3:4

4 **God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. KJV**

There is nothing wrong with the revelation of God, Paul affirmed. The unbelief and

contradictions of the unbelievers does not challenge God in any real way. He is True if no one believes Him and shall be shown to be truthful in the final judgment. His Word shall prevail and there is nothing man can do to prevent it being so.

Now, listen to the perverse thinking the next question reveals.

5 But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)

Our unrighteousness stands in contrast to His righteousness and amplifies (commends) it. The contrast is deepened by the blackness of our wickedness.

So... reasons some fool... because it serves to make Him look better and shows even more clearly how excellently Holy He is.... we should not be judged for our wickedness and it is unfair for Him to do so.

Now this seems idiotic to us because it is strange to our ears but some of the religious garbage being taught all around us is just as insane.

The idea that a tiny sip of wine and crumble of bread can convey spiritual unction to a man.

Or a dip in a tub of water?

Or a prayer repeated after another?

Or a prayer said by someone else over a dead body?

Or memorized answers to rote questions?

Or receiving magical money because we send some to a man on TV?

Those are all just as insane, merely more familiar to us because we have heard and seen them accepted as normal.

No wonder Paul was anxious and come to preach the gospel to the church at Rome! It was in trouble!

6 *God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?*

If God were to behave in this way, letting men off for their sins because their wickedness punctuated the brilliance of His Righteousness, how could we even begin to comprehend a Righteous Judgment such as His Word has declared?

Any line of thought which would leave one to the kind of conclusion we find questioned in v.5 would obviously be so badly flawed that no one could believe nor accept it.

The position being taken by some is expressed in the question of v.7. Paul stepped back and asked their question.

7 *For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?*

I don't know how many times in my life I have heard someone express something like this, "Yes, I know I did wrong but it all turned out OK so why am I being charged with doing wrong?" This is the reasoning of a very perverse, troubled or deceived mind.

My wrong is my wrong, period. My lie is my lie, period. The same with my covetousness, my lust, my pride and my selfishness. They make me a sinner and whatever Positive thing God does with my sin, including demonstrating His Own Glory, does not mitigate in any way my guilt.

Why are you judged a sinner? **BECAUSE YOU ARE ONE!!**

And, surprise, surprise, these same people were lying about Paul's message. Now, pay attention, this was clearly happening at Rome.

8 *And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.*

This same idea will be repeated in 6:1.

Rom 6:1

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? KJV

There was an influence at Rome that wanted the gospel to say just that. And... they could not do that as long as the firm linkage between the NT Gospel and the OT scriptures and worship was maintained. So... get rid of the Jewish influence completely.

You may not know that there was a large Anti-Semitic sentiment in Rome among the non-Jews. The emperor, Nero, hated them with a passion though I do not know why. Maybe because they were such a difficult people to rule, never satisfied with anything but complete independence which was never going to happen.

Whatever the reason, there seems to have been some if not many among the Gentile converts to Christianity who struggled with this racial hatred and it is well known that many Jews did the same toward the Gentiles. One need only look at the detail of Paul's admonitions concerning civility and brotherhood in chapters 12-16 and the issues related to racial differences as well as the persistent push of the Jews to modify Christianity into a subset of Judaism.

And then as interesting question and answer.

9 *What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both*

Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;

Who is the 'we' and who is the 'they'? The 'they' of the second phrase are the unbelievers, both Jew and Gentile. He is about to launch a long series of quotations from the Jewish scriptures (much to the consternation, no doubt, of many of his readers) that proves all are under sin, meaning under the condemnation of God because of sin.

None of 'us' are any better than any of 'them' regardless of which side of the fence one is looking from. The Gentile cannot look arrogantly at the Jew and neither can the Jew consider himself better than the Gentile. Within the church this principle becomes even more important because none of us are converted except by the Mercy and Grace of God. Every other person in the church is our brother or sister, part of our family and worthy of our love.

All are under sin. What a hopeless and helpless situation. The only remedy is the Great Work of Jesus Christ to redeem us and our duty is to repent of our sins and believe on Him. When we get to that place we lose all of our arrogance and pride, joining Paul to consider ourselves the chiefest of sinners in the whole world.

What a magnificent job Paul did in addressing the needs.