

**Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church**  
**Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 3, Verses 1-8**  
**Notes from Tuesday August 17, 2010**  
**Last Revised on August 18, 2010**

*n.b. This is the continuation of the lesson begun on this date in Chapter 2, at Verse 25*

**Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 1-4**

Will someone please read Chapter 3, Verses 1-4 in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now will somebody please read that in English.

**1Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?**

**2Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God**

**3What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?**

**4By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged."**

Thank you.

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Remember in what we read before, at the end of Chapter 2, it seemed that there was little or no difference between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

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Surely this is a consistent teaching of the whole Bible, in the sense that no group of Christians (neither Jew nor Gentile, Greek nor Barbarian, Slave nor Free, Male or Female, etc) can be in any way superior to any other group of Christians. Christ himself removed the walls of separation.

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But at the same time, Israel occupies a central position in Holy Scripture, which is impossible to ignore. Indeed in his very first lines in this letter, Paul underscored the fact that the gospel is God's good news concerning his son who was descended from David according to the flesh.

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So how shall we understand the central importance of Israel and the equality of all Christian believers? Paul really had to ask and answer the questions raised the first verse of Chapter 3.

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Verse 1 reads:

**(Verse 1)****Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?**

This is not a trivial question, even today, particularly among Messianic Jews.

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God chose Israel as his special people and ordained circumcision as a mark of his special relationship with them.

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Is there no lasting value?

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Paul's answer in Verse 2 is ...

**(Verse 2)****Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God**

This does not so much mean that the Jews had a multitude of advantages on every front, but that they had certain advantages of truly major proportion.

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At the top of the list, God's revelation of himself to the human race came to the Jews and through them to all the nations.

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And it is through Israel that all the nations of the world have been and ever shall be blessed.

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Jesus Christ, who is Lord of the Church, is first of all the King of the Jews.

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And so whatever rights and privileges we Gentiles may have in the Kingdom of God, we have them as guests of the Jews. (Barth)

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It is their house into which we have been invited!

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Yet it must be remembered, and all of Jewish scripture points to this, that the history of Israel is a history of falling away from God.

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And Paul does admit this in Verse 3, which reads

**(Verse 3)****What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?**

Here Paul is just being kind.

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It is not just "some" who were unfaithful, but nearly everyone in Israel, all the time, and in the most horrible ways imaginable.

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The story of Israel is the story of Israel falling away from God, time and time and time again.

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Finally they crucified the son of God.

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I am reminded of Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts Chapter 3, verse 36, where he says "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

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Does ***this*** nullify the faithfulness of God?

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Did God give up on Israel and forget his promises to her?

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If God were any god but our God, he surely would have!

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But in Verse 4 Paul says:

**(Verse 4)**

**By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged."**

Our God is almighty, perfect, and able.

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All that happened in the history of Israel, and of the world, up to and including, especially including, the death of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary, was within Gods sovereign control and part of his perfect plan.

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Let people do and say whatever they will, God's will simply cannot be nullified.

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He has been is and ever shall be perfectly faithful, both to himself and to his promises to us.

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At this point in his argument, King David enters the mind of Paul.

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The quote in Verse 4 is from Psalm 51, which is attributed to David, on the occasion of his sin with Bathsheba.

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You remember the story? David seduced and had sex with another man's wife, the wife of one of his loyal soldiers, and then he used his authority as King of Israel to have her husband killed in battle.

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It was a disgusting sin in every way, and punishable by death two or three times over under God's law. And surely David lies buried someplace in Jerusalem as Peter attests.

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Yet the Bible also records that David was, "a man after God's own heart," and the founder of the royal house from which came our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And David is one of the folks we expect to see if and when we ourselves ever make it to heaven.

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All of this, I think, floods into Paul's heart and mind as he quotes from Psalm 51, at the point where David confesses his sins before God, while extolling God's righteousness and love of Truth, on the one hand, and God's faithfulness and great compassion, on the other hand, and David's hope that God will forgive him and transform him and conform him to God's Truth.

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All who would be reconciled with God will, like David, necessarily conform to God's truth.

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God is patient and loving and kind, but his truth is absolute, and he does not bend it for anyone, not even for David, and not even for Himself! That is why Christ had to die on the cross and why, as we read in Chapter 1, Verse 17, the gospel is the revelation of God's righteousness.

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So in summary, then, to this point: the Jews have been blessed beyond all measure and have been a blessing beyond measure to all the nations. They are so very special and yet they have sinned against God most grievously over the centuries. God cannot and does not adjust his truth to our lies, he does not and cannot accept our sins or simply overlook them, not even the sins of the Jews, not even the sins of David. But God's truthfulness applies also to all of his promises, to David, the Jews, and to the World. So we wait with baited breath to see what God will do, knowing that in all things he is true and righteous and gracious and just. Praise be to God!

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But if God has everything worked out, then why must people in general, and Jews in particular suffer as they do?

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I think David understood, but do we?

### **The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 5-8**

Would someone please read Chapter 3, Verses 5-8, in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now would someone please read those same verses in English.

