



Guilt, God's Glory -- and Grace

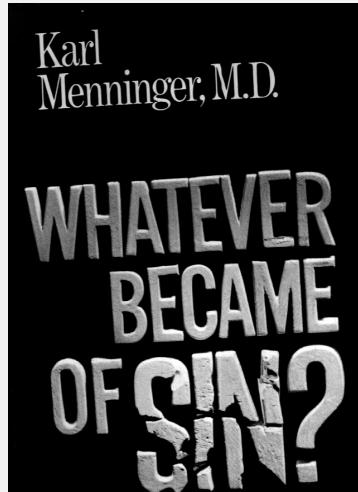
Study 3a: EVEN 'MORAL' MAN GUILTY (2:1-10)

2:1-10 Guilt is universal – even the man who considers himself “moral” judges others by his own standards, not by God in Christ

And how apt this reply would have been to a man like Seneca! For Seneca could write so effectively on the good life that Christian writers of later days were prone to call him "our own Seneca." Not only did he exalt the great moral virtues; he exposed hypocrisy, he preached the equality of all men, he acknowledged the pervasive character of evil ... he practised and inculcated daily self-examination, he ridiculed vulgar idolatry, he assumed the role of a moral guide. But too often he tolerated in himself vices not so different from those which he condemned in others -- the most flagrant instance being his connivance at Nero's murder of his mother Agrippina. -- **F.F. Bruce, ROMANS (1963) p.87**

The transition from Gentile to Jew is conducted with much rhetorical skill, somewhat after the manner of Nathan's parable to David. Under cover of a general statement St. Paul sets before himself a typical Jew. Such an one would assent cordially to all that had been said hitherto ... It is now turned against himself, though for the moment the Apostle holds in suspense the direct affirmation, "Thou art the man." -- **W. Sanday, A. C. Headlam, ROMANS (11e., 1906) p.54**

It was, I believe, a precept of John Wesley's to his evangelists, in unfolding their message, to speak first in general of the love of God to man;



The century's most famous historian, Arnold Toynbee, said of Karl Menninger's 1973 book, 'He deals with both individual and collective sin ... the distinction between the two kinds is not clear-cut, since my individual sin is partly society's, and society's is partly mine'.

then, with all possible energy, and so as to search conscience to its depths, to preach the law of holiness; and then, and not till then, to uplift the glories of the Gospel of pardon, and of life. Intentionally or not, his directions follow the lines of the Epistle to the Romans. -- **Handley C.G. Moule, THE EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE ROMANS (9e., 1907) p.63**

The presumptuous Jew interpreted the special goodness of God to him as the guarantee of immunity from the criteria by which other men would be judged and he claimed for himself indulgence on the part of God; the Gentile needed repentance but not he. What the apostle says is that the goodness of God when properly assessed leads to repentance; it is calculated to *induce* repentance, the frame of mind which the Jew considered to be the need only of the Gentile. -- **John Murray, ROMANS (1959) Vol. 1, p.60**

This is a remarkable passage ... the ungodly not only accumulate for themselves daily a heavier weight of God's judgments ... the gifts of God also, which they continually enjoy, shall increase their condemnation; for an account of them all will be required: and it will then be found, that it will be justly imputed to them as an extreme wickedness, that they had been made worse by God's bounty, by which they ought surely to have been improved. Let us then take heed, lest by unlawful use of blessings we lay up for ourselves this cursed treasure. -- **J. Calvin, COMMENTARIES: ROMANS (1539) p.88**

Study 3b: CONDEMNED by WITNESS of CONSCIENCE & LAW (2:11-29)

2:11-29 Does the Jew's attachment to the Law of Moses score points for him?

