

Intro: Suppose you are at a large lake, standing on the shore. You look out over the water, and see your friend in a boat. He's reading a book. You look through your binoculars and see the title, "How to Drive a Boat: Ten Easy Lessons." Your friend is reading intently, so much so that he doesn't see what you see. His boat is sinking. It has a massive crack in the side. You yell to him, to warn him, but he refuses to listen. You throw out a lifeline, but he refuses to take his eyes off his book, and merely mumbles, "I'm Ok. Leave me alone. Don't interrupt me while I'm having a good time."

How are you going to help your friend? How do you help someone who is in danger, yet refuses to admit, "I'm in trouble. I need help."? Such is the condition of many people all around us. Especially religious people. How do you help those that you love see that they have a need for help, that they need Jesus Christ in their lives?

It's not easy. In fact, it's the greatest obstacle in evangelism. Until people admit they have a need, they will never see why they should accept Jesus Christ as their own "Savior".

So how can we help those we love who are blinded to their need? By doing what Paul did with his friends, the Jews. How did Paul help the Jews? He addressed for them what is (for us) a very unpopular topic. Guilt. In Romans 3, the apostle forces his friends to come face to face with the issue of guilt.

Guilt is not a very popular subject. In our society, people are no longer "guilty," but "victims." A person is encouraged to pass the buck for deviant behavior. "It's not your fault you did what you did. It's the fault of your parents, or your 1st grade teacher, or your government, or your society." Six of the most difficult words to ever say are these, "I was wrong. I am guilty." Yet until we get a handle on the problem of guilt, we will never appreciate the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How did Paul help his friends, his Jewish countrymen, come to grips with their guilt? We'll find out as we examine Romans 3.

Proposition: In Romans 3:1-8, to deal with the problem of guilt, Paul clarified three areas of confusion for the Jew.

- I. The Jew had great opportunity (1-2).
- II. The Jew had great objections (3-8).
 - A. They had a faulty view of themselves.
 1. Our unbelief cancels God's faithfulness (3).
 2. Our unrighteousness commends God's righteousness (5).
 3. Our falsehood enhances God's truthfulness (7).
 - B. They had a faulty view of God.
 1. God is inept (4).

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

2. God is unjust (6).
3. God is inconsistent (8).

III. The Jew had great obligation.

Conclusion: How to deal with the problem of guilt...

1. Admit the truth about yourself.
2. Admit the truth about Jesus Christ.

I. The Jew had great opportunity (1-2).

Here's an important question addressed in Romans. Is there a difference between the Jew and the Gentile? After what Paul said in chapter two, we might be inclined to say, "No. There is no difference." In v 24, he rebuked the Jew, "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles THROUGH YOU." Then, in v 28, he offered this stunning insight, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh." His point was that ritual doesn't save (whether it's Jewish ritual, or any other), nor does religion. Only the reality of a relationship with Christ saves a person. That is true whether you are a Jew or a Gentile. You need Christ.

Paul used a special rhetorical device when he wrote. He placed himself in his reader's shoes, asked the question his reader would be thinking, and then answered that question. That's what he does in verses 1-8. Notice he asked eight questions in this section, questions which he knew were stirring in his Jewish reader's mind.

Questions #1 & 2 are in v 1, "What advantage, then, hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision?" Paul could just hear his imaginary objector, his Jewish friend, say, "If what you said in ch 2 is true, that being a 'Jew' is a matter of the heart, is there no difference between Jew and Gentile? What's the use of being a Jew? Is there any advantage in our Jewish heritage?"

How did Paul answer? V 2 "Much every way." There is a difference between Jews and Gentiles! The Jewish people are the apple of God's eye. They are an elect nation. God chose them out of all nations. God gave them the promised land. God gave them the tabernacle and the temple where He revealed His presence. God delivered them from Egypt. Yes, the Jews are a privileged people.

But what is their greatest benefit? Notice v 2. The word "chiefly" means "first of all." It's as if Paul intended to list a whole series of blessings unique to the Jews, but he listed only one (and felt compelled to deal with the ramifications of that one; Paul later picks up this issue in Rom 9:4-5). What is Israel's greatest privilege? What is the greatest opportunity and advantage of the Jews? V 2 "Unto them were committed the oracles of God."

We are treading on holy ground. What sets the Jewish people apart from the Gentiles is this. God entrusted to their care His "oracles." What are the oracles of God? The Greek word is "logia" (root "logos"). Logos is a word or statement from God. It can refer to the entire Old Testament. It can refer more specifically to the commands of God (i.e. the Ten Commandments). The NIV puts it this way, "They have been entrusted with the very words of God."

Don't you get perturbed when you are in a group of people, and they all start laughing, but you haven't the foggiest idea why? You missed something. Everybody else heard it, except you. You are left in the dark.

