

# The Epistle of Paul to the *Romans*

## **Condemnation: The Need for God's Righteousness** (1:18 - 3:20)

### **Unrighteous Jews** (2:1 - 3:8)

**3:1-2** What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? **Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.**

The "first" "advantage" of the Jew (with the mark of circumcision) is their stewardship of God's "words" (*logion*: sayings) <sup>Deuteronomy 4:8, Psalm 147:19-20, 1 Peter 4:11</sup>, which was a way to indicate the Old Testament ("Law and the Prophets" v.21, Matthew 7:12, 22:37-40, Luke 16:16, Acts 13:15). However, Israel also had/have God's promises and covenants as His firstborn sons. <sup>Romans 9:4</sup>

The OT contains truth about salvation <sup>2 Timothy 3:14-15</sup> and the essence of the gospel <sup>Galatians 3:8</sup>. When Paul exhorted Timothy to "preach the word", he was referring to the OT <sup>2 Timothy 4:2</sup>.

**3:3-4** What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?

**Not 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."** God's promises were directed at the nation of Israel and were offered to every individual Jew. God will be completely faithful <sup>2 Timothy 2:13</sup> to fulfill all His promises to the nation, but in order for each individual Jew to obtain the full benefit of His promises, they must each come to repentance and faith <sup>Isaiah 55:6-7</sup>. Therefore, the fact that a Jew is not saved, does not mean that God has failed to live up to His promises. Paul then quoted David <sup>Psalms 51:4</sup>, who came to his senses when Nathan confronted him about his sins against God (Bathsheba). Men are natural liars <sup>Psalms 116:11</sup>, but God is proven true and His decisions just every time a person is humbled in the face of their sin <sup>John 3:33, 1 John 5:6-12</sup>.

God chose all the physical descendants of Abraham to be heirs of His promises <sup>Genesis 13:14-17</sup>; however, those who refuse to come to faith reject (and lose) the inheritance. Only those Jews who have faith <sup>Galatians 3:7</sup> and produce fruit <sup>Luke 3:7-9</sup> become His 'spiritual' children. Perhaps these facts support the concept of all people being chosen, but not all being saved.

**3:5-8** 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.)

Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say - 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!

Paul continued to anticipate and then respond to the objections that his teachings actually questioned the justice and righteousness of the character of God. However, his illustrations were similar to Indians in Old Town displaying their jewelry on black velvet in order to highlight the colors and shine of the stones and metal. The obvious nature of God's holiness and purity (especially when contrasted with the sinfulness of mankind) prove Him worthy to be the ultimate judge of man. This contrast in no way justifies man's wickedness <sup>Romans 6:1,15</sup>, but it simply brings to light the necessity of cleaning up the evil in man <sup>Romans 6:21-23</sup>. "[God] detests the way of the wicked, but loves those who pursue righteousness." <sup>Proverbs 15:9</sup>

### **Unrighteous Mankind (3:9-20)**

In this concluding section of Scripture on unrighteousness, Paul concluded his indictment of mankind with this: the condemnation of God will fall upon the unrighteous Jew and Gentile.

**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.** Paul's mention of "we" probably is in reference to both himself and the Christians in Rome he was writing to. He reminded them of the fact that "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin" <sup>Psalms 143:2, Romans 3:22-24</sup> (slaves to sin) prior to salvation, that the flesh of both Christians and non-Christians is corrupt, and that the temptation of the flesh is a continuing issue throughout earthly life <sup>Romans 8:5-13, 13:14</sup>.

In the following text <sup>v.10-17</sup>, Paul used a series of OT quotes to indict the character <sup>v.10-12</sup>, conversation <sup>v.13-14</sup>, and conduct <sup>v.15-17</sup> of all people. He continued to emphasize the universality of human sin and rebellion by using words and phrases like "all" and "no one".

