

A Study in Romans

Study Three Romans 3:1-31

Day One

1 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."

v. 1 – Paul spent most of chapter two pointing out that the Jews had forfeited their right to be the people of God, for while they had the Law, they did not keep it. Instead they clung to the fact that the Law was given to them and held onto that as a superstition, so to speak, thinking that this made them “special.” Paul pointed out that the only thing that made anyone special, Jew or Gentile, was faith in Christ.

v. 2 – Having said this, Paul saw that there was an advantage in being a Jew, for God did indeed give His promise to the Jews. God started His revelation to mankind through Abraham, so the Jews had a heritage and culture that was based on God’s revelation to man.

v. 3 – Some of the Jews did not have faith, but that did not nullify God’s promise to them through their father Abraham. But this was not an ethnic promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham’s natural offspring. Rather, Abraham is the father of the faithful, and it to his seed that the promises came and would be kept. God is faithful to perform His word to the Jews even if the Jews were not faithful to Him.

v. 4 – God’s words are true when He said to Abram:

"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God" (Genesis 17:4-8).

God has kept his everlasting covenant with Abraham’s descendents in faith and He has given his natural descendants the Land. God is true and He never, ever goes back on a

promise. Many natural Jews are content with receiving the Land and still resist putting their faith in God's Son. To them, Paul still speaks that a Jew is one inwardly and not outwardly.

Day Two

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? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.

v. 5 – Paul had written that the unfaithfulness of the Jews had actually proved God's faithfulness in keeping His promise. A human argument could reason: "So what's the problem? Man's failure made God look even better, so why would God be angry?"

v. 6 – If God were unjust, as the reasoning in verse 5 would suggest, then how could God judge the world in righteousness. In other words, if God used man's unfaithfulness to prove His faithfulness, how could He then judge unfaithful men? They were simply being who they were and it all turned out to make God look good anyway!

v. 7 – Paul continued this same line of absurd reasoning that the Roman heretics took. If man's falsehood only serves to make God appear to be even more gracious and faithful, why would men be considered sinful when their sin just made God look good? It is hard to imagine that this line of reasoning existed, but it must have, for Paul was spelling it out and refuting it to the Roman church.

v. 8 – Now we see the issue. Some had actually attributed this perverted line of reasoning to Paul! Since Paul preached free grace, some were concluding that man's sin gave an opportunity for God's free grace to operate, thus minimizing man's sinfulness. Paul was fighting for his integrity as an apostle as he refuted this line of reasoning.

v. 9 – So Paul refocused the assertion of some that the Jews were superior to Gentiles, some even saying that the Jews unfaithfulness that proved God's faithfulness made them superior through their failure. Paul stated that anyone who thought like this deserved to be condemned for their rotten thinking. How pervasive the sense of superiority must have been among some Jews for them to think that even in their failure they served a purpose in making God look good!

But as stated earlier, this attitude is also present in some Christians. Make sure it isn't present in you.

Day Three

10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;
11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.
12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

vs. 10-12 – Paul quoted Psalm 14:1-3 to refute the argument that the Jews were somehow superior to Gentiles because of their genetic connection to Abraham and the patriarchs. The summary of this passage is that all men have sinned. I had a seminary professor once say, "Man isn't as evil as he could be, but he is still evil." These verses don't mean that men aren't capable of some compassionate goodness. It does mean that man is polluted and even his good deeds are tainted by the evil root from which they come.

I have often told people that you cannot expect Christian deeds from non-Christians. It just won't happen.

Day Four

13 "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips."
14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."
15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
16 ruin and misery mark their ways,
17 and the way of peace they do not know."
18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

vs. 13-18 – Your Bible probably doesn't have these five verses in Psalm 14. They are only found in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Seventy scholars (Septuagint is the Greek word for 70) translated the Hebrew Scriptures in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, in the third century B.C. This was a historic event, for it represented the first effort by Jews to make their Scriptures accessible to people of another culture. Today Christians are facing the task of translating the Bible into every language; some have had to develop a written language for a tongue before the Bible could be translated. This is truly a great work that has its roots in the model of the Septuagint.

