

ROMANS 3:1-9 "With Privilege Comes Great Responsibility"

Rom 3:1-9 What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? 2 Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God. 3 What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? 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." [Psalm 51:4] 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.) 6 Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? 7 Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" 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. 9 What shall we conclude then? Are we any better [Or worse]? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin."

This is an interesting portion of scripture, in that Paul, anticipates certain responses from the Jews, as he describes how all men, who reject the Messiah, will be judged by God, whether Jew or Gentile.

In chapter two he concludes by saying, "Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God." (Rom 2:25, 28-29)

And so in essence, he levels the playing field for the Jew and the Gentile, and explains how there is no difference when it comes to God's judgment.

But, Paul is not so naive as to think that there are no advantages to being a Jew, and this is why he raises these questions in our text.

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

F.F. Bruce makes this comment: "Here Paul imagines someone breaking into his argument and saying, 'Well then, if it is being a Jew inwardly that counts, if it is the circumcision of the heart that matters, is there any advantage in belonging to the Jewish nation, or in being physically circumcised?' We might have expected Paul to answer this supposed question quite categorically: 'None at all!' But, rather to our surprise, he replies, 'Much in every way.' "

It may look like Paul is confusing the issue, when in fact he's about to clear it up. There's an advantage, but it's not the advantage you can boast in or rely on alone to attain eternal life.

Let's talk about the advantage. First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.

No other nation under heaven had been so privileged, to have God come to them, and explain to them who He was, and how He desired for a people to have a personal relationship with the Creator of the universe.

Some translations use the term "the oracles of God" which include the whole counsel of God, whether it be the 10 commandments, or those encouragements or rebukes given to the prophets to be given to the nation of Israel.

God gave to Israel what He did not give to the other nations; His very word, and that is a great advantage. But with it comes a great responsibility.

And this has been Paul's point all along. 'You have been irresponsible and callous towards the God who condescended to you to give you His will. And in the process you have become like the other nations who have always been callous towards their Creator.

Stephen, whom we are introduced to in Acts, was a man full of the Holy Spirit and testified to the Jews about this attitude towards God. It cost him his life as they stoned him to death. But, here's what he said when speaking about God giving Moses His word.

Act 7:37-39 "This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.' 38 He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us. 39 "But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt."

Now, if I may be so bold, as to make an analogy here to the church of Christ today. We have been entrusted with the living word of God, given through the apostles and the prophets of old, and we have been instructed to give this living word to the world.

But, we have also been instructed to walk according to God's word by faith, and so show the world that we belong to the One true God, who has given us life in Christ. If you look at the church of Christ in the world today, it is sometimes difficult to make any distinctions between it and the rest of the world.

And so, we hear of the gospel of "self-esteem" being touted from the Crystal Cathedral in California. We hear of major denominations questioning the validity of the very word of God, and how some of these denominations have used the scalpel of higher criticism to exclude portions of the bible to fit their needs.

Other denominations have felt the need to stay in step with a changing world by changing the meaning of God's word to include the acceptance of such abominations as homosexuality, whereby they actually ordain such people into the ministry.

The list goes on and on. But, the bottom line is that some people who claim an advantage of being part of the "Christian Church" have shown themselves, as being outside of that church, by their very actions, and denial of the "oracles of God" entrusted to them, and their hearts have gone back to Egypt; back into the world.

By the way, this is not really news in the sense that we don't see it coming. In fact, we are told in the latter days, just prior to Christ's second coming, this will culminate in what is referred to as the Apostasy, which by definition must be associated with the visible church in those days.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 ^{NAU} Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ² that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

Paul also refers to this as a falling away from the faith.

^{NAU} **1 Timothy 4:1** But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

This is why we take every thought captive and test the spirits as the apostle John puts it.

1 John 4:1 ^{NAU} Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Every believer needs to guard himself against the temptation to compromise the very word of God, which the writer of Hebrews says is ".....living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Heb 4:12)

That is not a word which is anemic or unable to give answers to everyday problems we all face in life. It's not a word that needs to be supplemented with the wisdom of men. God's word gives hope, not only for this life, but for the life to come, which will last for eternity.

This is the word you and I have been entrusted with, and by the power of the Holy Spirit that word can be used to transform the life of an unbeliever, or transform the life of a believer who seeks to grow in relation to his or her salvation.