When the world was in the total darkness of sin, God spoke to Israel. He revealed Himself to the Jew. For 20 centuries, God revealed Himself, His plan, His expectations, all of this, to the Jewish people. From Moses to Malachi, He put in their hands the deposit of the very oracles of God. The Jew knew. The Jew's problem was not a lack of knowledge. The Jew had God's Word. Because of this, the Jew had great opportunity.

What does this have to do with "guilt"? The Schofield footnote points out (p. 1213), "In proving the guilt of the world Paul brings the witness of three forms of divine revelation, i.e. God's will as it is revealed in the law and the prophets: (1) against the pagan, the witness of creation (1:19-20); (2) against the moralist, the witness of conscience (2:15); and (3) against the Jew, the witness of the Scriptures."

To the Jew, Paul says, "You have great opportunity, more so than any other people! You had God's Word. To whom much is given, much is required." The same can be said of us.

To help the Jew come to grips with guilt, Paul clarified the area of opportunity.

II. The Jew had great objections (3-8).

If the Jews are a privileged people, and they are, what went wrong? If they had the oracles of God, why did they crucify the Messiah? And if they crucified the Messiah, did God cancel His plan for them? If He didn't, does that mean He excuses their actions? Those are the questions, the objections, Paul answers in vv 3-8.

The objections Paul addresses in vv 3-8 were typical. They are the ones he heard time after time as he evangelized his Jewish kinsmen all over the Roman empire. No doubt, he heard these objections from the Jews in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia in Acts 13 (the stirred up trouble for Paul). He heard the objections from the Jews in Lystra who stoned him (Acts 14).

Application: Paul knew what he believed, why he believed it, and was able to defend the truth of what he believed. Are you? That's called "apologetics." Can you answer (from the Bible, not opinion) these questions: "What is a Christian? What is the difference between Christianity and other religions? What makes Jesus unique? How does a person become a Christian?" If we're serious about leading people to Christ, we need to get serious about learning to handle objections in a loving, logical way.

Paul did. The objections that were a hang-up to the Jews he had in mind in writing Romans were two-fold.

A. They had a faulty view of themselves.

To be honest, it is somewhat confusing to follow Paul's reasoning in the following verses. It is helpful to remember that he is asking and answering questions that were either rationalizations or road-blocks for religious Jews who refused to admit their guilt. They had a faulty view of themselves (vv 3, 5, 7; Paul's response given in vv 4, 6, 8). This faulty view surfaced in three misconceptions.

1. Our unbelief cancels God's faithfulness (3).

V 3 "For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?" God gave the Jews His oracles. But some of them lacked faith. Some of them did not believe. Like the ten spies who saw the greatness of the Canaanites instead of the greatness of God, and refused to enter the Promised Land. Like Passhur the priest who had Jeremiah beaten and put in stocks because he didn't believe what Jeremiah said (Jer 20:2). Like Irijah who arrested Jeremiah and threw him in prison (Jer 37:13). Like King Ahaz who refused to believe Isaiah. Like Ahab who challenged the Word of God through Elijah. Like Saul who exhibited unbelief.

Did the unbelief of these Jews cancel God's plan? No. Does man's unbelief cancel God's faithfulness? No. V 4 "God forbid!" No way! "Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written (taken from Ps 116:11)..." II Tim 2:13 says, "If we believe not, yet he abides faithful; he cannot deny himself." God's plans do not rest on the whims of men.

But wait. Since Israel blew it, since the Jews rejected their Messiah, since they did not believe, since the "true Jew" is one who is one "inwardly" (2:29), we need to ask an important question. Is God through with the Jews? Has the Church taken the place of Israel? There are those who would say, "Yes." In concise terms, covenant theology asserts that the promises God made to Israel in the OT are fulfilled by the Church. The Church equals Israel. The Church has replaced Israel. Is that true?

Here is an important theological question. Does God have a future for Israel? That's the issue Paul addresses in Romans 11. In 11:1, Paul asks, "Hath God cast away his people? God forbid." In v 2, "God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew." In the present church-age, there is a Jewish remnant in the Church (5). God is doing a special work to call Gentiles to Himself, which in part is designed to provoke the Jews to return to God (11). In using a vine metaphor, Paul says God has cut off the branch of Israel from His redemptive plan (19). But God is also able to graft them back in again (23). One day, He will, and Israel will be saved (26).

God does have a future for the Jews. Their unbelief did not cancel His faithfulness. Next, Paul moves to a second misconception.

2. Our unrighteousness commends God's righteousness (5).

V 5 "But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance." Notice the closing words first, "I speak as a man." The Phillips paraphrase captures the idea, "I'm using a human tit-for-tat argument." No doubt, Paul had heard this before.

The LB captures Paul's thought in these terms, "But, some say, our breaking faith with God is good, our sins serve a good purpose, for people will notice how good God is when they see how bad we are. Is it fair, then, for him to punish us when our sins are helping him?" Obviously, such reasoning comes from the lips of a person who refuses to admit guilt, who is grasping for straws. Paul will address the issue further in ch 6. For now, he speaks bluntly in v 6, "God forbid..."

