

Comments on Romans 3

In response to the previous chapter, where he says Jews should not condemn Gentiles for not living the Law of Moses, due of the risk of hypocrisy, Paul rhetorically asks, "What good is it to be a Jew? (v. 1).

The benefit is they have access to the Law and the Prophets (v. 2). But, what if they don't actually live according to the Law and the Prophets? (v. 3) God will still be faithful to the covenant with Abraham (v. 4). Does that make God wrong for punishing their rebellion? No. (v. 5-6) Does that give excuse for sinning? No. (v. 7-8)

Nobody is righteous, not Jew or Gentile (v. 9-19), so all will be justified (i.e., made righteous, sins forgiven) by faith, through the sacrifice by Jesus Christ, not by the Law of Moses (v. 21-31).

This is difficult chapter. The KJV is obtuse. The Good News Translation (GNT) does a [better job than most](#). But, aside from the translation, there is a lot of implied knowledge Paul is assuming the intended audience has.

Paul is writing to believing Jews among the ecclesia who, like him, were immersed in Pharisaic Judaism, so they had the same theological and religious education he had. The result is there is a lot of implied context that gets glossed over, and the casual reader misses it.

Verses 1-8 are a summary of the tension created by the Abrahamic Covenant between the Lord and Israel. Circumcision is the defining symbol of the Abrahamic covenant, dividing Israelites from Gentiles. The Lord providing prophets, from Moses to Malachi, is part of His relationship with them, to keep them informed of their standing with Him in the balance of covenant blessings and curses (cf. Lev. 26, Deut. 28). Understanding that context is essential to comprehending Paul's argument.

There are some changes in the IV/JST for [this chapter](#) that are worth discussing. Comments on the relevant verses appear below.

¹What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? ²Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

v1-2 If the Law of Moses is a risk to the Jews and not necessarily of any benefit to them (cf. ch. 2), then what is the

benefit of being Jewish, of being part of the covenant with Abraham (v. 1)? The great benefit is they have access to the word of God through His prophets and Scripture (v. 2).

v1 The IV/JST emends to:

What advantage then hath the Jew over the Gentile? or what profit of circumcision, who is not a Jew from the heart?

Smith adds what is implied by the surrounding text. Paul's comparison is between Jews and Gentiles, and the issue at hand is those who are Jewish by lineage, not by true spiritual practice, from Paul's perspective.

"the Jew", technically Paul is referring to the lineage of Abraham through Jacob, and therefore Israel in general. He himself is of the tribe of Benjamin (cf. Phil. 3:5-6), not Judah. However, with the ancient split between the Northern Ten Tribes, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, and subsequent invasion by Assyria that resulted in the dissolution of the Northern Ten Tribes, all that remains is the Southern Kingdom. The title "the Jews" is the New Testament shorthand for any of Natural Israel who remain as part of the Southern Kingdom, which was historically run by kings of Judah (e.g., David, et al.).

"of circumcision", i.e., of Abraham. The act of circumcision is the indicator of the covenant with Abraham. What Paul is implying is they are part of Natural Israel, part of Abraham lineage. If the Gentiles have access to everything the Israelites have, then what good is it to be born of the tribe of Judah, through Jacob, through Abraham? If the Gentiles are just as good as Israelites in every way, then what is the point of the Abrahamic Covenant?

v2 "the oracles of God", meaning the prophecies or word or scripture of God. Paul is referring to the Law of Moses and the Prophets of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isaiah through Malachi). Where the Gentiles have had little or no interaction with the Lord, and are therefore left to their own idolatrous devices, the Israelites have had a lot of guidance from the Lord through His prophets over the generations. Whenever they listen to the Lord and His prophets they are blessed. If not, they are cursed.

³ For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? ⁴ God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

⁵ But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) ⁶ God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?

