

What About The Jews?

Romans 3:1-18

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Introduction: By the time Paul asks the opening question of Chapter Three; “Then what advantage has the Jew?”...We are quite certain we know the answer. Based on chapters one and two the answer we expect is “None!” No advantage whatsoever! The ritual religion of the Jews will not save them and The Law of God likewise Will Not Save Them! So what advantage is there to being a Jew? The shocking answer....”much in every way!” Amazing! For a book written to the capital of the Gentile world, God has a tremendous amount to say about Israel. We are only two chapters into this inspired letter and Israel has been the subject of 50% of it and we are still on that subject as we start chapter three. Let’s read it.

Romans 3:1-18 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ² Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED." ⁵ But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) ⁶ May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? ⁸ And why not *say* (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just. ⁹ What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." ¹³ "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; ¹⁴ "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; ¹⁵ "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, ¹⁶ DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, ¹⁷ AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." ¹⁸ "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

Paul is still speaking to his critics when he writes this text. This is not his first controversy. He has been arguing with Jews since he started his missionary journeys. In fact, he went to them first in every city he entered and told them the Good News that the Word of God’s Prophets had been fulfilled in the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. That God had been faithful to send them the promised Messiah. But although some believed, the leadership remained steadfast in their rejection of God’s provision of Salvation through faith apart from their works. Paul consistently countered, as he has so far in Romans, that Jews are guilty sinners just like the gentiles and that possession of the

Law, the Priesthood and the sacrifices cannot save them and that it actually condemns them by calling out their sin. The Jewish leaders retaliated by accusing Paul of teaching that **there is not now, nor has there ever been any value or benefit to being a Jew.**

Paul begins this chapter by responding to that criticism. In fact, this very issue is still alive in our day in a slightly modified form. The question in the church in the 21st century is “Is God Through With Israel?” Did God reject Israel as His chosen people when they rejected their chosen Messiah?” It is fundamentally the same question. Was there ever or will there ever be any benefit or advantage to being a Jew?

This is the first mention of the issue in the book of Romans. Later on Paul will devote chapters 9, 10 and 11 to answering this question, but for now he introduces the topic by asking and then answering the question from his critics.

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? [1]: Historically and humanly it is hard to find much advantage to being a Jew. When we first encounter them as a people they are slaves in Egypt. They are abused and the cities of the Pharaohs were mortared together with their blood. It did not get particularly better from there. When God delivered them from Egypt they spent 40 years wandering in a desert. Once inside the promised land they conquered it haphazardly. They were eventually decimated by Assyria, then carried away as slaves again by Babylon and finally returned to a ruined country as a band of ragamuffins from Persia. They were overrun by Greece, Syria, Egypt and then Rome. They were under the Roman yoke when Jesus was born there. 40 years after His murder the Romans destroyed the city and in 135 AD Hadrian tore down every stone on the temple mount looking for the gold that might have melted into the cracks when Titus burned it down. They spent the next 1900 years as refugees among the nations of the world. In 1948 they returned only to be attacked days after their nation was established. They were attacked again in 1967 and 1972 and have been under continual hatred and assault from every nation on the earth up to this very day. This is but a small tip of the misery of being a Jew. Humanly there is no advantage and after what Paul has said about them spiritually we are shocked when he says...

Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God [2]: Of all the nations of the Earth, God has decided to entrust one people with His Words. An Oracle in ancient paganism was a pithy saying by one of their God’s. Scripture clearly has a lot more in mind when it uses the word “logion.” Here it almost certainly means the Words or Utterances of God. We would find them collected and protected in what we call the Old Testament. It was and still is God’s Word. He carefully revealed it and planted it in this universally hated and persecuted band of brothers known as the Jews...Israel....The people of God.

What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? [3]: Were they worthy people? Absolutely not. Their unworthiness is at the heart of the teaching today that God withdrew His promises from Israel because they rejected Christ. They went beyond what God could forgive and therefore He nullified all His promises to them and transferred those promises to the church.

After stating that there are many benefits to being a Jew and mentioning that they among all the nations of the earth had been given the very Word of God, he addresses the fact that they did not keep it. They proved unworthy of it. So the question is asked, "does the fact that some of them did not believe the words and utterances of God mean that God would not be faithful to do what He said He would do?" Let me put this question a different way. "Are the promises that God makes to a people like the Jews nullified if the Jews do not believe them?"

God has always knew everything The Jews were capable and would do. He knew they would reject and murder their Messiah. How do I know? Because He wrote about it in Isaiah and the Psalms centuries before it actually happened. Nevertheless, God made promises to Israel that would not be nullified by their sin. Here is just one of many places that speak of it. To Babylon God said....

Isaiah 47:6 ⁶ "I was angry with My people, I profaned My heritage And gave them into your hand. You did not show mercy to them, On the aged you made your yoke very heavy.

To Israel in their suffering and captivity God says....