Paul almost always quoted not from the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament, but rather the Septuagint. You may have noticed from time to time that an Old Testament quotation of Paul's may not exactly match the quote in your Bible. That is because your Bible is translated from the Hebrew text, but Paul's quote is translated from his Septuagint text. So Paul's quote is often "once removed" from the Hebrew quote, thus making for some minor discrepancies of wording.

Many want to make sure that their translation is a literal, word-for-word translation. This is easier said than done. The job of translation is never easy and one word in Greek may not have a literal one-word translation in English or some other language. This should not make you nervous. God is protecting His Word.

Why aren't these verses in your Bible, but in Paul's letter? We will never know for sure. The Bible is an old book that has been translated and handed down for millennia. There are ancient versions that do vary slightly from one to another, which is to be expected. (I had a seminary professor tell me that 99% of the Bible is preserved; 1% has been corrupted through translation and differing versions). For a book that contains parts 4,000 years old, I think that is remarkably accurate.

I would like to think that these verses somehow should have been in the Old Testament version, and the Holy Spirit included them in the New. I have faith that the God who inspired the Bible is also able to protect and defend it from perversion, even through all the translations of the centuries.

The verses Paul quoted here certainly sound like the Bible and they contain the truth that sinful man produces all kinds of unrighteous deeds with the mouth, feet and eyes. That is good enough for me.

The Septuagint represents the age-old challenge of translating the ancient works of God into modern languages and images that are understandable to the receiving culture. I'm sure this was a great challenge then and still is today. I am glad that the God of the Bible is directing these efforts just as He inspired the original manuscripts (referred to as the "autographs;" we do not have any of the autographs available today—just the copies). I am not saying that the translations are inspired, but interpretations of the inspired with God watching over the work.

Day Five

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

v. 19 – This is an interesting verse (aren't they all?). Paul made an obvious statement: that the Law spoke to those under the Law. The attitude of some Jews was that since they were *under* the law, they were no longer *subject* to the Law. That sounds weird, I know, but let me explain. The Law for some Jews had actually become God. Their system took the place of God; therefore, their system *was* God. Any rule or system that

can explain God or “force” God to do what man wants, that system becomes God. The Jews saw themselves as God’s keeper on earth, and therefore felt God “needed” them whether they behaved righteously or not.

I have seen Christians guilty of the same thing. Their doctrine, history or experience became everything; it is their God. I saw some so enamored with faith, that they put their faith in faith instead of in God. I have seen some so proud of their historical place in God that they became lukewarm in their love for God, but felt that their history counted for something special in the sight of God. Their history, therefore, became their God and they put their faith in it.

We have all seen some of God’s servants so impressed with how God used them that they felt they were above morality when it came to the opposite sex or money. Their ministry had become their God.

Does this make sense to you? Are you guilty of putting anything else in the place that God should have in your life?

v. 20 – The Law came to make men aware of sin and to educate his conscience. It was never intended to be a system that could be kept, with man receiving a grade depending upon how well he kept the rules. Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (Galatians 3:24-25 – NASU).

vs. 21&22 – A new righteousness apart from the Law has come and that is faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ, not keeping the Law, is the new “rule.” And this rule has been challenged and attacked over and over again throughout the last 2,000 years of Church history.

The Law can only lead to legalism and there is still plenty of legalism in the Church. Some legalism even pertains to prayer and reading. There are many who have taught that if you don’t get up early and spend an hour in prayer and reading, your Christianity is shallow and defective. I believe we should spend time in prayer and reading, but this burden is more than most can bear. I find people regularly walking in guilt because they cannot fulfill this legalistic rule.

