There’s some heavy theology wrapped up in this text, really in the whole book of Romans. I’m going to try to highlight some of the main claims and interpretations of this text and review the theology of Romans with hope that our eyes don’t glaze over and our grey matter turn to mush.

The book of Romans is a letter written to the Gentile Christians in Rome. It is often thought of as the Apostle Paul’s last will and testament and the summary of his theology and teachings. It is one of Paul’s last letters.

Romans has been misinterpreted over thousands of years to justify the belief that Christianity supersedes Judaism. Supersessionism (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supersessionism) is the belief that the new covenant in Christ has made the covenant of Judaism null, void, and obsolete. That was the common teaching of the Church for hundreds of years. It’s why we call the Jewish Scriptures the Old Testament and the Christian Scriptures the New Testament.

Recently, though, the mainline Protestant Church and Catholic Church have rejected that theology pivoting toward a dual covenant teaching that the Abrahamic covenant is valid for Jews and the new covenant is valid for Christians. With this shift of theology, some Christian scholars are naming the Old Testament as the First Testament and the New Testament as the Second Testament.

I think this text from Romans 3 can be used to make the argument that Paul saw no distinction between Jews and Christians, so one was not better than the other. He saw no reason for Gentiles to become Jews before becoming Christians, because he believed both Jews and Christians were justified. Paul said in verse 30 of chapter 3: the One God who makes the circumcised righteous also makes the uncircumcised righteous. Meaning that the Jew and Gentile are made righteous or justified by faith. Both are equally justified because of God’s faithfulness to the covenants.

From my sermon series last summer on the book of Galatians, we remember the first major conflict in the Christian church was over the matter of whether or not Gentiles had to first become Jews before being included in the church. The Jerusalem council agreed that Gentiles did not need to become Jews but were given some general principles to follow. That ruling seems to not have settled the matter.

The letter to the Romans was written by Paul to mend the relationship between Gentile Christians in Rome and Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. A message of equality between Jews and Christians is an important message in Paul’s letter to the Romans because this community of Gentile converts are Christians who are concerned that their claim for “full inclusion” in the church is not being recognized. Paul intends in his letter to try to reconcile the Gentile Christians feeling excluded and the Jewish Christians who seem to reject their full inclusion. (The Jewish Annotated New Testament, Romans)

With regard to justification in Romans, justification is one of three phases of salvation according to Paul’s teachings in Romans. Paul starts with teaching that we who believe in Jesus are justified by our faith, that is we are reconciled to God. That which had once separated us from God, being our sin, has been forgiven through grace, and we stand before God justified as one redeemed from the law of sin and death.

Next is the phase of sanctification or life in the Spirit in which we are growing toward the fullness of life and faith. Finally is the gift of eternal salvation. For Paul, salvation is not only about where we’re going to spend eternity; it is about how we have been and are continually being saved in this life. (Adam Hamilton, The Call)

I’d like to address the Law in this text before moving on with salvation. The Law Paul refers to in this text is the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law is the commandments contained in the Torah which is the first 5 books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Mosaic Law includes the 10 commandments plus the 613 laws in the book of Leviticus.

Paul seldom talked about civil Roman law. Of the 106 times Paul uses the word law in his writings, only once does it refer to Roman law. In Romans 13, Paul does say to submit to the government. However, he most often writes about Levitical Law because it is crucial to our faith. Christ fulfilled the Law and revealed God’s righteousness is so doing. Being a good Christian, or Jew, in 1st century Palestine, often meant being a bad Roman. God’s Law requires justice, kindness and humility (Micah 6:8). Jesus fulfilled the Law with an ethic of compassion, inclusivity and love. These were not values inherent to the Roman empire.

Paul’s reference to the Law here in chapter 3 is to the Mosaic Law. He wishes to point out that the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is the Law. The Law is not diminished or thrown away. The Mosaic Law is upheld.

So what are we to make of this theology?

What if Jews and Christians are both under valid covenants with God?

What if they have their covenant and we have our covenant?

What if we both are saved?

Romans 3: 29 – 31 says:

**29**…is God the God of Jews only? Isn’t God the God of Gentiles also? Yes, God is also the God of Gentiles. **30**Since God is one, then the one who makes the circumcised righteous by faith will also make the one who isn’t circumcised righteous through faith. **31**Do we then cancel the Law through this faith? Absolutely not! Instead, we confirm the Law.

God is the One God of both the Jews and the Gentiles. The new covenant in Christ does not cancel the Law of the Jews. Somehow, the new covenant confirms the Law.

So, what do we do if we believe that both Christians and Jews are justified by faith and are both saved in their own right?

Can we believe that?

Are we willing to expand our belief about who is saved to include the Jews?

What does it cost us if we believe that others can be saved apart from Christ?

I know everyone’s mind has just jumped around the Bible grasping for Scriptures that say there is no salvation apart from Christ. For instance, John 3:16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes… Well, it doesn’t say the others aren’t saved.

I think it’s time for us to rethink our Pauline theology and expand our minds to consider that God may continue to be faithful to the covenants made with Abraham and the Jewish patriarchs. After all, isn’t faithfulness part of what we revere about God? His faithfulness? We cling to His faithfulness to His promises when we are in need of His help. We rely on that. Why wouldn’t we believe that He’d remain faithful to the covenants of His ancient peoples?

We lose nothing by believing God may still be faithful to the Jews. We can still believe that Christ is the Way and the Truth and the Life for He is our way, our truth and our life. We can tell everyone we meet that He is the Bread of Life, that He is the Sacrificial Lamb, that He is Beloved Son. All that is still true, even if the Jews are justified. Regardless of who else may be saved, Christ is still my Savior.