

Accusations Part I

Romans 3:1-8

June 19, 2022

This section of Scripture ends Paul's discourse on the wrath of God and His condemnation of the Jews who failed to live up to their calling as the chosen people of God. The Jews, for the most part, were distorting God's character, thinking that their special relationship with God and adherence to the law was the means to salvation. The Jews also failed to understand that it is only by God's grace that anyone is saved. Obedience to the law was their god; it was what they worshipped.

Slandorous accusations against Paul were a normal part of his ministry. In verses seven and eight of this chapter, Paul is asking why he is being persecuted. Because Paul preached a message of grace and had a reputation of being hard on the Jews, they wrongly accused him of promoting a sinful lifestyle. In Acts 21 we read where Paul came to the Jerusalem temple bringing a gift from Gentiles. However, James warned Paul that the Jews were not happy with him because they thought that Paul had abandoned the law because of what he was teaching about circumcision. Paul was told that he needed to go through the ceremony of purification to prove to the Jews that he was living in accordance with the law. Seven days later, when Jews from Asia saw Paul, they accused him of bringing Gentiles into the temple. This resulted in him being beaten by the Jews and arrested by the Romans. It almost cost him his life.

In writing to the Roman church and anticipating that the Roman Jews would have the same reaction to his teaching regarding circumcision, Paul wanted them to understand that failure to obey the law essentially nullified their circumcision. He wrote, "For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision" (Romans 2:25). Paul knew that there would continue to be accusations against him, but he wants the Roman church to understand that the Jews were also making accusations against God and His character. Central to Paul's defense is the character of God. When Paul wrote this letter the Jews had the entire Old Testament. They knew that Abraham was counted righteous by faith (Genesis 15:6); they knew that the righteous live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4); they knew that all are like sheep who have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6). The only logical conclusion is that only by grace is anyone saved.

Paul warns the Jews in Rome that they are in a dangerous position because they were given special privileges and honor because of who they are, and yet they have squandered these privileges. The Jews were distorting the character of God by manipulating the law to make themselves look good in the eyes of fellow Jews. John Calvin stated that the Jews had a

corrupted view of God. He said, "With such an idea of God, nothing which they attempt to offer in the way of worship or obedience can have any value in His sight, because it is not Him they worship, but, instead of Him, the dream and figment of their own heart." He goes on to say, "Hence they do not conceive of Him in the character in which He is manifested but imagine Him to be whatever their own rashness has devised." This last group of people are not like those in Chapter One who openly reject God and live in blatant sin; this is a group of people who has made up their own god and they will incur greater wrath because they are confusing the world about God and promoting a false gospel.

It is easy to criticize the Jews for their misrepresenting the character of God, but we need to examine our own heart to make certain we are not doing the same. We need to ask ourselves, does my life represent the true character of God? Do the words that I speak represent His true character? Am I promoting the God of the Bible or am I promoting a god that I have fashioned? Do I strive to defend the righteousness of God in my life? It has always been, Satan's ploy to cause God's people to question God's character. Questioning the character of God is the inception of blasphemy. Questioning God's character started with Adam and Eve in the Garden, and it continues today. Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44) told Eve a lie, causing her to disbelieve what God had said regarding the consequences of eating of the of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). Satan couched the lie in such a way that it seemed like disobeying God would yield positive results – knowledge.

Disbelieving God is the reason why people accept the LGBTQ Plus movement. God's Word could not be clearer; many of the Old and New Testament Books condemn sex outside the marital bond between man and a woman. God is Infinitely wise and good - what he approves we should approve and what he condemns we should condemn. Therefore we do not give approval to any sexual sin including those celebrated during Pride Month. We are warned in Romans 1:32, "Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." We must not use evil to combat evil. We should have compassion on those who are caught up in the gay lifestyle, but without affirming their choice. We need the saving grace of God just as much as they do! The issue underneath all of this is the character of God, calling into question His holiness. It is one thing to have compassion on those struggling with sin and quite another to accept the things that call into question the character of God.

