

INTRODUCTION

"The New Testament book of Romans is somewhat difficult to understand" (Mosher, *Romans: A Study Outline* i). The main reason as to why Romans is misunderstood is because many think that it is a personal letter written to the brethren at Rome about the brethren at Rome; however, this is not the case (Mosher, *Romans Class Lecture Notes*). The letter is a treatise by the inspired Apostle Paul where he defines his theme and thesis concerning the righteousness of God and the way in which man can be declared righteous by God (Mosher, *Romans: A Study Outline* 2). It is important to note that throughout the book of Romans, the word righteousness, when referring to man's righteousness, is a legal term referring to the act of God declaring man justified and forgiven (Mosher, *Romans: A Study Outline* i).

The purpose or theme of Paul's letter addresses the following question: "How can a man be righteous before God?" (Mosher, *Romans: A Study Outline* 2). Paul answers this question with the following thesis: justification for all men, from Adam to present day man, is found only in the gospel (Mosher, *Romans Class Lecture Notes*). God's righteousness is proven in this treatise as Paul proves that all justified men can be declared righteous by God because Christ's blood was shed and the gospel of Christ came to fruition (Mosher, *Romans: A Study Outline* 2).

OVERVIEW OF ROMANS 3:1-8

As one comes to the text of Romans 3:1-8, it is needful that the initial foundation of the letter, as given in the first two chapters, is already understood based on Paul's theme and thesis. In the first part of chapter one, verses 1-17, after giving his introduction and salutations, Paul lays out the purpose of his letter by stating his thesis in verses 16-17; specifically, that all faithful men are saved and justified in God's plan of salvation known as the gospel of Christ (Taylor 12). "However, before either Jew or Gentile would hear and heed this plan, it was intensely imperative to exhibit the universal need for gospel justification" (Taylor 22). Therefore, after starting his thesis, he begins by writing evidence that the gentiles are in need of the gospel because of their sinfulness (Lipscomb 33).

Until the beginning of chapter two, the Jews must have been pretty proud of themselves and of Paul for writing such accurate truths concerning the sinfulness of the gentile people (Mosher, *Romans Class Lecture Notes*). However, in chapter two, Paul goes beyond the gentiles to explain that the Jews too are sinful and in need of the gospel; henceforth, proving the universality of sin among all peoples (Taylor 33). Chapter two verse one lays the framework for a point that would not be well received by the

Jewish people. To paraphrase, the verse essentially states that the "Jew constantly condemned the Gentile for doing certain things; but in doing so he condemned himself, for he did the same things" (Lard 70). This would have been a shock for the Jew because he "seemed to think that because of his special relationship with God he would, somehow, escape" God's judgment (Wacaster 86). The basic point of chapter two are that the Jews were no better than the gentiles because they too had sinned against God. Paul would go on to write that the judgment of God is based on impartiality and what a person does in this life (Romans 2:11), not based on whether they are a Jew or a Gentile (Haley 37).

As the Jews would have finished reading the first two chapters they would have understood that they were in the same state as the Gentiles and therefore, based on their sin, in need of the gospel for salvation (McGuiggan 118). Paul, having been a former Jew, knew that the Jews would have resented this very idea; therefore, through inspiration, he anticipates their next question: what is the advantage then of being a Jew or what profit does he have over the gentile? (Camp 22). In verses one through four of chapter three Paul would explain to the Jews that their advantage was not that salvation was exclusive to them, but that Jews were profited by having the law in their

possession; furthermore, in verses four through eight, Paul would explain that the true advantage for a Jew is to obey the will of God and that there is no advantage in perverting the truth (Mosher, *Romans: A Study Outline 16-17*).

TEXT

Romans 3:1 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?

In chapter two, Paul had done all he could "to remove from the Jew all reason to boast and to put him on the same plane with the Gentile" (Nygren 136). Therefore, he anticipates the questioning they would have been considering concerning God and His righteousness: how is God righteous, when Jews, who are His children and chosen people, are in the same state as the Gentiles- is there any profit to being circumcised and in a covenant relationship with God? Those males who were circumcised had their foreskin removed and in doing so they entered into a covenant relationship with God (Exodus 12:48; Acts 7:8).

"The protester's thought is this: 'If being a Jew gives us no advantage over the Gentiles on Judgment Day, then what's the big deal about being a Jew at all? Is [God] just now changing [H]is mind about the Jews?' (Cottrell 128-129). Asking such questions challenges the righteousness of God. Therefore, Paul,

by inspiration, answers the anticipated questions in the next verse.

Romans 3:2 Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

oracles [lovgia] (Berry 407): "something uttered, utterance, sentence, declaration, (esp. the sayings of the oracles of the gods.)" (Bullinger 558); "all the written utterances of God through O.T. writers" (Vine 826)

Throughout time "the Scriptures have been preserved by God's faithful ones" and specifically the "Old Testament was preserved by the Aaronic priests and the scribes" (Mosher, *The Book God "Breathed"* 325-326). James Coffman in his commentary on Romans writes the following:

The fact of the Jews having been the divinely appointed custodians of the scriptures in the pre-Christian ages has the necessary effect of denying the allegations of the Roman Catholic Church, or of any other church, that their opinion of what belongs or does not belong in the OT canon has any weight at all. (95)

The reason Paul uses the phrase "Much every way" and then only lists having the oracles as the one reason is because the main or most important reason amply suffices without having to include the remaining list (Lenski 210). To have the oracles was a blessing because of the ready availability to the law of God. However, Romans 2:17 reveals that they did not even obey the

oracles and words that God had given to them, but even if they had obeyed, having the oracles and being called Jews was not what justified them (Mosher, *Romans Class Lecture Notes*).

