

“Liar”

Romans 3:1-18

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Romans 3:1-18 *What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? 2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. 3 For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? 4 Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged." 5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) 6 Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? 7 For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? 8 And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"? —as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just. 9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. 10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." 13 "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; 14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways; 17 And the way of peace they have not known." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."*



The Columbian Nobel prize winning author Gabriel García Márquez once remarked: "Everyone has three lives: a public life, a private life, and a secret life." It's the secret life that generally gets us in trouble. It's the secret life that we lie about. It's the secret life that holds such catastrophic power to destroy the world we call our own. It's in this world of the secret life that we lie to ourselves and to others and pretend we are something other than we truly are.

Pilate asked Jesus "what is truth?" And it seems never before in the history of humanity has that question been so stark and replete with social ramifications. What we need to grasp...and truly fail to admit as we delve into this rather difficult passage, is that mankind is a species of sinners and that we are...in our totality, *lost*. Our "secret lives" will and have condemned us to bondage, pain, and incurable sadness.

The news today is steeped in violence, protest, war and human atrocity. School shootings continue as new terms become part of our modern vernacular. 'Active shooter,' 'genocide,' 'revenge porn,' human trafficking, 'all inclusive.' The irony is that the very people who are responsible for bringing us to this painful point in history are taking the high road in their brazen belief that they have the answers to correct the issues that plague our culture. There are now more than 400 million civilian-owned firearms in the United States, (that they know of) or enough for every man, woman and child to own one and still have around 75 million guns left over. And the answer I keep hearing to stop the school shootings is to tighten gun purchase rules and vet gun applications better. But what about the 400 million already out there? And what nobody wants to even breathe is the words "maybe it's just mankind...*maybe it's just evil in people...maybe it's just SIN*. Oh no...that would be admitting that what we Christians have been espousing for hundreds of years is correct! That we do indeed need to be "saved," if only from ourselves! No, pride would never allow it. We are quite smug in our position...even as we "fiddle while Rome burns."

Despite the apparent modern aspect of this condition, the heart that got us here is nothing new. No, even Paul was dealing with this same adamant pride of position. For by this time, the Jews who would be reading this letter were undoubtedly beginning to become increasingly indignant with the apostle. They were saying to him, in effect:

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Look, the way you sound, it is as though these privileges that God has given to us -- our great religious heritage -- really means nothing at all. You are undervaluing our heritage. And also if there is no partiality with God (Ro 2:11), what good is it to be Jewish? If being a Jew gives us no advantage over the Gentiles on Judgment Day, then what's the big deal about being a Jew at all? Have we just been spinning our wheels for the last 2,000 years? Are the covenant and its special sign — circumcision — God's idea of a practical joke? Or is he just now changing his mind about the Jews? Is he going back on his word?

Paul is beginning this passage with his answer...*No, I am not saying that; these things mean a lot. The Jews have been given a position of privilege -- they were given the oracles of God; they were entrusted with the message of God; they were chosen as the channel by which God would communicate with the race -- and this is a tremendous privilege.*

Remember that back in chapter 2 Paul had just taught about circumcision (Ro 2:25, 26, 27, 28, 29) and about the judgment of God falling without impartiality on the Jew as well as the Gentile. It seems Paul has pulled back the curtain to reveal the fact that the Great Oz was nothing more than a bumbling old man. In his baring of the Jewish arrogance and elitism, he had seemingly poked the sleeping lion. But Paul's purpose was not to denigrate His brethren, but rather to simply show that Jews have no advantage with respect to Gentiles in regard to the judgment of God just because they are Jews.

Paul, in chapter 2, has said something that is very provocative and would not go unchallenged, namely, that some Jews are not really Jews and some Gentiles can really be Jews, even if they are not circumcised. The problem is that this seems to call into question the special position of Israel as God's chosen people. Paul seemed to instinctively know that his argument could be misunderstood and could quite possibly draw the bristled ire of the orthodox Jew. Thus in this section he stops to elaborate or "clarify" his position. In this passage Paul would both affirm Jewish privileges (see Ro 3:2) and yet clarify the nature and limitations of those privileges.

