

## It Still Takes Faith

### Romans Chapters 3 & 4

#### **Romans 3:1-2 (KJV)**

1 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit *is there* of circumcision?

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

The Jews did have an **advantage** over the Gentiles. Paul says, “much in every way.” But then he immediately addresses one of their main problems. Their continual and historic lack of faith. They had the oracles; they had the Law; they had the foundation of understanding; they had works, however hypocritical and self-righteous. Yet, they put such reliance on their traditions, ceremony, and works that they couldn’t stoop to the Gospel. Jesus Himself confronted this when He said they had, by their tradition, made the Law of God of none effect. In the Book of Mark, Jesus confronts them again by saying that “in vain do they worship God” because they had supplanted the commandments of God with the tradition of men, keeping the latter and forsaking the former. Jesus said they did this because they wanted to keep their own traditions. (They preferred their way of doing things over God’s - or at least their interpretation of ‘God’s way.’) **It was a choice.** It was a choice to rely on their works.

This is what the Apostle Paul was constantly addressing in them. Trying to get them to understand that works, while good, couldn’t save them. They needed the righteousness of God. It wasn’t just Paul; Isaiah saw the same thing about their righteousness as a nation - it was like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Daniel prayed something similar in repentance for the nation as a whole - that God was righteous, but not they (Dan. 9:4-8). The Pharisees went about to “establish their own righteousness” and, therefore, displayed no desire nor need for the righteousness of God. Paul was continually persuading them that righteousness came by faith and grace rather than the works of the law.

He was not teaching the Gentiles the same level of contrast necessarily between faith and works because the Gentiles were not relying on their works as according to the Mosaic Law or the traditions of the elders. While still believing in many false gods, which they needed to turn their back on and ‘believe on Jesus’, they understood they didn’t have a background or backlog of works on which to lean. While the Scripture is applicable to both Jew and Gentile, it seems to apply for two different reasons - or at least two different reasons hold a greater sway on the application.

Paul, as is his style, asks and then answers his own questions. While he said the Jews had an ‘advantage,’ he asks in Romans 3:9 whether the Jews were “**better**” than the Gentiles, then answers, “No, in no wise.”

Why? He asks. Then he answers. Because they are both sinners!

He then goes on to quote Psalms 14:2-3, 51:1-3, 5:9, 140:3, 10:7, 36:1 & Isaiah 59:7-8, all of which were written to the Jewish people. All describing the innate sinfulness of man. The utter hopelessness to be righteous without God. “There is none righteous, no not one,” Paul quotes from these references above.

They had forgotten their own prophets' writings and had decided that they were righteous. They were righteous by their rigorous, self-disciplined, regimented, ceremonially observant lifestyle.

But they weren't.

**Romans 3:20 (KJV)**

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.

They had rejected faith in God's redemptive work and grace, which came by Jesus Christ.

Thus, the Jews were admonished in Romans and elsewhere to "believe on the Lord" rather than rely on their works; Paul stating that works would not save them. He was not giving the simplistic modern 'formula for salvation' via the 'Roman Road.' It **wasn't** a statement lending credence to easy-believism. It wasn't the Billy Graham version of conversion and salvation to the Gentiles. Romans wasn't really written with the Gentiles in focus, otherwise he wouldn't have used the pronoun 'we' as he did. The 'we' he is speaking of is the Jewish people and supports his appeal to them.

What Paul wrote must be judged against the canvas of his time and to the people to whom he wrote. Consider, the Jews had so many things correct: They believed in One God, they worshipped Him (as they knew how), they kept the commandments, they dressed modestly, they sang the correct songs, they were faithful to the synagogue, they read the Scriptures (or studied the Torah), etc. They had a lot going for them - they had the **advantage**. BUT as a people, they lacked something very fundamental that rendered them '**no better**' than anyone else in everything they did. They lacked faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ. They didn't believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. They had become comfortable with and reliant on their own efforts for salvation or right-standing with God.

**Romans 3:22 (KJV)**

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.

