

Is God’s Faithfulness Nullified (3:1-4)?

The Promises of God (3:1,2)

3:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 3:2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

- Paul, throughout chapter 2 of this letter, has been proving that Jews need the Gospel to be saved as much as non-Jews: READ 2:9-11,28,29.
- Paul may have done his arguing too well.¹ He now anticipates questions in reaction to his teaching throughout chapter 2. If “*there is no partiality with God*” and the true circumcision (the mark belonging to the covenant people) is not “*outward in the flesh,*” then what’s the point of the Old Testament? Why did God give the command that Abraham’s physical descendants be circumcised (Genesis 17:10,11)?
- The Jews thought the mark of the Abrahamic (circumcision) to be immunity from God’s judgment. They neglected the fact that God introduced the mark of the covenant with a command to obedience to God in the covenant: “*I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and I will multiply you exceedingly...now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised*” (Genesis 17:2,3,10). When the sacrament of the Abrahamic covenant is given, it

¹ Paul’s anticipating of questions probably comes from his extensive experience “reasoning” with the Jews in synagogues as he worked to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah/Christ (Acts 9:22; 17:2,3; 18:4,28; 19:8).

follows the command to walk obediently before God. For the Jews to claim the sacrament without living in the obedience of faith, their faithless disobedience nullified the sacrament. **Similarly, our neglect of God’s commands may mean our baptism (the New Testament sacramental counterpart to circumcision) was not reflective of true belief.**

- What is the benefit of being a physical descendant of Abraham, circumcised into the old covenant people of God? “...*they were entrusted with the oracles of God*” (Romans 3:2).² **The benefit is that they, among all the peoples of the world, alone received the Word of God. Do you value having the Bible so much that you would call it the first**

² There are other benefits, listed in 9:4,5. Paul, though, highlights the receiving of God’s written revelation as being “*first of all,*” or the greatest benefit. Without the Word, we know nothing about Who God is, what He demands, and His way of salvation. As James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000) said, “Can any of us experience anything in life of greater personal advantage to our souls than possession of the Holy Scriptures? Of course not! Without them we are utterly confused, adrift on a sea of human speculation where all the great questions of life are concerned. Is there a God? We do not know; at least, in our sinful state we are unable to admit the full personal significance of there being a God. Who are we? We do not know the answer to that important question. Apart from the Scripture, we cannot know that we have been created in the image of the one true God and are called to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever. How do we come to God? How is our sin to be dealt with? What way of life is best? Does what we do here matter? It is only from the revelation of God in the Bible that we can have answers to any of these life-and-death questions.” Notice, too, that these are “*the oracles of God.*” The Scriptures are not the words of men, but the Word of God.

of all the great benefits you have as one of God’s people?

- Just being “*hearers of the Law*” does not make you right before God (2:13), but hearing the Law contained in “*the oracles of God*” brings you closer to salvation than those who do not have the Word of God.³ Nobody is saved unless it is by the revealed Word of God, so the old covenant people were closer to salvation than those outside that covenant (it was still no guarantee to salvation, but it brought a person closer):
 - “*In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the Word of truth*” (James 1:18).
 - “*...you have been born again not of seed which is perishable [physical descent from Abraham] but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring Word of God*” (1 Peter 1:23).
- The Old Testament (“*oracles of God*”) was given to lead to Christ. It’s all about Him.⁴ Unbelieving Jews, because of their unbelief in Christ, cannot understand the very book which was their greatest benefit: READ 2 Corinthians 3:14-16.

³ “*...the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith*” (Galatians 3:24). Or, as Jesus said, “*you search the Scriptures [the Old Testament] because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me*” (John 5:39).

⁴ I know I beat this drum a lot, but it’s so important! READ Luke 24:27,44-49; John 5:39,46; 8:56. Remember that I’ve given you chapters of the Bible I think believers should read every week (like Philippians 3 and Hebrews 12)? Galatians 3 is one of them, especially 3:22-24. The Old Testament is not a stand-alone book, but is meant to lead us to Christ!

- Unbelieving Jews had made the institution God commanded (circumcision under the Abrahamic covenant) worthless – did their breaking of God’s Law make faithful Jews’ believe in Christ less? No. **Religious hypocrites are not a reason to throw true religion away.**

Not Believing the Promises (3:3)

^{3:3}What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?

- When Paul addresses the need for Jews to believe in the Gospel to be saved, please note that Paul’s not attacking the Jewish people as a whole. This is not anti-Semitism! Paul himself is an ethnic Jew. So was Jesus, and the vast majority of the first believers in Him! Paul clearly says here, “*some did not believe.*” This is evangelism, not racism. He earnestly desires that those who are ethnic Jews and unbelievers in Jesus be saved!
- Just as 3:2 anticipates the list of 9:4,5, in 3:3 we have an anticipation of Paul’s question in 9:6. God promised covenant relationship with the descendants of Abraham, but Paul is teaching that, apart from the Gospel, they are lost! Does their unbelief in the Gospel (lostness) mean that God’s Word (His promises to Israel) in the Old Testament was false?
- The “*oracles of God*” (the Old Testament) were meant to lead the Jews to Christ, Who is the ultimate fulfillment of all O.T. promises. All the O.T. rituals and laws were “*a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ*” (Colossians 2:17). The unbelieving Jews worshiped the “*shadow*” instead of the “*substance.*”
- There is no salvation for unbelievers, no matter who their father is or what kind of good deeds they try to do. And they won’t be able to blame God for their lostness on the day of judgment, either.
- The unbelief of “*a Jew who is one outwardly*” (2:28) does not mean that God is faithless in His promises

“The Faithfulness, Truthfulness, and Righteousness of God”
from Romans 3:1-8 (NASB)

Pastor Michael Head – Indian Hills Baptist Church, Silver City, NM
Sunday, April 17, 2016

to Israel. Instead, we are being taught that the categories “Israel” and “Jew” are not ethnic, outward, or physical qualities in God’s estimation. God will be faithful to the true Jews, despite the fact that most ethnic Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah/Christ.⁵

- **Religious hypocrites do not lessen God’s character, even though because of them unbelievers blaspheme God (2:24). God is faithful despite and even through those who are unfaithful.**⁶

Sinners Do Not Change God’s Character (3:4)

^{3,4}May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written [in Psalm 51:4], “That You may be justified in Your words, And prevail when You are judged.”

