

Romans 3:1-4

3:1-2

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

Did the Jews have an advantage? Was there any profit in circumcision?

Much every way, Paul responds. There was an advantage in being a covenanted *Jew*, seeing they received the *oracles* of God. An oracle is an *utterance*, that is, actual words. The word oracle is used 4 times in the Bible.

Acts 7:38

This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us...

Here we see the oracles are a reference to the Law of Moses.

Hebrews 5:12

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

1 Peter 4:11

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...

The scriptures, that is, the writings that were inspired by God Himself, the very *Words* of God (not message, not idea, not gist, but actual, individual, specific words) were committed to the trust of the Jews. They had the very form of sound words, and so they were of all people on earth at most advantage and also most accountable to God.

The Church the Body of Christ has, in this dispensation of God's grace, been historically the stewards of God's Words, many words of which the Jews reject altogether.

Paul tells Timothy in **2 Timothy 1:13**,

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

The sound words we have received have an *actual form* to them; there is intrinsic design in them. The God of heaven crafted physical creation with careful brilliance, down to the atom, and should we think He would be any less meticulous with the Words of eternal life?

The word *oracle* carries with it the idea of actual, specific words.

Interestingly, the word *oracle* only ever occurs in a Jewish context, to refer to the writings committed to Israel. From Acts 7, we see it's a reference to the Law itself.

And so if we think of *oracles* in terms of the Law, we see more clearly the distinct Jewish nature of the epistles of Hebrews and Peter. They were never commanded to depart from the "lively oracles," but to keep them (Matt. 23:1-3, Matt. 19:17, Matt. 5:18-19).

Was there any profit in circumcision? Absolutely. The covenant of circumcision was a sign of the faith of Abraham, a seal of the promise of God in their flesh.

Genesis 17:7-11

⁷And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

⁸ *And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.*

⁹ *And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.*

¹⁰ *This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.*

¹¹ *And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.*

Notice that this covenant would be established in *their generations* plural; the covenant was and will be established with this people, but as Jesus made clear in the gospels, and Paul will make clear in Romans, only those who are of the faith of Abraham (those who have faith in the singular Seed), will be counted as children of promise. But the context here is that the multiplied offspring of Abraham, in order to remain in the covenant, had to be circumcised on the eighth day.

By nature and virtue of their covenants they were given special privilege to have a relationship with the true God, and through the revelation of God's Law they had the advantage of knowing God's character and will.

Romans 3:3

For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

This "faith of God" is God's *faithfulness*.

The ninth entry for *faith* in Webster's 1828 English Dictionary defines faith as this:

Faithfulness; fidelity; a strict adherence to duty and fulfillment of promises.

Galatians 2:16 contains a similar construct, "faith of Christ," where it informs us how to think about it.

Galatians 2:16

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

The word *even* here means likewise or in like manner, communicating an even-ness or likeness between the first clause of the verse and the second.

If the faith of Christ is the same as believing in Jesus Christ, then this statement is redundant. What this is saying is that our justification comes by the faithfulness—that is, the faithful performance of—Jesus Christ. He faithfully performed everything necessary to justify us before God the Father. Justification does require a work, only in our case, it's not *our* work, it's the work Jesus faithfully performed on our behalf.

To understand it this way eliminates the redundancy.

When we understand the construct this way, then Romans 3:3 makes more sense:

Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? How can they be in unbelief and have faith simultaneously? This is speaking of *God's faithfulness*. The unbelief of Israel cannot make His faithfulness without effect. His promise will stand.

This is understood from the next verse,

Romans 3:4

God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

Here in Romans 3:4 is the first of the ten

"God forbid" statements made in Romans. This phrase is the strongest possible statement to correct our thinking as the Holy Spirit leads us through the doctrine.

God *forbid*. God actually *forbids* this type of thinking.

It's imperative that we get the doctrine correct, and these God forbid statements are there to make sure our mind is continually conformed to that of Christ.

These God forbid statements also serve as checkpoints in understanding and maturity. As we work through Romans, God will help us how to think about sin, about the Law, about our relationship to them and about Israel.

Here Paul is correcting our thinking about God's faithfulness. Even if every man is wrong, even if every man is a sinful liar, God's faithfulness will not change.

And this is what this verse says, let God be true but every man a liar. Every man, as we will see in this chapter is imperfect in speech, and is imperfect in fidelity to God.

...Let God be true...

What He says will stand; what He promises He will perform.

As it is written, Paul says. This is a quote from Psalm 51:4:

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

What is interesting is that Paul's quote here actually differs from the original. In Psalm 51 it is God who is justified in what He says, and being clear when He judges meaning there is no fault that can be found in Him, His judgment is perfect. But Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says,

That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

So Psalm 51 says *when thou judgest*, and Romans 3 say *when thou art judged*. Psalm 51 says "be clear," Romans 3 says "overcome." It could be that Paul is saying the same exact thing as Psalm 51, that God overcomes man's judgment, that man, though he may judge God, in the end, can find no fault with Him, which would be true.

Or it could be that Paul is speaking of the sinner who has admitted let God alone be True and every man a liar, for in so admitting, he himself would be justified and overcome when He is judged of God, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (**James 4:6, Psalm 138:6**).

Psalm 51 *is* describing the man who has acknowledged his transgressions before God,

Psalm 51:3

For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

Psalm 51:9-10

Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:17

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

In this way, the variation in the quote makes sense; whereas, if it were a verbatim quote, it would seem as though he misquoted it.

Both senses previously considered are simultaneously true, and I don't believe Paul "misquoted" anything; Paul is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit reserves the right to alter any statement He's previously made in the scripture.