He indeed shows that ignorance is in vain pretended as an excuse by the Gentiles, since they prove by their own deeds that they have some rule of righteousness: for there is no nation so lost to everything human, that it does not keep within the limits of some laws. -- **John Calvin, op.cit., p.96**

It is obvious that the Jews regarded circumcision as in some way securing their salvation ... for example, the Rabbi Menachem, in his Commentary on the Books of Moses, fol.43, col.3, says, "Our Rabbins have said, that no circumcised man will see hell." ... In the book Akedath Jizehak, fol.54, col.2, it is said, "it is taught that 'Abraham sits before the gate of hell, and does not allow that any circumcised

Israelite should enter there.' ... All hopes are vain which are founded on a participation of the sacraments of the Church." -- **Charles Hodge, ROMANS (1866 ed.) pp.97, 103**

... the apostle seems to be alluding to those discussions of legal casuistry in which the Jewish schools excelled, as when the two eminent doctors Hillel and Schammai gravely debated the question, whether it was lawful to eat an egg laid by a hen on the Sabbath day. -- **Frederic Godet, COMMENTARY ON ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS (1883 tr.) p.128**

Who can read this passage without reflections on the privileges, and on the seals of membership, of the Christian Church? Who may not take from it a warning not to put in the wrong place the sacred gifts, as sacred as they can be, because divine, of Order, and of Sacrament? -- **H.C.G. Moule, op.cit, p.75**

Study 3c: GREATER LIGHT, GREATER GUILT (3:1-8)

3:1-2 Does the impartiality of God nullify Jewish privilege and promise? (Psalm 147:19,20)

[Paul] has been at pains to remove from the Jew all reason to boast and to put him on the same plane with the Gentile. But now Paul replies, "Much in every way!" The Jew's advantage does not rest on what he does, but on what God has done with him. The fact that God chose Israel as His peculiar people and gave her His promises can never be undone. -- **Anders Nygren**, *COMMENTARY ON ROMANS* (1944, tr. 1949) p.136

3:3-4 Does not Jewish unbelief remove God's obligation to covenant promise? (Isaiah 49:14-16; 54:4-8)

Does he mean than, "In spite of their unfaithfulness God will still grant them a glorious future, because they are Jews"? Probably not. His real meaning seems to be this: "Since God is faithful, those Jews who are faithful to him, and therefore to that which has been entrusted to them, will certainly receive the fulfilment of his promises." -- **William Hendriksen**, *NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY: ROMANS* (1982) p.111

Instead of remarking that he might have written "many," the remark that ought to be made is this emphatic "some" points to the other "some," to those who did prove faithful. Paul himself refers to them at length in 11:1-5. Among this implied other "some" are Paul's Christian readers. -- **R.C.H. Lenski**, *THE INTERPRETATION OF ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS* (1936) p.215

The condition under which they would receive the benefits of the [law] covenant was that of **faithfulness** ... Nothing in the modern return of the Jews to Palestine and the setting up of the Israeli republic corresponds with Bible prophecies concerning the restoration of Jehovah's name-people to his favor and organization. In no way does it correspond with the restoration of the **Faithful**, repentant Jewish remnant who forsook Babylon and returned to the land of Judah in 537 B.C. -- **WTBTS**, *LET GOD BE TRUE* (rev. 1952) p.210,217 (emphasis added)

... must not the idea, that the earlier breaches of covenant on the part of the Jews might possibly annul the *logia* [oracles], have been wholly strange to Paul and his Jewish readers, since they knew from experience that, even when the Jews had heaped unfaithfulness upon unfaithfulness, God always committed to them anew, through His prophets, the promises of the Messiah? -- **H.A.W. Meyer**, *ROMANS* (6e., 1884) p.112

If negative answers were returned to these questions [in v.3] the result would be **offensive** not only (as is often supposed) to Jewish national sentiment but to **theology**. If the Old Testament is to be believed God did choose the Jews out of all mankind and did bestow special privileges upon them. To reduce them therefore to the level of other nations is either to accuse the Old Testament of falsehood, or to accuse God of failing to carry out his plans. The Jew then has an advantage which he can never lose, since it rests not upon his merit, but upon God's faithfulness to his declared word. -- **C.K. Barrett**, *ROMANS* (BNTC, 1957 rev. 1962) pp.62-63 (emphasis added)

