

Foundations: Romans – “Knowing” (3:1-8)

“Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.” Romans 3:1-2

In Chapter 3, Paul continues the indictment against mankind (most specifically, the Jews). Having shown that the Jew’s heritage, covenant and law don’t secure eternal life, and having shown that Jew and Gentile are on the same footing before God (all under the judgment of God), Paul anticipates the next Jewish objection: “So why be a Jew? What advantage is there?” Frankly, after chapter 2, we might think the answer would be simply, “There is no advantage.” But Paul surprises us with “much in every way.”

It’s almost humorous that Paul replies this way. He says “much in every way. To begin with...” yet we never really see any other point but one. The advantage was that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. That’s it. And that is certainly enough. “Oracles” (Gr. *logion*)¹ is used in the Septuagint for the word from God (cf. [Num. 24:4, 16](#); [Deut. 33:9](#); [Ps. 119:67](#); [Isa. 5:24](#); [28:13](#)). It is consistently used in this same sense in the NT (cf. [Acts 7:38](#); [Heb. 5:12](#); [1Pet. 4:11](#)).¹ It refers to the declarations or utterances of God. Some believe that Paul is referring to the whole Old Testament, but others believe it to mean simply the promises and commands of God. Israel was entrusted (Gr. *pisteuo*) with the very words of God, words that God had committed to their guardianship, words that gave life through faith.

“Having the written self-revelation of God was an immense advantage to the Jew, and it remains so for us today. First, because we have *the written description of God’s eternal nature*. God’s Word teaches us that God is the all-powerful Creator and completely sustains the universe. It reveals that he is perfect in holiness, in righteousness, in love, in justice. We learn from this that there is an infinite gulf between us and him. The God of the Scriptures is majestic, transcendent, beyond total human comprehension. Having this disclosure from God is an immense help because this is not how the natural mind thinks of God, no matter how intellectual or intelligent it is. The unbeliever always wrongly closes the gap between God and man—either by bringing God down or by raising man up. There is therefore a huge advantage for those who have the written Word of God.

¶The second advantage of having the oracles of God is that we have a written description of *the nature and purpose of man*. This is closely tied in with the revelation of God because if we see the majesty of God, we are able to see ourselves as we truly are. Human beings who respect God the Creator can begin to understand the mystery of their own being. This, coupled with the Scripture’s revelation of our radical corruption, allows us to see ourselves as lost sinners, a fact which those without the oracles of God cannot fully see. Our ultimate personal advantage in having God’s Word is that we have written directions as to what is required of mankind—that we are to love God with all our being ([Mark 12:30, 31](#)).

¶The advantage of being among God’s people, then, as an initiated Jew and today as a churchgoer is tremendous. We have God’s Word. We know what God is like. We know what we are like. And we know what he requires for salvation.”²

“What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, ‘That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged.’” Romans 3:3-4

“What if some were unfaithful?” God is very giving in this statement – chances are that those that were unfaithful were a little more than “some.” Scripture testifies that the Jews did not always live up to God’s standard of obedience to Him. This is true of all of us. But their anticipated argument is basically, “if we didn’t hold up our end of the bargain, does that mean God will break His word to us?” After all, God

¹ Utley, R. J. D. (1998). *Vol. Volume 5: The Gospel According to Paul: Romans*. Study Guide Commentary Series (Ro 3:2). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

² Hughes, R. K. (1991). *Romans : Righteousness from heaven*. Preaching the Word (p 73). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

did choose Israel. He cut covenant with Israel. Can the unbelief or unfaithfulness of “some” cause God to be unfaithful to His promises? Paul’s answer is an emphatic “no way!”

In his answer in verse 4, Paul adds a quote from David in Psalm 51:4 – “Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, ‘That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.’” This verse comes from the Psalm David wrote after his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. David repented and spoke to God saying, “Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgment.” “The words he quotes state David’s purpose in confessing his horrible double sin...that God might be ‘proved right’ in his judgment on David. By acknowledging his sin, David vindicates God’s sentence of judgment...What Paul is suggesting is that God’s faithfulness to his word (vv.3-4a) includes his commitment not only to bless his people but also to punish them for their sins.”³ It calls to mind Nebuchadnezzar’s words after God’s judgment and subsequent restoration: “...all His works are right and His ways are just, and those who walk in pride He is able to humble” (Daniel 4:37b).

“But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world? But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come? – as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.” Romans 3:5-8

The next objection to Paul’s words is found in verse 5. “But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)” In other words, how can it be just for God to punish the Jews when their unfaithfulness has actually made God’s righteousness more conspicuous? Paul basically says, “that’s preposterous!” If that were the case, that God were unfair in judging unfaithful Jews, then He would be barred from judging the world. And of course, that could not be. So, since God will judge the world (cf. 2:5) He will not be unfair in extending His wrath on guilty Jews (cf. 2:11). A second question is this: If someone’s lack of truth enhances God’s truthfulness, how can God in fairness condemn (lit., “judge”) him as a sinner? In other words, since sin seemingly benefits God, how could He turn around and judge sinners for their sin? Paul raised these two questions, which are examples of unsaved people’s casuistry, because some opponents were falsely accusing him of advancing them and proclaiming, Let us do evil (lit., “the evil things”) that good (lit., “the good things”) may result. The apostle did not reply to these slanders. He assigned such persons to God and simply observed, Their condemnation (*krima*, “judgment”) is deserved. Later, however, he did discuss a similar question (6:1). To suggest, as did these two questions (3:5, 7), that God is unfair in condemning sin is to blaspheme the very nature of God. Such persons who question God’s condemning are therefore themselves condemned!⁴

³ Moo, Douglas. (2002) *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Exposition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

⁴ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (V 2, p 448, V 2, p 449). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.