⁷ For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? ⁸ And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.

v3-8 If Israel has a covenant with the Lord, and He has sent prophets to them (v. 1-2), then what happens when Israel fails to uphold their terms of that covenant? What if Israel is unfaithful? Paul asks and then answers three major questions posed by covenant theology:

- 1) If Israel is unfaithful to the covenant, will the Lord abandon the covenant? No, the Lord is faithful. (v. 3-4)
- 2) Is it unfair for the Lord to punish unfaithful Israel? No, the Lord is a just judge. (v. 5-6)
- 3) Is the Israelite's unfaithfulness irrelevant? No, the sinner, and slanderer, is condemned. (v. 7-8)

Note the question in v. 3 is in the past tense, the question in v. 5 is in the present plural, and question 7 is in the present singular, or present personal. Paul is deliberately addressing Israel's past failures (v. 3), Judah's present failures (v. 5), and the individual Israelite's present personal failures (v. 7).

v4 "That thou mightest be justified...when thou art judged", a quotation of Ps. 51:4. Paul is bringing in the context of that entire Psalm, which is that of an Israelite confessing before the Lord that they are a sinner asking for His mercy and forgiveness for themselves and for all of His people who will worship Him in humility.

v5 The IV/JST on this verse is a significant paraphrase that generally carries the same meaning, with the exception of the parenthesis, which is the opposite meaning:

But if we remain in our unrighteousness and commend the righteousness of God, how dare we say, God is unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man who fears God,)

"I speak as a man", in other words, "I am asking the naturally occurring logical question from the human perspective", which is: "Is it fair for God to punish man?" And, the answer is, "Yes".

From the philosophical point of view of Israelite versus Gentiles, Israelites see all of nature and creation as controlled by the Lord and Him acting deliberately according to the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant as dictated by the terms in the Law of Moses. For the idolatrous Gentiles, this is messy question as they have many gods who frequently act with caprice and do not hold any particular regard for humans. Gentiles frequently blame the gods for being petty and unfair in punishing or neglecting humans.

Paul clearly falls on the side of Israelite theology that argues God is just, not capricious, and has deliberate ulterior motives in punishing humanity when moved to do so (cf. Lev. 26, Deut. 28).

v7-9 The IV/JST has significant changes. Smith's rendition of v. 7-8 is an attempt to clarify the obscurity of those verses in the KJV, but, honestly, it doesn't really help. The changes on v. 9 are an improvement over the KJV.

7. For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie, (as it is called of the Jews,) unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? and not received? Because we are slanderously reported?

8. And some affirm that we say, (whose damnation is just,) Let us do evil that good may come. But this is false.

9. If not so; what then are we better than they? No, in no wise; for we have proved before, that Jews and Gentiles are all under sin.

v8 The wording of this verse is difficult. The underlying issue is that if a person sins and they are forgiven by God, then that creates an opportunity for the person to continue sinning. If their sins will be forgiven, then why not continue sinning, when it will be forgiven anyway? Clearly, Paul rejects such nonsense, as he advocates repentance for the sinner, the entire abandonment of the worldly way of life. Paul condemns anyone who would forward such a view.

Additionally, some are accusing Paul, and perhaps the ecclesia in general, of suggesting he is forwarding the view they do not need to lead a godly life. It seems likely the accusers are those Judaizers within the ecclesia who are

attempting to force the Law of Moses on the Gentile members (e.g., the Judaizers whom Paul attacks in Galatians). His rejection of the Law of Moses being imposed on Gentiles within the ecclesia results in some accusing them of saying, "We can be evil, and good will come from it", meaning they do not have to keep the commandments and God's mercy will cover their sin. Of course, Paul rejects this and condemns those who would disparage him like this.

The verse is worded such that Paul is condemning those who forward the view, and simultaneously those who falsely accuse him of forwarding this view.

"whose damnation is just", Paul is referring to those who make the false accusation against him, they will be justly condemned, as well as anyone who would forward the view that they could continue in sin. Paul is jointly condemning both the unrepentant and the slanderers.

⁹ What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; ¹⁰ As it is written,

There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹² They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. ¹³ Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: ¹⁴ whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: ¹⁵ Their feet are swift to shed blood: ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways: ¹⁷ And the way of peace have they not known: ¹⁸ There is no fear of God before their eyes.

