

31. The Book of Romans 3:3-4

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

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It has been a while since we last studied Romans—with our week of fasting and prayer, my pinched nerve and other health issues that kept me sidelined, followed by Cyndi and I going to the pastors and wives conference in California along with taking a little time before and after to see family—it has been 8 weeks since we were in Romans.

So, bear with me as we take a little time to review and get up to speed as to where we are in our study of this incredible book.

We are currently in the first section of Paul's epistle to the Romans—which is the most complete treatise on the Gospel of Jesus Christ you'll find anywhere in the Bible (1:16-17).

As we have said repeatedly, in this first section of the book (1:18-3:20—a section referred to as “Condemnation”) Paul is presenting his argument that the whole world apart from Jesus Christ is lost in sin, separated from God, and condemned to hell.

With the precision of a brilliant prosecuting attorney, Paul sets out to systematically prove his case by first addressing:

- I. *The unrighteous heathen in 1:18-32.*
- II. *The self-righteous hypocrite (moralist) in 2:1-16.*
- III. *The ultra-religious Hebrew (the religionist) in 2:17-29*

As we have already seen, the Jews based their righteousness, salvation, and security on 3 primary principles or grounds:

1. *Their heritage—they were descendants of Abraham.*
2. *They had been given God's Law—which made them special in God's eyes and gave them special privileges—including and especially that it exempted them from judgment.*
3. *They were circumcised—which brought them into the covenant God made with Israel and further exempted them from the judgment God was going to bring on the gentile world someday.*

These 3 things gave the Jews a tremendous feeling of security and safety from God's judgment.

And so, in this section Paul sets about to systematically destroy this false security which the Jews had wrapped themselves in, peeling off layer after layer of false righteousness and false security in 2:17-29.

He did this until his fellow Jews were left naked before God—stripped of any self-righteousness demonstrating that they were no different than the Gentiles when it came to the judgment of God.

He does so by showing them that: 1) *their heritage can't save them (verses 17-20)*; 2) *that having the Law can't save them (verses 21-24)*; and 3) *that circumcision won't save them either (verses 25-29)*.

Now, Paul knew that this would immediately lead to a series of questions and objections from the Jews that he anticipates and verbalizes in verses 1-8 of chapter 3.

Question/Objection #1

Romans 3:1 (NKJV)

¹ What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?

"If all you have said (in 2:17–29) is true, and Jews are no better than Gentiles since all are guilty of violating God's laws. If our Jewish heritage, our knowing and teaching the Mosaic law, and our following Jewish rituals such as circumcision do not make a Jew righteous before God—'then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?'"

Paul's answer—

Romans 3:2 (NKJV)

² Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.

Being a Jew has many special privileges and blessings attached to it—not the least of which being that they were entrusted with the **'oracles of God.'**

In other words, the Old Testament Scriptures were given to the Jews by God for them to—protect, copy, teach and preserve for future generations. (verse 2)

One author commented—

"They were people of special privilege. God had revealed His word to them. We are people of special privilege in that God has given us His word. Tonight, we are here to study the Word of God—and that is a tremendous advantage to have the Word of God! An advantage only if you keep the Word of God and live by the Word of God. But if you don't keep the Word of God, if you don't live by the Word, then having the Word itself is not an advantage—it can actually work in reverse and be a liability (a basis for judgment). In reality, it is more of a responsibility than a blessing—in other words, you have a greater responsibility, knowing the will of God than a person who has never known the will of God or the Word of God."

"...or what is the profit of circumcision?"

Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant—

Genesis 17:1–2, 7-11 (NKJV)

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I *am* Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. ² And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."

⁷ And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. ⁸ Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession;

and I will be their God.”⁹ And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.”¹⁰ This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; ¹¹ and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

So, circumcision brought the Jews into this special relationship with God where they were now officially the covenant people of God which contained many blessings—but also carried with it many responsibilities as well!

Paul goes on—*“But how have the people of Israel responded to this tremendous privilege? —For the most part, they have demonstrated an appalling lack of faith.”*

Which led to another question—

Question #2

Romans 3:3 (NKJV)

³ For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?

So, Paul anticipates that many Jews at this point will be thinking that, since the Jews (as a group) are the covenant people of God—does that mean that God deals with them as a group and not as individuals?

Because not all Jews actually believe in God or obey His commandments—does that mean that the whole nation will be judged as a group based on the unbelief of some and not as individuals?

But also, Paul imagined that some would be thinking—

“Well, granted that not all Jews have believed, but does that mean that God will go back on His promises to bring the Messiah to rescue the Jewish people from Gentile dominion and oppression and establish the Kingdom? After all, He did choose Israel as His people and He made definite covenants with them (promises—one of those being the promise of the Kingdom). Can the unbelief of some negate God’s promises to all?”

Paul’s answer—

Romans 3:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: “That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged.”

