

Pentwater Bible Church

Romans Message 12

August 7, 2022



The Last Supper by Peter Paul Rubens Cir 1632

Daniel E. Woodhead – Pastor Teacher

Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Romans
Message Twelve
The Jewish Blessing
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Romans 3:1–8

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. ³For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? ⁴God 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. ⁵But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) ⁶God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? ⁷For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? ⁸And 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 (KJV).

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE JEWS?

Romans 3:1

¹What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision (KJV)?

Paul's shadow conversation with his potential Jewish critic continues following chapter two. Previously, Paul had clearly stated that true "Jewishness" is not a matter of heritage, but a matter of one's relationship with God, and that true circumcision is not on the body, but on the heart. The Jewish response might have well been, "If that's true, then is there any advantage to being a part of the Jewish nation or, for that matter, in being physically circumcised? The apostle Paul then continues with an answer to several potential objections to his previous discussion of how the Lord has made even the Gentiles aware of His morality. That is, through their consciences. God often spoke with a great deal of respect for the Jews, as a special people, a holy nation, a peculiar treasure, the seed of Abraham His friend.

Deuteronomy 33:29

²⁹Happy art thou, O Israel: Who is like unto thee, a people saved by Jehovah, The shield of thy help, And the sword of thy excellency! And thine enemies shall submit themselves unto thee; And thou shalt tread upon their high places (ASV, 1901).

Jeremiah 31:35–37

³⁵Thus saith Jehovah, who giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who stirreth up the sea, so that the waves thereof roar; Jehovah of hosts is his name: ³⁶If these ordinances depart from before me, saith Jehovah, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. ³⁷Thus saith Jehovah:

If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith Jehovah (ASV, 1901).

He gave them circumcision as a badge of their fidelity to Him, and a seal of their covenant-relation to Him. Now the apostle seems to deny them all such blessings, and reflect dishonour upon the ordinance of circumcision, as an insignificant sign. If he is not properly a Jew, who is born of Jewish parents, and brought up in the customs, rites, and religion of the Jewish nation, but any one of any nation, where's the superior excellency of the Jew to the Gentile? A man may as well be born and brought up a Heathen as a Jew; the one has no more advantages than the other by his birth and education. Another way of stating the question may be, *what hath the Jew more?* The objection could arise from the position that if a Heathen should do the things required by the Law, he would be treated as if he had been circumcised. Therefore, the apostle poses the question, "*what profit is there of circumcision?*"

Romans 3:2

² *Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God (KJV).*

The circumcised Jew has great advantage over the uncircumcised Gentile, *in every way. chiefly*; more especially, particularly, and in the first place; *because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.* What the apostle means by this is. The law of Moses, and the writings of the prophets, the descriptions of the ceremonial law, and all the prophecies of the Messiah. This is essentially all the books of the Old Testament, and whatsoever is contained in them. which are called so, because they are all divinely inspired. They contain the mind and will of God, and are infallible and authoritative. As a result, it was the privilege and profit of the Jews that they were intrusted with them, when other nations were not, and so had the advantage of having them for their own use which gave them a more clear and distinct knowledge of God than the Gentiles could ever have had by the light of nature and their consciences. Moreover, they had the honor of being the keepers of these sacred books, these divine oracles, and of transmitting them to posterity, for the use of others. Including here are all the Pseudigraphia and Midrashim helping to explain the Divinely revealed Scriptures.

They were the chosen people group through whom the Messiah came to earth (Isaiah 11:1–10; Matthew 1:1–17). They were the beneficiaries of covenants with God himself (Genesis 17:1–16; Exodus 19:3–6). Later in Romans, Paul returns to this theme and lists several other benefits of being Jewish: "*Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen*" (9:4–5). But these privileges did not make them better than anyone else. In fact, the privileges made the Jews even more responsible to live up to God's requirements. Paul himself was a Jew, and even though he became a highly effective Christian, he did not turn his back on his heritage. In fact, he realized that the prophets, the Law, and God's plan all pointed to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Therefore, he could confidently state that being a Jew and being circumcised did have meaning, but only as part of God's total plan. The Jews were *entrusted with* God's words, preserving them through the coming of Christ, and His return who was the fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures.

