

ROMANS 3

Where Does the Jew Stand?

TO THE
ROMANS

God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

us, called to be
the gospel of God,
beforehand through his
Scriptures,³ concerning his
descended from David² according
and was declared to be the Son of
power according to the Spirit of holiness

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is
heaven against all ungodlines
teousness of men, who by their
ness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For
known about God is plain to
God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For
attributes, namely, his eternal po

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Where Does the Jew Stand?

In Chapter 2 we saw God’s indictment on the hypocrite—that person who condemns in others what he himself practices. And we also saw Paul making the case that the Jew (or anyone else for that matter) would not be saved by being outwardly religious, as in the practice of circumcision (see 2: 27-31). No, we must be changed within by a circumcision of the heart. Without inner transformation, the Jew and Gentile both are lost.

Jewish “Lostness”

Now in Chapter 3, Paul defends his indictment of Jewish “lostness” against the imaginary protests of a Jewish opponent. No doubt, he had encountered some of these very arguments from Jews during his ministry.

In verses 1-2 he deals with the question, “What advantage has the Jew?”

Romans 3:1–2 ESV

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? ²Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.

Remember in Chapter 2, Paul had informed them that being circumcised would have nothing to do with saving them. He said, “²⁵ *Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.*”

And, “²⁸ *A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.* ²⁹*No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.*”

This statement, no doubt, shocked the Jews and begged the question, “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew?”

Paul answered “Much in every way!” To begin with Jews had been entrusted with “the very Words of God.” This was likely a reference to the entire O.T.

Looking back again to Chapter 2, Paul had spoken of those hardened and unrepentant Jews who were storing up wrath for themselves (2:5). He had described those who were proclaiming the Law fervently to the Gentiles but were practicing it in a shoddy manner before them (2:21-24).

Clearly, the Jews in Paul’s crosshairs were being unfaithful toward the Covenant God had made with them. So the question Paul now tackles is:

Romans 3:3-4

What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness?

⁴Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: “So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.

The Jews wanted to know if the unfaithfulness of some Jews nullified or cancelled out the faithfulness of God. Paul says, No way! “Let God be true and every man a liar.”

God is true to His word and covenant. He will not judge me for someone else’s sins. Paul had said in Chapter 2:

Romans 2:7-8, 11

⁷To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger....¹¹For God does not show favoritism.

The Imaginary Debator

Next, the imaginary debater begins questioning God's justice.

Romans 3:5-6 NIV

But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) ⁶Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?

Paul's imaginary foe is literally arguing that his wickedness actually serves God by providing a contrasting background for God's righteousness. In other words, "If I weren't sinning, how could God's righteousness stand out?"

This, of course, is horribly twisted thinking. Paul says, "If this were true, God could not judge the world, for one could say that the whole world was serving God by sinning!"

But now the ridiculous argument is taken a step further:

Romans 3:7 NIV

Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?"

In other words, the Jew's unrighteousness actually enhances God's forgiveness and therefore it is commendable to sin! God ought not find fault with the Jew for his sin because that sin helps magnify the character of God!

Once again, Paul responds with a resounding "God forbid!" God is both just and righteous, something woven into the very fabric of His Word. Since that is so, it is obviously a false assumption that man's sin somehow enhances God's righteousness.

What made all this particularly bad was that Paul's enemies were spreading the rumor that this is what Paul was actually preaching; that he encouraged sinning as a means of enhancing God's glory.

Romans 3:8

...as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved.

So Paul has concluded his case against the Jew. God pays no attention to the Jewish claim to be exempt from judgment on the grounds that he is a Jew. Religion in itself (and no one was more religious than the Jew) cannot exempt anyone from the judgment of God. Jew and Gentile, religious and irreligious alike, all stand before God, exposed to His wrath on the ground that they are sinners.

The Guilt of All Humanity

Next, Paul is going to place all of mankind under the indictment of guilt before God. He will do it in 3 phases:

1. The universality of sin
2. The criminality of sin
3. The culpability of sin

First, the **UNIVERSALITY** of sin:

Notice the constant repetition of the words, "none" and "no not one." Not a single member of Adam's race is exempted. The indictment is sweeping, complete, all-encompassing.

