

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Lesson 9, Chapter 3

We barely got started on Romans chapter 3 last time, and this week we'll continue it. Before we re-read Romans 3 I want you to keep in mind that what Paul is doing (at least for the first few verses of Romans 3) is defending Israel's election as God's set apart people. Romans chapter 3 is but a continuation of chapter 2 (there never should have been a chapter break here as it completely disrupts the flow of Paul's thought pattern). Paul's opening words are "Then what advantage has the Jew"? This question is what sets the stage for Paul to make the argument that Israel was, is, and shall remain God's set-apart people despite what he may have said in chapter 2. So whatever commonality Jews and gentiles share does not diminish Israel's special standing before the Lord. On the other hand being Yehoveh's set-apart people, having received and ratified covenants from God that makes them set-apart, does not so totally separate them from the rest of humanity that they are considered exempt from the shared fate of the human race. They are still liable to sin and to experience God's wrath.

Throughout this chapter we see Paul struggling, as do we, to define the place of the Law (meaning the Law of Moses) within the lives of Believers: Jew and gentile. But the real reason for this struggle is not so much that the Law's place in the lives of worshippers of the God of Israel has changed due to Christ's advent, because it hasn't. The reason for the struggle is because the place and purpose of the Law within 2nd Temple Judaism had become corrupted and was now not being utilized as God intended. Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount was largely about recovering the true purpose and meaning of the Law of Moses. Yeshua was not trying to reform or recast the Law itself; in fact he stated straightaway that not the tiniest speck of the Law would change until Heaven and Earth passed away. Rather He was trying to reform the religion of the Jews (Judaism) that was misusing and misunderstanding the Law. In many ways that is what Paul is trying to do. He is trying to put the Law into the proper perspective as it was always intended because it had become diluted, subverted, and twisted over the centuries since the Babylonian Exile as manmade rules and regulations (Tradition, **Halakhah**) crept in at an ever-increasing rate, until finally Yeshua could say:

Matthew 15:7-9 CJB

⁷ You hypocrites! Yesha'yahu was right when he prophesied about you,

⁸ 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me.

⁹ Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.'"

So up to now in the Book of Romans we find Paul teaching some basic God-principles that the

Believing Jews of Rome, especially, should have already known. But their Judaism had distorted these God-principles by intertwining them with manmade doctrines such that they had to un-learn much of what they believed before Paul could teach them the divine truth. Ironically, this is precisely the place that we find Christianity in the 21st century. The Church has so mixed God's Word with the hundreds of doctrines of men (supplemented by the new political correctness of the West) to the point that for the average laymen it is nearly impossible to distinguish truth from error. So it falls to a few individuals to step forward and try to re-establish God's most basic principles by re-establishing God's Word, just as it is, as the only reliable source of truth. And just like what Paul discovered, there is much un-learning that must come about among Believers before Godly illumination can take place and rid us of our false beliefs.

Let's re-read Romans chapter 3.

RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 3 all

Let me begin by reminding you that what we see here, especially at the opening of the chapter, is Paul speaking in a way that is quite familiar in the Jewish Talmud. Paul debates as a Rabbi because he is a Rabbi. His method is to present a problem and then argue against a previous ruling in order to arrive at the correct solution. The solution then becomes a doctrine or a regulation. So he begins the argument by asking the question: "Then when advantage has the Jews?" This refers back to chapter 2 where Paul explains that Jews and gentiles are equal before God. And rather surprisingly, when it seems as though from everything he has said up to now the answer would be "no advantage", he answers the question: "Much in every way". The Jews' advantage, says Paul, stems from the reality that they have a God established priority, a pre-eminence, which in every respect is valuable and important. And then Paul begins to explain the most important aspect of this pre-eminence: they have received, and were entrusted to keep and maintain, the Word of God. No other nation, no other people, had this received such an honor. When we hear Paul say that the Jews' advantage is "Much in every way", we need to take that in a conversational sense and not as a theological absolute. Often I hear Pastors and Bible teachers say that in the Bible 'all means all: 100%'. No it doesn't. In the Bible the terms "all" or "every" mean mostly, almost entirely, or the vast majority. "All" and "every" are not meant to be precise terms; there will be exceptions to the rule.

