

Monday, August 22, 2022 ◻ Romans 3:1–4

Questions from the Scripture text: What question does 3:1 ask about the outward Jew? About outward circumcision? What is the answer in v2? What is the greatest advantage/profit that they had? What did some of them not do (v3)? But what doesn't this unbelief do (v3)? Who would be true even if every Jew (and church member) turned out to be a liar (v4)? Whom would the Lord be justified in judging?

If there are people who receive the covenant sign, but do not receive the thing signified, does this mean that there is no advantage or profit from it? In these four verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **Church members' unbelief doesn't negate the goodness of the gift of church membership and covenant sign or the goodness of the Giver of these good gifts.**

Circumcision, the covenant sign, had real advantages (v1–2). Jews who suddenly discovered that their membership among God's people and receiving of God's sign had to be matched by an inward reality in order to profit them (v25–29) might have thought in rebellious reflex, "then it would have been better not to have been members at all, or have received the sign at all!" This idea is behind the question in v1.

But the answer to the question directly repudiates their complaint. There is much advantage to membership and sign in every way! So, the apostle follows immediately with the chief advantage: "to them were committed the sayings of God." Who would say that this is not an advantage? But being a member of God's assembly means gathering to hear His Word. And as Jesus shows in tying His two commands together, water baptism on earth entitles us to be taught everything that He has commanded (cf. Mt 28:19–20).

When physical circumcision is not matched by flesh circumcision, man is the liar, not God (v3–4a). It's probably an understatement to say of the circumcised that "some did not believe" (v3). Sadly, even in this age of the outpouring of the Spirit, it's difficult to conclude that it would be an understatement to say also of the baptized that "some did not believe." But does this mean that God's faithfulness, in God's sign, is somehow without effect?

It's a rhetorical question that expects the answer "no," but such is our confusion over these things that the apostle answers it: "Certainly not!" The advantage of being a member of God's assembly and a recipient of God's sign is great, even if one is self-deceived about his spiritual state, or never comes to faith (cf. Heb 6:1–9). God is still true. It is that man who began as a liar, and remained as a liar. God displays to us what faith would receive, but we still must receive that faith entirely by grace! The "every man" in v3 is stunning: even if every single church member ever were lost, the mercies of membership and sign would still be true mercies, and God Himself would still be true!

Even in the church, God gives salvation entirely by mercy, not obligation (v4b). The point in the first part of v4 is supported by a quote from Psalm 51. Who had more membership/sign/promise advantages than David? And yet when he has committed such sin as would call his salvation into question, he comes humbly to God, admitting that if after all he had turned out to be lost, God would be righteous and just to condemn him to hell. How many times had David offered sacrifices that attested to the washing of the blood of Christ? And yet, he knew that we must not presumptuously think that we have been regenerated simply because we were sure that we were at the time when we participated in a covenant sign.

Yet, membership and sign encourage us to look to God for mercy, just as David did! Later in the same Psalm, he admits that without the Spirit-given heart-work (Ps 51:6, 10, 17), the sacrifices are worthless (Ps 51:16). But, when that work is in place, the Lord does delight in those sacrifices that assured of the perfection of the coming sacrifice of Christ (Ps 51:19).

Whether for our children, or for ourselves, when we look to God to fulfill the reality of His signs, we do not do so presumptuously, but looking for mercy from a merciful God, as encouraged to do so because He has given us signs of that mercy.

What covenant membership and signs have you received from the Lord? What advantages do you get by them? To Whom do you look for the inward reality to which the outward signs point? By what means? What further advantage do the signs have for you, when the inward reality is in place?

Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for giving us that membership and sign which have entitled us to being taught to observe all that You have commanded. Forgive us for when we are presumptuous and think that we can know that we are regenerated because we thought that we were when we participated in a covenant sign. But make us always to look to You for faith and repentance as undeserved mercies of Your grace, for which we ask through Christ, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP51A "God, Be Merciful to Me" or TPH51C "God, Be Merciful to Me"

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Romans 3:1-4. These are God's words. What advantage? Then has the Jew or what is the prophet of circumcision. Much in every way Chiefly because to them, we're committed. The oracles of God For, what if some did not believe well their belief where they're unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect.