[judged as being unrighteous by sinners who accuse God of wrongdoing]

This is interesting in that—many Reformed and Calvinist groups (and others) believe that because the Jewish people rejected Jesus as their Messiah that they have forfeited the promises that God gave to them thru Abraham and that the Church has now replaced the Jewish people as the covenant people of God and that all the promises of God have passed from Israel to the Christian Church (Replacement Theology).

Paul’s response is a terse—**“Let God be true but every man a liar!”**

Let’s finish looking at Paul’s line of thinking, and then I want to look briefly at the idea that Israel forfeited the promises of God thru their unbelief and rejection of their Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:3–4 (NKJV)

³ For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? ⁴ Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: *“That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged.”*

In other words, he says, *“Certainly not! Whenever there is a question whether God or man is right, we must always take the side of God that He is always right in all He says and does even if we don’t understand or disagree—we must assume that God is right and every man is a liar (a purveyor of misinformation).”*

In his rebuttal, Paul quotes David in Psalm 51:4—

Psalm 51:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight [his sin with Bathsheba]— That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.

All sin is ultimately against God so that when He judges a person for the sins they committed against another human being (like David did with Bathsheba and then having her husband Uriah murdered to cover up his sin)—God is just when He judges because all sin is against Him.

But once again, looking at the question that many Jews would no doubt be wrestling with in light of Paul’s comments in this section of Romans—

Romans 3:3 (NKJV)

³ For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?

God’s promises don’t require us to believe them to make them true.

One commentator has this to say—

“The Jew failed; doesn’t that mean God failed? No. God’s promise to send Israel the Redeemer/Messiah was not defeated by their willful disobedience and rejection. All His promises for the future of the nation will be fulfilled to His glory in spite of their unbelief. Now, my friend, you may not like that, but I personally thank God that His promises to me do not depend on my faithfulness. If it had depended on me, I would have been lost long ago. Thank God for His faithfulness!

He goes on—

“If I quote something God has said in His Word, but don’t believe it—does that make it then not so? If I say, I don’t believe that two plus two equals four—and you give me two apples and two more apples, and I count them. But I say, I don’t believe it! Does that mean that two plus two doesn’t equal four, because I don’t believe it? Of course not! It only proves that I’m a fool. So, the fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God. I don’t believe in God!’ Does that mean that God doesn’t exist because he doesn’t believe in God? Of course not!

If I say, ‘I don’t believe that this is the Word of God.’ Does that mean that this isn’t the Word of God? Of course not. And so, because some do not believe, does that make the faithfulness of God of no effect? Of course not! It doesn’t alter the fact at all!” “If all mankind were to agree that God had been unfaithful to His promises, it would only prove that all are liars and God is true.”

In other words, the majority doesn’t determine what’s right or wrong.

I’ve heard people over the years who have said when a majority of people claim something to be true—*“Can the majority be wrong?”*

Folks—the majority is seldom right!

That is because the fallen heart of man most always leans in the direction of sin—in the direction that is opposite of what God has said. If the actions of a person's life are built on Satan's lies instead of God's truth—guess what, that person's life will be characterized by confusion and perversion because it is being governed and controlled by lies—lies they believe to be the truth.

This is what Paul (and David) are basically saying—if you're going to believe someone, you'd better believe God rather than man—because God is always right and always speaks truth.

One author said it well—

“Now what he is saying here is that God is justified in what He has said. Men oftentimes challenge what God has said about heaven. What God has said about hell. What God has said about the judgment of sinners. And many times, people challenge the justice or the fairness of God. You hear it all the time. How could a God of love allow a child to be born without an arm, with a physical impairment? Why would a God of love... (man always challenges the fairness or the justice of God)? There are so many factors that we don't take into consideration when we bring up these kinds of issues. It's interesting how that we want to blame God for every calamity—even hurricanes are called ‘acts of God.’ Things that are destructive, we say ‘well, God did it!’ And we blame God falsely. We are living in a world that is in rebellion against God. We are living in a world that is suffering the consequences of those rebellions. Prior to the flood, there were no hurricanes. There were no violent types of tornadoes that were destructive. Calamity is the result of man's sin and is not God's fault. And yet people still want to blame God for the consequences of their own rebellion.

And so, he is speaking of that here in verse four, that even if a person charges God with wrong—God is still right!

I have a hard time understanding the mindset of a man who would challenge God or who would judge God. Who am I to challenge the justice of God or the fairness of God? And yet we find people doing that all the time—but know this, God is right, He will prevail.”

Before we move on to the next question Paul anticipates his readers are wrestling with—let's take a moment to look at the idea that the Jews could forfeit the promises (the covenant) God made with Abraham and his children thru their rejection of Messiah.

For this we need to go back to Genesis 15—to the place in Scripture where this covenant was first established by God with Abraham (then called Abram).

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-21 (NKJV)

¹ After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” ² But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” ⁴ And behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” ⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶ And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. ⁷ Then He said to him, “I *am* the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.” ⁸ And he said, “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?” ⁹ So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹ And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. ¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell

upon him... ¹⁷ And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. ¹⁸ On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—¹⁹ the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

Part of the covenant God made with Abram (Abrahamic Covenant) was that God would give him a people—

Genesis 12:2 (NKJV)

² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.

