

Romans

September 20, 2009

Romans Chapter Three

This is the eighth lesson in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God is revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ”

Title: “The Unbelief of the Jews” Romans 3:1-8

After the wonderful declaration that the **gospel of Christ** - which is the **righteousness of God** - is revealed, the apostle next writes that the **wrath of God is also revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.**

The wrath of God is revealed in man’s wicked suppression of the truth of God that may be known.

And all men, Gentile and Jew are judged by the law that they have; either the law of conscience or nature, or the law given by God to Israel through Moses. **There is no partiality with God.**

The Jews, at least most of them, thought that because God had blessed them with the possession of the written law and the rite of circumcision that they were protected from God’s wrath.

In our last lesson we examined the argument that Paul makes in order to strip away the last refuge of the Jew’s self-righteousness; viz. the written law and circumcision. Paul makes it clear that the mere possession of the outward signs, even of true religion, has no value unless those symbols are accompanied by obedience from a heart that has been circumcised by the Spirit. The application to us is that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are worthless, even condemning, if they are not correctly observed.

By correctly observed, I do not mean the external ritual but the internal blessing to a circumcised heart.

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Circumcision of the heart is the removal from the heart {in principle} of that which is evil.

This concept of the circumcised heart is not a New Testament concept, look at Deuteronomy 10:12-22.

Of what does Moses remind the Israelites? Obedience!

Cf. Jeremiah 9:23-26

And then Paul astonishes his readers with God's definition of a Jew {2:28-29}

Today we will conclude the section: **The Wrath of God Upon the Jew**, which includes 2:1 through 3:8.

Part 4: The unbelief of the Jew 3:1-8

As I have been teaching the Bible for over forty years when teaching a difficult passage or what may be termed a "hard" doctrine, I can usually predict what questions will be asked. E.g., when discussing the absolute necessity of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, the question almost always comes up: "What about those poor people in the most remote parts of the world that never hear of Jesus? How can they believe in what they have never heard? Will God send them to hell if they don't have a "chance" to hear the gospel?" Yes, He will! Cf. 1:20

That's why this church supports missionaries, e.g. Trevor and Teresa Johnson of World Team who are stationed in Papua Indonesia.

At the time Paul wrote this great letter he had been preaching the gospel for over twenty years and he anticipates the questions that he knows will come up. "You will say to me...."

In Chapter Three, Paul asks six questions and answers them for his readers. We will look at three of the questions in this lesson and the other three questions in the next study.

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FIRST QUESTION AND ANSWER (3:1-2)

What are the advantages of being a Jew or of being circumcised?

The probable answer after what he has taken away the law and circumcision might be: “NONE!” But Paul says, “**Much in every way!**”

It is true that God will judge both Gentile and Jew on the basis of what they have done and what they know to be true about God.

But yet, the Jew had many privileges.

Chiefly, mainly, [first of all? there is no second, until you go to 9:4-5].

The most important advantage is that Israel had been entrusted with the Word of God. Cf. Psalm 147:19-20; Acts 7:38; esp. Romans 9:4-5

There is a great difference in the privilege of having God’s Word as opposed to not having it. While its mere possession does not work as some “good luck” charm, it has the value of teaching you truth that you otherwise would not have. Take the Proverbs as an example. Are you not better able to live a peaceful and contented life knowing God’s wisdom?

Does knowing that, “A soft answer turns away wrath,” help you deal with someone’s attack?

What a blessing to know God’s Word.

Is it God’s fault when someone ignores what they know?

John Calvin: “If the Lord’s favouring of a nation with the giving of His Word is to be regarded as such a great benefit, we can never sufficiently despise our ingratitude for receiving it with so much neglect or carelessness, not to say disdain.”

John Trapp: “Prize we this privilege, and improve it. You must never expect another edition of the faith once received, once for all.” {Jude 3}

What about the so-called Word of Faith and Roman Catholicism who claim continuing revelation?

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SECOND QUESTION AND ANSWER (3:3-4)

Will Israel's unfaithfulness nullify God's promises? Did God fail?

Paul's testimony (3:4 a): **"Of course not!"**

{ "Certainly not!" "God forbid!" Do not even think that way!" }

Though everyone else in the world is a liar, God is true.

The answer to this objection is fully treated in Chapters 9-11.

The failure of national Israel in no way diminishes God's faithfulness to uphold His part of the covenant. The fact that the Jews failed to be a blessing to the nations, a light to the Gentiles, and, in fact, turned to idolatry, does not keep God from being faithful.

With respect to Israel, God will keep His promises to them.

Ah, but who is Israel?

Jewish rabbis, who are followed by the proponents of Dispensationalism have missed the definition of "Israel." The most popular view of eschatology today, as evidenced by the success of the "Left Behind" series of fictional books, teaches that national Israel is yet to be restored. They teach that God will restore Israel as a nation. That God has a separate plan for the Jews and for the Church.

They make a complete and eternal distinction between the Jew as a race of people and the Church despite what we read in Ephesians 2:11-3:13.

Yes, there is a national Israel to whom God made promises. But God put conditions on those promises to national Israel. And now Paul is telling us who is the "Israel of God."