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 So far, the reading of God's inspired and inherent word. So the apostle has told them that if they have the sign of circumcision but not the inward reality, then it is as bad for them as being uncircumcised and that someone who is not circumcised in the flesh.

But does have the inward reality. It is as good for him as if he was circumcised. That the the primary substance of circumcision is not that which is done in the flesh but that to which it points. And if we have faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ and the inward work that makes us love the Lord and delight in his law.

In our inner being that circumcision, then assures us and affirms the, the circumcision in the flesh affirms that which the spirit has done in the heart. Now he hasn't said it exactly in that way. He's made the point. That the main thing, the substance is what the Spirit does.

In the heart. Not what that not that which is in the flesh. And so he asks the question that corresponds to the statement with traverse 25. It opened in Romans 2 verse 25. He had said for circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law. But then he goes on to say that all these unconverted Jews who trusted in themselves rather in the Lord and his salvation.

And so did not from the law, keep the heart. As we heard even in the previous passage in verses 17 through 24, that, that leaves us with the question, then if it's circumcision of the heart that makes the ultimate difference. Then what's the point or what's the profit of having circumcision in the flesh?

And sometimes I'll even hear people not so much that we have worshipping with us now. But when I talk to people and of course, there's always trying to evangelize them and and, you know, there are lots of people who are, you know, they say they don't believe in church membership, don't church believe in church leadership.

And a lot of them say, well, you don't need to be baptized, you just need the spirit and of course, what they mean by the spirit is not at all what the Bible describes, the spirit actually doing in people, but they say things like that. And you just say, well, Jesus is the one who arranges the members in the body and gives us all these commands that require us to be bound to one another.

In a committed way He invented church membership. And Jesus is the one who calls and gifts the shepherd teachers and has established. The is so it's not like yes the thing that you need is Jesus as applied to you by the Holy Spirit through faith. But those things are not in competition with baptism and the fact that you can have Christ without receiving water baptism doesn't mean that water baptism isn't valuable First of all, he commanded it.

Yeah and you could just end the conversation there probably or should be able to But the same with circumcision, he's just finished saying you can be not circumcised and yet have the spiritual substance to which circumcision belongs. And someone say well see you don't need circumcision Circumcisions useless. He's like, oh well except God commanded it.

And of course there's even more than that. And when he asks the question, What advantage, then has the Jew or what is the prophet of circumcision? He says, first much in every way, that's why we're gonna take some time. And then in the midweek sermon this week, it's always a blessing when something that was just.

The last point gets to be its unsermon because then you could take more time to do things like to look at. Some of the benefits that being in the Covenant and having the covenant sign. Therefore, identifying you as a member of the assembly of Christ's Church of Christ's people, some of the real advantages that it gives you.

And we'll look at chapter 9 of the of this letter. And we'll look at first Corinthians 12 through 14. We'll look at well chapter 12 of this letter of Romans. And we'll look at Hebrews chapter 6 and maybe another place or two and just read, you know, all the different things that God gives those whom he gathers into his church that are real advantages.

And that if we're not saved, They testify against us precisely, because they were real advantages, but after he says much in every way he just names one and he'll return a name some more as I said in chapter 9, but he just says chiefly because to them were committed.

The oracles of God, In other words who can say that having the sayings of God is not an advantage. Don't you understand? What a great thing it was to be a Jew who had the words of God, while all the rest of the world languished in darkness pushing down on the truth and they're unrighteousness without the light of God's word shining on them.

Not. They didn't like it. Yeah, Ahab had 401 prophets. One of them was true. He preferred the 400 false. Why? Well, precisely because they didn't say what God said, The one, you know, always says bad things. I hate him because he always says, bad things concerning me. Well, that happens to be the truth about us and it has to be a truth that we need to receive to understand so that we will label of Christ, But it is a real advantage to have the word of God.

And that's just the chief advantage out of many for it. Says much in every way. Now what if people who had these real advantages didn't come to faith verse 3 in a little bit of an understatement I think because I'm reading my Bible and it seems like it's a lot more than some of Israel over the course of its history.