The religious Jews clung to a third misconception about themselves.

3. *Our falsehood enhances God's truthfulness (7).*

V 7 "For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory, why yet am I also judged as a sinner?" It's the old adage, "The end justifies the means." The reasoning says, "It's good for me to leave my wife, because it will give her opportunity to show how great her love is for me." That's foolish.

Paul was burdened for his Jewish friends. He knew they had a faulty view of themselves (he, too, had once). They rejected the gospel with these three misconceptions, "Does our unbelief cancel God's faithfulness? Does our unrighteousness commend God's righteousness? Does our falsehood enhance God's truthfulness?" The obvious answer to all three is, "No." But the problem was this. The Jew used them as a smoke-screen, as a reflector to deflect the issue of his guilt, "I'm not so bad."

You may ask, "Well, how could the Jews have such a faulty view of themselves?" The answer has to do with a second hang-up.

B. They had a faulty view of God.

Notice the parenthesis in v 8, "As we are slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say." Paul's Jewish critics slandered him. They said, "Paul, if you follow through with this idea, you come to this conclusion: The worse we are, the better God likes it (see LB of v 8)."

Is that what Paul said? Certainly not. But Paul's critics twisted his words. They were selective hearers. They attacked and misrepresented him by taking his words, pulling them out of context, and repeating them.

It happens all the time. Politicians do it. Lawyers do it. Unfortunately preachers do it. To prove our point, and to make our opponent look bad, we build a "straw man" case. We take something our opponent said, pull it out of context, and create a "straw man" image of our opponent. Then we tear it down, and say, "See, I'm right! He's wrong!"

For example, a critic of the doctrine of eternal security will say, "I don't believe in eternal security because people who believe in eternal security say, 'I can live however I want, and still make it to heaven.' You're crazy to believe in eternal security." Question--Did the critic give an accurate representation of the doctrine of eternal security? No. He created a straw man.

Another example. "I don't believe in election and predestination. Calvinists are fatalists. They teach that men are mere robots." Is that true? No.

Paul's critics did the same thing to him. They twisted his words, and then slandered him for believing in something which he did not believe in the first place!

The truth is this. Paul's Jewish critics had a faulty view of God.

1. *God is inept (4).*

Remember the objection in v 3? "Our unbelief cancels God's faithfulness." Is God powerless to fulfill His purpose? Is He wringing His hands wondering how He's going to straighten out the mess the world's in? Is He inept? No.

V 4 "God forbid..." Let God be true. I may not understand, but I must never question God's faithfulness. He is in control. He is powerful. He is sovereign.

2. *God is unjust (6).*

Paul preached salvation by grace. His message said, "Out of his sheer grace and mercy, God reaches down and lifts undeserving sinners out of the pit, and saves them in Christ. God brings glory to Himself by rescuing lost sinners."

Here was the criticism Paul heard, "If salvation is by grace, if God gets glory from saving sinners, if God 'uses sin' to bring glory to Himself, God is unfair. God is unjust if He judges people for something that He also uses to bring glory to Himself."

How did Paul respond? Is God unjust for judging unrighteous people? V 6 "God forbid; for then how shall God judge the world?" Paul was saying, "God is not unjust. Your view of Him is faulty!"

3. *God is inconsistent (8).*

This comes from the argument in v 7 that says, "Our falsehood enhances God's glory." Paul's critics said, "Paul, your God is inconsistent if He condemns evil when good results." How did Paul respond?

V 8 "Whose condemnation is just." That's a blunt statement. But it was a blunt problem. To accuse God of being inconsistent is absurd, and one who does so is under appropriately under the judgment of God.

Now we come to the third area of confusion for the Jew. We've considered his opportunity in vv 1-2, and his objections in vv 3-8. Thirdly...

III. The Jew had great obligation.

Why did Paul dialogue with unsaved Jews like he did in Rom 3:1-8? Was it to win an argument? No. It was to win a soul. It was to see his friends escape certain destruction. He knew if they didn't "get out of the boat" of the blind ritual of Judaism, they would perish forever. The greater the opportunity, the greater the obligation.

His cry was clear, "Get out of the sinking boat! Admit the truth of your condition. You are guilty. I am guilty. All men are guilty. Only when we trust Jesus Christ does God remove our guilt."

That was the great obligation of the Jew. And of us.

Conclusion: How to deal with the problem of guilt...

1. Admit the truth about yourself.

Have you ever admitted to God, "I am a sinner. I am guilty. I need help."? Dealing with guilt starts with admitting guilt, namely, the cause of guilt. That is sin.

2. Admit the truth about Jesus Christ.

The truth is that only Jesus Christ can save us and set us free from our guilt. What have you done WITH Christ? Have you received Him as your Savior?

What have you done FOR Christ? If you are a Christian, if you know Christ, I challenge you to stop and consider where we would be today were it not for Christ. We would be condemned by a holy God, guilty. Thank Him for His grace today.