And yet, even with their great distinction as the keepers of God's oracles to mankind, the Jews failed in their obligations. And so Paul acknowledges this failure by asking yet another question in verse 3. He asks: 'but if Israel was unfaithful, does that lack of faithfulness cancel God's faithfulness towards them?' That, my friends, is a very volatile question because it involves the issue of whether Israel is still God's special people, or has God abandoned them because they broke the covenant? Or in what in Theology circles is called supersessionism (Replacement Theology), due to their rebellion has Israel been replaced by the gentile Church? For centuries, including in our day, much of the institutional Church answers this question with a resounding, "Yes it does!" It would have been nice if Church authorities would just read, and take seriously, a couple more verses because in verse 4 Paul answers the question that he asked to his straw man. He says that if some Jews failed by being unfaithful to

God, that this certainly does not affect God's faithfulness to them. Let's be clear that this faithfulness of God has to do with His being faithful to the covenants that He made with Israel. And conversely, Israel's unfaithfulness is based upon their not being faithful to those same covenants. So while Israel broke their end of the deal, God kept His (and continues to keep it). Thus the covenants remain intact and effective (the Covenants of Abraham and Moses) not because Israel upheld them (they didn't); it is because God, the guarantor of the covenants, upheld them. Therefore the advantage that Israel and the Jewish people have always enjoyed over the gentiles continues enforce. Gentiles have not superseded Jews as God's covenant people. Gentiles do not have an advantage over Jews.

So Paul refutes the straw man's suggestion by saying "Heaven forbid!" in answer to the question of whether God has rescinded His faithfulness to the covenants He made with Israel. In Greek the term "Heaven forbid" is *me genoito*. Literally it translates to "let it not be". However what we are actually dealing with is Hebrew idiom, and it gets watered down when it is expressed in Greek. I showed you a little trick a few lessons ago to find out how we can, in some cases, better understand what the Hebrew thought is behind these Greek words of the New Testament. The trick is that we go to the Greek Septuagint, which is a very early translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament). Then we compare the Greek next to the Hebrew and we can see which Greek word was chosen to translate a particular Hebrew word in the Old Testament. Next we can investigate exactly what that Hebrew word meant, which tells us how it was also meant for the Greek equivalent word to be taken. Once we know that, we can apply it generally anywhere we find that same Greek word, OT or NT. In the Septuagint (the Old Testament) it is the Greek words *me genoito* that are used to translate the Hebrew expression "*chalilah*". *Chalilah* is a very passionate and strong expression of intense negativity. In the Old Testament *chalilah* is often translated to English as "a curse on it" or "away with it". This is why you'll see some English translations say "God forbid" or "Heaven forbid" because in English those are intensely negative terms. But in reality the words God, Heaven and forbid are not there. It is merely an attempt to show just how emphatic of a response Paul is making. And yet, there is one other element. Saying "*chalilah*" is a standard Rabbinic response in the Talmud for when one Rabbi disagrees with the premise and/or religious ruling that another Rabbi has established. So what we read is Paul arguing in a familiar, standard Rabbinic way.

Verse 5 enters us into a fascinating theological whirlpool, and I will confess up front that my recent research has caused me to change my mind on what I used to think this passage was conveying to us. The passage reads: "**Now if our unrighteousness highlights God's righteousness, what should we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict His anger on us?**" Along with most other Biblical commentators I used to believe that what is being said as a theological principle is that it is the extreme nature of humanity's lack of righteousness that necessarily demonstrates God's profound righteousness. Thus, says Paul, would God be unrighteous to inflict His anger on us? To which Paul answers "Heaven forbid". If this was true how could God judge the world?

