

## **Week of August 13 - 19**

### **The Advantage of Being a Jew (Romans 3:1-8)**

Paul begins by clarifying that he is not saying that physical circumcision has no value or that being a Jew by birth has no value. Instead, those who are Jews by birth should be proud that God trusted them with His Word and knowledge about His will. However, Paul will continue to clarify later on that "circumcision" and being a "Jew" (God's people), is truly spiritual (based on obedience to God's Law), not physical.

### **Everyone Is Guilty before God (Romans 3:9-20)**

Paul returns to explain that every person is a sinner, for all have sinned, giving evidence by quoting scriptures from the Old Testament. Under the Law, everyone is accountable to God, and no one is righteous based on the Law's standards (which are God's standards).

He explains, "Are we Jews better than Gentiles? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all men are sinners, whether Jews or Gentiles. As the Scriptures say, "No one is good - no one in all the world is innocent. No one has ever really followed God's paths or even wanted to. Everyone has turned away; all have gone wrong. No one anywhere has kept on doing what is right, not one. Their talk is foul and filthy like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are loaded with lies. Everything they say has in it the sting and poison of deadly snakes. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. They are quick to kill, hating anyone who disagrees with them. Wherever they go, they leave misery and trouble behind them, and they have never known what it is to feel secure or enjoy God's blessing. They care nothing about God nor what he thinks of them.

"So," Paul says, "the judgment of God lies heavily on the Jews because they are responsible to keep God's laws instead of doing all these evil things. Not one of them has any excuse. All the world stands hushed and guilty before Almighty God. Now, do you see it? No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the Law commands. The more we know about God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying them; His laws serve only to make us see that we are sinners."

### **Our Righteousness Is through Faith (Romans 3:21-31)**

However, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is what allows us to be considered righteous when we obey the Law because our past sins are forgiven. God has shown us a different way to heaven — not by "being good enough" and trying to keep His laws, but in a new way. Now God says he will accept and acquit us — declare us "not guilty" — if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved this same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or how bad we have been. All have sinned; all fall short of God's ideal, but now God declares us "not guilty" of offending Him if we trust in Jesus Christ, Who in His kindness freely takes away our sins.

Faith is the gift of God, His son Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for our sins. So it is that we are saved by faith in Christ and not by the good things we do. Does God save only the Jews this way? No, the Gentiles, too, may come to Him in this same manner. God treats us all the same way; all, whether Jews or Gentiles, are declared "not guilty" if they have faith. Well then, if we are saved by faith, does this mean that we no longer need to obey God's laws? Just the opposite! Only when we trust Jesus can we truly follow him.

### **Abraham Was Saved by Faith (Romans 4:1-25)**

Paul continues his explanation of the Law of faith by using Abraham as an example. While he first explains that faith, not works, is what was considered righteousness, he later clarifies what he is not saying, that we can continue sinning. "What then are we to say? Should we continue to sin so that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?"

The whole section from Romans 4 to Romans 6 and beyond is all one long explanation. Paul often gives explanations within explanations, making his whole argument several chapters long.

In chapter 4, he explains that the promise of salvation is based on faith, because Abraham believed God and showed his belief through his actions, which was considered righteousness by God. Abraham was not regarded as righteous because of his works, but his actions were proof of his belief in God.

Paul explains that this gift of righteousness by faith is given to all people, both the circumcised (Jews) and the uncircumcised (Gentiles). Physical circumcision was a sign of God's promise of righteousness through faith, meaning it was a physical representation of the spiritual event.

This is the spiritual circumcision that Paul discussed. "Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart - it is spiritual and not literal."

Paul continues to explain that obeying the Law without faith in Jesus Christ cannot result in salvation, because the promise given to Abraham by God was given based on Abraham's faith, not on his obedience to the Law by itself since this occurred before the Law was even given to Moses.

Abraham's obeying God as a result of his faith is what was considered righteousness. Abraham trusted God that he would be the father of many nations even when he had no child and was already very old.

Paul then explains that our belief in Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our past sins is what will be considered to us as righteousness. Our belief essentially allows for Jesus' sacrifice to take effect and cleanse us of our sins, so that we might be regarded as righteous when we obey the Law.

*God initiated the relationship with Abraham. Some say God selected him because he must have been the only righteous man alive at that time. But a man can't earn God's favor. His favor comes when people take Him at His Word, staking their lives on the belief that His promises are true. Justification by faith has always been God's way of saving someone.*

### **The Results of Justification by Faith (Romans 5:1-11)**

Paul explains that because of God's gift of being made righteous through faith, it gives us peace from knowing that we will stand before God blameless and share in His glory. Since we have been made right in God's sight by faith in His promises, we can have real peace with Him because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Because of our faith, He has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to becoming all that God has had in mind for us to be.

Then Paul speaks of the love of God as seen in Christ dying for us, who are evil, while at the same time, we were God's enemies.

