

ROMANS 2:25-29

Paul asserts that circumcision as a rite was an outward or physical sign of being God's chosen. But a Jew (one who brought praise to God) was one who was "circumcised in heart" as an obedient subject. Some non-Jews sought to obey God inwardly although outwardly they were uncircumcised. This passage does not suggest that Christians today replace national Israel.

So, he asks, who is he that brings praise to God's name? The circumcised Jew who disobeys God or the uncircumcised Gentile who obeys God? This does not imply that a believing Gentile became a Jew but rather that a believing Gentile brought honour and praise to God's name independently of the Religious rites that Jews boasted of. Ironically Judah means "Praise" a virtue and title given by God not Man.

Romans 3: 1-8

The late William Barclay commenting on these verses said the following:

"Here, Paul is arguing in the closest and the most difficult way. It will make it easier to understand if we remember that he is carrying on an argument with an imaginary objector. The argument stated in full would run something like this.

The objector: 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 objector: What, then, is the difference?

Paul: For one thing, the Jews possess what the Gentiles never so directly possessed – the commandments of God.

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The objector: 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 favouritism 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.

The objector: 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 unfaithfulness has given God a marvellous opportunity to demonstrate His faithfulness. My sin is, therefore, and 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 surely can't condemn someone for giving God a chance to show His justice!

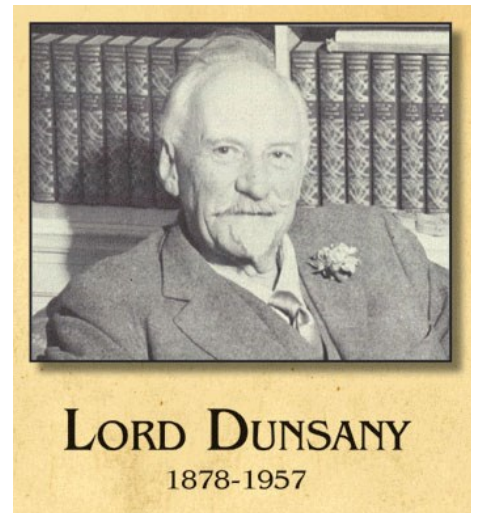
Paul: An argument like that is beneath contempt! You have only to state it to see how intolerable it is!

When we disentangle this passage in this way, we see that there are in it certain basic thoughts of Paul in regard to the Jews.

1. To the end of the day, he believed the Jews to be in a special position in relation to God. That, in fact, is what they believed themselves. The difference was that Paul believed that their special position was one of special responsibility; the Jews believed it to be one of special privilege. What did Paul say that the Jews had been specially entrusted with? The oracles of God. What does he mean by that? The word he uses is *logia*, the regular word used in the Greek Old Testament for a special statement or pronouncement of God. Here, it means The Ten Commandments. God entrusted the Jews with commandments, not privileges. He said to them: "You are a special people; therefore you must live a special life". He did not say: "You are a special people; therefore you can do as you I like."

Romans Lesson 7 continued

When the Irish novelist Lord Dunsany came safely through the First World War, he tells us that he said to himself: “in some strange way I am still alive. I wonder what God means me to do with a life so specially spared?” Paul says that thought never occurred to the Jews. They never could grasp the fact that God’s special choice was for special duty.

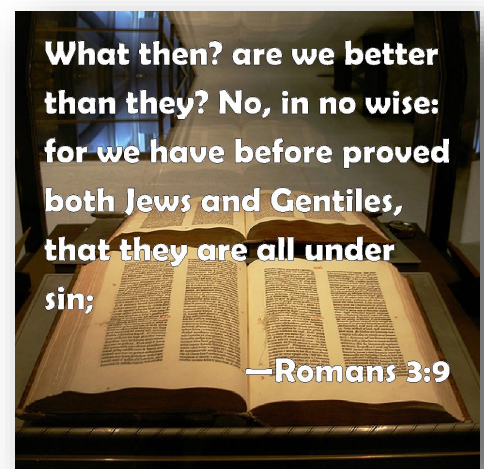


2. All through his writings, there are three basic facts in Paul’s mind about the Jews. They occur in embryo here; and they are in fact the three thoughts that it takes this whole letter to work out. We must note that he does not place all the Jews under the one condemnation. He puts it like this: “*What if some of them were unfaithful?*” (Vs).

2a) He was quite sure that God was justified in condemning the Jews. They had their special place and their special promises; and that very fact made their condemnation all the greater. Responsibility is always the other side of privilege. The more opportunity we have to do right, the greater our condemnation if we do wrong.

2b) But not all of them were unfaithful. Paul never forgoes the faithful remnant; and he was quite sure that that faithful remnant – however small it was in numbers – was the true Jewish race. The others had lost their privileges and were under condemnation. They were no longer Jews at all. The remnant was the real nation.

2c) Paul was always sure that God’s rejection of Israel was not final. Because of this rejection, a door was opened to the Gentiles; and, in the end, the Gentiles would bring the Jews back within the fold, and Gentile and Jew would be one in Christ. The tragedy of the Jews was that the great task of world evangelization that they might have had, and were designed to have, was refused by them. It was therefore, given to the Gentiles and God’s plan was, as it were, reversed – and it was not, as it should have been, the Jews who evangelized the Gentiles, but the Gentiles who evangelized the Jews.



Romans Lesson 7 continued

Further, this passage contains two great universal human truths.

1. The root of all sin is disobedience. The root of the Jews' sin was disobedience to the known law of God. As John Milton wrote, it was "man's first disobedience" which was responsible for paradise lost. When pride sets up human will against God's will, there is sin. If there were no disobedience, there would be no sin.

2. Once people have sinned, they display an amazing ingenuity in justifying their sin. Here, we come across an argument that reappears again and again in religious thought – the argument that sin gives God a chance to show at the same time His justice and His mercy and is therefore a good thing. It is a twisted argument. One might as well argue – it would, in fact, be the same argument – that it is a good thing to break people's hearts, because it gives them a chance to show how much they love you. When anyone sins, the need is not for ingenuity to justify the sin, but for humility to confess it in penitence and in shame.

Questions:

1. What makes a Jew a real Jew?

2. The Jews special position before God was connected to what?

Discuss:

How is that the Gentile ends up evangelizing the world?