But for what if some did not believe Well they're unbelief. Make the faithfulness of God without a fact. In other words, If God put them in his church and God put his sign on them, and God gave them real advantages and they still didn't get saved. Does that mean that God didn't do all of these things in?

Good faith. Does that mean that God wasn't really offering them life or really giving them in advantage? And of course, the answer is no, but there are some who would say yes. And so the puzzle answers it for us in verse 4. He says certainly not Of course they're not believing doesn't doesn't make the faithfulness of God without effect.

He says, indeed, let God be true, but every man a liar, in other words, if every single Israelite ever had been lost, God would still have been the faithful and merciful and true God who separated for them from the world who displayed his salvation to them in the sacrifices, who gave them his word.

And and gave them many benefits. Many true benefits and God would be true. And the fact that they didn't get saved, wouldn't say anything negative about God? It would just say this is how bad sin is. This is how bad the fallenness of man is the depravity of man.

Is that even after being shown all of these special graces, they did not receive them as saving grace. As they did not respond and repentance and faith. In other words, when God saves someone in the church, it's a miracle. Just like when God saves someone from outside of the church and he marshals a wonderful example when he says as it is written that you may be justified in your words and may overcome.

When you are judged and he's quoting here. He's quoting here from Psalm 51, and David praying. Now who had received as many advantages as David, you want to talk about being set apart, how about being anointed the king of Israel? You want to talk about having access to the words of God.

How about being inspired by the spirit to write much of the scripture yourself? And yet, When David committed his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah and stood in it for months, and finally, the Prophet Nathan comes and confronts him. David does not say, oh, but I have all these advantages and I know that I was sincerely saved, then and once saved always saved.

So I'm okay, I'm quite certain that I meant it when I professed my faith. I'm quite certain that I have meant it when I was at the table at the Lord's. Supper, I'm quite certain that I have meant it when I was baptized or when I saw another baptized or whatever, If anybody in this world is saved, it has to be me Now.

David says, you know, I need a new heart. I need you to renew right. Spirit, I need you to be my righteousness. I need you to atone for me and cleanse me. So that I'll be, I'll be clean. If you don't do this, you would be righteous to condemn me.

And that really backs up the first half of the verse too, because if David is condemned, what hoped do, all of these other Jews have, are they going to claim that they are better than David? Well Paul, probably thought he was better than David before he got converted and maybe there are people who do too But it's a really strong historical biblical argument, isn't it?

The second half of verse 4, for the first half of verse 4, Don't you see that? God would be righteous to condemn everyone. And so we must never come to him presumptuously as if he owes us salvation. But always asking for mercy, because we know that, he who would be righteous to condemn us.

There's a God of mercy who tells us that and shows us that to bring us to repentance to bring us to faith to bring us to a renewed walking with him. The way he did for David in Psalm 51. So do covenant signs to circumcision having an advantage absolutely much.

And every way Does Baptism much more, and more ways, it's a better sign for a better administration in the Covenant of grace. And yet, There are many, baptized you don't believe, There will be many. Who say, Lord Lord, on the last day, says Matthew 7. Hell will be well populated with baptized individuals and circumcised individuals.

And then, of course, many who, who had neither. So let us not be presumptuous but let us make use of the advantages that he's given us to direct us to the Lord Jesus to have hope in the great, mercy of our God, who gives us these advantages to affirm to us that none who have Christ will be lost.

Can you be baptized in Paris? Yes. Can you have Jesus and perish? Of course not and that's what you're baptism. Says, it doesn't say that, if you have it, you will be saved. It says that if you have him, you will be saved. So let's pray. Thank you. Lord for this portion of your word and forgiving us to spend some time in it.

Just now as a family, we pray that you would keep blessing it to us that you would open our eyes to see how great are the advantages that you have given us. Truly Lord. You have been merciful to us and we pray then that you would help us not to presume upon the advantages, but to make use of them and respond to them by looking to Christ.

And continuing with purpose of heart, to continue with him. Our Lord. And to be made like him little, Christ's Christians. Do this for us. We ask in his name. Amen.