The usual theological assumption is that God uses the unrighteousness of mankind to prove His own righteousness. Let me say it another way: it is regularly assumed that Paul is saying that God more or less allows people to sin in order that He has a means to show the world just

how righteous He is. This is rather standard Christian doctrine, but I don't buy it because if God had to allow wicked things to be done for sin to happen in order to prove His own righteousness, then how can it be just to turn around and punish man for committing these same sins? After all, according to this theological rationale, if mankind didn't sin then God would have little way to prove His righteousness. Or in another way of thinking, God's righteousness is to be measured relative to man's unrighteousness. None of this works; to me the entire premise is just wrong minded. This explains why Paul replies in a typical Rabbinic fashion to this straw man's ruling that he disagrees with, "Heaven forbid!" But what is he saying "Heaven forbid" to? He is **not** replying to whether God is unrighteous to inflict His anger, but rather he is saying "Heaven forbid" to the entire line of reasoning. That is, it is a false reasoning to think that God's righteousness can only be established in proportion to mankind's sinfulness.

He follows up his "Heaven forbid" response by saying (and I'm paraphrasing) that if God has to measure His faithfulness in proportion to mankind's unfaithfulness, how can He judge the world? We'd have a sliding scale of God's righteousness that is forever moving according to the forever moving level of mankind's righteousness! Essentially Paul is saying that the notion that God's faithfulness must be demonstrated by mankind's unfaithfulness is absurd. And he goes on to give an example of its absurdity in verse 7. There he says (and again, I paraphrase), if I lie, and by means of being a liar this elevates God's righteousness (remember that sliding scale?); and by my lying God therefore receives even more acclaim and honor, then why should I get punished as a sinner for making God even more glorious by my lying? Isn't it advantageous to God for me to sin, since the more sin I do the more glory He gets? I hope you're seeing why this standard theological doctrine that indeed our unrighteousness is meant to highlight God's righteousness simply can't be so. And that doctrine pretty much has to ignore everything Paul says in verses 7 and 8 because in verse 8 Paul then takes such faulty reasoning to its logical conclusion. He says that if the straw man's suggestion was really true, then what else is a good Jew to do in response but to say, OK; then "let us do evil so that good can come from it". In fact, apparently this same doctrine of God's righteousness being established according to humanity's unrighteousness, which much of Christianity has held to for centuries, is what many Jews held to in Paul's day. And so he says that even though as Jews we certainly don't think or say to one another "let's do evil so that good can come from it" in fact the Jews are accused by gentiles of believing that, due to their tradition that man's unrighteousness establishes God's righteousness.

Let me pause to say this: our Christian doctrines are vitally important. They are not just important to what we believe but also to how we are perceived by the unsaved world. In Scripture we find that God is always concerned with the worldly perception of us, His worshippers, because it reflects on Him. And when we don't bother to think through some of these doctrines that we causally tell others that we believe in, and so they should too, and when we don't examine where they logically lead to or ask where they came from, it can not only relegate us to living a deception, it can also make us appear anywhere from mean to irrational to the world. And thus it makes God look mean and irrational. What we just examined is a perfect example of this.

In verse 9 Paul expands on the argument with his straw man. He says, "So are we Jews better

off?” Notice first of all that Paul says “we Jews”. To those who think Paul has “converted” and thus become a “Christian”, which at all times referred to a gentile, this is yet another proof that he did not. He is a Jewish Believer in Yeshua; not a Christian. I’ll paraphrase Paul’s question: In light of Believing Jews having an advantage over Believing gentiles in every way, does this make us (Jews) better off than our gentile brothers in Christ? To which Paul answers the straw man: “not entirely”. So this modifies his answer to “Then when advantage has the Jew” when he said that the advantage was much in every way. But now he says that there are limitations. And that limitation is that in the end a Jew is as much a slave to sin as a gentile. Thus any thought of inherent Jewish superiority over gentiles because of their election as God’s people must be abandoned. A hierarchy of superior Jews versus inferior gentiles was never God’s intention. Whatever advantage Jews have is contained in the fact that God has given to them the honor of having His Laws and commands in their midst, and in having a set apart land, and the special protection and guidance of God. So while the Jews do have God’s Torah to show them what sin is and it isn’t, the Torah (the Law) doesn’t have the power to change people’s lives. The Law doesn’t have the power to break the stranglehold that sin has upon people; ALL people, including Jews. Further, no matter how hard a Jew might try to obey the Law, God is going to judge each person (Jew and gentile) impartially based on what they do. So even though trying not to sin, when a Jew inevitably sins he is as much liable to God’s wrath as a gentile who doesn’t have the Law, and sins.