¹⁹ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

v9-20 While Israelites in general, and Jews in specific, have the benefit of being part of the Abrahamic Covenant and having access to the Lord's words via His prophets (v. 1-2), they are no better than the Gentiles because they sin as much as Gentiles do (v. 9), as evidenced by the Scriptures (v. 10-18). The Law of Moses applies to everyone under that Law, Israel in general and Judah in specific, and that leaves all of mankind without excuse and under the Lord's condemnation (v. 19). The Law of Moses doesn't make anyone righteous, as it makes it clear all mankind are sinners (v. 20).

v10-19 A lengthy compounded quote of Ps. 14:1-3 (v. 10-12), Ps, 5:9 (v. 13), Ps. 140:3 (v. 13), Ps. 10:7 (v. 14), Isa. 59:7-8 (v. 15-18), Ps. 36:1 (v. 18). The history of Israel has been a lengthy series of rebellions punctuated by brief periods of good behavior. The quotes Paul strings together here are very selective and particularly harsh, especially the Isaiah quote, which is a blistering rebuke of Judah. Reviewing the Hebrew Scripture, it is impossible to self-righteously say Jews are better than the Gentiles. And, that is Paul's point.

v20 People cannot possibly observe all [613 commandments](#) of the Law of Moses, so it exposes the sinfulness of man in their failures. However, the person who is trying to live the Law of Moses will be justified, cf. 2:13. In Paul's writings the question is where the source of Justification, or forgiveness, resides. The Law of Moses does not provide a means of expiation of sins. But, the person who is trying to live the Law of Moses will be justified because of their faith in the Lord.

²¹ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²² Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵ whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; ²⁶ To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. ²⁷ where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. ²⁹ Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: ³⁰ seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. ³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

v21-31 God's righteousness is revealed entirely apart from the Law of Moses, as the Law and the Prophets predicted (v. 21). Righteousness is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe in Him, regardless of Jew or Gentile (v. 22). All mankind has sinned and are not worthy of God's glory (v. 23).

Being made righteous is an undeserved free gift because of redemption by Jesus Christ (v. 24), whom God presented as a mediating sacrifice through the blood He shed, to offer

righteousness to mankind through His forgiveness of their sins (v. 25). This shows God is righteous in His Judgements, being willing to forgive and justify those who accept Jesus as His Messiah (v. 26).

How can anyone brag about being righteous by keeping the Law of Moses? They cannot. Is righteousness by any law of works? No. It is through the law of faith (v. 27). Mankind is justified, or made righteous, because of faith in Jesus Christ and not the works of the Law of Moses (v. 28). God the Father is God over all, Jew and Gentile (v. 29), the only God of mankind, who will justify the circumcised and uncircumcised because of faith (v. 30).

Does faith eliminate the Law of Moses? No, faith establishes the Law of Moses (v. 31).

v21 "being witnessed by the law and the prophets", making reference to the myriad messianic prophecies in the Law of Moses and throughout the various Hebrew Prophets.

v24 The IV/JST differs from the KJV on one word, substituting "only" for "freely", as follows:

Therefore being justified only by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;

This conforms to the emendation made in v. 28 as well. I cannot explain Smith's change here. Paul's intent in saying it is "justified freely" is that Grace is a free gift, it is not something people earn by the works of the Law of Moses or deserve as a result of their own righteousness. Justification is a free gift given to us, even though we don't deserve it, if we have faith in Jesus Christ.

v25 Imagery of the blood sacrifice of the Passover is intentionally used to show that God the Father is willing to pass over, or skip, the punishment the sinner deserves because of the blood of the sacrificial Lamb, the Son of God.

v28 The IV/JST differs from the KJV on one word, inserting "alone", as follows:

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith alone without the deeds of the law.

This agrees with the emendation made on v. 24 and emphatically endorses the theological position that Justification is solely by faith, not by works.

v30 The IV/JST omits "it is one" and replaces it with "that", as follows:

Seeing that God will justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

Smith's omission addresses the obtuse KJV rendering, which most modern translations follow. Some [modern translations](#) do omit the obtuse phrase as Smith does (e.g., Phillips, TLB, NOG, NASB, WE). Paul's intent is to say there is only one God, the God of Israel and the Gentiles, not two Gods, a God of Israel separate from the God of the Gentiles, per Deut. 6:4. I assume most modern translations stay faithful to the KJV rendering to preserve the similarity of the wording to Deut. 6:4.

v31 Paul is arguing that faith preceded the Law of Moses and undergirds it as a foundational theological principal. The Law of Moses relies on and rests on faith.

Paul clearly has no intention of eliminating the Law of Moses among the Jewish members of the ecclesia. His intention is to eliminate it as a requirement for Gentiles among the ecclesia.

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