Romans 3:1-8

Jews and Gentiles Both Sinful, but Jews Have Advantages

In **chapter one** Paul condemns the Gentiles.
In **chapter two** Paul equally condemns the Jews.

- Paul ends the chapter by saying that God is more pleased with an obedient Gentile than an unbelieving Jew.
- The conclusion at the end of chapter two would be that there is really no advantage to being a Jew and that God's promises and plans for Israel have been forgotten.

Thus, the reason for **chapter three**.

- Although both Gentile and Jew are guilty before God the Jew still possesses an advantageous distinction from the Gentiles.
- Though judgment and salvation are on equal plains between Jews and Gentiles there still remains a privileged position for God's covenant people.
- There is and will always be a distinction between the Jew and the Gentile.
- Paul explains this in chapter three.

Paul continues his dialog with his imaginary debater.
It is possible that this debate is a window into many debates between:

- *Paul the apostle* and
- *Saul the Pharisee*.

The Four Questions

Paul asks four questions in verses 1-8:

1. What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew? (3:1) What advantage, then is there in circumcision? (3:1)
2. What if some did not have faith? (3:2) Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? (3:3)
3. If our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? (3:5) That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (3:5) If that were so, how could God judge the world? (3:6)
4. If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner? (3:7) Why not say – 'Let us do evil that good may result'? (3:8)

These questions could be paraphrased as:

a) If Jews and Gentiles are both guilty before God, what advantage is there in being a Jew?
b) Will God forsake his promise to bless the nation of Israel since some of the Israelites proved to be unfaithful?
c) Since the Jewish sin and failure to be holy help create a contrast to God's faithfulness and holiness are they not really helping demonstrate God's glory? (This point is based on Psalm 51 where David confesses his sin but calls on God's unfailing love. Verse 4 of Psalm 51 is quoted by Paul in 3:4.
d) If my lying glorifies God by showing Him to be the only perfectly truthful person, why does God punish me for lying? Does not the end justify the means?

Paul raises these questions to help clarify what he is teaching.

The First Question

3:1 What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?

Israel's Favored Position

Old Testament Verses that indicate Israel was special to God:

- "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex.19:6)
- "Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples." (Dt.10:14-15)
- "You are a holy people to the Lord your God; and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth (Dt. 14:2) "The Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession" (Psalm 135:4) "The people whom I formed for Myself, will declare My praise." (Isaiah 43:21)

Advantages of Opportunity, Not Salvation

Being Jewish did not bring them salvation but it brought them many advantages and opportunities that the Gentiles did not have.

Romans 9:3-5 says: *"Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ."*

Privileges Comes with Responsibilities

But with privilege comes responsibility as is seen in Amos 3:2:
"You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins."

Receiving an Invitation is Not the Same as Responding to an Invitation

Matthew 22:1-9 - In the parable of Matthew 22:1-9, Israel is shown as being the first to be invited to the King's son's wedding feast.

Advantage of Having the Word (Revelation from God)

"words" is ***logia*** and is usually translated "oracles". It is a reference to divine utterances.
In the Septuagint this word refers to:

1. Announcements by God to reveal his purpose and tell of what he intends to do
2. Pronouncements of the duty placed on man in regard to God having revealed his purpose

Entrusted To Obey, Guard and Promote the Word

"Entrusted" means more than having received the oracles. It conveys the idea of:

1. protecting what God entrusted them with
2. advance (propagate) what God had entrusted them with
3. obey and take to heart what God had entrusted them with

Jews Focused on their Privileged Status, but Not on Their Response
Once again, the Jews considered themselves privileged but did not respond to their privileged position nor did they fulfill their responsibility that was the reason the received the words of God.

In fact, 2 Chron. 34:14-33 details a time when the Jews lost the very words of God.

Jesus rebuked a group of Jewish religious leaders by saying,
"*You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God*." (Matthew 22:29)

The Jews (like the church of today and throughout the church age) had the word of God but:

- they neglected it
- lost it
- raised their traditions above it
- thought they could get along without it
- Claimed the name of God and assumed privileges but did not consider their obligation to God's standards in the Word or their responsibilities revealed in the Word

The Second Question:

3:3 What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?

Jews Failed So God Gave Up?
Paul's next question anticipated that some readers would assume that based on Israel's failure in chapter 2 that God would no longer be obligated to keep his promises to Israel.

The promises were made but where always accompanied with warnings of judgment and punishment for disobedience.

Promises To The Nation, Not Individuals
The promises were made to the nation as a whole, but not to individual Jews. In other words, the nation would endure, but individuals could be separated from their national inheritance.

This is seen in Ezekiel 20:34-38, *"I will bring you from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered . . .I will purge you of those who revolt and revel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel."*

Their lack of faith was manifest in their lack of obedience.
But, Israel's lack of faith has not changed God's faithfulness to fulfill his word.

Replacement Theology Calls God Unfaithful
To teach that Israel is no longer going to be used by God and that instead the church has taken over Israel's place and receives Israel's promises is not only bad theology but according to this verse describes God as being unfaithful.

Who is Israel?

Romans 11:1, "*Did God reject his people? By no means*!