Now the first eight verses of Romans 3 can be interpreted as an "imaginary dialogue" that the apostle holds with his Jewish detractors. The style Paul utilizes here is known as a **diatribe** which was a common method of teaching used by writers and instructors in Paul's time. Paul was well versed in Jewish thought as well as the street arguments of his own culture and time, just as many of us are in our own day and social paradigm. We are often quite aware of the "tomatoes" that are lobbed into the religious fray from people's foxholes of perceived safety.

So Paul moves unilaterally to answer what He knew was the questions in the hearts and minds of the readers. In this "dialogue" Paul points out that the Jew is indeed special! They had been given the care of the "oracles of God": The Old Testament Scriptures, the righteous "standard," and the Ten Commandments! The Jewish nation is God's "chosen nation." God had not and *will not* revealed Himself in this specific way to any other nation on earth (Deut. 4:8; Ps. 147:19-20). God promised through the Jewish prophets, as recorded in the Old Testament, to send the Savior of the world through them (John 4:22). Through the symbolic significance of the Temple and of the laws and sacrifices, the Jews uniquely had God's revelation about the coming Messiah and Savior. All the other nations were left in spiritual darkness. God entrusted the Jews with His very Word!

This was a great privilege, but also a great responsibility. To have the light of God's Word and yet to reject it means that you are more accountable than the person who had no light except the general revelation of creation (Rom. 1:20; Matt. 11:21-24). During two thousand years of human history from Abraham to Christ, the pagan nations worshiped their false gods, offering sacrifices to appease their anger, living in fear and confusion, with no hope of salvation. But the Jews knew how to approach the living and true God, maker of heaven and earth. They had His promises to send the Savior. The godly in Israel were looking for the fulfillment of that promise (Luke 2:25-32). What an unspeakable privilege!

The Jews had been guarding the “oracles of God” for centuries, yet by refusing to see Jesus for who He really was, they failed to “complete” their mission. Does such a fact change the truth? Paul’s point was no, absolutely not! God is *still* real and faithful. The truth is still the truth. Man may fail to handle such truth in integrity, but our failure does not change the facts. Our modern Gentile church today is steeped in varying degrees of legalism. Does such a practice deny God’s grace? No, it also does not change the facts. We can “imagine” all we want, and believe that “truth is in the eye of the beholder,” but the facts remain constant and the truth continues on despite our purposeful blindness.

In our world we hear statements based solely on current cultural norms and social acceptance. And such seems to demand little or no necessity of facts, data, and proof. We try people in the courts of public opinion where we are judge, jury and executioner, and proof and facts are not required. It is called “living in a fantasy.” We have exalted lying to the status of scientific proof. Paul is trying to bring his brothers “back to earth.”

He is trying to call home those who attempt to “dance” around the facts especially those of Scripture. He is dealing with those who try to twist Scripture to find a crack in which to slip through their sin. He is speaking to those who live in a world where they believe they are in good standing with deity because they go to church some, or were raised in a Christian home, or believe that Jesus is the Son of God. After all, we aren’t “bad” people! They are no bodies buried in our back yards! One of the arguments that are given herein goes like this: “If my unfaithfulness causes God to manifest *His* faithfulness and to magnify *His* grace, is not my sin therefore by contrast enhancing the world’s understanding of the absolute holiness and love of God?”

But such a “dance” fails at its core! Because God *will* and *does* judge the world. We don’t like that side of God. We falsely think that God’s grace means we are without call and duty, and therefore God will not judge. But that is not Scripture however much we would want it to be otherwise.

One thing is for sure. We the church today can’t say we are better than the Jews because of how *we* have handled *our* message...*our* “oracles of God.” We’re not righteous. We’re all sinners! And there is not a one of us that has not “dropped the ball.” Our flesh has never and will never “seek after God.” Only through the prompting of the Father and the calling of the Holy Spirit will we ever move toward deity. John 6:44 says “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...*” But the alarming aspect of such is that we believe that we are ok! That we are indeed “guides to the blind...a light to those in the darkness.” (Rom 2:19)

In the latter half of this passage...verses 12 -18, Paul unleashes a corporate condemnation of mankind. Jew, church-goer, legalist, gracer, or “self-excuser,” we are *all*, without intervention, lost in our sin and our flesh. But despite such an all-encompassing judgment, we stand today with the open door before us. Salvation... redemption... justification... the offer is on the table.