Isaiah 48:8-11 ⁸ "You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, Because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; And you have been called a rebel from birth. ⁹ "For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, And *for* My praise I restrain *it* for you, In order not to cut you off. ¹⁰ "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can *My name* be profaned? And My Glory I will not give to another.

May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found a liar*, [4a]: Every man on earth may say that God is a liar and He will not keep His promises, but He will. God will be found true. He is a faithful God. What He says can be trusted and you can stake the destiny of your eternal soul on it. BECAUSE....your salvation like His promises depend entirely on Him and not on you. Paul had no doubt read this in Jeremiah;

Jeremiah 31:35-37 ³⁵ Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: ³⁶ "If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever." ³⁷ Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done," declares the LORD.

As it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED." [4b]: As outrageous as this seems, men judge God all the time. They call Him a liar or an impotent old fool who either cannot or will not do what He says in the Bible. It matters little to fools that God has already done 90% of what He promised to do. They mock Him nevertheless. Peter warns them saying

2 Peter 3:2-4 ³ Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

Can you imagine the audacity of declaring God a liar because he has not yet acted. Romans 3 is given us the ultimate High View of God. He is faithful! He is a promise keeper! Every Word of God will be absolutely justified [proven to be true] and He will prevail over those who say He is unfaithful to His promises.

Psalm 96:13 ¹³ For He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness And the peoples in His faithfulness.

Psalm 33:4 ⁴ For the word of the LORD is upright, And all His work is *done* in faithfulness.

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? [5a]: This is the great objection to Grace! It is still a complaint today among legalists of every flavor and stripe. "How can God be righteous if He shows mercy even when we sin." We would never do that so God cannot do it either."

The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) [5b]: His Critics say, "Everyone knows that God inflicts wrath on wickedness. [Romans 1:18] Paul is therefore saying that God too is unrighteous when He faithfully keeps His promises to people who are unfaithful to Him." Paul makes it clear here that this is the reasoning of the Gospel's critics and not his own.

May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? [6]: This is rejected by God in the most emphatic terms possible. God is the faithful judge of the world who will judge the world, But what God does is NOT dependent upon anything men do. To suggest otherwise is to call God unfaithful and even unrighteous. God keeps His Word because it is who He is. Mere men are not going to cause God to deviate from who He is.

The Jews hated Grace and all religiously self righteous people still do. They are certain that they have earned their standing and salvation with God and they resent that He would show grace to sinners. This was the constant drumbeat criticism of Jesus' opponents...

Luke 15:1-2 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. ² Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? [7]: Paul is preaching the faithfulness of God to His promises. He is using God's faithfulness to Israel as an example, but later on he will also apply this to Christians.

Romans 8:29-31 ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many

brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?

For now the point is this. "If a Jewish man lies [and they do], that lying is not able to break the promise of God to Jews. God makes promises to sinners! Did God know Israel's unfaithfulness when He made promises to her? Of course....that is what makes Him God. So God is revealed as faithful, trustworthy, reliable and wholly truthful when men lie and betray Him and He still keeps His word to them. The Glory of God's faithfulness cannot be seen apart from men's faithlessness. **There is no need for faithfulness when there is no possible reason in the universe to break your promise.** But Israel gave God every reason to break His promise to them and yet He did not.

Grace bashers always make the charge that God's grace give license to sin. They imply that if God is faithful to His Promises then He has given us license to sin and that makes God unrighteous too. If the faithfulness of God is true then why would He care if I sin... "why am I also still being judged as a sinner?"

And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come "? Their condemnation is just [8]: The opponents of the Gospel of Grace actually accused Paul of preaching that men should do evil deeds so that God can be gracious. They are still doing it today. I have had at least one opponent of Grace accuse me of believing in the "damnable doctrine of once saved always saved." To that I could only respond with Paul....

John 10:25-30 ²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. ²⁶ "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. ²⁷ "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ "I and the Father are one."

Is Israel Better then, than Gentiles?

What then? Are we better than they? [9a]: This is how Paul has framed his argument so far:

- All men know there is a God and that He has eternal power, but they do not honor Him as God.
- As men labor to deny God and suppress His truth He is justified in just letting them slip further and further away into their chosen desire for freedom from God.
- Men who chose religion believe that God will not notice their sin and rebellion.
- Men who chose morality believe that God will not notice that they break the very standard of morality they impose on others.
- Even God's chosen people...who have the very Words of God....and who have been given all these promises by God are not without guilt before God. The Jews have been kept together as a people because in their sin and rebellion they reveal that God is absolutely faithful to His Word and Promises.

Paul states that Jews have many benefits but the primary one is they have been entrusted with the very Word of God. And they have not trusted God. They have been unfaithful to God, but their unfaithfulness has revealed the Glory of God's faithfulness. So are the Jews better than the gentiles....

Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; [9b]: Not even a little. They have just been given more privileges, but they have not been faithful to God. God has preserved this people for 5,000 years now and they have almost never been faithful. We are not talking about individual salvation now. NOT AT ALL!! We are talking about God's Character as a faithful and gracious God. It is put on display in Israel even though that nation has not been faithful to God. No Jew will be saved from hell and judgment because he or she is a Jew, no gentile either...Because....

As it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; [10]: Paul has made his case that every human being is unrighteous before God and that none of the things men commonly believe will justify them will in fact have any effect whatsoever. This is the first indictment of the nature or character of men. All humans are evil in nature. We are not equally evil but we are evil in the light of the righteousness of God.

THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; [11]: We are ignorant of God. There is a wisdom of this world and a wisdom that comes from God. The two do not intersect. Humans cannot know the mind of God, but God has graciously revealed it to them in His Word. But men reject it outrightly because they do not seek for God.

1 Corinthians 2:11-12 ¹¹ For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." [12]: This is the universal nature of mankind. It means to go the wrong way. If there are two paths to take and one leads to God, men will take the other one. Isaiah put it this way...

Isaiah 53:6 ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. But God still caused the sins of men to fall on Christ. Because this was His purpose and pleasure and mankind's desire to go the wrong way was not going to change what God wanted and willed to do.

"THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; [13]: Do you ever listen to yourself? Pretty scary right? How much of it is intended by you to reveal truth and love and justice? To bring healing to people who hurt you or disappoint you? Why is it so hard to say the right thing? To be gracious when we speak? Because it is in our nature to do otherwise. Jesus confronted men with this very fact while on earth.

Matthew 12:34-38 ³⁴ "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ³⁵ "The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. ³⁶ "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." ³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

Yes I would want to change the subject too if I had been there!!!

"WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; [14]: Cursing is open expression of bad will and calamity to fall on others. Desiring the worst for someone and gladly telling anyone who will listen. Bitterness is more discreet and kept under wraps more. Both flow from the human heart...by nature! This is why it is universal. David described them when he wrote about men

Psalm 64:3-4 ³ Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed bitter speech *as* their arrow, ⁴ To shoot from concealment at the blameless; Suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear.

"THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, [15]: The 20th century has been dubbed the Century of Genocide. And not just because of the holocaust in Germany. The Soviets killed even more of their people....over 12 million. Since 1900 over twice as many Americans have been killed by personal murder than have died in all the wars in American History. According to the UN 437,000 people were just murdered during 2012. We are not talking about war....just murder. Is this a justifiable charge toward humankind....absolutely!

DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, [16]: How often do you hear of people who are just brutalized before being killed. Their property taken and their bodies violated. Look at the swath of misery cut through Syria and Iraq by ISIS. Consider what goes on in the inner city in America.

AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." [17]: Do you ever get sick of the bumper sticker that says "visualize world peace!" Well you might as well because that is the closest you are ever going to get to it. There has never been a time when men have talked more about peace while at the same time butchering one another in numbers that stagger and numb the mind.

"THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYE [18]: Ultimately it all comes down to this. And this goes back to the beginning of this passage in Romans 1:18.

Romans 1:18 ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

Men have pushed God aside to such an extent that they do not think He is able or willing to do anything to stop them. They expect to have no accountability to man or God. This is the logical outcome of the course of action human kind has set its foot to.

CONCLUSION: And with that we can almost hear Paul say to the empanelled Jury...I Rest My Case! The nations of the world are evil in the sight of God and they prove it every day by acting out their character toward one another. AND....

Israel is not better than the Gentiles. Their great privileges have not given them a standing that exempts them from the judgment of God. The advantages were not saving in and of themselves. They still had to obey the light that they were given and they did not. America like Israel has been given great and surpassing spiritual light, BUT more light does not translate into being more righteous. In some ways it often has the opposite effect. More light to a stubborn and unrepentant heart means more rebellion and more sin and more accountability.

God has proven that the whole world of humanity is by nature unrighteous. That means we do not do what is right. And no matter how we might try to exempt ourselves, the charge and indictment includes us. No remedy on earth will suffice for our cure!

Let me apply this to us this morning. What does this mean for you? It means that no matter who you are, what you think about yourself, what good you have done or bad you have not yet done...you are guilty and condemned before God. Anything you are saying to yourself to try to exempt yourself from this verdict is a lie. The case is airtight and the condemnation is universal. Is God telling the truth here or not?

Saving Faith starts with this negative. Are you willing to abandon trust in everything else in the world for your restoration to God. Will you consider all your righteous acts [and I am sure there are many] as worthless compared to the righteousness of Christ? Saving Faith puts unconditional trust in the righteous Son of God. He has lived the righteous Life that you will never live. All your personal sins He has freely heaped upon Himself at the Cross. He has loved you unspeakably! You cannot know the depth of it except by beholding Him in His all sufficient purity....dying for you a sinner. You must not add Christ to your own merits and righteousness. You must set everything aside and place your life and trust in Jesus Christ alone! Paul takes every doubt and concern and crushes them with these closing verses of Romans 8....

Romans 8:31-39 ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.