Romans 3:3–4

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 (KJV).*

While it was true that many Jews were not faithful to God or to what they had been entrusted, that didn't change the fact of God's faithfulness. Many Jews rejected the Gospel and thus failed to understand their own Scriptures. But Israel's unfaithfulness did not determine God's faithfulness. Never does God's faithfulness depend on the actions or attitudes of anyone. God had always been faithful to Israel, despite the nation's failings, and God would continue to be faithful to His covenant with them.

Although the Jews enjoyed such a privilege, some of them did just not believe as in all generations of every people group. This can be viewed as a compounding of their sin, that they should have such means of light, knowledge, and faith, such clear and full evidences of God, and yet be stuck in unbelief. However, this was the case only of some, not of all, and we must realize not of their disbelief of the Scriptures being the word of God, for these were always received as such by them all, and were constantly read, heard, and followed if only in routine compliance. Some were disobedience to the commands of God required in the Law, and of the promises of God, and prophecies of the Messiah. Further, their disbelief in the Messiah Himself when He came was due to the darkness and unbelief of their minds. Which begs the question, *shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?* The answer is obviously no, their unbelief could not, and did not cancel the truth and faithfulness of God as well as His promises concerning the Messiah. Those were recorded in the oracles of God, which He had committed to them. It is quite clear that God raised up the Messiah from among them, which is another advantage the Jews had over the Gentiles.

Paul later encouraged Timothy by writing, "*Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself,*" (II Timothy 2:11–13). God's faithfulness is still far ahead of our obedience. In fact, it is futile to try to make God's faithfulness in any way dependent on the quality of our faith or obedience. Our experience of following Christ in this life will always include a composite of faith and faithlessness. However, this is not so with God. He will always demonstrate His faithfulness by steadfastly doing as He has promised in all things.

In the most forceful manner that Paul could use, he wanted to emphasize the fact that the combined self-justification of the whole world could not stand up to God's truth. If God and every person were to disagree, there still would not be any doubt about who was right. Let no such thing ever enter into the minds of any, that the truth of God can be, or will be made of no effect by the lack of faith in any person or group. Always be aware that God is true, faithful to His word, constant in His promises, and will always fulfil His purposes, even if *every man is a liar*. The fact that many people are unfaithful (Psalm 116:11) by suppressing the truth (1:18), exchanging the truth for a lie (1:25), and rejecting the truth (2:8), doesn't change the deeper fact of God's faithfulness. God's purpose for Israel and his plan for all people remained unshaken. The world has always had a mixture of faith and faithlessness.

Psalm 51, from which Paul chose to quote (verse 4), is one of the profoundly confessional passages in the Old Testament. It records the repentance of David following his confrontation with the prophet Nathan over his sin with Bathsheba. In the revelation of his sin David realized, as all of us must, that there is no denial before God. He sees even those things that we hide so well in ourselves and perhaps even come to believe never happened. Kings were used to getting their way. We tend toward the same arrogance. Before God it carries no weight at all.

Psalm 51:1–4

¹Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: According to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions; And my sin is ever before me. ⁴Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, And done that which is evil in thy sight; That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, And be clear when thou judgest (ASV, 1901).

Paul says *that thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged*. This is his proof that God is true, and stands to His word, though men are fallible, inconsistent, and wicked. God made a promise to David, that of the fruit of his body He would set upon His throne; that the Messiah would spring from him; that He would of his seed raise up unto Israel a Savior. Now David sinned greatly in the case of Bathsheba, but his sin did not remove the truth and faithfulness of God. David showed himself to be a weak sinful man, yet God remained true and faithful to every word of promise which He had sworn in truth to Him. Therefore, when he was brought to the realization of his evil, and at the same time to observe the steady reliable truth and faithfulness of God, he said, *I acknowledge my transgression, &c. against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight*. This was the confession of sin he made, *that thou mightest be justified in thy sayings; or when thou speakest*. Which is to say in paraphrase, that God would appear to be just, and faithful, and true in all Thy promises, in every word that is gone out of His mouth, which shall not be recalled or made void, on account of David's sins. David says that though I have sinned, You always remain faithful. He further says that this also I declare with shame to myself, and with adoring views of Thine unchangeable truth and goodness: *that thou mightest overcome*; that is, put to silence all such condemnations and charges, as if the faith of God could be made void by the unfaithfulness of men: *when thou art judged*; when men will be so bold and daring to challenge God's truth and faithfulness, and contend with Him about them. God is always true to His word, though men fail in theirs, and fall into sin. God kept His word with David concerning the stability of His kingdom, his successor, and the Messiah that should come from him, though he sinned greatly against God. There is some small differences between these words in the Hebrew text of Psalm 51:4 and rendered by the apostle. In the last clause of them, the former is, *that thou mightest be clear*; in the latter, *that thou mightest overcome*.

