

Intro:

How many of you are all too familiar with these words:

“It’s not fair!”

Have you ever heard those words before?

“The feeling that something is not fair is perhaps the most morally offensive feeling there is.”¹

1. The sense of injustice is partly behind the current library worker’s strike in our city ... it may be right or wrong, but it is there.
2. Divorcee agreed to sell her husbands’ Mercedes -Benz and split the proceeds as part of their divorce settlement, signed over the car to the first bidder for \$25 and sent a check for \$12.50 to the enraged husband. She got back at her husband, but lost a lot of money.²
3. One woman sent a colleague who had undermined her project a photo of himself, cut into pieces. Years later he confessed it truly had chastened him.³

In bygone days, a thin man insulted a fat man. The fat man challenged his tormentor to a duel with pistols.

On the day of the duel a debate ensued about the unfair advantage held by the thin man because he was a much smaller target. Finally the thin man came up with a solution.

“Let the outline of my figure be chalked upon your body,” he said to his opponent, “and any shots of mine that hit outside the chalk lines, we won’t count.”⁴

Fairness! Justice! People want justice!

Today we are going to come to a line in our passage that might provoke a sense of unfairness and injustice if we aren’t careful in our understanding.

Read Rm 1.15-17

Our title is *To the Jew First*. What part of our text might seem unfair?

That line – to the Jew first... but understand what God is saying to us here:

¹ Willar Gaylin, M.D., clinical professor of psychiatry at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, quoted by Barbara Lang Stern in *Vogue* magazine, 4/1/85, p. 400.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ “The Duel”, cited In *The Best Of Bits & Pieces*, “1.24.00”.

Proposition: The open door of the New Testament gospel means an entrance into unspeakable privilege for the believer of any race.

I. Understanding Jewish Priority

A. More than merely a matter of historical order or methodology

1. Many commentators make Jewish priority merely a matter of history:
 - a. Charles Hodge: “**First**, therefore, must refer to time: ‘To the Jew in the first instance, and then to the Gentile.’ Salvation, as our Saviour said to the woman of Samaria, is from the Jews. From them the Messiah came, to them the Gospel was first preached, and through them it was preached to the Gentiles.”⁵
 - b. Everett Harrison in *Expositors*: “It is a case of historical priority, not essential priority, for the Jew who is first to hear the gospel is also the first to be judged for his sins (2.9).”⁶
 - c. William Newell, ““In expressing to the Jew first, Paul is not at all prescribing an order of presentation of the gospel throughout this dispensation. He is simply recognizing the fact that to the Jew, who had the Law and Divine privileges, the gospel offer had first been presented, and then to the Gentile.”⁷
 - 1) Note Newell makes it a matter of history
 - 2) And specifically says it is not a matter of methodology
2. Some note the apostle Paul’s strategy, emphasizing methodology
 - a. Each time he enters a town, he heads for the synagogue and preaches to Jews and proselytes first
 - b. After the Jews in a town have heard (and usually mostly rejected) the gospel, Paul would then turn to the Gentiles

Example: Antioch of Pisidia, Paul’s first missionary journey, preaches to the Jews first (Ac 13.16-41)

Note response (read Ac 13.42-47)

⁵ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. 29.

⁶ Everett F. Harrison, “Romans” in *Expositor’s*, vol. 10, p. 19.

⁷ William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, p. 22.

- Many Jews ('the people') beg to hear message next Sabbath (42)
- After meeting, many Jews and God-fearers (Gentiles) follow Paul (43)
- Next Sabbath, whole town shows up – Jews jealous (44-45)
- Paul and Barnabas say:
it was necessary to speak to you first
but ... since the Jews repudiate it, now ...
we turn to the Gentiles. (46)
- Paul quotes Isa 49.6 (*cf.* Isa 42.6) declaring his solidarity with the wideness Messiah's mission: not just the Jews but also the Gentiles.

In this, they suggest that the priority is a matter of natural methodology:

- Paul is a Jew, he naturally goes to Jews first.
- As a matter of method, if you can win a few people with knowledge of the Scriptures first, they can be a help to the Gentiles who will follow.

But if it is a simple matter of historical order (Jesus showed up in Israel, naturally the preaching of the gospel would begin in Israel) or simply a matter of apostolic strategy (preach to Jews first, then Gentiles), what place does this phrase have in this verse, the explicit statement of the theme of the whole book of Romans?

Romans 1:16 ¶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Why not just this:

Romans 1:16 ¶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith ...

No, there is more meaning here than this. There is a theological reason for this phrase, "to the Jew first".

B. Actually a matter of God's eternal plan to fulfill Kingdom priorities

John Murray puts it this way: "In this text there is no suggestion to the effect that the priority is merely that of time. The implication appears to be rather that the power of God unto salvation through faith has primary relevance to the Jew."⁸

And here is where we might be tempted to say, "Unfair, unfair! Why the Jew first?"

