

EARLY BELIEVERS IN ROME

Lesson Two; Romans 1:17-3:1

From Faith to Faith (1:17)

¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from [God's faithfulness to our faithfulness], as it is written [in Habakkuk 2:4], "The righteous shall live [eternally] by [merit of] faith[fulness]." (Cf. Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38; *b.Makkot 24a*)

Grace: *Charis and Chen*

Grace = "favor"

Eg. Exodus 33:12-18

Merited Favor in God's Eyes

The Roman Believers

- Jewish believers
- Proselytes
- God-fearing Gentiles

Standard dogma expects God-fearing Gentiles to become Jewish. Cf. Paul's theological adversaries in Galatia

Paul's Gospel

The inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom and the redemption of the whole world through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

The Laws of Noah

1. Do not worship idols or other gods.
2. Do not blaspheme God's name.
3. Do not murder.
4. Do not commit sexual immorality.
5. Do not steal.
6. Do not eat things while they are still alive (i.e., meat with blood).
7. Establish courts of justice.

Godless Idolaters (1:18)

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth [of monotheism and God's expectation of ethical standards].

Diatribes against Idolaters (1:19-32)

Romans 1:18ff Cf. Wisdom of Solomon 13-15

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to [the Gentiles, even without the revelation of Torah], because God has shown it to them.

²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived [by all human beings], ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse [for their immoral behavior].

²¹ For although they knew [about] God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became

futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images [in his likeness] resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Cf. Psalm 106:20)

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves [though sexual sins],

²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie [idolatry] and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural [sexual] relations for those that are contrary to nature [such as homosexuality];

²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural [sexual] relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error [i.e., sexual depravity].

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness [violating the universal (Noachide) laws which apply to all human beings], evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,

³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

³² Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die [as is evidenced even in pagan mythology], they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Religious Self-Righteousness (Romans 2:1-5)

¹ Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you [whether Proselyte or Jew] who judges [the so-called godless gentiles]. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself (Cf. Matthew 7:1), because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.

³ Do you suppose, O man--you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself--that you will escape the judgment of God [just because you are Jewish]?

⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed [on the day of judgment].

Justice in the Final Judgment

⁶ He will render [reward or punishment] to each one according to his works (Psalm 62:13): ⁷ to those [Gentiles] who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;

⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil [not just for the Gentiles, but], the Jew first and also the Greek,

¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good [not just for Jews, but], the Jew first and also the Greek.

¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

The Standard of Judgment

¹² For all [those pagan Gentiles] who have sinned without the law [which means without being Jewish] will also perish without the law [as a punishment for violation of the universal standards that apply to all human beings], and all who have sinned under the law [as Jews] will be judged by the law [for violating the commandments and the covenant].

¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

The Moral Compass

¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires [of Gentiles], they are a law to themselves [knowing basic right from wrong and possessing a basic moral compass], even though they do not have the law.

¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts [as a universal impulse toward an ethical standard], while their conscience also bears witness [causing them to feel guilt for wrongdoing], and their conflicting thoughts accuse [them for wrongdoing] or even excuse them [through rationalizations and self-justifications] (Cf. Jeremiah 31:31)

¹⁶ on that day [of the final judgment] when, according to my gospel [which teaches the inclusion of the Gentile believers in Yeshua], God judges the secrets of men [both their wicked deeds and their wicked hearts and their good deeds and their ethical behavior] by Christ Jesus.

The Double Standards of the Proselyte Movement

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew [because you have undergone a legal conversion] and rely on the law [by which I mean your covenant status as a Jew] and boast in God [instead of Gentile idols]

¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;

¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind [Gentiles], a light to those who are in darkness [of idolatry and ignorance],

²⁰ an instructor of the foolish [who do not have the revelation of Hashem], a teacher of [ignorant] children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth--

²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?

²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law [because you have traded the Fear of the LORD for assurance in your Jewish status].

²⁴ For, as it is written [in Isaiah 52:5 LXX], "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." (Cf. Galatians 6:12-13)

Circumcision of the Heart (Romans 2:6-29)

²⁵ For circumcision [being legally Jewish] indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision [that is, your Jewishness] becomes uncircumcision [spiritually no better than an idolater].

²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised [and not Jewish] keeps the precepts of the law, will not his [physical] uncircumcision be regarded as [spiritually] circumcision [which is to say, an heir of the reward]?

²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law [as it applies to him as a Gentile] will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law [as it applies to you as a Jew].

²⁸ For no one is a [proper] Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is [the true, spiritual meaning of] circumcision outward and physical (Cf. Deut 10:16, 30:6, Jer. 4:4).

²⁹ But a [proper] Jew is one inwardly [not just outwardly], and [the spiritual meaning of] circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit [of God writing His Torah on your heart], not by the [mere legal status of the Torah's literal] letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

^{3:1} Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision [to become a proselyte]?