

Provoke Them To Jealousy

(Rom 10:16-21)

So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.
(Rom 11:11-14)

Here in these verses in Romans, we find an interesting phrase, which I think holds much of the key toward reaching the Jewish people, and indeed, reaching all people. It is that phrase ‘provoke them to jealousy’. Paul says that God has allowed Gentiles to become His covenant people to cause the original covenant people to be jealous, and to return to Him. The question is this- what is it that the Jews, and for that matter, any people, see in a truly born-again believer that ought to provoke them to jealousy? What is it about the Christian life lived as it ought to be that becomes strangely attractive, a curiosity which draws people like a magnet?

And then secondly – do you have that kind of Christian life?

We know the usual ways people seek to provoke each other to jealousy. One is by material goods. People want to be envied for the car they drive, for the house they live in, for the clothes they wear, for the boats they have, for the gadgets they possess.

Another is by physical appearance.

Another is by achievements.

Another is by social status.

Another is by religious dedication.

Another is by the people we know and associate with.

And all of this is a very selfish exercise of wanting someone to be jealous of me for my sake.

But what the Bible speaks of here is something quite different. It suggests God gives us something we did not earn or deserve, which will cause a kind of jealousy that will provoke them to salvation. The first is this:

1) *To be freed from guilt and to be enjoying true holiness Romans 5-7*

A London psychologist once told a famous evangelist that seventy percent of the people in mental hospitals in England could be released if they could find forgiveness. If you look around you, you will find that the entire human race is forever trying to deal with the cries of their consciences. Romans 2:14 tells us that the conscience of man is either accusing or excusing him. He is always either accusing himself, declaring himself guilty, or else he is pretending to exonerate himself, saying, not guilty.

People do all kinds of things to deal with their guilt.

Some people sin more. They reason if they repeat the same sin, or continue in it, it won't feel so wrong. They feel that their lost purity won't seem like a loss if they live in continuous promiscuity. In other words, they try to make sin seem normative, so it won't set off the alarm of their conscience.

Some people go to therapists who tell them they shouldn't feel guilty, for any one of a hundred different reasons – others are to blame, their brain is the problem, their childhood is the problem, their self-esteem is the problem.

Some people become more religious, or ethical, and feel that their good generally balances out the bad. They feel that by a law of averages their moral deeds outweigh their bad ones so they won't count against them.

Some people simply work harder, party harder, and keep themselves busier and busier or continually entertained so that they just won't have to think about their guilt. They live in permanent distraction mode – where the silence which would allow the conscience to speak is forever drowned out.

Some people are too honest for that and face their guilt. But not having a way to rid themselves of it, they become depressed, withdrawn, some even go insane.

Some people try to reason away their guilt by comparing themselves with everybody else. They believe if they are not found in the company of mass murderers, but are morally on par with most, they ought to quiet their conscience. And many people do succeed in quieting or searing their conscience, or resetting it to their own standard of morality. Yet there is enough internal knowledge of the law of God in each heart for a person to know they are guilty before God. That's what we now know - that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

[\(Rom 3:19\)](#)

The religious Jew seeks release from guilt through a combination of things. The primary one occurs around the Day of Atonement. Rabbinical Judaism teaches that leading up to Yom Kippur are the Yom Noraim – the Ten Days of Awe. In these ten days Jews are to try to do as many good works or mitzvot as possible because at the end of the ten days, three books will be opened – the Book of the Wicked, the Book of the Righteous and the Book of the Not-so-Righteous. The religious Jew believes that if he has done enough good works during those ten days, his name will be moved from whatever book it is in now, into the Book of the Righteous. But of course, it is a gamble – how many good works are necessary? Of what kind? What if your sins outweighed your good works? There is no peace in this religious game.

Above all, the Jew knows that the sacrifices, which make up such a prominent part of the Torah, can no longer be done since the Temple has been destroyed. The rabbis teach that prayer is good enough to atone, but this is a recent invention. The fact is, many Jews are still trying to have the Temple rebuilt.

For that matter, some strict groups undergo what is called Kapparot. Taking a rooster or a hen, they swing it over their heads three times, saying, "This is my substitute, my

vicarious offering, my atonement. This cock or hen shall meet death, but I shall enjoy a long, pleasant life of peace.