- There is a racial aspect to Paul's indictment.

Romans 3:9

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.

All men, Jew and Gentile, Oriental and Occidental, red and yellow, black or white—all are on the same footing at the judgment.

- There is a religious aspect.

Romans 3:10-12

¹⁰As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹²All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Paul is stating that in their relationship to God, men are unrighteous. Man is incapable by nature of doing that which is right in the sight of God.

Many people think that their behavior is right—and it may be according to human standards. But God does not judge men by human standards. He tries them by His own standards of absolute perfection.

In light of those standards "There is none righteous, not even one."

Unreasonable

Paul points out that man is *unreasonable* in his relationship with God. "There is no one who understands." Writing to the Corinthians, he says in essence the same thing:

1 Corinthians 2:14

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Think about it: God clearly gave to man an ingenious mind. We have sent men to the moon, learned how to communicate with one another on the other side of the world in mere micro-seconds, and have enjoyed the technological revolution, lifting ourselves out of the dark ages of candles, foot travel, and early death by disease and cold.

Yet when it comes to the things of God, our minds are strangely clouded. We betray an incredible denseness when it comes to God's truth. Our ingenious minds are warped and twisted when it comes to eternal and spiritual issues. The damage brought on by sin runs deep into the thinking processes of man.

Commentator John Phillips writes, "Man's imaginations are often filthy; his memories often betray him; his deductions are often false; and his conclusions are often wrong." Put simply: On the things that matter most, man is blind.

Unresponsive

Next, Paul shows that men are *unresponsive* in their relationship to God.

Romans 3:11

There is none that seeks after God.

Someone might say, "Well then, how do you explain that pagan lands are filled with temples and worshippers?" The Bible gives the answer: "*The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, not to God.*"—1 Cor. 10: 20

Paul has already told us in Chapter 1 that the Gentile world has turned its back on God in order to pursue idolatry. Behind this world's false beliefs is “the god of this world.”—2 Cor. 4:3-4, the devil. Jesus said that religion apart from regeneration is vain. “No man can come to me, except the Father draw him.”—John 6:44

Unrepentant

And man is *unrepentant* in his relationship to God.

Romans 3:12

All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

This passage rips away all of man's imagined goodness. We have all walked away from God prior to conversion. God sums up our godless lives with the word “unprofitable.”

So in God's eyes man is unrighteous, unreasonable, unresponsive, and unrepentant—every one of us.

Next, there is the **CRIMINALITY** of sin (3:13-18)

Not only is man guilty before God, he is indeed guilty by his own actions. Paul shows this first by his words—what they say, then by his feet—his ways.

First, his speech:

Romans 3:13-14

¹³Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. ¹⁴Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.

Human speech stinks like a corpse in a grave, is full of lies, and is venomous like

a poisonous snake. Words are so important that Jesus warned, “...*every idle word men speak, they shall give an account for on the Day of Judgment*” (Matt. 12:36).

Next, his ways (15-18):

Romans 3:15

¹⁵Their feet are swift to shed blood...

Man is by nature murderous, “swift to shed blood.” The first recorded sin after the fall was murder. J. Edgar Hoover once observed, “There is a murder every 40 minutes in the United States.”

Next:

Romans 3:16

Ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they have not known.

Man’s wicked ways lead to *misery*. Look around you. Statistics show that drug abuse and drug addiction cost Americans over \$484 billion annually.

We live in an addicted culture. Why? Because life without God leads to misery. It leaves a gaping, vacuous hole in the soul that man desperately tries to fill with hopeless counterfeits—counterfeits that don’t work.

Paul says, In all their searching, “The way of peace they have not known.” God sent the Prince of Peace over 2,000 years ago, but most reject Him. “There is no fear of God,” says Paul, “before their eyes.”

In bringing his indictment of all men to a close, Paul wrote:

Romans 3:19

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Those under the law are the Jews. Those without the law are the Gentiles. They all are under God's judgment.

Romans 3:20

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

FACT: The law was not given for us to perfectly obey—we can't do it. It was given to magnify our awareness of the sinfulness of our sin. It was given that we might say, "I can't keep it. I'm undone! What shall I do?"

The answer is Amazing Grace:

Galatians 3:24

So the law was given to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