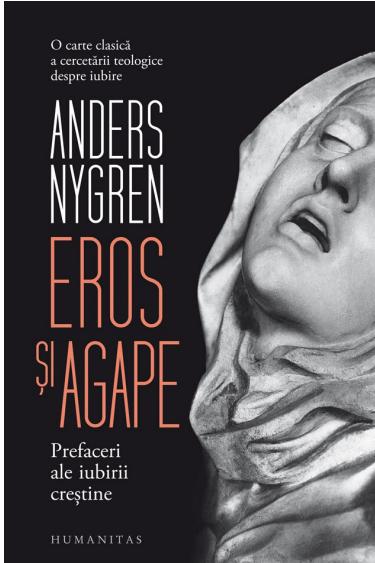
We should understand "the faithfulness of God" in terms of the **covenant** aspect of God's dealings with Israel. There are really two sides to this faithfulness, the one **positive**, the other **negative**, in line with a similar duality in connection with the righteousness of God (1:17,18). That the **negative** aspect is before us here is evident from the mention of his wrath (v.5). This is in harmony with a frequent emphasis in the prophets. When Israel fractured the Sinaitic covenant, God's very faithfulness compelled him to judge his people by sending them into captivity. The **positive** aspect (which we might have expected from v.1 but which is deferred) will appear in the sustained discussion of God's dealings with Israel (chs.9-11). -- **Everett F Harrison**, *ROMANS* (EBC, 1976) Vol.10, p.36 (emphasis added)

God's intent, when He let David fall into sin, was that the divine righteousness be revealed ... Though man's sin is rebellion against God's will, it must yet serve to magnify the divine truthfulness and righteousness. -- **Anders Nygren**, *op.cit.* p.138

And so when God eventually makes good his promises to the nation, not only will the unbelievers be seen to be liars, but God will be "justified" in all his Old Testament sayings, and will "overcome" when he is judged ... his faithfulness to his promises will shine with added luster, because it was kept with those utterly unworthy of it. If Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, and if through him the Jewish race is not ultimately redeemed, then his rejectors are the world's wise men; but if God's plain but far-reaching promises are made good by him, then unbelievers will be found liars, and God's glory will shine the brighter on the dark background of their unworthiness and sin. -- **James Stifler**, *ROMANS* (2e. 1897) p.48

God's truth is absolute and independent; it cannot be impaired, even if man's falsehood be universal. -- **E.H. Gifford**, *ROMANS* (Cook, 1881) p.83

The promises of God do not depend on man. He will keep His word, whatever man may do. To suggest otherwise were **blasphemy**. Nay, God must be seen to be true, though all mankind are convicted of falsehood. -- **W. Sanday, A.C. Headlam**, *ROMANS* (11ed. 1906) p.69 (emph. added)



3:5-8 How is God VINDICATED even by man's unrighteousness? But does God's faithfulness mean that man may continue in sin?

The character of sin as directed against God, and for the reason that it is directed against God, subserves the purpose of **vindicating** the justice of God's condemnatory judgment. So far from detracting from the justice of God, sin ... promotes the **vindication** and exhibition of his justice in judgment he pronounces with reference to it. -- **John Murray**, *THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS* (NICNT, 1959) Vol.1, p.95

Man's very unfaithfulness, so far from destroying God's faithfulness, will really make the latter more prominent and glorify God all the more ... The unchangeable faithfulness of God is the bed-rock of revelation and Christianity. "He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself." -- **W. Griffith Thomas**, *ROMANS* (DC, n.d.) Vol.1, pp.115,119

ARE CHRISTIANS FREE FROM ACCOUNTABILITY?

We should feel the peculiar responsibilities which rest upon us as the inhabitants of a Christian country, as members of the Christian Church, and possessors of the word of God; as such, we enjoy advantages for which we shall have to render a strict account. Charles Hodge, COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS (1866 ed.) p. 117