



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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SIN AND CONDEMNATION: THE WORLD'S NEED TO GET RIGHT WITH GOD

The Arguments of the
Religionist (Jew) Against a
Heart Religion, [Romans 3:1-8](#)

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Romans 3:1-8 (NASB)

¹Then what advantage has the Jew?
Or what is the benefit of circumci-
sion?

²Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

³What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?

⁴May 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.**”

⁵But 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.)

⁶May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

⁷But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

⁸And 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.

(Romans 3:1-8) Introduction: Paul has said there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, between a religionist and other men ([Romans 1-3](#)). All men stand before God guilty of sin and condemned. Now at this point Paul imagines the religionist seeing exactly what he is saying. The religionist also sees the tremendous weight of Paul’s argument; therefore, he strains to counter Paul with three argu-

ments, arguments often made by Christian religionists and church members who profess Christ and attend church only enough to salve their consciences. (See previously discussed [Deeper Study # 1, Religionists—Romans 2:17-29](#); and note—[Romans 2:17-20](#) for a discussion of who the religionist is.)

Looking at the rather tragic history of the Jewish people, one is not inclined to think there has been any advantage in being a Jew. In spite of the reality that they are such a noble strain of humanity and chosen by God, their history has been a saga of slavery, hardship, warfare, persecution, slander, captivity, dispersion, and humiliation.

They were menial slaves in Egypt for some 400 years, and after God miraculously delivered them, they wandered in a barren wilderness for forty years, until an entire generation died out. When they eventually entered the land God had promised them, they had to fight to gain every square foot of it and continue to fight to protect what they gained. After several hundred years, civil war divided the nation. The northern kingdom eventually was almost decimated by Assyria, with the remnant being taken captive to that country. Later, the southern kingdom was conquered and exiled in Babylon for seventy years, after which some were allowed to return to Palestine.

Not long after they rebuilt their homeland, they were conquered by Greece, and the despotic Antiochus Epiphanes reveled in desecrating their Temple, corrupting their sacrifices, and slaughtering their priests. Under Roman rule they fared no better. Tens of thousands of Jewish rebels were publicly crucified, and under Herod the Great scores of male Jewish babies were slaughtered because of his insane jealousy of the Christ child. In the year A.D. 70, the Roman general Titus Vespasian carried out Caesar's order to utterly destroy Jerusalem, its Temple, and most of its citizens. According to Josephus, over a million Jews of all ages were mercilessly butchered, and some 100,000 of those who survived were sold into slavery or sent to Rome to die in the gladiator games. Two years previously, Gentiles in Caesarea had killed 20,000 Jews and sold many more into slavery. During that same period of time, the inhabitants of Damascus cut the throats of 10,000 Jews in a single day.

In A.D. 115 the Jews of Cyrene, Egypt, Cyprus, and Mesopotamia rebelled against Rome. When they failed, Emperor Hadrian destroyed 985 towns in Palestine and killed at least 600,000 Jewish men. Thousands more perished from starvation and disease. So many Jews were sold into slavery that the price of an able-bodied male slave dropped to that of a horse. In the year 380 Emperor Theodosius I formulated a legal code that declared Jews to be an inferior race of human beings—a demonic idea that strongly permeated most of Europe for over a thousand years and that even persists in many parts of the world in our own day.

For some two centuries the Jews were oppressed by the Byzantine branch of the divided Roman Empire. Emperor Heroclitus banished them from Jerusalem in 628 and later tried to exterminate them. Leo the Assyrian gave them the choice of converting to Christianity or being banished from the realm. When the first crusade was launched in 1096 to recapture the Holy Land from the Ottoman Turks, the crusaders slaughtered countless thousands of Jews on their way to Palestine, brutally trampling many to death under their horses' hooves. That carnage, of course, was committed in the name of Christianity.

In 1254 King Louis IX banished all Jews from France. When many later returned to that country, Philip the Fair expelled 100,000 of them again in 1306. In 1492 the Jews were expelled from Spain even as Columbus began his first voyage across the Atlantic, and four years later they were expelled from Portugal as well. Soon most of Western Europe was closed to them except for a few areas in northern Italy, Germany, and Poland. Although the French Revolution emancipated many Jews, vicious anti-Semitism continued to dominate most of Europe and parts of Russia. Thousands of Jews were massacred in the Ukraine in 1818. In 1894, because of growing anti-Semitism in the French army a Jewish officer named Dreyfus was falsely accused of treason, and that charge was used as an excuse to purge the military of all Jews of high rank.