Some will go to a river, and empty their pockets, symbolising casting off their sins - a practice known as Tashlikh. But it is in vain. God forgives, but He also demands restitution. He forgives, but not without a substitution.

It is not very believable to imagine a God who forgives you without any kind of restitution. But it is in vain. God made it very clear in Leviticus 17:11:

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. (Lev 17:11)

But at the heart of it, every man knows this guilty feeling will only go away if the One I have offended pardons me.

True Christianity is the only religion which offers two things – a placating of the offended One, and a consequent offer of mercy to the offenders. Romans 1, 2 and 3 establish our guilt. Romans 3 and 4 tell us how we cannot escape from our own guilt by our own works. And then comes this glorious word – justification. Because of Christ’s perfect life, death and resurrection, God does this legal transaction. On the cross, He treated Christ as you should have been treated, so that now He treats you as Christ should have been treated. Christ bore your guilt, and now you, as a believer, bear His righteousness.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Rom 8:1)

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:1)

Only a believer can say, my sin stain is washed away. I need no longer try to excuse or accuse myself. I don’t have to try to escape or distract myself. I don’t have to carry on a life of nervous, frenetic religious activity to appease a God I do not know. God Himself has forgiven me for Christ’s sake.

To have a conscience at rest – that is enviable. To be able to say that I need no other argument, I need no other plea – It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me. To be able to look at your past, and say – regret, maybe, but continual shame – no. To be able to look up at God and say – my name is now written in the Lamb’s book of life, where it cannot be erased.

Forgiven sin is the heart of a life of obedience and holiness. Jesus said of a weeping repentant sinner at his feet:

“Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven--for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” (Luk 7:47)

One might try to live a godly life to try to impress others, to try to appear better than one's neighbour – but these are ignoble motives. To do out of a clean conscience, from a simple humble, grateful life– this is enviable. For people to see someone, who is truly honest and filled with integrity, speak in a godly way, shun evil, be loving, kind, gracious, merciful, generous, patient, humble, whose family is harmonious, and to know there is no insincerity behind it, that it is simply based on a forgiven sinner loving His master – this is enviable.

This is the Gospel we announce to every corner of the globe – forgiveness is offered. The Creator offers amnesty. It's not made up, it's not a sentimental fairy tale – the hard facts are in. Jesus historically died and rose again. God stepped into time to say, “I mean it, I will forgive you, at my own cost – simply repent and believe on my Son”.

Is that you? Do you communicate that you are at peace with God? Does your life lack the nervous restlessness of trying to escape the sound of your conscience, because God has once and for all said to it, “Peace, be still”.

2) To have security in the present and for the future through a permanent, favourable relationship with God (Romans 8)

Everybody seeks some kind of certainty because life is filled with uncertainties. The economy can fluctuate, and jobs can be lost. Your health can decline, or you can develop some kind of syndrome or disease. You can be involved in some kind of crippling accident. Then there is the possibility of attack from criminals or terrorists. For that matter, there is always the possibility of natural disasters. Your loved ones could be snatched away from you in an instant in an accident of some sort.

So to what do most people turn to try and get certainty, or security?

Money, the more money, supposedly comes more security. With money, after all, you can get a better medical plan, better insurance policies, better retirement funds, better security systems on your house and car, better safety systems for your car. And in moderation, there is nothing wrong with all of the above.

Most people live on the edge of uncertainty, some with near continual anxiety, some in raw fear of uncertainties. Look at the multiplying of all kinds of anxiety related disorders around us – panic attacks, depression, obsessive compulsive behaviours, chronic insomnia, withdrawal, and a litany of physical manifestations – ulcers, cramps, headaches, muscular tension. And the nature of uncertainties is that since there is no way of knowing if they will happen or not, you can remain in a permanent state of ‘what if, what if.’

And worse than that, there is then the leap into the unknown – what happens after you die? The dead do not tell us. You cannot go and come back, in spite of what the talk show guests tell you. And we all sense the fact that after death, you do not die again – you live forever in whatever state or place you land up in.

What would bring certainty to all these uncertainties? It would be if there was someone in charge, someone in control, and if you knew that someone. In fact, if you

knew that person in control of all things loved you, you could have peace in any circumstance.