I would rather see someone spend five minutes a day with regularity than to set an unrealistic resolution that will not be fulfilled beyond a few days. I spend about 30 minutes every morning writing these devotionals. I do this because I want to, because the Lord has put it in me to write. No one is making me do this, nor am I teaching that everyone else should be doing this. I have responded to the Lord and this practice for me is pure joy; hard work also, but joy nonetheless.

If you are a leader, do you put people under pressure to perform? Do you put a standard of righteousness before the people that you can't even keep? Or can you keep this standard because you have a staff who can do your work while you "pursue God?" Please be careful not to communicate that we come to the Lord by faith but stay with the Lord by rules.

Day Six

There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished- 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

v. 23 – If someone didn't understand by now that the Jews were in so way superior to the Gentiles, then they were not going to get it. The early church faced doctrinal crisis after crisis. But every crisis allowed the Holy Spirit to work through the leaders to clarify the truth and that truth has been handed down from generation to generation. I am reminded of what Jesus said about the Spirit:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come (John 16:13-14).

The Spirit guides the Church as a whole and each individual into all the truth. The enemy of the Church works to twist and pervert the truth, however, and uses people to propagate his twisted doctrines:

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3)

If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work-which is by faith (1 Timothy 1:3-5).

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

And Paul said that all “fall short of God’s glory.” So we can assume that sin cost man the glory or excellence of God that was his by nature of creation.

v. 24 – The word “justified” can best be remembered by the words “just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned.” But this justification can only come through God’s grace in Jesus.

v. 25 – God did not overlook the sins of man; that would have been unjust. Instead He satisfied His righteousness by shedding blood for the forgiveness of sins—the blood of His own Son! How can anyone accuse God of injustice?

v. 26 – God justifies men and women through faith in Christ and at the same time is just to condemn sin. What a magnificent plan! But this can only be appropriated through faith in Jesus! He is truly the Way, Truth and Life.

Day Seven

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.

28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

29 Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, 30 since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

31 Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

v. 27 – No person can brag about how he or she earned God’s salvation through anything they have done. The basic theme of Romans is faith in Christ as opposed to faith in keeping the Law. Although we have covered other verses that pertain to the role of the Law, let’s look at one more passage:

They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me (1 Timothy 1:7-11).

The Law must be used properly for it to be effective and the most effective use of the Law is to show man that he is sinful. But the Law cannot deliver from sin; only make us

conscious of sin. When we are conscious of sin, then we must put our faith in Christ to deliver us from sin.

v. 28 – There are so many verses that say this same thing. Perhaps you want to do your own study.

v. 29 – The Jews did not own God (although they thought they did). You don't own God either. He is your God, but not in the sense that you have exclusive rights to His presence. When anyone thinks he owns God, then he is in some measure of trouble for this often leads to spiritual pride. God is bigger than any one movement, nation or doctrine.

v. 30 – You can read the Galatians Study to review Paul's arguments against circumcision being seen by some as a necessary rite to go along with faith. God justifies everyone through one thing and one thing only, and that is faith! There can be no room for any other interpretation. But that doesn't stop man from trying. Today there are some that put their faith in other spiritual disciplines—reading, praying, fasting, stopping some nagging sin, etc.—but the only way to please God is through faith.

v. 31 – The Law teaches man about sin but the Law cannot deliver from sin. Only faith in Christ can do that. If Paul spent this much time teaching about this, I think we need to pay attention. In fact, as we close this week's study, perhaps you need to ask the Spirit to show you any area that you have replaced faith with some other work or habit. Are you walking under any legalism? Have you put others under any bondage of legalism? Were you saved by faith, but now walking in a mentality that you must earn your daily grace?

This is such a sensitive issue. For instance, we need to pray and read, and we must discipline ourselves to do this. But you can put so much trust in your discipline or your spiritual practices that you look down on those who don't or can't match what you do.

Ask the Spirit to show you where you stand on this issue. I am reading and praying more than ever, but it is a result of the work of the Spirit in my life. I was saved by faith and I am growing by faith. Faith isn't an event; it's a way of life.