When a number of influential Jews began to dream of re-establishing a homeland in Palestine, the Zionist movement was born, its first congress being convened in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. By 1914, some 90,000 Jews had settled in Palestine. In the unparalleled Nazi holocaust of the early 1940s at least 6,000,000 Jews were exterminated, this time for racial rather than reli-

gious reasons.

Although in our society anti-Semitism is seldom expressed so openly, Jews in many parts of the world still suffer for no other reason than their Jewishness. From the purely historical perspective, therefore, Jews have been among the most continuously and harshly disadvantaged people of all time.

Not only have Jews historically had little social or political security, but in [Romans 2:17-20](#) Paul declares that, although they are God's specially chosen and blessed people, Jews do not even have guaranteed *spiritual* security—either by physical lineage or religious heritage. Being born a descendant of Abraham, knowing God's law and being circumcised did not assure them a place in heaven. In fact, rather than protecting Jews from God's judgment, those blessings made them all the more accountable for obedience to the Lord.

After having demolished the false securities on which most Jews relied, Paul anticipated the strong objections his Jewish readers would make. The truths he sets forth in the book of Romans he had taught many times before in many places, and he knew what the most common objections in Rome would be.

Paul had confronted Jewish objectors from the beginning of his ministry when Paul took the four Jewish Christians into the Temple to fulfill a vow for example. The leaders seized him and cried out to the crowd that had gathered, **“Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.”** ([Acts 21:28 \(NASB\)](#)). It was because Paul had a reputation for teaching such things that the Christian elders in Jerusalem persuaded him to take the men into the Temple for purification, thinking such an act would convince the leaders that Paul had not forsaken the teaching of Moses (see [vv. 21-24](#)).

[Acts 21:21-24 \(NASB\)](#)

²¹ **“And they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them**

not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

²² **“What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.**

²³ **“Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow;**

²⁴ **take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.”**

In his defense before King Agrippa, Paul said,

[Acts 26:19-22 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁹ **“So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,**

²⁰ **but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.**

²¹ **For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.**

²² **So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place.”**

The apostle did not teach that Jewish heritage and the Mosaic Law ceremonies were not important. Because they were God-given, they had tremendous importance. But they were not in Paul's day, and had never been, the means of satisfying the divine standard of righteousness. They offered Jews great spiritual advantages, but they did not provide spiritual security.

After his conversion, Paul continued to worship in the Temple when he was in Jerusalem and faithfully practiced the moral teachings of the Mosaic Law. He personally circumcised Timothy who was Jewish on his mother's side, as a concession to the Jews in the region of Galatia ([Acts 16:1-3](#)).

[Acts 16:1-3 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ **Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek,**

² **and he was well spoken of by the brethren who**

were in Lystra and Iconium.

³ Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

He even continued to follow many of the ceremonial customs and the rabbinical patterns in order not to give undue offense to legalistic Jews, as noted in [Acts 21:24-26](#).

[Acts 21:24-26 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁴ “Take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.

²⁵ “But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.”

²⁶ Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.”

But the essence of his preaching was that none of those outward acts have any saving benefit and that a person can become right with God only through trust in His Son Jesus Christ. It was that truth of salvation only by God’s grace working through man’s faith that the unbelieving Jews found intolerable, because it exposed the worthlessness of their traditions and the hypocrisy of their ostentatious devotion to God.

Self-righteous, self-satisfied Jews could not stand any attack on their supposed Abrahamic security and their man-made legalism. The apostle had learned from all these experiences that unbelieving Jews would always accuse him of teaching against God’s chosen people, against God’s promises to His people, and against God’s purity. It is therefore those three objections that he confronts in [Romans 3:1-8](#).

[1. What profit is there in being a religionist—in being circumcised or baptized \(v.1-2\)?](#)

[2. Does unbelief void God’s promises—make God a liar \(v.3-4\)?](#)

[3. Is God unjust if He takes vengeance \(v.5-8\)?](#)

1. ([Romans 3:1-2](#)) Religionists— Word of God— Jew: the question is, “What profit is there in being a Jew or a religionist—in being circumcised or baptized or a church member?”

