

CLASS 3: THE ADVANTAGE AND THE DISADVANTAGE OF BEING A JEW (Romans 2:1 – 3:20)

2. The Jews guilty, ch. 2 - 3:8

The Jews should not look down on the Gentiles as great sinners. The Jews are sinners as well. They have spurned God's mercy, and by their pride and disobedience to the law are themselves treasuring up God's wrath.

God's requirements are greater for the Jews, who have his law. While the Gentiles will be judged on the basis of their conscience, the Jews will have a stricter standard. Gentiles who are saved have God's law written on their hearts, as promised by the new covenant; they will be received instead of unconverted Jews.

While Jews rely on their standing and knowledge of the law, their lives reveal an unbelieving and disobedient heart. Circumcision must be spiritual, not just physical. A true believer in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, is a true Jew; for he is circumcised in the heart.

No one should complain that God is unfair to the Jews, for he has given them many precious privileges. He has ordained that many Jews would not believe, in order that his righteousness might be revealed to both the Gentiles and the Jews. His justice and mercy are shown in this way. (This theme is expanded later in the epistle, ch. 9-11.)

The Jews' sin of judging the Gentiles

¹ *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.* ² *We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things.*

The Jews sin in the same way as the Gentiles, but not as openly expressed (3:9; cf. Matt 5:20—mental sin).

The Jews have a greater obligation (Matt 11:20-24).

God will judge the harshness of the Jews (Matt 7:1-5).

The judgment coming on the unbelieving Jews

³ Do you suppose, O man- you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself- that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Previously the Jews had received special treatment by God (Lev 26:44-45). But these blessings were conditioned on their faithfulness (Lev 26:3-13).

V. 4, how do God's kindness, forbearance, and patience lead to repentance?

Now, because of their sin and rejection of their Messiah, they will be judged by that same covenant.

- John the Baptist – Matt 3:7-12
- Jesus – Matt 21:33-45
- Paul – 1 Thess 2:14-16
- James – Jas 5:1-6 (esp. v. 3)

God's equity in judging

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

While national judgments fall on the Jews as a whole, individuals will be judged righteously (esp. vv. 6, 11).

Truthful judgment (vv. 2, 5, 16 [including secrets])

“The Jew first and also the Greek” – two times, in both cases (vv. 9, 10)

The lost (vv. 8-9)

Self-seeking, rejecting truth, following evil (non-Christian)

Punishment: wrath, anger, trouble, distress

The saved (vv. 7, 10)

Persist in doing good, seeking glory, honor, immortality (Christian; cf. Rom 1:5)

Eternal life, glory, honor, peace

The standard for judging

¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

“Without law” (*anomos*) – wicked (4:7; 6:19), or neutral (1 Cor 9:21)

Fate of those without law – judgment, perish (1:18, 32; cf. 2:5)

Moral law requires faith (10 Commandments)

Doers, not hearers, will be justified

“Doers of the law” = life of faith

- v. 7, “patience of good work”
- v. 10, “working the good thing”

“Justified” – first use in Romans

To be declared to be righteous by God

Future justification –

“What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection? A. At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God, to all eternity.” (WSC 38)

“Doers” – faith results in obedience (Jas 1:22-25)

Gentiles who obey the law

¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

“By nature”

Greek *phusei*; can mean “by physical nature” or “by birth” or “by culture” (v. 27, “uncircumcision by nature”; Gal 2:15, “Jews by nature”

Can go with following verb “do” – “do by nature”

Or can go with previous verb “have” – “have not the law by nature”

Second seems better – “nature” referring to culture, upbringing

“Work of the law written on their hearts”

“Work of the law” – works the law requires (3:20, 28)

May refer to conscience of unsaved Gentiles

May refer to conscience of saved Gentiles

Second seems better – quotation from Jer 31:33

Leading up to day of judgment

Conflicting thoughts and self-judgments

Unbelieving Jews spiritually uncircumcised

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth- ²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." ²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.

Vv. 17-20, mask of Jewish hypocrisy

First use of word “Jew” for the reader; probably intended in v. 1

Conditional sentence broken off at end of v. 20 (“if” . . . no “then”; an anacoluthon)

Rebukes of Jesus (Matt 5:17-20, 21, 27, 33, 38, 48; 15:7-9; 23:13-36)

Vv. 21-24, the mask removed

Stealing (*corban*, Mark 6:8-13)

Adultery (John 8 story)

Robbing temples

Forbidden (Deut 7:25-27)

Josephus said forbidden (*Antiquities* 4:8:10)

Paul never did it (Acts 19:37)

Perhaps permitted in Talmud “if it had been previously desecrated by Gentiles”
(Sanday & Hedlam, 66)

Breaking law (general statement) – example in John 7:19

Gentiles blaspheme because of Jewish disobedience – Ezek 36:20-23

V. 25, spiritual circumcision more important than physical

“If” you obey the law

Believing Gentiles spiritually circumcised

²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Physical circumcision valuable

- Abraham (Gen 17:9-14)
- Moses (Exod 4:24-26)
- Joshua (Josh 5:2-9)

Physical circumcision not now required (1 Cor 7:17-19)

Circumcision of heart more important

Taught in OT (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4, 14; 9:24, 26)

Vv. 26, 29 – faith produces spiritual circumcision

v. 26, “not” (*ouk*) expects a positive answer

Believing Jews and believing Gentiles both spiritually circumcised

The Advantage of the Jews

3:1 *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?* ² *Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.* ³ *What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?* ⁴ *By no means! Let God be true though everyone were 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 serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)* ⁶ *By no means! For then how could God judge the world?* ⁷ *But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?* ⁸ *And why not do evil that good may come?- as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*

v. 2, much advantage; does not contradict 2:25-29

"The oracles of God" – this and circumcision are the two main advantages of the Jew

v. 3, "faithfulness" of God (*pistis*, same word for "faith"; context determines translation)

"Faithfulness of God" – subjective genitive

v. 4, quotation from Ps 51:4

vv. 5-8, proves Paul not an antinomian (as some falsely accuse him)

3. All the world guilty, 3:9-20

Paul concludes this section with a chain of OT quotations, showing the depravity of the unregenerate heart, "There is no one righteous, not even one." Therefore, he concludes, the whole world is guilty before God.

The charge against all humanity

⁹ *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,*

"Not entirely" (*ou pantos*, as in 1 Cor 5:10), not "certainly not" (*pantos ou*, as in 1 Cor 16:12)

OT quotations

Note that these quotations are taken from passages against the unbelieving Jews of the time. However, based on Romans 1 and on the fact that the Gentiles' lives were even more lawless than the Jews', the same condemnation applies to them. That was stated in chapter 1, and in

his conclusion Paul includes them with the unbelieving Jews, as all being under God's judgment and condemnation. Not the terms "there is not" (6 times) and "all" (1 time).

¹⁰ *as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* (Ps 14:1-3 = Ps 53:1-3)

¹³ *"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive."* (Ps 5:9)

"The venom of asps is under their lips." (Ps 140:3)

¹⁴ *"Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."* (Ps 10:7 LXX)

¹⁵ *"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known."* (Prov 1:16; Isa 59:7-8)

¹⁸ *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."* (Ps 36:1)

Conclusion regarding the whole world

¹⁹ *Now we 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. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

V. 19, previous OT quotations show all Jews under sin

 "The law" = entire OT in this case

Chapter 1 showed all Gentiles under sin

V. 20, conclusion: all people, Gentile and Jew alike, are under sin

 Responsible, condemned, need salvation