

# Faithful God and Sinful Humanity

Thomas Robinson, *Gospel of God's Grace for All of Us* 7, November 16, 2014

## Romans 2:28 - 3:20 (ESV adapted)

<sup>28</sup> For the **outward person** is not the Jew, nor is that which is outward, in flesh, real circumcision. <sup>29</sup> But **the secret person is the Jew, and circumcision is of a heart, in Spirit**, not in letter. Their **praise** is not from people but **from God**.

**3:1 What then is the Jew's advantage?** Or what is the benefit of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> **Much in every way.** First and foremost, **they were entrusted** (*pisteuein*) **with the oracles of God.**

<sup>3</sup> What if **some** were un**faithful** to that trust (*apistein*)? Does their un**faithfulness** (*apistia*) nullify the **faithfulness** (*pistis*) of God?

<sup>4</sup> By no means! Let **God be true** though everyone were a liar, as it is written,

*"That you may be recognized as **right in your words,**  
and be victorious when you enter **judgment.**"*

[Ps 51:4]

<sup>5</sup> But if **our unrighteousness** confirms **God's righteousness**, what shall we say? That the God who brings on **wrath** is unrighteous? (I speak in a human way.)

<sup>6</sup> By no means! For then how could **God judge the world?**

<sup>7</sup> But if **God's truthfulness** multiplies to **his glory** through my lie, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? <sup>8</sup> And why not "do evil that good may come"? – as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their judgment is just.

<sup>9</sup> What then? Are we better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that **all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin**, <sup>10</sup> as it is written:

*"**No one is in the right, not one;***

*<sup>11</sup> no one **understands; no one seeks for God.***

*<sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become **futile;**  
no one acts with real goodness, not even one."*

[Ps 14:1-3]

*<sup>13</sup> "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive."*

[Ps 5:9b]

*"The venom of vipers is under their lips."*

[Ps 140:3b]

*<sup>14</sup> "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."*

[Ps 10:7a]

*<sup>15</sup> "Their feet are quick for shedding blood;*

*<sup>16</sup> disaster and misery are in their paths,*

*<sup>17</sup> and **the path of peace** they did not know."*

[Isa 59:7-8]

*<sup>18</sup> "There is no **fear of God** before their eyes."*

[Ps 36:1]

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law (Torah) says it speaks to **those within the law**, so that every mouth may be stopped, and **the whole world may be accountable to God's judgment.** <sup>20</sup> Because **from works of law** (Torah) **no flesh will be declared right before him** [Ps 143:1-2], for **through law** (Torah) **comes knowledge of sin.**

## Romans 1:16-17

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who **believes** (*pisteuein*), to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it **God's righteousness** is revealed from **faithfulness** (*pistis*) into **faith** (*pistis*), as it is written, "*The righteous from **faith** (*pistis*) shall live.*" [Hab. 2:4]

## Romans 9:4-5

<sup>4</sup> They are people of **Israel**, and to them belong the **adoption**, the **glory**, the **covenants**, the giving of the **law**, the worship, and the **promises.** <sup>5</sup> To them belong the fathers, and from them, according to the flesh, is the **Messiah**, who is **God** over all, blessed forever. Amen.

## God and Israel for All the World

In this introductory section of Romans (1:18-3:20), Paul starts from God's act in his son Jesus and the power of that action to save all people, starting from the Jews and including all the world, showing God's faithfulness to his promises and his overcoming human failure.

Romans is known for its universal indictment of human sin and brokenness "under sin" (3:9).

Paul has looked at the Gentiles, even its rigorous moralists, and at his own world of the Jews. Everywhere the indictment of sin holds. Even Israel's national claim to special standing because of God's gift of the Torah was repeatedly undermined by Israel's sins leading to exile, as scriptures emphatically show. Gentiles could be moral like Jews.

So what's special about the Jews? We might expect "Nothing!" Instead Paul says, "A lot!" Israel / Jews are not just an abstraction. They are a concrete people with real history with God. God "entrusted" them with his "oracles" – God's self-revelation as creator, his promises, covenants, law, prophets, wisdom, steadfast love, faithfulness, judgment.

God entrusted his oracles to Israel for the sake of the whole world, as a light to the nations, not just for one people. God always cared for his whole creation. Some were unfaithful!

In fact, that was the repeated story, from Abraham to Jacob, Moses, David...(See Ps 51).

God always had to create a way to be faithful to his promises in spite of human failure.

Note that Paul here speaks of "faith/trust" (*pistis/pisteuein*) for the first time since 1:17.

Here he shows the breadth of these words. Not simply "believe in something," "have faith in Jesus" as a mental process, but "trust/faithfulness" as a way of life and character.

He speaks of the "*faith(fullness) of God*" on which everything depends. God's faithfulness is also God's truth (3:4,7) and God's righteousness (3:4,5,6). The verses that follow show it fulfilled in the "*faith(fullness) of Jesus Messiah*" (3:22) often translated as "faith in Jesus."

These important words include both sides: believing, trusting, being faithful in life. God's faithfulness in Jesus is the basis of our faith/faithfulness/trust that brings life (1:17).

## Is it Really all that Bad?

Paul has been in a lot of conversations and controversies about all this. He knows how we want to duck the indictment for sin. Yes we sin, we lie, but that just makes God's truth and faithfulness stand out. We make God a hero. He should be happy. In fact, let's sin more so that God's even more heroic and glorious when he saves us. Are you saying that, Paul?

No! Sin, violence, deception, rage, injustice still destroy human life on every level. Jews have had a very vital role to play in bringing the revelation of God to the world, but they are still united with everyone else in the destructive power of sin. Just read the scriptures.

The indictment finds both Jews and Gentiles in their different ways under sin's power.

Paul quotes a series of scriptures, Psalms and Isaiah, that point to the pervasive power of evil. They mostly speak metaphorically, inclusively rather than list specific wrongs.

Understanding is lost. Life becomes futile. Peace is lost. Recognition of God is lost.

## The Law of the Knowledge of Good and Sinful

This is the alienation of humanity from God portrayed in Genesis from the garden of Eden.

All humans experience the suffering of evil – the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

But Torah brings the knowledge of evil as sin in relation to God. All are indicted. But that God is the faithful one who promises blessing to all people through Abraham's seed, Israel, the Messiah. The story is as paradoxical as humanity. God himself, not just his law, must enter human life in order to open new life, transformation, setting all things right.