The Jewish people sadly do not have this. Many of them hold to a view like that of Rabbi Kushner, who wrote a book called, 'When Bad Things Happen to Good People'. There he said that God has arranged the universe in such a way that even He cannot solve all of its dilemmas but that He also, due to His caring nature, suffers along with His creatures. So the good in your life is from God, but that bad - He isn't in control of that. Which is a terrifying thing, because who do you pray to in bad times if, in fact, God is not capable, or in the least bit responsible?

One of the greatest stumbling blocks to faith for a Jew is the Holocaust, and for that matter the persecution of the Jewish people for over two thousand years. Other Jews believe God is sovereign over the world, but they do not believe this God can be known personally. They believe God is father over the whole world in that He created it. He is father over all people, or over the Jewish people in that he takes an interest in human affairs. But they do not believe you ever enter into a personal relationship with God, where He treats you as an adopted child with the privileges that go with being part of His family. A Jew does not think that can be known in a personal way.

There is not much certainty in this. For, of course, if God is father to everyone on earth, His Fatherhood is either very inconsistent or makes little difference to life. And if you can never have any assurance in this life of how you will spend eternity, that is probably the worst kind of uncertainty.

But after having dealt with sin and guilt for seven chapters, the book of Romans has this glorious eighth chapter which is all about certainty. Its basic premise is that since God does not condemn you but instead loves you, and since God is in full control, nothing can happen to you which will not be for your good.

You now know this God, not in an impersonal way, but you know Him as Abba, Father!

This is something only Christianity can offer. The Gospel is that you will be reconciled with the King of Kings, and being loved By Him, you need not worry or be anxious. God will protect you. God will provide for you. God will not condemn you. God has chosen you. God has predestinated you. God has given up His very Son for you. And the very worst things in life - tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword, cannot alienate you from His care. Indeed, we find that nothing in all creation can do that.

And all things work together for good to them that love God, who are called according to His purpose.

Verse 38 tells us that not even death can separate us from the love of God – we are eternally secure.

Judaism and all other non-Christian religions do not have someone who died and rose again, defeating death, and promising that we would be with Him. We have that.

Now if this is your God, a Sovereign God, who has personally loved you – what is it that you are to be anxious over? A believer in Christ has the gift of certainty about this life and the next. He might not have certainty about what God is going to do next, but he is certain that what happens next is what God is doing. He might not know what the future holds, but he knows Who holds the future. And arising out of the countless promises in the Word of God is a sense of peace, certainty and calmness because he knows the Sovereign King, and more than that, he knows the Sovereign King knows him, and loves him. It's really as simple as...

I John 4:18: There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

People are drawn to certainty. When people see the certainty, the peace, the sense of acceptance and inner calm of a Christian, that in the midst of rising prices, possible health conditions, rampant disease, growing crime, natural disasters, political instability, threatening war, the believer has peace - a peace which passes understanding. It isn't comprehensible that someone in this world should have that kind of certainty.

Serenity in the midst of insanity:

When the Philippians jailer heard Paul and Silas singing praises in prison, it must have stirred his heart deeply. When Paul saw Steven dying with forgiveness on his lips, it must have touched his heart. And countless tribes have seen missionaries who did not fear hardship, loss, persecution, or even death – and it gripped them. They were filled with a sense of inner emptiness – I do not have such a hope in my heart, that I can hold the whole world so loosely in my hand. I am a slave to circumstances. I do not know the Creator as my own Father. I do not know I am in the centre of His hand, the object of His loving care.

Everyone wants to have a peace that is not enslaved to circumstances.

Certainty is very attractive to people with so much uncertainty. It is enviable. This is not something we have to invent, Christians, it is ours. But I think the Lord summed it up when He said:

“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” (Joh 13:17)

If you know your guilt is removed, blessed are you if you live like it. If you know your Father is the Creator and is Sovereign of the universe, blessed are you if you live like it.

You could probably sum up these two ideas like this – freedom from guilt is peace with God, and a certainty about the present and the future is the peace of God.

Do you communicate that by your actions, reactions, thoughts, meditations, speech? Do you have that peace? And do you show others that you have that peace? It provokes to jealousy.