

## Romans

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Romans 3:1-8



Vss. 1-2

- By the time Paul is writing this letter to the Romans, he has spent years in the Jewish synagogues making the case for Christ. And in so doing he has had the same conversations and debates over and over a thousand times. So here at the beginning of Chapter 3 what he is doing is having that same conversation and debate with an imaginary Roman Jew. William Barclay suggests the start of the conversation here goes something like this:

**The Roman Jew:** The result of all that you have been saying is that there is no difference between Gentile and Jew and that they are in exactly the same position. Do you really mean that?

**Paul:** By no means.

**The Roman Jew:** What, then, is the difference?

**Paul:** For one thing, the Jew possesses what the Gentile never so directly possessed--the commandments of God.

- To his dying day Paul always believed that the Jews had a special relationship with God. The Jews understood this as having special privilege while Paul wanted them to see that it was really special responsibility. Paul tells them that the benefit of this special relationship is "great in every respect", starting with the fact that they have had the written Word of God since the time of Moses and the spoken word since Abraham. But in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible written by Moses, the meaning of the special relationship is laid out, the responsibility of the Jewish people is clear. Exodus 19:5-6a – "Now then, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine, and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation..."
- So here in the opening chapters Paul is teaching them from their own scriptures. "IF you obey My voice and keep My covenant, you will be Mine", God says to the Jews, but Paul reminds them that they have **NOT** been obedient nor kept His covenant. Virtually every one of the prophets testifies to this, so in fact the Jews have forfeited their special position with God and it has been taken by Gentiles who through Christ do keep to God's Way.

Vss. 3-4

- But the debate only intensifies:

**The Roman Jew:** Granted! But what if some of the Jews disobeyed these commandments and were unfaithful to God and came under his condemnation? You have just said that God

gave the Jews a special position and a special promise. Now you go on to say that at least some of them are under the condemnation of God. Does that mean that God has broken his promise and shown himself to be unjust and unreliable?  
**Paul:** Far from it! What it does show is that there is no favoritism with God and that he punishes sin wherever he sees it. The very fact that he condemns the unfaithful Jews is the best possible proof of his absolute justice. He might have been expected to overlook the sins of this special people of his but he does not.

- This is leading up to the opponent's suggestion that we should sin all the more so God would have the opportunity to demonstrate His grace all the more. But here Paul is pointing to the justice of God and reminding them of the repeated words of the prophets: **all sin** that is unrepented will be judged as such, whether Jew or Gentile.

Vss. 5-6

- So the debate continues:

**The Roman Jew:** Very well then! All you have done is to succeed in showing that my disobedience has given God an opportunity to demonstrate his righteousness. My infidelity has given God a marvelous opportunity to demonstrate his fidelity. My sin is, therefore, an excellent thing! It has given God a chance to show how good he is! I may have done evil, but good has come of it! You can't surely condemn a man for giving God a chance to show his justice!

**Paul:** An argument like that is beneath contempt! You have only to state it to see how intolerable it is!

- If that all sounds archaic, believe me it's not. In various forms, people still practice that philosophy all the time. In recent days there has been a great deal of discussion about what is moral and what is not throughout the various denominations in America. In reading through some of that discussion in the media, I have actually seen church leaders suggest that if this or that is in fact immoral, still then there is nothing to worry about, because God is Love and He will demonstrate His amazing Grace and forgive all of our sins. Repentance? Oh that is a bad word that is never mentioned. Contrition? Please don't suggest that anyone feel bad about themselves.

Vss. 7-8

- Paul's imaginary opponent then sums up his argument, to which Paul responds with cold brevity: "Their condemnation is just". In other words, merely to even make such an argument as that argument demonstrates how far from the Way and Truth of God you have wandered and you are condemned by your own words as you seek to justify your sin. How far from David's example of repentance and contrition in Psalm 51 have God's people wandered?!