The Objection That Paul Attacked God’s People

[Romans 3:1-2 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ “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.”

What do you do with the Jew who is Abraham’s seed? The promise of God to Abraham was that his seed (the Jewish nation) would be the children of God (see [next edition Deeper Study #1—John 4:22; cp. Genesis 12:1-4](#)). If a man is born a Jew (born into a Jewish family) and he professes to be a Jew, a follower of God, is he not acceptable to God ([Romans 2:17-29; cp. Romans 2:1-29](#))? “If not, then what profit is there in being a professing Jew, a follower of God? You are saying there is no advantage in being a Jew or a child of Abraham.”

The application of this passage concerns every man. If a man is born a Jew or a Christian (the right nationality), if a man is born into a Jewish or Christian family (the right heritage), if a man claims to be a Jew or a Christian religionist, and he is *still* not acceptable to God, what profit is there in being a religionist?

Paul’s answer is simple: the advantages are great. The Jew and Christian are highly privileged, especially in that God has committed His Word to them ([Romans 3:2; Romans 9:4-5](#)).

Romans 3:2 (NASB)

²“Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.”

Romans 9:4-5 (NASB)

⁴“Who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,
⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

They have the privilege...

of possessing God's Word.

of reading, hearing, seeing, obeying, and living God's Word.

of living within a society that has been affected by God's Word.

These are enormous privileges. A man born within a nation and a family that has God's Word has every advantage in coming to God and in living for God. In fact, such a man could have no greater privilege. His privileges are so great that he is left without excuse if he fails to live for God.

John 5:24 (NASB)

²⁴“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

John 6:63 (NASB)

⁶³“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”

John 6:68 (NASB)

⁶⁸“Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.’”

John 8:51 (NASB)

⁵¹“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.”

John 15:3 (NASB)

³“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”

John 20:31 (NASB)

³¹“But these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in

His name.”

Romans 15:4 (NASB)

⁴“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Ephesians 5:26 (NASB)

²⁶“So that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”

1 Peter 1:22 (NASB)

²²“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.”

1 John 5:13 (NASB)

¹³“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Psalms 119:9 (NASB)

⁹“How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.”

Proverbs 6:23 (NASB)

²³“For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life.”

Proverbs 14:34 (NASB)

³⁴“Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people.”

Paul's accusers continually charged him with teaching that the Lord's calling of Israel to be His special people was meaningless. If that were so, the apostle blasphemed the very character and integrity of God.

Paul knew the questions that some Jews in Rome would ask after they read or heard about the first part of his letter. “If our Jewish heritage, our knowing and teaching the Mosaic Law and our following Jewish rituals such as circumcision do not make a Jew righteous before God,” they would wonder, “**then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?**”

Romans 3:1 (NASB)

¹“Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?”

Many Scripture passages would have come to their minds. Just before God presented Israel with the Ten Commandments, He told them, “**You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**” (Exodus 19:6).

Moses wrote of Israel, “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples” ([Deuteronomy 10:14-15](#)).

In the same book of Deuteronomy Moses wrote, “You are a holy people to the Lord your God; and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” ([Deuteronomy 14:2](#)). The psalmist exulted, “The Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession” ([Psalm 135:4](#)). Through Isaiah, the Lord declared of Israel, “The people whom I formed for Myself, will declare My praise” ([Isaiah 43:21](#)).

Because of those and countless other Old Testament passages that testify to Israel’s unique calling and blessing, **many Jews concluded that, in itself, being Jewish made them acceptable to God.** But as Paul has pointed out, being *physical* descendants of Abraham did not qualify them as his *spiritual* descendants. If they did not have the mark of God’s Spirit within their hearts, the outward mark of circumcision in their flesh was worthless ([Romans 2:17-29](#)).

Romans 2:17-29 (NASB)

¹⁷ “But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God,
¹⁸ and know *His* will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,
¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,
²⁰ a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,
²¹ you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?
²² You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?
²³ You who boast in the Law, through your

breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

²⁴ For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

²⁵ For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

²⁶ So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

²⁷ And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?

²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.