And what about us church? So much has been given to us. So much promise. Such opportunity. The world on an oyster. And yet so often we still refuse to hear the truth. We too have been granted such favor and of course, its responsibility. We live at the end of this grand story...having known the cross and its redemption. We have witnessed the march of the gospel across the world and through the halls of time...the miraculous...the supernatural...the transformative power of the Spirit of God. We too have known the light of God’s Word and are also so accountable for what we have been given. We too have been given an unspeakable privilege. Yet the fact still stands that most of us are unrecognizable as being any different than those in the world...we just go to church on Sunday.

We still lie to ourselves in those secret places and tell ourselves we have it under control...that we’re ok...we can find our way out of this ourselves. And often we’re simply drowning like everyone else. The world is drowning, and we so very much need salvation.

Salvation. Redemption. It has been described so simply as just “surrender.” “*I surrender all.*” I will stop lying to myself and others. I do not have it under control. I do not have the answers. I **need** salvation.

I readily admit there are many things in God’s Word that I do not understand, such as the doctrine of God’s sovereign election. There are things that are difficult to rejoice in, such as the trials and pains that I must endure as a follower of Christ. There are worldly issues that are hard for me. Why does God allow little children to suffer terrible things? Why does He allow many to live and die with no gospel witness? Why doesn’t God tear down the satanic strongholds of false religions that deceive millions? I’m not saying that we shouldn’t wrestle with these hard issues and try to think them through more carefully.

But, there are two ways to approach these hard matters. You can come as a submissive child, asking the Father to give you more light, so that you will know Him and His ways more accurately, so that you can obey Him more fully, *even if some answers are never forthcoming*. Or, you can come as a critic, demanding that God give you answers, as if He owes it to you. You can seek for the “cracks” and cling white-knuckled to any and every excuse to slide on the issue of Jesus.

If you try to prove that you’re right and God is wrong, you’re on thin ice! Even though you may not understand God or His ways, you have no right to contend against Him or accuse Him of wrong. The Book of Job shows that even the most righteous man on the face of the earth has no grounds to contend with God and demand answers, even if he feels that he is suffering unjustly. Learn from Job to slap your hand over your mouth, admit your own insignificance in God’s presence, and repent in dust and ashes (Job 40:4; 42:6). If you fight against God, you lose. If you submit to Him, you win. So wrestle with your questions in a spirit of submission, not defiance.

It will always be easier to rationalize sin rather than to repent of it. It’s easy to latch on to some objection about God or the Bible and then use that objection to dodge the clear truth of the Bible about Jesus Christ, and then justify your own sin. The Lord Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of God’s Word. If He is true, then every objection against Him is a lie. God will prevail when He judges all sin. Make sure that you have repented of your sin and taken refuge in the Lamb who was slain for sinners! Jesus Christ and Him crucified is God’s final answer to every objection!

In verse 4 of our text Paul quotes Psalm 51:4. Now recall that Psalm 51 is the psalm of King David's confession after his adultery with Bathsheba. Here is what David said in the context of the psalm. He says to God, "*Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge*" (51:4). In other words, David says that the reason God would be just to judge him is that his sin was against God. All of our sins are ultimately against God. David's sin makes God's judgment of David righteous - it is true to God's nature, it is true to his glory, and so this righteousness is faithfulness to his covenant.

Paul quoted this Psalm to support his claim that God is not unfaithful or untrue even if some Jews or all men are unbelieving and false to God. So it goes like this. Verse 3: the unbelief of some Jews does not nullify God's faithfulness; and verse 4: even if every man were false to God and under God's judgment, God would still be faithful and true. Why? Because David himself said that God had the right to judge him because of his sin. He did not claim that his Jewishness would spare him, any more than we can claim that our church participation will spare us. "I have sinned," David said ". . . that you [God] may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged."

Verses 10 – 18 *As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

“...let God be true but every man a liar.” We must be born again to see the kingdom of God. And we must every day and forever walk in that humble spirit of salvation to actually live in that kingdom here and now.