Romans 11:11, "*Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all*!

Romans 11:25, *"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written*:

> "*The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins*."
>
> 1. The deliverer (Messiah) still has to come from Zion
> 2. The deliverer (Messiah) still has to turn godlessness away from Jacob
> 3. This is part of the covenant God made with Israel: He will take away their sins. So, Zechariah 12:10 is yet to occur:

> "***I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son***."

The day mentioned in Romans 11:25 and Zechariah 12:10 has not yet happened.
Paul's point here is that God is faithful to keep his promise to the nation of Israel.

So, the conclusion is that the church cannot replace Israel unless God breaks his promises to Israel.

The people's lack of faith **would prevent** them from receiving and seeing God's salvation.
But, the people's lack of faith **could not prevent** God from keeping his promise to Israel.
The **individual** Jew may be lost, but the **nation** will be saved.

Who makes up the nation? The believing Jews!

> "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. " – Romans 9:6, 7

. . .In other word, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."

Thus Paul could write in Romans 11:26,

> "And so all Israel will be saved. . ."

3:4 Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written:
"So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

"Not at all!" (μη γενοιτο, *me genoito*) is the strongest way in the Greek to make a negative statement and more it means this is impossible. It is a negative oath.

- KJV- "God forbid"
- Phillips- "Of course not!"
- NASB- "May it never be!"
- ESV – "By no means!"

Paul uses this same phrase in:

> Romans 3:6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11

Faithful To Take the Nation to the Promised Land: Positive Faithfulness

- God promised to take the Israelites from Egypt to the promise land.
- But, the whole nation of Israel proved to be faithless (except for Joshua and Caleb).
- Did God then not fulfill his promise?
    - No, he just waited 40 years and after killing the unbelievers he fulfilled his promise to a new generation.
- This positive faithfulness is the theme of verse 3. Verse 4 is God's negative faithfulness.

True To His Promise of Punishment

"Let God be true" means that God is reliable or trustworthy. You can count on God staying true to his word. God will fulfill his promises be they blessings or judgments.

Nehemiah 9:32-33 the Levites (9:5) recognize God's truthfulness in judging Israel like he said:

> *"Now therefore, O our God, the great, mighty and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes – the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings and leaders, upon our priests and prophets, upon our fathers and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong.. . . they did not pay attention to your commands or the warnings you gave them."*

"Every man a liar" may refer to:

- the Gentiles,
- the Jews (as covenant breakers toward God's oracles)
- to the general nature of the whole human race.

The point of the statement is probably to go to the extreme, such as, even if every man where to lie, God would still be true to his word.

POINT: God's character (faithfulness, truth, etc.) is not a response to man.

Paul Uses David's Psalm 51 to Prove Negative Faithfulness

Paul then quotes from Psalm 51 where David is confessing his sin with Bathsheba. The verse is Psalm 51:4:

> *"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge."*

Paul is using this verse to express the negative side of God's faithfulness.

In verse 3 God is faithful to fulfill his promise to Israel even if they individually are unfaithful. In verse 4 God is faithful to punish Israel as a nation and as individuals when they sin.

The Third Question:

3:5 But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)

The 3rd and 4th questions both deal with how man's sin helps bring out the glory of God:

- 3rd question – Man's sin is the dark background that provides the best contrast to God's bright righteousness.
  It is easier to appreciate the righteousness of God when man sins.
- 4th question – God's promises also include the promise of judgment for sin. When man sins and God punish him, God again demonstrates himself as truthful. Example: Jeremiah said Judah was going to Babylon if they didn't change. Judah continued to sin and God then fulfilled his word. Judah's sin gave God an opportunity to show he was truthful.

Here Paul first draws a false conclusion:
"Our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly." Then he makes a sarcastic application of this false doctrine:
"God then is unjust in bringing his wrath on us."
But, fearing some of his readers may just be waking up or tuning in to the public reading of his letter he quickly adds that he is "using a human argument" and does not really believe what he just said in sarcasm.

God cannot overlook Israel's sin simply because they are Israel.
God would then be showing partiality and would disqualify himself from judging mankind.

3:6 Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?

The Fourth Question:

3:7 Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?"

"Enhances" means to increase, to be in abundance.
This is saying that sin gives God a chance to prove he is truthful when he brings judgment.

3:8 Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say— "Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved.

If anyone is saying that our sinning helps glorify God they deserve to be condemned.

<u>Charge against Paul and the Gospel of Grace</u>
People had accused Paul and his message with the same accusation that they charge the gospel message today with:

- "You mean people can sin and still go to heaven?"

- “You are giving people a license to sin!”

The same thing is going to be brought up in Romans 5:20-6:1-2:

- “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”
- “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!”

<u>God’s Faithfulness to Judgment is Part of God’s Faithfulness</u>

Many people do not like to hear judgment and condemnation brought out of the scriptures. But, if a person is going to listen to Bible teaching the condemnation of sin and the judgment of the sinner is part of the message God has revealed to man (both in nature and in scripture). To fail to teach and preach temporal and eternal judgment of sin is to fail as a teacher of the Word of God.

Isaiah



742-681 BC