Many in the church today misrepresent the character of God -- and this is gross idolatry. When we believe that God approves a sinful lifestyle, we don't understand God's character. This is similar to what Paul was addressing in his letter to the Romans. The Jews had created a religion that appealed to their emotion, a religion which allowed them to escape pain, a religion which

allowed them to live for themselves. Paul is more concerned that the Jews avoid the eternal pain of hell. If we don't get God's character right, we don't get life right. The Jews claimed eternal salvation because they believed that their special status meant that God would be lenient with them – and they promoted this false sense of security to those around them. However, Christians can *rightfully* claim eternal security because God does not change (Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8) and because Jesus said, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish" (John 10:28). We have eternal security because of what God has done, not because of anything we have done. Paul suffered being bound with chains as a criminal all because he wanted to save the elect from eternal condemnation. He had a special burden for his countrymen and was willing to take their place in hell if it were possible (Romans 9:3).

When Paul asked the rhetorical questions in verse one of Chapter Three the Jews interpreted these as Paul saying that there was no advantage in being a Jew. They knew that God had made many promises to them, so, to them, Paul was saying that God lied to them. They were thinking, if the law doesn't matter, if circumcision doesn't matter, then why were they called out as a nation? They may have even questioned whether or not they were a chosen nation. But God did call them; He called them strategically and purposefully, for the praise of His name (Isaiah 43:21). Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 10:14-15 that God is the owner of everything and that He set His heart to love their fathers and their offspring above all the peoples of the earth. Paul will discuss the advantage of being a Jew further in Chapter Nine, but, for now, Paul wants them to understand that their greatest advantage is the privilege and responsibility that comes with having received the oracles of God.

God set His affection on the Jews, but there was a problem with their calling; the problem was their lack of belief, lack of faith, and their lack of trust. God gave them the plan of redemption and they ignored it. They clung to their calling as a people rather than the gospel they were given. We must be careful that we don't fall into the same trap today. The Jews proudly paraded their election before the world, about them being the chosen people, about them having the plan of redemption; they boasted that the Messiah would come through them. Even today Jews love the law but ignore the moral implication of it. They ignored obedience and they ignored repentance. They knew their calling, they knew the law, and they knew circumcision; hence, they thought these were sufficient to guarantee eternal life.

The above describes many who identify with Christ today. Churches across the globe are putting their stamp of approval on many sins clearly identified in Scripture, thinking that times have changed and so, now, God is okay with these behaviors. Many have the attitude of, I am part of God's people, I have His Word, I can say His name, I go to church, I teach Sunday School, I'm

around God's people, thus God accepts me. The problem with all of this is that we may do all these things without repenting and humbly trusting God with your life.

Israel was called by God, but for what purpose? Israel was entrusted with knowledge of the one true God and His character, and they were chosen to be a conduit to share this with the rest of the world. Israel was supposed to be a conduit of living water to the world. Israel had the law, the priests, the prophets and they were supposed to go into the world rightly representing God's character. In this way Abraham, through his descendants, was to bless the world (Genesis 22:18). The Gentiles see God in creation (Romans 1:20) and the work of the law is written on their hearts (Romans 2:15), but they didn't know how to interpret these things. God had given the Jews the key to understand these things and they failed to be the conduit.

The purpose of the church today is to prove, through our unity, that God exists. God asks the church to prove its unity through coming together in Baptism and the Lord's Supper, yet these ordinances are waning in the church today. Why? Because we are not evangelizing, not being a life-giving conduit to the world. Since we believe the Bible is God's inerrant, infallible, inspired Word, we have the truth. While the world may believe truth is relative, we know that the truth of God's Word is absolute and unchanging. There is only ONE way of salvation (John 14:6) and this is the message we must proclaim. Most of us are not being a conduit of this message. We rationalize to ourselves, that when circumstances are just right and a door is opened, then I will share the gospel – but then we never do. So often we sit on the promises of God when we should be proclaiming these promises.