²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

Nevertheless, Paul continues, the advantage of being Jewish was **great in every respect**. Although it did not bring salvation, it bestowed many privileges that Gentiles did not have. Later in the epistle, Paul tells his readers, doubtlessly with tears in his eyes as he wrote,

Romans 9:3-5 (NASB)

³ “For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,
⁴ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises,
⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

The Jews as a people had been adopted by God as His children, with whom He had made several exclusive covenants. He had given them His holy law and promised that through their lineage the Savior of the world would come. The Jewish people were indeed special in God’s eyes. They were blessed, protected, and delivered as no other nation on earth.

But most Jews paid little attention to the negative side of God’s revelation to them. He proclaimed of Isra-

el, **“You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth:’ but immediately went on to say, “therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Amos 3:2).** With high privilege also came high responsibility.

In the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a feast given by a king to celebrate his son’s marriage. Several times he sent messengers to the invited guests telling them that the feast was ready but each time they ignored the invitation. Some of them even beat and killed the messengers. The enraged king sent his soldiers to destroy the murderers and set their cities on fire. The king then sent other messengers to invite everyone in the kingdom to the feast, regardless of rank or wealth ([Matthew 22:1-9](#)).

[Matthew 22:1-9 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ **“Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying,**

² **The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.**

³ **And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come.**

⁴ **Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are *all* butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.'"**

⁵ **But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business,**

⁶ **and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.**

⁷ **But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire.**

⁸ **Then he **said* to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.**

⁹ **Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find *there*, invite to the wedding feast.”**

That parable pictures Israel as the first and most privileged guests who were invited to celebrate the coming of God’s Son to redeem the world. But

when the majority of Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, God opened the door to Gentiles, those whom the king’s messengers found along the highways and in the streets. I believe that the guests who attended the feast represent the church, people in general who acknowledge Christ as God’s Son and received Him as Lord and Savior.

Through Isaiah, the Lord lamented of Israel, **“What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?” ([Isaiah 5:4 \(NASB\)](#)).** The answer, of course, was that there was nothing more that God could have done for His people. He had bestowed on them every conceivable blessing and advantage.

Becoming more specific regarding their benefits, Paul said to his hypothetical Jewish objectors, **“You were entrusted with the oracles of God.”** *Logion* (oracles) is a diminutive of *logos*, which is most commonly translated *word*. *Logion* generally referred to important sayings or messages, especially supernatural utterances.

[Romans 3:2 \(NASB\)](#)

² **“Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.”**

Although *oracles* is a legitimate translation (see also [Acts 7:38](#); [Heb. 5:12](#)), because of the term’s association with pagan rites, that rendering seems unsuitable in this context.

[Acts 7:38 \(NASB\)](#)

³⁸ **“This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and *who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you.*”**

[Hebrews 5:12 \(NASB\)](#)

¹² **“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”**

In many pagan religions of that day, mediums and

seers gave occultic predictions of the future and other messages from the spirit world through supernatural **“oracles.”** By observing the movements of fish in a tank, the formation of snakes in a pit, or listening to the calls of certain birds, fortune-tellers would purport to predict such things as business success or failure, military victory or defeat, and a happy or tragic marriage.

Such a connotation could not have been further from Paul’s use of *logion* in this passage. His point was that the Jews **were entrusted with** the very **“words”** of the one and only true **God**, referring to the entire Old Testament (cf. [Deuteronomy 4:1-2](#); [Deuteronomy 6:1-2](#)).

Deuteronomy 4:1-2 (NASB)

¹ **“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.**

² **You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”**

Deuteronomy 6:1-2 (NASB)

¹ **“Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it,**

² **so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.”**

God’s revelation of Himself and of His will had been **entrusted** to the Jews, and that gave them unimaginably great privilege as well as equally immense responsibility.

Romans 3:2 (NASB)

² **“Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.”**

As the poet **William Cowper** wrote,
They, and they only, amongst all mankind,

Received the transcript of the Eternal Mind;
Were trusted with His own engraven laws,
And constituted guardians of His cause;
Theirs were the prophets, theirs the priestly call,
And theirs, by birth, the Saviour of us all.