Faith was the only way into the Kingdom of God. It was the great equalizer. It leveled the field between Jew and Gentile. Likewise, it also levels the field between 3rd, 4th, or even 5th-generation Apostolics and those fresh out of the world.

**Romans 3:26-28 (KJV)**

26 To declare, *I say*, at this time **his [Jesus]** 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. [added]

When the issue of Gentiles being, or attempting to be, persuaded to be circumcised (to become Jews). The Apostles took council and didn't see the advantage or necessity of it for the New Testament believers. So, to the church of the Gentiles was given the common admonishment and commandment to abstain from fornication, pollution of idols, things strangled, blood and meats offered to idols, which obviously applied to the Jewish people as well, but if they were a Jew, they were already observing this. This was the command from the Apostolic council because the Jews were trying to highlight the 'better way' over the door the Gentiles had come through - faith. (Remember Abraham was righteous BEFORE circumcision).

So we see, reliance on the Law and Ordinances were not the Gentiles' snare; fornication and idol worship were. While, for the Jews, in Paul's focus here, tradition was that which they were to guard against, for the Gentiles, it was immorality and the tendency to idolatry.

While the entire Bible is inspired of God, we must "rightly divide" and properly apply the Scriptures. Romans and Hebrews are wonderful, wonderful books, but we must remember they were written in part to self-sufficient people of Jewish descent or at least persuasion who did not see their need of Jesus Christ in the correct light. Not that the message is diminished to us, but simply through this understanding, we can grasp a fuller meaning of the text. For instance, he is not speaking of the "law" of the Gentiles. Thus, as Gentiles, when we fulfill the righteousness of God, our battle is not against the "Law of Moses" because we were never under it!

As a new, first-century, first-generation church, their battle was largely against the immorality and idolatry of the world and not the 'Law' and can certainly apply to Apostolic new converts. On the same token, this is not always true about **multi-generational Apostolics**. While all flesh must abstain from these sins, a successive generation of Apostolics may also have the additional struggle against man-made (not speaking of church 'rules' or standards) traditions [hairstyle, taste in clothing, way we worship, songs we sing, cars we drive, income level, higher education] this being their great impediment to full understanding and spiritual growth. We began to judge righteousness by how much better our works (or blessings) are than those of others and **not by our faith and obedience to the Scriptures**. Pride can creep into our churches and young people just as it did in the Pharisee who prayed, "I thank thee that I am not like this Publican." I DO this, and I DO that. YET, the Publican, who hadn't done much except sin, apparently was JUSTIFIED when he left. Why? Because he understood his works were insufficient and instead expressed his faith in God's benevolence and mercy.

Understand, the Jews tradition was not 'bad' or altogether 'wrong'. It was only where their tradition nullified the Law or caused them to trust in their works that Jesus found fault with. In other words, they forgot that it took faith and came to depend on a *way of life* to save them.

### **Romans 3:9 (KJV)**

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.

We have to be careful that lifestyle doesn't become seen as the source of our blessings... and not faith. As subsequent Apostolics, we cannot allow our reliance to ever fall on our heritage, tradition, church culture, or manner of life to save us! These things are good...no, they are GREAT! They offer our children and young people a huge ADVANTAGE in walking with God, in life, in their career, in marriage, in raising children, but they do NOT make us BETTER! We are still flesh.

Certainly, while we must maintain the standards of holiness to not be lost, they are not the things that save us from our sins. (Long sleeves don't save me, but short sleeves can cause me to be lost, etc.) Reliance on **anything else** beside the full grace and abundant mercy of Jesus Christ leads to a mindless and careless 'mechanicalism' of Christianity, that is, without the actions of faith - because it has been replaced with tradition! We assume our works are good enough and our salvation is a forgone conclusion, and so we put faith to the side on a dusty shelf.

Who needs it anyway? I have everything I need and can just do more works if I don't. No! It still takes an encounter with God where we see that no matter how hard we try, we can't earn or be worthy of our salvation. No matter how much we do or what 'laws and precepts' we conform to, we still need the blood of Calvary. We are still sinners saved by grace. Grace comes by faith.

It still takes faith to be saved!

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