Romans 3:3 For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

Here, Paul gives the second assumed question that would be asked by the Jews (Wacaster 138). They would essentially be asking, "Is there something wrong with the gospel because people will not obey?" (Mosher, *Romans Class Lecture Notes*). Tom Wacaster states the following:

Since Israel was not faithful to God, will God still keep His promises to Israel? In other words, will their unfaithfulness render God's fidelity of no effect? The force of the objection is this: "If we suppose that the Jews were unfaithful, as you claim Paul, then it is to be supposed that the Jews would be lost. This would in turn imply that God had failed to keep His promises." (138)

Paul firmly answers the potential quibble of the Jews in the next verse.

Romans 3:4 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.

God forbid [me;-gevnoito] (Berry 408): "may it not be"

(Bullinger 301); and throughout "Paul's Epistles it is almost

entirely used to express the Apostle's repudiation of an inference which he apprehends may be drawn from his argument" (Vine 457). In his book, "Studies in Romans", Robert Taylor explains why Paul used such strong language as an immediate response to the potential question that would have been asked by the Jews:

To think for a moment that infidelic man, Jew or Gentile, could render ineffectual the Abrahamic promise to bless all mankind through the seed (the Christ) was unthinkable and unimaginable to Paul. (59)

This is a "strong affirmation that God will never fail to keep His promises" (Wacaster 138). Paul then goes on to quote from Psalm 51:4 which was a part of David's call for mercy as he sought forgiveness from God for the sin he had committed with Bathsheba (Winters 38). The Jews had a theory that they were saved because God had made His covenant with them; therefore, they were thinking that if no one obeyed the gospel then it would be wrong and they would be right (Mosher, *Romans Class Lecture Notes*). However, God is always right no matter if the entire world refuses to obey Him (Mosher, *Romans Class Lecture Notes*).

Romans 3:5 But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)

The third anticipated question Paul responds to is paraphrased and summarized in Keith Mosher's Romans Study Outline:

They evidently thought that if God had overcome Jewish unrighteousness and still sent his Son through that nation, did not the Jewish unrighteousness "work out" to God's glory? And, if their unrighteousness "worked out" to God's glory, then, God could not judge them. (17)

After Paul states their anticipated question, he concludes by saying he speaks as a man. Paul is essentially saying, "Men may think this way, but that is no reason to suggest that God thinks this way as well" (Wacaster 141). The answer to this question is very important as stated by James Coffman:

Of course, there is more to this quibble than meets the eye, for it touches upon one of the truly great mysteries, that of how God can overrule sin, which is contrary to his will, and do so in such a manner as to bring about the accomplishment of his purpose. (101)

Paul answers the third anticipated question in the next verse.

Romans 3:6 God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?

Again, one reads in his English translation the words "God forbid" which indicates that there is no way, ever, ever, ever,

ever this could have happened, has happened, or will ever happen (Mosher, *Romans Class Lecture Notes*). Tom Wacaster writes that Paul goes on to reduce their argument to an absurdity:

If the Jew's unfaithfulness manifests the faithfulness of God, then by the same token, the unfaithfulness of the world manifests the fidelity and faithfulness of God, and none should be punished. (141)

Based on their anticipated arguments, God could never judge the world because every disobedient Jew and rebellious Gentile would be out of God's reach for judgment (Taylor 59).

Romans 3:7 For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?

In verse seven, Paul through inspiration, referred to the quibbles that others have made concerning his teachings in order to make his next argument (Taylor 60). Mosher writes the following concerning this verse:

This would mean that the Jews had unfairly accused Paul and his teaching (verse 7). That is, if Paul were "wrong" did not his work still glorify God? So why were the Jews still saying Paul was a sinner? The Jews were arguing that their "wrongness" had worked out to God's glory, so why Pick on Paul? (17)

"Here is a masterful piece of reasoning on the part of Paul" (Wacaster 142). "Paul, in this place, is absolutely not discussing the abuse of the doctrine of salvation by grace", which is misunderstood by many to be the meaning of this

passage, but based on the context, "he is still defending the intrinsic righteousness of God" (Coffman 103).

Romans 3:8 And 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.

If man's sin causes God to be glorified the more, then why not do much evil that good will come (Wacaster 142)? Again, Paul is reducing the arguments he is anticipating to an absurdity (Coffman 104). However, it is taken quite seriously by Paul as some had been slanderously saying that he advocated such teachings (Taylor 60). Not only did Paul not advocate such a position, but he went on to say that those who do so are absolutely incorrect are in sin and therefore, condemned by God (Coffman 104).

CONCLUSION

"The book of Romans is one of the most profound books of the New Testament" (Elkins iii). The depth and spiritual enrichment found throughout the letter and in passages such as Romans 3:1-8 are portraits of God's righteousness as He reveals the salvation that is available to all men through the gospel of Christ (Holland 6). Romans 3:1-8 answers the questions the Jews would have had challenging the righteousness of God. In chapter one, Paul had shown that the Gentile condition was hopeless and

in chapter two he had shown that the Jewish condition was hopeless; therefore, the Jews would have been questioning God's righteousness and how they could be lost when God had chosen them as His people (Mosher, *Romans: A Study Outline* 16). Paul answers the Jew's questioning of God's righteousness by explaining the great advantage they had in having the oracles, by disabusing their belief that being a Jew is what saved them and lastly, by pleading with them to realize that God is righteous and His word is true regardless of whether they obey Him (Mosher, *Romans: A Study Outline* 16).