Tragically, however, Jews had focused much attention on their privileges but little on their responsibilities. During one period of their history they misplaced and lost the written record of God’s law. Only when a copy of it was found by Hilkiah the high priest during the restoration of the Temple did Judah begin again to honor the Lord’s commandments and observe His ceremonies for a brief time under the godly King Josiah (see [2 Chronicles 34:14-33](#)).

For many centuries before the time of Paul, beginning during the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews’ reverence for her man-made rabbinical traditions and interpretations had come to far outweigh her reverence for God’s written Word.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day prided themselves as being experts in the Scriptures. But when the Sadducees tried to maneuver Jesus into a corner by asking a hypothetical question about marriage in heaven, He rebuked them by saying, **“Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures, or the power of God?”** ([Mark 12:24 \(NASB\)](#)).

To a crowd of unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem the Lord declared, **“You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me”** ([John 5:39](#)). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man died and went to hell. From there he cried out to Abraham to send a special messenger to tell his brothers the way of salvation. But Abraham replied, **“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them”** ([Luke 16:29](#)). In other words, the Old Testament contained all the truth that any Jew (or any Gentile, for that matter) needed to be saved.

Jews who truly believed the Scriptures recognized Jesus as the Son of God, because He is the focus of the Old Testament as well as the New. But most Jews preferred to follow the traditions of the rabbis and elders

rather than “that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give... the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15 [\(NASB\)](#)).

That same attitude has characterized much of Christianity throughout its history. The teachings and standards of a denomination or of an exclusive group or sect have frequently overshadowed, and often completely contradicted, God’s own revelation in the Bible.

Belonging to a Christian church is much like it was to be a Jew under the Old Covenant. Outward identity with those who claim to be God’s people, even when they are genuine believers, is in itself of no benefit to an unbeliever. But such a person does have a great advantage above other unbelievers if in a church he is exposed to the sound teaching of God’s Word. If he does not take advantage of that privilege, however, he makes his guilt and condemnation worse than if he had never heard the gospel. **“For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.”** ([Hebrews 10:26-27](#); cf. [4:2-3](#)).

Hebrews 4:2-3 (NASB)

²“For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

³For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,’ although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.”



CORAM DEO **(Before the face of God)**

The Honor of Being a Slave

Romans 1:1 (NASB)

¹“Paul, a bond-servant [*doulos*-slave] of Christ Jesus, called *as an apostle*, set apart for the gospel of God”

The apostle begins with a simple identification of his name. As a Roman citizen, his name was Saul. But he became Paul, the one who was radically transformed on the Damascus road. Years later the theologian extraordinaire of the early church identifies himself humbly and simply as Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ.

The Greek word *doulos*, which is the word *servant* in the **KJV**, bond-servant in the **NASB** is more accurately translated by the word *slave*. In the ancient world a servant was a hired employee who could come and go and even resign if he wanted. But a *doulos* was owned by a *kyrios*, a master or lord. He was the purchased property of the slave owner.

This imagery is frequently used in the New Testament to reflect the relationship between Christ and his people. We belong to Christ—our *kyrios*, our Lord and Master. He has the right of an owner to impose obligation on us. Because Paul so clearly understood that believers have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, he called himself a *doulos*, or slave, of Jesus Christ.

By nature humanity stands in bondage to sin. We are bondservants to our own evil impulses and fallen nature. Yet we are told that where the Spirit of the Lord is—where the Spirit of the *kyrios* is—there is liberty. Jesus said, “⁽³¹⁾ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, *then you are truly disciples of Mine*; ⁽³²⁾ and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” ([John 8:31–32](#)).

Jesus addressed those words to people who were not free, but were in abject bondage. But the irony is this: *A person’s only freedom is to become a slave to Jesus Christ*. Freedom from Christ means slavery to self. But one enslaved to Christ knows the royal liberation that only Christ can bring. So Paul, in citing his own creden-

tials, looks to his highest virtue—that he is a slave to Jesus Christ.

Coram Deo

As the Holy Spirit brings to mind your obligations before God, don't look at them as hardship or duty. If you have one you particularly dislike, ask God to change that situation, not necessarily by removing you from it, but by giving you a true servant spirit.

For further study: [Psalm 19:7–14](#); [Matthew 23:1–12](#); [John 13:1–17](#); [Acts 20:17–38](#)

Continued in next edition...