Never underestimate God's word and never feel as though His word is out of touch with reality or our present world's problems. There isn't a problem that isn't touched by sin and we all know that there is forgiveness from sin in Christ. There's where we begin..... the heart changed by God in Christ.

But Paul goes on to anticipate another objection from his Jewish brethren in our text.

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

What is Paul trying to convey in this verse? William Barclay in his commentary on Romans does a little role playing by including this imaginary objector to whom Paul speaks.

"Paul says, 'For one thing, the Jew possesses what the Gentile never so directly possessed--the commandments of God'

..... The objector says, 'Granted! But what if some of the Jews disobeyed these commandments and were unfaithful to God and came under his condemnation? You have just said that God gave the Jew a special position and a special promise. Now you go on to say that at least some of them are under the condemnation of God. Does that mean that God has broken His promise and shown Himself to be unjust and unreliable?'

Paul answers this in verse 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." [Psalm 51:4]

The argument is, that despite how privileged the Jews are in having God's word, their relationship with God is still fouled up. 'Maybe it's God's fault. Maybe there's a flaw in His character where He can't even manage a group of people to whom He's revealed Himself. Yeah, it's not our fault, it must be God's fault.'

But also, it's important to point out that though God unilaterally entered into a covenant with the Jews, the administration or the outworking of that covenant was bi-lateral, in that each party was responsible for their part in the covenant.

God essentially told them, 'you're part is to trust and obey Me.' My part is to bless or curse according to how you carry out your part.' So, is it God's fault that the Jews faced judgment for their disobedience?

Paul says, "may it never be. Let God be true, and every man a liar." This, by the way, is an argument we still hear today. 'If God is so awesome and merciful and loving, why can't He manage the world He's made, and put a stop to all the suffering and hatred in the world?'

However, the issue isn't God's inability to stop the madness, the issue is God's righteousness to judge sin, of which He is not the author. Men have chosen to sin, and the curse of sin, and its effects in life, are real.

But God is not to blame for that. In fact, He is the One who has given us a way out. If we're looking for God to simply stop the madness, then we would have to go back to Noah and the method God used to stop the madness back then.

Is that what we really want? Not if we're concerned about the souls of those who are lost. Sin and its effects have been dealt

with. But it's been dealt with righteously and mercifully at the cross of Jesus Christ.

By the way, there is a sense in which God is curbing the sinfulness of men's hearts as His Spirit puts the brakes on the madness of men so that they are not totally out of control. How does He do this? Through the means He has instituted. Governments exist because God decrees it and puts it in place as He desires.

This is why Pilate had no excuse for putting an innocent man to death as he asked Jesus this question:

John 19:10 ¹⁰ So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"

And of course Jesus' reply made it clear where Pilate received his authority.

John 19:11 ¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin."

The law of God itself is another one of the means that the Spirit of God uses to curb the sinfulness of men. And of course, the very nature of man that the Spirit of God has given man is such that we are all made in the image of God, thus we all are aware of our sin and the need to conform into His image even though we deny it through our actions as we suppress that truth as Paul points out.

Romans 1:18-20 ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

And so does the world's unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God? May it never be! Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

Paul is quoting Psa 51:4, which is the Psalm David wrote with tears, after he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and to cover his tracks, he killed Bathsheba's husband. Nathan the prophet came

against David at the command of God and David's response is told in this psalm where he recognizes his responsibility for personal sin.

He says to God in that psalm.... "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."

'You're right God, You always are. Though I be a liar trying to conceal my sin and excuse myself with some lame story', "You are proved right by Your holiness when You speak and justified when You judge."

But, Paul isn't done addressing this imaginary objector. He goes on to raise another problem which he anticipates.

Rom 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.)"

Barclay again gives us another way of looking at this argument in terms we may better understand. The objector says, 'Very well then! All you have done is to succeed in showing that my disobedience has given God an opportunity to demonstrate His righteousness. My infidelity has given God a marvelous opportunity to demonstrate His fidelity (faithfulness). My sin is, therefore, an excellent thing!'

Sin has given God a chance to show how good He is! I may have done evil, but good has come of it! You can't surely condemn a man for giving God a chance to show His justice!

For Paul he's embarrassed to even raise this question. And so he adds the disclaimer, "I am using a human argument", which is to say, 'I would never seriously think this, but human thought could certainly go to this extreme.'