Dispensationalism conveniently ignores the fact that God, in the covenant, promised both to bless Israel if they obeyed but to **punish** them if they disobeyed. An honest study of "the curses and blessings," Deuteronomy 28; and the offer of life and death in Deuteronomy 30:11-20 should convince anyone that the promises to national Israel were **conditional** on obedience. Did they obey? Why then did they wind up in Babylon?

God's righteousness can have a negative as well as a positive effect on Israel, Cf. Nehemiah 9:32-33.

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Try to keep in mind that the apostle is revealing here in Romans, in Galatians, and elsewhere who are the “Jews” and who are the “Israel of God.” Paul has just given a new definition of the true Jew in 2:29.

Dispensationalism makes the error of interpreting the N.T. by the O.T. instead of using the N.T. to interpret the O.T.

“In the Old Testament God meant what He said; in the New Testament God says what He meant.” John Wilmot

Dispensationalism teaches that Jesus came and offered a kingdom to the Jews which they rejected. So God had to come up with the church, which they view as a “parenthesis.” When Jesus returns in a “secret” second coming the church will be “raptured” out and the Jews will be restored as a nation.

As Brother Gables pointed out some time ago, it is national Israel that is a “parenthesis.”

“There is nothing in the Bible which suggests the Word of God is to the Jew first then to the Gentile – AND THEN TO THE JEW AGAIN.”

Prophecy Spiritually Understood, Part 4, page 15, Charles D. Alexander

Galatians 3:7-9 “Therefore know that **only** those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham....”

It is to “those who are of faith” who will be the ultimate beneficiary of the promises.

So, did all Israel fail? No, Paul writes, “...what if some did not believe?” Cf. 9:6-8

Take a modern illustration: A youth enrolls in college. He comes from a wealthy family, so paying the necessary expenses is not an issue. He is in excellent health, and is even above average in intelligence. The college he attends is one of the best; the teachers are superb. In spite of all those advantages, he never graduates. Why not? He is lazy and does not make the most of his opportunity. He is unfaithful to his trust. Have the parents failed? No, and neither did God fail. [Don't remember who I got this from.]

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And know also, that God who is faithful to His promises is likewise faithful to His **threats**.

Parents, you should take a lesson here. When you threaten to punish your child if he/she disobeys, you must be faithful to your promise, otherwise you are teaching your child that you can't be trusted. Being an expert, having helped to raise one son, it was only necessary for me to use the rod on my son three of four times in his young life. But he knew without a doubt that I would do what I promised! Did he grow up to hate me? Ask him sometime. He will be 53 years old on September 22nd.

Will Israel's unfaithfulness nullify God's promises?

Did God fail?

Of course not!

The second part of Paul's answer to the question in verse 3 is David's testimony. Paul quotes from Psalm 51:4 to prove his point.

David had sinned grievously. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. When Bathsheba became pregnant, David arranged for the murder of Uriah and married Bathsheba. The Lord sent Nathan the prophet to David and by means of a parable about a rich man who stole the poor man's one and only ewe lamb, he elicited from the lips of David judgment of death for the one who had done such an awful deed. Then Nathan answers: "You are the man!"

Cf. Psalm 51 When we come to that great event of 2:16; when we stand with David and all the human race we want to be able to say:

"I need no other argument, I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me."

Has the Holy Spirit convicted you of sin against God?
Can you acknowledge your just condemnation?

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Can you honestly say that God would be just and right if He sent you to hell? I make no apology for repeating this question because the Holy Spirit may make someone think for the first time that they have been trusting in something other than the righteousness of Jesus Christ; even it is Christ plus something and not Christ alone.

THIRD QUESTION AND ANSWER (3:5-8)

If our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness, isn't God unfair to punish us?

Paul seems embarrassed to even have to deal with this objection, "I speak as a man." Then he refutes the objection with all the force he can find, "Their condemnation is just!"

The argument of the objector to God's rejection of Israel as a nation is as follows: "On the basis of your doctrine, Paul, since man's unrighteousness brings out more sharply God's righteousness, should not the Almighty be happy about that turn of events? Is God not unfair when, instead, He inflicts wrath on man?"

"What, God unfair?" What a wicked thought!" "God forbid!"

Paul will address this wrong view of the doctrine of grace more fully in Chapter 6, which begins with, "Let us continue in sin that grace may increase."

Jude warned the church about such men: See Jude 4

This passage has dealt with the false security of the Jew who trusted in the mere possession of the written law and the outward sign of circumcision.

Some people who profess to be Christians are in danger of the same error. They appropriate the promise of blessing and ignore the responsibility of personal faithfulness. In effect, they say, "If attending church does not save you, why bother to go at all?"

Some people think they are "secure" because they have walked an aisle, raised their hand at an invitation, or even been baptized - but they have never truly submitted to the Lordship of Christ. The Holy Spirit has never convinced them that they are justly under the wrath of God.

They have an uncircumcised heart.

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We need to help such people understand what real conversion is and encourage those who profess faith in Jesus Christ to make sure their life is consistent with their profession

We have seen, I hope, how the Jews and many people today misapply the promises of God. I will conclude this lesson with an example of how some people misuse the promises of God.

Many times have I heard someone, perhaps in prayer, call on 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

That promise was to Israel, not to the United States or to the church. There may be an analogy in principle to other situations, but the context is Solomon’s dedication of the temple to the Lord.

So let’s be very careful how we handle the Word of God.

Next time, God willing:

The Wrath of God Upon the Whole World
Romans 3:9-20