To back up his premise that Jews are no better off in this respect than gentiles, he begins to list several Bible passages and weaves them together to form a logical thread. Verses 10 through 12 are from Psalms 14:1-3, and 53:1- 3. Verse 13 is Psalms 5:10 and 140:4. Verse 14 is Psalm 10:7. Verses 15 through 17 is Isaiah 59:7, 8 and Proverbs 1:16. Verse 18 is Psalm 36:2. The flow is that no one is righteous or kind (righteous unto God, kind unto his fellow man) so no one is adhering to the two God-principles that undergird the entire Torah: “Love your God with all your heart, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself”. Further everyone sins if not by deed, certainly by their words (what comes up from their throats and exits from their mouths). And everyone has evil in their lifestyle rather than only good (even if they may think otherwise). I can’t tell you the number of people I’ve spoken to who won’t give their life to Messiah, but do firmly believe they’re going to Heaven because they are basically good people. Therefore they don’t feel they need to be saved from their sins, because they see no sin in their lives. Or, even though they may sin, it is small sins and on balance their good outweighs their bad. And finally Paul says that there is not sufficient fear of the Lord within people thus they don’t have enough wisdom to see themselves as they really are.

Obviously Paul is not suggesting that all people have sinned in exactly the same way or level of seriousness. But rather it is that among these sins, all have succumbed to one or more. Let me stop here to say that this is the point at which many commentaries say that it was not ever, and is not currently, possible to obey all of God’s laws and commandments. Thus the Law was, from its inception, a faulty covenant. I disagree; ideally it **is** possible to obey everything in the Torah. The problem for humanity is that from a practical point of view our evil inclinations are simply too powerfully developed for us to fully overcome them. From a technical standpoint, we can obey all of God’s moral laws, and in fact during the 1000 year reign of Christ, we will.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 CJB

¹¹ ***For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach.***

¹² ***It isn't in the sky, so that you need to ask, 'Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?'***

¹³ ***Likewise, it isn't beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, 'Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?'***

¹⁴ ***On the contrary, the word is very close to you- in your mouth, even in your heart; therefore, you can do it!***

Did God lie to Israel, and to mankind? Or was this just kind of a hyperbolic Heavenly cheerleading to obey the Law all the time knowing it was not possible? Of course not. Obedience to the Law is possible and expected for Israel, and all who join themselves to Israel.

Verse 19 is a kind of summary meant to hammer home the point that whether living within the Law (Jews) or living as part of the non-Jewish world (gentiles), everyone deserves God's wrath. "Every mouth being stopped" is meant to depict a defendant in a courtroom who has been pleading his case; but the evidence against him is now so overwhelming that he has nothing left to say. He is guilty as charged; there is no doubt and he knows that nothing is left but the verdict and the punishment. So he goes silent.

Recall that chapter 3 is being aimed very much at Jews because Jews in this era sincerely believed that simply being a Jew exempted them from God's judgment and wrath. And if that is the case, then they have little need for the Gospel. The gentile who believes he lives a good and moral life, and the Jew who believes that his fortunate heritage immunizes him from God's wrath, are in the greatest danger. This is sort of Paul's version of that TV crime show called Scared Straight where youthful offenders are taken to an adult penitentiary and given a taste of what true prison life is. Hopefully they'll leave so scared and shaken that they will change their ways and never wind up there for real.