The point is that the special position of being the chosen people of God brought with it special responsibility; the Jew, says Barclay, "believed it to be one of special privilege. And in that sense special license to do whatever they chose, with impunity."

Barclay tells a story of one Lord Dunsany who came safely through W.W.I. He quotes Dunsany as saying, 'In some strange way I am still alive. I wonder what God means to do with a life so specially spared? Barclay says, That thought never struck the

Jews. They never could grasp the fact that God's special choice was for special duty."

Unfortunately, many Christians haven't grasped that either. The world is full of people who name the name of Christ, thinking they have special privileges without understanding that they have a special life with special responsibilities, and special duties to their loving and gracious God, who can enable them to be His witnesses; lights in a dark sinful world, which is on a collision course with a Christ-less eternity.

Rom 3:5-6 "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.) 6 Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?"

God is not unjust. He is perfect in all His ways. And because He is perfect holiness and righteousness, He is the only One who could make such judgments on the world, which He created.

Paul then raises another objection which he hears coming from the mouths of those who would try to argue their case and excuse their sin.

Rom 3:7-8 "Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" 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."

At this point the argument becomes absurd. "Let us do evil that good may result"? As you talk with people and are given the privilege to give the hope that is within you, you will hear some of these absurd arguments.

One of the guys at work, whom I've shared with, was trying to get around his responsibility to come to God on God's terms through faith in Christ, and he made the comment to me, 'Drew, what makes your relationship with Christ viable is that you believe it. And so what makes the Muslim's relationship with Allah viable is that they believe it.'

His point was that, whatever you believe is truth; to you it will be true, because you believe it. My response was, whether I believe it or not doesn't change the fact that God is true to Himself. He doesn't need my belief to verify His truth.

And truth isn't truth simply because someone believes it. I pointed out that simply because someone sincerely believes the world is flat doesn't make it so, or that because someone believed the sun revolved around the earth doesn't make it so.

What he was saying was that truth is relevant. It's truth as long as you believe it to be truth. But that argument is absurd, because truth is not subjective. Truth is defined by the God who created all things.

What he was really saying was that you embrace what you believe to be truth and I'll embrace what I believe to be truth and don't tell me that there's only one truth when it comes to salvation, and then we'll all be one big happy family.

But, I lovingly, but truthfully told him, that God makes the rules and He is truth and His word is true and that ultimately you will have to come to grips with the fact that you can't continue to excuse your sin under the guise, all truth is truth, simply because someone believes it to be true.

Always take them back to the One true God who has revealed Himself in His word, and who tells us that He loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

Don't get bogged down with absurd arguments, which are always designed to lead you away from reality and the truth, which God has clearly given us.

Paul would not excuse sin and he would not give the Jews a way out from under their responsibility to seek the Messiah, who is the way and the truth and the life, outside of whom, no man can come to the Father.

You don't need to be apologetic for that. You do need to be loving enough to meet their need and give them the truth in love. Don't ever forget however, that if they reject the truth, that doesn't negate the truth. Don't ever let it shake your faith.

Christ Himself was rejected of men when He came to this earth and proved that He was the Son of God, through His miracles, and ultimately through His resurrection.

Just keep giving the truth in love and let the Holy Spirit do His ministry of bringing life to men and women, dead in their transgressions and sins.

But, never become proud in yourself, and never take the attitude that we have special privileges without special duties to our God, who has chosen us out of this world and has given us eternal life in Christ.

God chose Israel and God has chosen us to be His representatives, but we must never think that somehow we were worthy to be chosen, and that we can boast in such a privilege. You might remember what God said to Israel regarding His choice of them.

Deu 7:7-8 "The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But it was because the LORD loved you"

He has loved us and chosen us for no other reason than that He has chosen to love a people for Himself, despite ourselves. That is why we have nothing to boast in except Christ crucified on our behalf.

Dwell on that life you have in Christ this week, and consider where you would be outside of His love and grace. And then ask God to give you an opportunity to be used by Him in showing forth His love towards a world which can be very unlovely.

Rom 5:8-10 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

Always keep it in perspective, and as Paul says, 'be thankful with a life of loving obedience and service to the God who purchased us with the blood of the Lamb who takes away our sin.'