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Hebrews 11 – Overview Part 7

Uncomfortable Results

This is the last study in [Hebrews 11](#) that will lead into [Hebrews 12](#). What is important is the nature of the content beginning in [Hebrews 11:35\(b\) – 40](#). Up until v35, everything has been fairly positive. The author has provided multiple testimonies of individuals in all kinds of circumstances that were both willing and able to trust God in their life. However, when we reach v35, the tone of what the writer provides changes very dramatically. Look carefully to how the description of biblical faith of many who suffered greatly actually unfolds.

³⁵Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented- ³⁸of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. ³⁹And

all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

The first words that capture my personal attention are in v35 when it says “**And others...**”, and then in v36, “**Still others...**”. Obviously, these two words represent a significant turning point where the author wants his readers to understand that biblical faith does not always produce the results that the believer may be expecting. I am sure that we have all heard someone say something like this: “*God did it for me and I am sure that He will do it for you.*” Well, that may sound good, but it certainly is not biblical. God may have delivered Daniel in the lion’s den, but there were many more that died under Nero in the Coliseum in Rome by being torn asunder by wild animals and used as human torches to further the persecution. Jewish tradition says that Isaiah the prophet was sawn in two with a wooden saw by Manasseh. The problem with the kind of perspective that if God did it this way for one person then He will most likely do it that way for someone else is that it gives the impression that God always works the same way – which He does not.

What we do know is that the principles of God found in Scripture are the same for every believer, but how the purposes of God are worked out through those principles is generally different from person to person. For instance, Marilyn Laslow was welcomed by the natives of Papua, New Guinea, but Jim Elliott was killed while attempting to evangelize the Huaorani people of Ecuador. The principle was the same – go into all the world and preach the gospel. However, how the purposes of God were worked out in doing so were very different. How God works in your life may be entirely different than how He works in someone else’s life. What God calls you to do may be entirely different than what He calls someone else to do. What Scripture clearly reveals is that God honors biblical faith, but how he honors it is His choice. For instance, God allowed Corrie Ten Boon to live during her time in the Nazi concentration camp, but the rest of her family died. Why would God allow one to live and the rest to die? No one knows.

In reading these final verses in [Hebrews 11](#), these people are included in the Hall of Fame for faith, but they did not experience personal deliverance. To the contrary, they suffered greatly and were killed, imprisoned, stoned, and sawn in two just for starters. The question is whether or not God failed them? Obviously, the answer to that question is a resounding “No”. So, the other question that has to be asked is whether or not they failed God, and the obvious answer to that question is a resounding “No”. They did not fail God and God did not fail them. In fact, in some ways what happened to these individuals may actually have glorified God even more than those who came before them in this chapter. Covington Theological Seminary lost 17 students that were martyred for their faith in Pakistan a couple of years ago when they were attacked and their homes burned and destroyed. Did God fail them? Absolutely not! If what someone believes is that deliverance from difficult and trying circumstances is the norm for God’s people, then they are naïve and undiscerning relative to the nature of biblical faith and the overall testimony of Scripture itself. One of the extremely disconcerting elements of the modern charismatic movement is their false doctrine that God’s intention is to bless everyone with material wealth and physical health. That is a ludicrous and unsupportable biblical position that has no merit whatsoever in the light of meaningful biblical exegesis. Every believer and every believer’s circumstances are spiritually unique in the plan of God and it is somewhat fallacious and undiscerning for believers to compare themselves to one another. God is utterly sovereign in how He may work with one individual in relation to another individual. The responsibility that we have as Christians is simply that we honor God’s sovereignty. It should be readily acknowledged that God’s sovereignty will very often raise more questions for a believer than it will necessarily answer.

There are several additional principles related to faith that need to be gleaned from this passage. The first lesson that should be gleaned from this passage is that the life of faith may be very costly at times. All that we have to do is to look at the dramatic change in the vocabulary beginning in [Hebrews 11:35](#). Notice the very uncomfortable words that the author uses to describe the consequences of biblical faith – “**tortured, mockings, scourgings, chains, imprisonment, stoned, sawn in two, slain, wandered, destitute, afflicted, tormented**”. Personally, I find no initial comfort in those words.