Then we come to the powerful verse 20. Here Paul states just what the purpose of the Law is, and what it is not. First, no one will be righteoused by God as a result of obeying the Law. Or in Christian-eze, no one will be justified by God as a result of obedience to the Law. Then why do the Law? Because says Paul, the Law shows us what sin is. To do the Law is to do right; to NOT do the Law is to sin. The Law reveals just how high that standard is in order for us, by our own deeds, to achieve justification. And even that isn't sufficient because in addition to all else, our underlying attitude as to why we do the Law matters. The words "For in His sight no one alive will be considered righteous" is taken from a Psalm of David: 143.

^{CJB} ***Psalm 143:1 A psalm of David: ADONAI, hear my prayer; listen to my pleas for mercy. In your faithfulness, answer me, and in your righteousness.***

² ***Don't bring your servant to trial, since in your sight no one alive would be considered righteous.***

So 1000 years before Christ, King David knew that there is no one alive who can be considered righteous based on their works and deeds. Because of our fallen natures, our evil inclinations, and the impossible circumstances of the corrupt world all around us, God's standard of righteousness cannot be met by any normal human being. King David had the Law of Moses; and he grasped that while obedience to the Law was always the right thing to do, the Law wasn't created in order to manufacture a self-righteousness.

Then verses 21 and 22 bring Paul's listeners a solution for what up to now has been an insolvable problem. Everyone in the world, without exception, is going to be judged. If doing the Law won't be enough to forego judgment, and if sincerely trying to live a good and moral life won't be enough to forego judgment, then what hope does anyone have? Paul's answer? There is only one hope and it is expressed in only one way. And that way doesn't come from doing the Torah, and yet it is in full conformance to the Torah. And that way is that we must be righteoused by God. And we will be righteoused (justified) IF we trust Messiah Yeshua.

There is an important theological distinction to be made here. Many Bible versions read, or many doctrines interpret the Bible to say, that it is our faith in Messiah that saves us. That is, our salvation is more or less dependent on our level of faith. The more faith we have the better our chances not only of salvation but also of achieving God's favor in other ways. That is NOT what this passage says. Rather it is that if we are to be righteoused (justified) by God, we must place our trust in Messiah's own faithfulness. Messiah's faithfulness was, and is, perfect. Biblically, faithfulness is about being obedient to God and to His covenants. So to be unfaithful is to break a commandment or a term of a covenant. To be unfaithful is another way of saying "to sin". Our human faithfulness will always be flawed, if not intermittent. If we have to rely on our faith for salvation, we're in trouble. I can trust but still not have sufficient faith to be perfectly obedient to God. Our faith will be sufficient for some circumstances, but not for others. So in lieu of **our** faith, we are instructed to trust in **Christ's** faith. If we trust in Him, God will substitute Yeshua's perfect faithfulness for our imperfect faith. That is the picture that the sacrificial system in the Law of Moses paints for us. Animals that are 100% sinless (and thus can be said in Bible-speak to have perfect faithfulness) can be substituted for our human lives that are so full of sin and unfaithfulness. And God, in His grace, will deem that animal as paying the ransom price for atoning for our sins. But atonement for sins is one thing; being gifted with a saving righteousness is another. Christ provides for both, yet He is not the one who actually bestows righteousness upon us. The Father is the one who reaches down to righteous us (to justify us) as a free gift.

Later on in Romans Paul makes a statement about Yeshua's faithfulness that we really must take a moment to examine. In Romans 10:4 we read this (I'm going to use the KJV because it is more familiar to our ears):

^{KJV} ***Romans 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.***

I know what this probably sounds like to you, because this verse is the source of much Church doctrine that says Christ has ended the Law for everyone who believes in Him. That is, we transition from trust in the Law to trust in Christ. This is not what it says. In fact, it falls perfectly in line with what we have been studying when we properly understand the meaning of the word "end"; **telos** in Greek.