The first three chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesians contain many of the great promises to the Christian. Some of these are: blessing in Christ, being chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, united in Christ, being given faith, hope, mercy, kindness, being created for good works, being brought near to God, being given the grace to preach, and being allowed to reveal the plan of salvation. These promises are also given to the church today. In spite of his persecutions, Paul considered it a privilege to proclaim the gospel. He said, "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere" (2 Corinthians 2:14). We too are to be spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of the character of God everywhere. Passive silence is disobedience, and it implies that the character of God doesn't matter. This is a terrible message!

Moses told the Israelites to obey God's law, and one of the reasons was for the sake of evangelism. Moses said when they entered the promised land the nations around them would see that they were different from other nation and "...when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that

has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?" (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). No other nation enjoyed this closeness (proximity) to God. Paul was saying that the Jew's advantage wasn't in just having the Ten Commandments; they had the entire Old Testament. Christians have a great advantage today in that we have both the Old and the New Testaments; however, if this doesn't cause us to live differently from the world, what would cause them to want to know the reason for our hope. (See 1 Peter 3:15) With privilege comes responsibility. We have the privilege of knowing the plan of salvation and we have the responsibility to share it with the world.

Romans 8 lists many advantages of being a Christian: promise of no condemnation (v.1), peace (v. 6), the Holy Spirit living within (v. 9), eternal life (v. 11), adoption (v. 14), intimacy with God (vv. 15-16), co-heirs with Christ (v. 17), future glory (v. 24), Holy Spirit interceding for us (v. 27), assurance that all things work for our good (v. 28), to be like Christ (v. 29), being glorified (v. 30), being more than a conqueror (v. 37), having nothing to fear (v. 38), having eternal security (v. 39). With these advantages and all those throughout Scripture how shameful it would be for us to sit on these advantages and not share them with the world! We have these advantages only because we have the Holy Scriptures.

These advantages are what drives the elders to want us to know doctrine, to know who God is, to be able to understand and interpret God's Word, so that we will walk in obedience. They want your children to know how the Bible fits together so that they can come along side of you. They want your middle and high schoolers to know the gospel and its call to holy living. The goal of knowing Scripture is not to create puffed-up intellectual giants, but to change lives so that they conform to God's standards. As 2 Peter 1:5-8 teaches, knowledge is a key component of godly living. If knowledge of the truth of Scripture is removed, a false gospel results and the character of God is defamed.

The elders want us to be able to articulate our faith and thus promote the correct understanding of the character of God; we are to do this in our conduct and in our words. If we do these things, we won't need a class on evangelism; we will naturally be an evangelist wherever we are. We will be a conduit of the living water that Christ alone provides (John 4:10).

Proclaiming a false gospel, one without repentance, carries great danger, to which Paul declares in Romans 11. Paul reminds Gentiles that we are aliens, grafted into God's family as some of the natural branches were broken off (v. 17). Furthermore, unless we stand firm in our faith, neither will we be spared (v. 20). God said He grafted Gentiles into His family for the purpose of making the Jews jealous and bringing them to repentance. The Jews were relying on their heritage and

privileges (the law and circumcision) and being a part of a community, but they failed to repent of misrepresenting the character of God and they stand in judgment. We can be tempted to do the same. We can easily fall into the trap of clinging to our election and identifying with those around us instead of identifying with the gospel. We lack repentance and we lack exercising true faith. Our life should defend the righteous character of God in all that we do. The laws that the Jews advocated actually distorted the character of God and made converts twice the child of hell as themselves (Matthew 23:15). Paul loved God and he wanted more than anything else to uphold His character by proclaiming the true gospel. The true gospel includes that God is holy, and He will defend His holiness with vigor, but He is also a merciful and gracious God. Therefore, there is hope for sinners such as we.

Selah:

- 1) How much value do you place on your upbringing? Your baptism? Your knowledge?
- 2) How good of a conduit of the gospel are you?
- 3) Do you really want God to be Lord of your life, or just the benefits of escaping hell?