**5But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)**

**6By no means! For then how could God judge the world?**

**7But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?**

**8And why not do evil that good may come?---as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.**

Remember, in Verses 1-4 Paul argues that the history of Israel has indeed been glorious, despite the faithlessness of Israel, and that the faithlessness of Israel has even served to

showcase the faithfulness and righteousness of God. which is now revealed fully in Christ.  
Amen!

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So if God is the master of this situation from beginning to end, and if it redounds to his glory, no matter what, then how can he possibly be angry with people in general or with Israel in particular. Our sins even make him look good!

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Maybe we should sin even more to bring God more glory! This may seem a silly argument to you, but soon after the time of Paul's writing there were Christians who actually advanced such arguments --- a view sometimes referred to as antinomianism. Since we are saved by grace, let us sin the more, so that grace will be all the more abundant. Etc.

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Paul seems to be responding here to some such arguments.

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He is, of course, radically rejecting these arguments, which are invalid on their face and wicked in their intent.

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Interestingly, we learn in verse 8, that some people had accused Paul of making some of these same kinds of statements himself.

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This only goes to show that Paul has been proclaiming the gospel effectively, because wherever the gospel of grace is proclaimed, charges of antinomianism are, rightly or wrongly, near at hand.

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Grace always seems, somehow, just a little too free.

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Let's look now in detail

In verse 5 Paul says:

**(Verse 5)**

**But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)**

Clearly Paul understands that there is a fundamental problem with this questions, which is why he inserts parenthetically "(I speak in a human way.)"

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Q. Do you see what is *fundamentally* wrong with this question?

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A. The question contemplates the possibility that God might sometimes be unrighteous in some way and that we might be somehow able to catch him at it.

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But this is *logically* impossible because God is the standard by which righteousness is determined.

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For us to pass judgment on God's righteousness would require a standard of righteousness higher and more perfect than God's standard (which is impossible) and it would involve us in making such a determination, which is just too horrible and ridiculous to contemplate.

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That is the sense of Paul's comment in Verse 6, which reads:

**(Verse 6)**

**By no means! For then how could God judge the world?**

I think Paul simply means to say, "Since God is the judge, of course it is absurd to speak of judging him."

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Yet, speaking in a human way, we often do this, don't we....sort of evaluate God?

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It's not so much that we think we are "better than God" but, rather, that we are trying to catch God being inconsistent with himself.

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That we are permitted even this freedom, speaks volumes about the greatness of our God!

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But of course, going back to verse 5, and speaking in a human way, it is easy enough to see that God is not being inconsistent with himself when he overcomes our unrighteousness and makes good to come of it.

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And what of this little horror?!

**(Verse 7)**

**But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?**

Verse 5 asked whether God himself was righteous and fit to judge our sins.

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Verse 6 says yes, God is the righteous judge.

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Verse 7 is a rebuttal question, which says, in effect "but how can it be right for God to condemn me for my sins, when my sins don't really hurt God but, on the contrary, abound to his glory.

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and finally verse 8 pushes this argument to its logical extreme saying, in effect, since my sin serves to glorify God perhaps I should sin even more and, so bring more glory to God.

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This whole line of reasoning is manifestly Satanic and hardly needs to be refuted among God's people.

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Yet in Verse 8 we discover that Paul himself has been accused of developing just this line of thought, which goes to show just how clever Satan is at undermining the gospel.

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Verse 8 reads

**(Verse 8)**

**And why not do evil that good may come?---as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.**

To say, “let’s do evil that good may come,” is so absurd on its face, that few would ever say it or be deceived by it.

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Surly those who advocate such a policy as well as those who accuse Paul of promoting such a policy deserve to be condemned.

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Surely this is not Paul’s policy, ever.

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But it occurs to me that this obvious fallacy --- “let’s do evil that good may come” --- is implicit in the question posed in Verse 7, which could be rephrased more simply to read: “its OK to sin because God will turn it into good.”

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And both of these are implicit in the still more subtle question set forth in verse 5, which we could simplify to read, “surely God will not punish our sins because he is righteous.”

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This is the mistake that many Jews were making, when they assumed that Father Abraham would keep them out of Hell simply because they were circumcised!

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And this is the mistake that many Christians are making, when we assume that Jesus will keep us out of Hell simply because we are baptized!

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And this is the mistake that the Universalists are making, when they assume that there finally is no condemnation for anyone, simply because God is so good.

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I am reminded of that scary passage in Matthew, Chapter 7, verses 21-23, where Jesus says: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

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We are dealing with something very serious here --- the extreme danger of being nominally and superficially associated with God. Paul is working very hard here to make sure we feel it, that we feel the radical danger of it.

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Q. Do you understand why?

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A. We need to understand our depravity so that we can be saved by the gospel.

*n.b. this is where we ran out of time on this evening.*

### **Closing Prayer**

Heavenly father,

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Please forgive our feeble attempts at excusing and justifying our sins.

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We collapse in a heap at the foot of the cross.

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Hoping and believing that you will save us for Jesus sake.

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We do not think that our sins are OK, not even a little bit.

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Please remove them far from us and

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conform us to the likeness of Christ.

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Let us and our old nature die with him,

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so that with him we can be reborn,

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Please enter into us Holy Spirit and lead us into new life

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even now, and finally to perfection on the day,

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when God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

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In Jesus Name we pray,

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Amen