Romans 3:5–8

⁵But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) ⁶God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? ⁷For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? ⁸And 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 (KJV).

The Lord through Paul anticipates further objections. He poses them in the question of this verse. He understands that people are usually more willing to rationalize than repent, and that their minds will be considering ways to evade God's righteous judgment. Paul knows they are thinking, *If God's faithfulness is not dependent on my faithfulness, then why should I be faithful? And if my sinfulness makes God look so good, then why should he punish me?* I'm actually helping him out! This was an attempt to make it seem unjust for God to punish sinners.

Is God unjust to punish the unrighteous? Many believe that God's wrath contradicts his loving nature. But God judges based on His own character, not on society's norm for fairness. God is not accountable to some external, vague notion of fair play. His personal moral uprightness is the standard by which He judges. Judgment and love are just two of His many characteristics. They are all equal and form the composite nature of God. One does not dominate the other.

Now it appears, that the unrighteousness of men commends the righteousness, or faithfulness of God, and yet all unrighteousness is sin. Here the wrath of God is revealed against the sins and would seem to be the dominant characteristic, if it was not for His full pardon through the blood of Christ, the Gospel. Additionally, the one is contrary to the other, and of itself, of its own nature, cannot influence and affect the other. Therefore, this can only be understood of the manifestation and illustration of the righteousness of God through all these things.

Considering the love of God is illustrated through the sins of men Christ died, and His grace and mercy is shown in the conversion of them. Then what follows is the question but if this be true, *what shall we say is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?* In other words can we say God is unrighteous because He takes action against sin?

Far be it; such a notion is completely wrong, nor can it be fairly assumed from what is asserted. It is the unrighteousness of His chosen people, on whom He takes vengeance but not personally, and not the unrighteousness of others, on whom He does take vengeance, which commends His righteousness; and supposing it was that of others. God cannot be unrighteous in performing His threatenings, in a way of righteousness: moreover, unrighteousness is sin, and does not of itself but by accident, illustrate the righteousness of God; wherefore God is not unjust in punishing it; for *how should God judge the world?*

For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? This is the same question from verse 5, posed with different words. The root problem is in people's misunderstanding of God's righteousness when He is patient to both unfaithful Jews and sinful Gentiles. Jews cannot condemn Gentiles logistically because both are in the same predicament. Both need to rely on God's righteousness in His dealings with them and then choose to trust Him or face His inevitable wrath for their sins. Nothing is more certain than that He will do it, and that this will be done as He exercises His righteousness.

And not rather, as we be slanderously reported, Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just. These are the apostle's own words, in answer to the objector he is conceptualizing and it is as if he should say, why don't you go on? Why do you stop here? *and not rather* say, as we are evil-spoken of, and our doctrine is blasphemed: *and as some affirm, let us do evil that good may come.*

The Gospel Paul preached was being misconstrued because he argued that obeying the Law would not bring salvation. Paul, and possibly the Roman Christians, had heard this objection from Jews who were accusing him of teaching lawlessness. If Jews or Gentile Christians interpreted Paul's words that God is faithful despite people's faithlessness to mean that God's Laws need not be followed, then they could reach this incorrect conclusion. Paul touches on the issue here and will return to it in detail in chapter 6. He wants his readers to take in the true freedom that Christ offers without slipping into lawlessness. He dismisses this perverse reasoning with the terse words, *whose damnation is just.*

In other words, if people's propensity to lie only makes God's truthfulness stand out more clearly, and thus His glory, why are people condemned for something that glorifies God? To answer in modern terms, Paul would say that the end does not justify the means. Getting to the right place (God's glory) the wrong way (by man's sin) can never be justified. As to those who suggest such a thing, Paul says, *their condemnation is deserved.*

Next message: ROMANS CHAPTER Three cont.

E-mail: Pentwaterbiblechurch@scfieldinstitute.org Call: 877-706-2479