Listen to what the Greek Dictionary says that **telos** means:

A **telos** (from the **Greek** ?????? for "end", "purpose", or "goal") is an end or purpose, in a fairly constrained sense used by philosophers such as Aristotle. It is the root of the term "teleology," roughly the study of purposiveness, or the study of objects with a view to their aims, purposes, or intentions.

Oh my! So it doesn't mean end, as in "end of the world" or "end of the road". It doesn't mean end in the sense of something is over and done. **Telos** means a purpose or a goal. Let's reread that verse adding in the word purpose: ***For Christ is the purpose (or goal) of the law for righteousness to every one that believes.*** So the Law is meant to lead us to Christ, and Christ is the goal of the Law, and He is the one that provides a way for us to attain righteousness, provided we believe in Him. It is anything but meaning that Christ has done away with the Law.

In verse 21 Paul makes the statement that even though the Torah doesn't provide the righteousness that we need, it is a witness to it. That is, the Holy Scripture (in Paul's day that meant only the Old Testament) presents the plan of God's redemption. Listen to Jeremiah 23.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 CJB

⁵ "The days are coming," says ADONAI when I will raise a righteous Branch for David. He will reign as king and succeed, he will do what is just and right in the land.

⁶ In his days Y'hudah will be saved, Isra'el will live in safety, and the name given to him will be ADONAI Tzidkenu [[ADONAI our righteousness].

Paul continues the theme that rolls over into verse 23 that since it is God who gives us righteousness, and since this occurs apart from the Law, then this way to achieve righteousness applies to both Jews and gentiles. Why? All humanity is in the same leaky boat. We've all sinned....Jew and gentile.....and we all come up short of being able to earn God's praiseJew and gentile.

Paul's next thought in verse 24 is the center, the focus, of his entire theology. It is that this righteousness that comes from God comes freely to the one who receives it. And yet there is a cost even though we don't pay it. Messiah paid that cost through his act, his deed, of permitting himself to be a sacrifice and a curse in our stead.

I think it is important in Seed of Abraham Torah Class to always realize this amazing reality; that although we obey God by doing the Biblical Feasts, eating Biblically kosher and observing

the Sabbath, NONE of this is our righteousness. Christ is the vehicle of our righteousness, and God freely gives us that righteousness through Him. But I would also like us to embrace something that is going to gain more and more importance as the years go by. The release of the findings of the Dead Sea Scrolls shows the close connection between the theology of the NT and the theology of the Essenes who developed their theology from a careful study of the Holy Scriptures, the Tanakh.

So we'll close today with a short reading from the Dead Sea Scrolls, from what is called the Community Document, scroll number 1QS. It is beautiful, it is poignant, and it is the truth that we all need to hear. Listen closely, please.

For to God belongs my righteousness and the perfection of my way, and the uprightness of my heart is in His hand. By His righteousness are my rebellions blotted out. For God's truth is the rock of my steps and His power is the stay of my right hand; and from the fount of His righteousness comes my righteousness. The fountain of righteousness, the reservoir of power, and the dwelling place of glory are denied to the assembly of flesh. But God has given (those things) as an everlasting possession to those who He has chosen. For is a man the master of his way? No; mankind cannot establish their steps, for their righteousness belongs to God, and from His hand comes perfection of the way. And if I stagger, God's mercies are my salvation forever; and if I stumble because of the sin of the flesh, my righteousness is in the righteousness of God which exists forever... He has caused me to approach by His mercy and by his favors He will bring my righteousness. He has righteoused me by His true justice, and by His immense goodness He will pardon my iniquities.

Right there is a wonderful way to express the Gospel. The Essenes seemed to have it absolutely figured out; everything except that Yeshua was Messiah. Everything except that trust in Him is how they had to obtain this righteousness from God that they knew they must have.

We'll finish up chapter 3 and begin chapter 4 next time.