**3:10-12 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."** <sup>Psalms 14:1-3, 53:1-3, Ecclesiastes 7:20</sup>

Paul used this quotation to illustrate the utter depravity of all mankind <sup>Ephesians 4:17-19</sup> with repeated statements to ensure there would be no doubt about his meaning. On his own, man is totally unable to grasp God's principles <sup>1 Corinthians 2:14</sup>. The phrase "no one seeks God" implies that the false religions of the world are not attempts to find God, but to find ways around God. Man naturally "looks out for his own interests" <sup>Philippians 2:21</sup>, so the only hope for man is for God to seek him <sup>John 6:44</sup>, then man has the opportunity to begin the journey to draw near to and learn about the Lord <sup>Psalms 16:7-8, Matthew 6:33</sup>. The phrase "turned away" was used to describe a soldier's desertion, and indicates a desire to go "our own way" <sup>Isaiah 53:6</sup>.

"As it is written" was a common introduction to OT quotes <sup>Mark 7:6, Luke 3:4, John 6:31, 2 Corinthians 9:9</sup>.

## Romans E Chapter 3a

These and others verses <sup>e.g., John 6:44, Romans 8:29-30</sup> may indicate that God only calls those who come to Him/Jesus; however, there are other verses that seem to modify that perspective. For example: "Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me." <sup>John 6:45</sup>

**3:13-14 [As it is written:] "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit."** <sup>Psalm 5:9</sup>  
**"The poison of vipers is on their lips."** <sup>Psalm 140:3</sup> **"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."** <sup>Psalm 10:7</sup> An "open grave" would reveal a decayed body and a foul stench, and it was used as an analogy of the decayed heart of an unregenerate person <sup>Jeremiah 17:9</sup>, which produces what their "mouth speaks" <sup>Proverbs 15:28, Matthew 12:34-37, James 3:1-12</sup>. Biblically, vipers are used as symptoms of evil <sup>Genesis 3, Matthew 3:7, 12:34-37</sup>. "Cursing and bitterness" are caustic ways of expressing intense hostility toward and wanting the worst for an enemy <sup>Psalm 64:3-4</sup>.

Note the progression of the evil that flows from the heart: "throat" ⇒ "tongues" ⇒ "lips".

**3:15-17 [As it is written:] "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know."** <sup>Isaiah 59:7-8</sup> The unsaved man has a tendency to damage and destroy everything he comes in contact with. The peace Isaiah referred to is not the inner peace from God (although the natural man knows nothing about this either), but is the outward discord and struggle between nations and individuals <sup>Jeremiah 6:14, Matthew 10:34-36</sup>.

**3:18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."** <sup>Psalm 36:1</sup> The following details the Lord's desire for man's handling of the "fear of God": the dread of the consequences of violating His commands <sup>Job 23:13-16</sup>, leading to the wisdom of God <sup>Proverbs 9:10</sup>, transitioning some of the fear to an awe <sup>Psalm 34:4-10</sup> of God's greatness and glory <sup>Psalm 89:7-8</sup>, resulting in salvation <sup>Isaiah 33:5-6</sup>, and with the fear continuing to help "keep [believers] from sinning" <sup>Exodus 20:20, Proverbs 16:6</sup>.

**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.** Christians are "under grace" <sup>Romans 6:14</sup>, while every unredeemed person is "under the law" <sup>Galatians 3:23</sup>. The Jews received the written law through Moses <sup>Malachi 4:4, Luke 24:44</sup> and the Gentiles have the law "written on their hearts" <sup>Romans 2:14-15</sup>, making both groups directly accountable to God. The phrase "every mouth may be silenced" <sup>Ezekiel 16:63</sup> implies there are no excuses <sup>Romans 1:20</sup>.

**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.** Perfect obedience to the moral law has only been accomplished one time <sup>2 Corinthians 5:21</sup>, and is not possible for a 'normal' human <sup>Romans 3:23</sup>. Thus, no one will be justified ("be declared righteous") "by observing the law" <sup>Galatians 2:15-16</sup>. The law is a spiritual mirror for mankind, producing an awareness of sinful acts <sup>Galatians 3:24</sup>.