Paul then explains the history of sin, as well as explaining the reasoning for the sacrifice of Christ covering the sins of all who believe and return to obeying God. Just as sin and the result of sin (death) came into the world through one man (Adam), likewise forgiveness of sin and eternal life come to the world through one man's sacrifice (Jesus Christ). "For just as by the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous."

### **How our Death to Sin Took Place and Steps to Freedom from Sin (Romans 6:1-14)**

Those who have been baptized into Jesus Christ have died to sin. Jesus Christ died to the sins of the world and was raised to eternal life. This means that if we have not died to sin and not "been buried with Him by baptism into death (this is symbolism, a figure of speech, as seen by the water baptism done by Paul and others," then we will not be raised by the Father to "walk in newness of life."

Paul continues to speak of the hope of being raised to eternal life with Jesus Christ and gives a small explanation of the nature of Jesus' resurrection and ours.

Just like Paul's explanation of circumcision being spiritual, not literal, baptism is likewise a spiritual event, not literal. Water baptism is a physical representation of being spiritually baptized by God's Holy Spirit. Another way to look at it is this: Why would Paul say, "a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart - it is spiritual and not literal." And then turn around and say, 'But water baptism, now that's literal! If you don't get baptized by real water, then you aren't saved spiritually.'

On the contrary, Paul would never say such a thing. The act of being physically baptized by water is to represent a spiritual baptism by God's Holy Spirit, based on the decision to repent. "I baptize you with water, but He [Jesus Christ] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Just like there are Jews who are Jews by birth, but they are not Jews spiritually, there are "believers" who are believers by having been physically baptized, but they are not believers spiritually. Meaning, they are not saved, although they may think they are because they have not been baptized by the Holy Spirit and do not uphold the Law of God.

Paul says all this to lead to his point of, "Don't let sin control your body any longer; don't give in to its sinful desires. Don't let any part of your bodies become tools of wickedness, to be used for sinning, but give yourselves completely to God - every part of you - for you are back from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for His good purposes. Sin need never again be your master, for now, you are no longer tied to the Law where sin enslaves you, but you are free under God's favor and mercy."

#### **We Are Slaves to Righteousness (Romans 6:15-23 )**

Continuing to emphasize his point, he says, "Don't you know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" Another way of putting it is that believers do obey, whereas those who disobey do not truly believe. They understand and have knowledge that Jesus died for their sins, but if they truly had faith and believed and had accepted Christ's sacrifice, then they would be reconciled to God and return to obeying His will. Essentially, we show what we truly believe by what we do – if we haven't repented of sin, then by our actions, we have rejected Christ's sacrifice.

Being a slave to God and obeying His will and His Law results in eternal life.

*The Law can't deliver us from our sinful natures. We have no power to obey the will of God by the Law. Our strength comes from somewhere else. Our struggle against sin is against our basic human nature. Our desire to sin is present in all of us, and we commit acts of sin that appeal to us. Our human nature is evil. But we grow up through the Holy Spirit.*

#### **We Are Married to Christ (Romans 7:1-6)**

Paul returns to teaching about the Law and what it means to be under the Law without Jesus' sacrifice. He is essentially explaining what he has already said: we have died to sin and are now free to be reconciled to God. He makes this comparison using the idea that a woman is adulterous if she is with someone else while her husband lives, whereas she is free to be with another man if her husband has died.

We are no longer slaves to death (with no hope of escape) under the Law without Jesus' sacrifice. Instead, we are now considered righteous when we obey the Law, because of God's spirit that cleanses us of our sins through Jesus' sacrifice.

Paul clarifies what he does not mean: the Law is not sin. The Law is the will of God (Do not steal, Do not murder, etc.), and it is holy. However, sin is what causes death. Even one sin makes us a law-breaker and condemned under the Law without Jesus' sacrifice.

Paul ends by saying that his mind is a slave to God, but his body is a slave to sin, meaning that his current body will still die due to sin, but he will be resurrected like Jesus because his mind/soul is a slave to God.

### **But We Continue to Struggle with Sin (Romans 7:7-25)**

Many read these verses thinking that Paul is expressing the fact that he can't stop sinning; however, Paul just told his audience repeatedly to stop sinning. For example, "How can we who died to sin go on living in it?"

In this chapter, Paul says, "But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive so that we are slaves not under the old Law, but now we are slaves in the new life of the Spirit." Paul is talking here about the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Then Paul clarifies that the Law is not evil, but that sin is actually what held us captive (not the Law). Paul explains that sin made us a slave to itself.

But what did Paul just say about being a slave to sin? "But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

Paul makes his point, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Paul says that Jesus Christ is the one who rescues us from this body of death. Jesus Christ's spirit, living in us, is what has released us from this slavery to sin. Now he is making the point that while the body will still die because of sin, we will not die entirely because of our obedience to Jesus Christ.

Even though our current bodies are slaves to the Law of sin, we must live according to God's will, obeying His Law, and by doing so, we have accepted Jesus' sacrifice by repenting of sin and will be cleansed of our past sins to inherit the gift of eternal life and be resurrected like Jesus.