1. Election of the Jews a fact of history

a. Out of all the people in the world in the 1800s BC, God chose Abram (Gen 12.1-3)

- 1) All the nations recorded in Gen 10
- 2) Babel confusion in Gen 11.1-9
- 3) The Shemite (Semitic) nations in Gen 11.10-32

b. God's intentions for Abram

- 1) I will make you a great nation
- 2) I will make your name great
- 3) I will make you a blessing to all the families of the earth (nations)

God intended to establish in Abraham a kingdom to restore God's righteous rule on the earth and bless all the families of the earth through it — but not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit...

2. Jews reminded of their place in God's economy as a rationale for their obedience to God's laws

^{KJV} **Deuteronomy 7:6** ¶ For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

^{KJV} **Deuteronomy 14:1** ¶ Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. 2 For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.

⁸ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 28.

3. The apostle Paul himself remarks on the place of the Jews in the book of Romans
 - a. Entrusted as the conduits of the ‘oracles of God’ [the Scriptures] (Rm 3.1-2)
 - b. Privileged as the benefactors of the covenants of the Kingdom (Rm 9.4-5)
 - 1) Adoption: exaltation by God as his adult sons
 - 2) Glory: presence of God among his people (theme of OT)
 - 3) Covenants: promises of God concerning the kingdom [Abraham and David – unconditional covenants]
 - 4) Law: program of God for earthly blessing [Moses – conditional covenant]
 - 5) Service: the privilege of conducting the true worship of God for centuries (and more yet to come)
 - 6) The Fathers: Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob, the patriarchs of faith
 - 7) The Genealogical relationship to Christ: a great privilege

Listen to John Murray again: “In this text there is no suggestion to the effect that the priority is merely that of time. The implication appears to be rather that the power of God unto salvation through faith has primary relevance to the Jew.”⁹

He goes on to say, “, and the analogy of Scripture would indicate that this peculiar relevance to the Jew arises from the fact that the Jew had been chosen by God to be the recipient of the promise of the gospel and to him were committed the oracles of God. Salvation was of the Jews [Jesus said that!] (Jn 4.22; cf. Ac 2.39; Rm 3.1-2; 9.4-5). The lines of preparation for the full revelation of the gospel were laid in Israel and for that reason the gospel is pre-eminently the gospel for the Jew. How totally contrary to the current attitude of Jewry that Christianity is for the Gentile but not for the Jew.”¹⁰

What are we saying?

⁹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 28.

¹⁰ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 28.

We are saying that the gospel has particular relevance to the Jews. It is the answer to their centuries of longing, since the Babylonian captivity.

- They had returned to the Land
- They had rebuilt the temple
- But they had no ark of the covenant in the new temple
- They had no glory of God in the new temple (compare Solomon's temple and its dedication)
- They had no presence of God in the new temple

Until Jesus came unto his own things (Jn 1.11)! The living presence of God came more powerfully to the Jews in the 1st century than it had ever come before — and they would not have Him!

To the Jew first! What a privilege!

But our verse doesn't stop with "to the Jew first..."

II. Enjoying Gentile Privilege (and also to the Greeks)

- A. On Pentecost, Peter (unknowingly, I think) stated the great privilege of the Jews and the new privilege of the Gentiles

^{KJV} **Acts 2:39** For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

- B. In Ephesians, Paul declared that privilege to his Gentile readers

^{KJV} **Ephesians 2:12** That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

- C. In the parable of the prodigal son, this truth is the point of the parable
1. We usually focus on the prodigal, we don't pay much attention to the older brother, but he is the point of the parable
 2. Younger brother wastes his substance in riotous living, repents, returns, and is forgiven (great celebration)

3. The older brother says, "It's not fair!" But notice the father's reply to him:

^{NAU} **Luke 15:31** "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.³² 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was lost* and has been found.'"

Older brother's privileges: *all that is mine is yours*. To the Jews belong the adoption, the covenants, the law, the service, the fathers...

But your brother who was dead is alive! He was lost and is found!

- The Jews are taught to rejoice in the expansion of the kingdom to the Gentiles! (Their temptation: "it's not fair")
- And the gospel teaches Gentiles to rejoice that they have been granted access to the same privileges as the Jews, who had it all along (Our temptation: "it's not fair")

Conclusion:

Turn back to Ac 13.48. Do you remember how the Jews began to be jealous when they saw the whole Gentile city in Antioch of Pisidia crowding in to hear the message of the apostles on that Sabbath?

They were jealous! "It's not fair, these are our promises, who let these people in?"

Answer: God let them in — Paul quotes Isaiah: the Messiah is al light not only to the Jews to the Gentiles.

How did the Gentiles react?

Ac 13.48

They rejoiced! And believed!

That same gospel opens the door to God's eternal privileges he offers through the patriarchs and the Jews and Christ now to all men: you can become Sons of God!

If you have never believed, won't you believe today?