Genesis 13:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered.

Secondly that God would give Abram and his descendants a land—

Genesis 12:1 (NKJV)

¹ Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.

Genesis 12:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 13:14, 17 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are--northward, southward, eastward, and westward... ¹⁷ Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you."

So now in Chapter 15 God is reaffirming His promise to Abram concerning the land (the land of promise, Caanan, the land of Israel (not Palestine)—

Genesis 15:7-10 (NKJV)

⁷ Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."⁸ And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?" ⁹ So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

God had already made a verbal promise to Abram to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan—but now He enters into an official, legal covenant or contract with him.

The word '**covenant**' comes from a Hebrew word that means "*to cut*"—which meant it was a covenant of blood or as we would say—a '*blood covenant*'.

The idea was that once the animal(s) were killed and cut in two—to ratify the covenant *both* parties would walk through those animal parts.

It was a serious commitment that brought with it a self-imposed curse should either of the covenanting parties break their part of the covenant—their pledge or promise to uphold their part of the covenant.

In essence they were saying, *"If I break my word, may I become like this severed animal!"*

Genesis 15:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ **And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.**

In Scripture vultures (birds that thrive on death) are often used to represent Satan and his demons.

I believe that the vultures that tried to devour the animals before the covenant could be ratified represent the attacks of the enemy against the covenant God made with Abram and the children of Israel to keep them from possessing the land He had promised to them.

We see these attacks going on even to the present day—that Israel is *'occupying'* the Palestinian's land.

And that the promises that God made to Abram and his descendants were made void when the Jews rejected Jesus and had Him crucified.

That Israel forfeited the promises God made with Abraham because they were unfaithful—but folks, that was/is impossible as we will see in a moment.

Genesis 15:12 (NKJV)

¹² **Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram...**

The Hebrew word for **'sleep'** is the same one used for the sleep God put Adam into when He took from his side a 'rib' and from which God made him a partner, a bride namely Eve—at which time the marriage covenant became possible.

So here the Lord causes Abram to fall into a deep sleep—

Genesis 15:17-21 (NKJV)

¹⁷ **And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.** ¹⁸ **On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates--** ¹⁹ **the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites,** ²⁰ **the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,** ²¹ **the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."**

The **'smoking oven'** and **'burning torch'** represented the presence of God—the Shekinah Glory.

Exodus 13:20-22 (NKJV)

²⁰ **So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness.** ²¹ **And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night.** ²² **He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night *from* before the people.**

The important thing to understand is that verse 18 tells us that God made a covenant with Abram—not that God *and* Abram made a covenant with each other. **This was a unilateral (one party), unconditional covenant** that God made with Abram—as opposed to a bilateral covenant like the one that God made with Moses and the children of Israel on top of Mt. Sinai.

Only God passed through those animal parts while Abram was asleep—which meant that Abram (and his descendants) didn't have any terms to fulfill, they didn't have any promises to keep—it was a promise that God basically made with Himself to give the land of Canaan to the Jewish people without any conditions or terms.

And as such, the covenant couldn't be voided, annulled, or broken because of unfaithfulness on the part of Abraham or his descendants because this wasn't a bilateral (two party) contract—it was a unilateral and therefore an unconditional contract or covenant.

One author put it well when he said,

"This was an unconditional, unilateral covenant. God (with astounding condescension) was symbolizing that if He were to break his word, He would be sundered (cut in two) like the butchered animals. It was an acted-out curse, a divine self-imprecation guaranteeing that Abram's descendants would get the land or God would die. And God cannot die!"

Or as another author said,

"This covenant God signed alone; Abram did not haggle with God over the terms. God established and Abram accepted. Abram could not break a contract he has never signed!"

Why is it so important that we study and understand a covenant that God made with a man 4000 years ago and half a world away? I mean, what possible relevance does any of this have on our lives as Christians today?

Well, the New Testament tells us in Hebrews 6, Galatians 3 and other places that the New Covenant is connected with the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants—

Galatians 3:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise [according to the covenant God made with Abraham].

So, by our faith in Jesus we are now spiritual descendants of Abraham and heirs of the promise God gave to him and his children.

The ultimate '**land**' God promised to all Abraham's children (who believe in the promises of God and put their faith in Messiah Jesus)—is the '*land of heaven*'—the ultimate 'Promised Land!' Although during the Millennial Kingdom they will inherit and possess all the land that God promised them—roughly 300 thousand square miles.

The important thing for us as Christians to understand is that just as the covenant God made with Abram was unilateral and unconditional—so is the covenant He made with us through Jesus—the New Covenant, also known as the 'eternal covenant'.

If the New Covenant was a bilateral covenant dependent upon God to keep His part (give us eternal life) if we keep our part of the covenant (keep the law perfectly)—none of us would be saved.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Romans 4:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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