- Paul has anticipated the question, “if all the Jews aren’t saved, does this mean God lied in the Old Testament?” He has answered by saying that God’s plan throughout the Old Testament has not failed because of the unbelief of most ethnic Jews.
- “...let God be found true...” **He is a faithful God (Deuteronomy 7:9; 32:4; Psalm 119:90; Lamentation 3:23), and is “the God of truth” (Isaiah 65:16). Nothing can change this. We should rejoice in this, rest in this. Look these Scriptures up. Worship in them. Give thanks!**
- The sad irony is that unbelieving humanity fights for the opposite conclusion – they argue that God’s Word is the lie and that anything unbelievers say is true, no matter how logically inconsistent, lacking of evidence,

⁵ “True Jews” are those who have entered into the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) through faith in Jesus Christ. The first promise of the new covenant is the working of the Spirit on the heart of the covenant-member (Romans 2:29; Philippians 3:3). They are true Israel, and the promises of the old covenant are theirs in Christ alone.

⁶ READ the hymn in 2 Timothy 2:11-13!

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or obviously false it is. Paul’s quote of Psalm 51:4 says that God will be proven just/right in all of His judgments. Unbelieving humanity wants to put the righteous Judge of the universe on trial, accusing Him of being false, but God’s judgment (as recorded in His Word) will itself be justified.

Reading Psalm 51

- The apostle Paul quotes from David as an Old Testament proof to his argument: **READ Psalm 51:1-4.**
- What event is the background of this Psalm?
- To what does David appeal to receive forgiveness for this sin? Does he rely on good deeds, his own good intentions/character, or a promise to do better in the future?
- Against whom does David acknowledge he has sinned? Whose Law defines what is sin and therefore worthy of judgment (1 John 3:4)?
- God’s character as a righteous Judge is confessed by David the sinner. Have you repented of your sin and confessed it before God? Confession is the key to forgiveness (1 John 1:8-2:2).

Is God’s Righteousness Tainted (3:5,6)?

How Can We Be Judged for Glorifying Him (3:5)?

^{3,5}But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God Who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)

- If the unbelieving Jews’ breaking of God’s Law doesn’t lessen its truthfulness, and their unbelief doesn’t lessen God’s faithfulness, and God is glorified and proven truthful even in their sin, then how can “*the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*” (Romans 1:18)? If He’s still receiving glory, how can

it be fair or right that He still is wrathful against unbelieving Jews?

A Righteous God Must Judge (3:6)

^{3:6}May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

- If God is unrighteous, Paul says, how is He qualified to bring righteousness to the world in His judgment of it?
- All human beings, believers or not, long for justice and right to be done. Of course, the lost have perverted ideas of justice and righteousness, but God’s revelation in their consciences cause them to still desire these things (2:14-16).
- “...it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). How will you face God’s judgment? If alone, relying on your own goodness or good works, you will be found guilty. Trust in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness before God’s judgment and receive Jesus’ perfect righteousness by faith – it is only His righteousness that will bring you through judgment.

The Gospel Is Not a License to Sin (3:7,8)

Question

^{3:7}But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

- “My lie.” What lie? Idolatry – putting anything and everything above God, including ourselves: “...even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks...**they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever. Amen**” (1:21,25).
- All of us, religious/spiritual or not, Jew or not, are serving the original Lie before we come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. The original Lie is that there are no consequences for breaking God’s Law (Genesis 3:4), and that, apart from obeying God, we can be just like God through the breaking of His Law (Genesis 3:5).

Autonomy. Do you see this in unbelieving society today? Do you see remnants of it in your heart?

- Paul makes the point that God is glorified, even in our sin, for it highlights His righteousness when He judges it. If God is glorified in judging sin, does this make sin a good thing?

Blaspheming the Gospel (3:8)

^{3:8}And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just.

- Paul has already argued against the false view of all non-Christian world religions, which say we must work to earn salvation or approval before God:
Good works → justification (being declared right before God)
- We have seen that the Gospel, as taught in the Bible, speaks of faith unto salvation, which is then shown by a life of obedience to God’s Word:
Faith → justification (being declared right before God) → good works
- However, some go to an opposite extreme and take any good works out of the equation (even though neither Paul nor the rest of the Bible teach this). The New Testament is clear that those who are true believers will obey God. The false teachers say:
Faith → justification (being declared right before God) without any obedience, fruit, or evidence of salvation.
- No true Christian can take God’s Law, His holiness, His righteousness, His judgment, and sin lightly – because the entire Bible takes these topics very seriously. A person who doesn’t consider these themes important, or presumes that grace is a license to sin, is someone far from the truth of the Bible, and, therefore, far from its salvation.

Repent of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ alone for your forgiveness and justification before God’s judgment seat, then live a life of faithful obedience to God that witnesses to your forgiveness!