They are not the kind of words that those of us in America can even relate to, but they certainly are words that people in other parts of the world can identify with. There are on average 480 Christians throughout the world who are martyred for their faith every day! I remember the story several years ago about the pastor who lived in the Central America country of Columbia and how his life was threatened by the drug lords that if he did not stop preaching that they would kill him. He kept preaching, and one day his body shows up in pieces in large paper bags on the front steps of his home. Did God fail him? Absolutely not! Could God have supernaturally delivered this man or the ones mentioned in the latter portion of [Hebrews 11](#)? Sure He could have, but **He in His sovereignty chose not to deliver.** Being delivered or not being delivered is never the issue. Being healthy or not being healthy is never the issue. Being wealthy or not being wealthy is never the issue. Being secure or not being secure is never the issue. **The issue is always the sovereignty of God, and until Christians grasp the reality of God's sovereign design and rule over their life, they will never be comfortable in the Christian life.** They will always be second guessing God and believing that He may have made a mistake in their life. [Romans 11:33](#) is the classic passage on this when it says,

³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

The second lesson is that genuine faith is generally validated when the believer obeys God in spite of their circumstances or in spite of their outcome. I love the way that the three friends of Daniel summed up their faith in God in [Daniel 3:16-18](#) when they said the following to King Nebuchadnezzar,

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods,

nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

"But if not..." Those are three amazing words. These three men had counted the cost and the potential outcome of what it meant to remain true to their faith, and death was a very viable option for them. In their case, the story is clear that living or dying was never the issue for them. **The issue was their faithfulness to a faithful God.** In their case, God delivered them. However, in the case of someone like Stephen in Acts 7, God did NOT deliver him. Rather, God allowed him to be stoned and he died because of his faithfulness to a sovereign God. The issue was never about living or dying, but his faithfulness to a faithful God. If a believer's expectation is that God will always deliver them or give them personal relief from stressful circumstances, most likely they will become extremely frustrated and irritable.

The third lesson is that people who live by faith live for the future. It seems that the ultimate dirge of the modern church is that it is obsessed in living for today rather than tomorrow. The spiritual myth of that perspective is that many Christians believe that what the world offers is better than what God offers. The people described in this portion of [Hebrews 11](#) were tortured. That word refers to stretching the individual over a large drum like instrument and beating them with clubs. Many of these faithful men and women who died were treated much worse than people treated animals. Let me ask the penetrating question – and it would be good not to answer this question too quickly. Today, right now, do you have the kind of faith where you would be willing **to suffer** for Christ no matter the outcome? If your answer to that question is a hearty "Yes", then would you be willing **to live** for Christ no matter the outcome? In reality, that is the harder, more demanding, and penetrating question.

One of the greatest concerns with the emergent church movement is that it is so intent on changing biblical words to become more culturally relevant. They are developing a whole new Christian vocabulary, and in the process they are depleting the biblical words of their true meaning. Today, we as 21st century Christians have almost no understanding of words like sacrifice, commitment, and perseverance. No one understands what those words really mean anymore because the current Christian culture has systematically removed their

true biblical meaning from them. These kinds of words are almost a foreign language to many Christians. For instance, how would you personally define the biblical word “**sacrifice**”? For many modern cultural Christians, it often appears to be a personal sacrifice to come to church on a Sunday evening or Wednesday evening – and for many, even on a Sunday morning. If anyone thinks that is what it means to make a sacrifice, then they have no understanding whatsoever of biblical words. What does [Romans 12:1](#) really mean biblically when it says,

¹I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

It seems that one of the major problems for Christians in the spiritual culture in which we live is that many simply do NOT understand what it truly means to be a Christian and to live out the Christian life in a meaningful and purposeful way. I hope that you understand that the New Testament and its commands and exhortations are not an option for the believer – but that is exactly what many have made them to be. Cultural believers seem to pick and choose what they want to obey, and then casually discard that which is not very palatable to them and their personal preferences and agendas. The New Testament is a way of life! It is demanding and relentless in its call on our lives, and if somehow we think that what it says does not apply to us, then we are terribly confused. The spiritual climate that the church has slowly and subtly developed is that we have turned Christians into consumers and customers rather than givers and supporters – and I am not talking about giving money. It is more about what can this church do for me and what can this church give to me. It is always about “me” and having my personal needs met and pampered. If we stand under the light of God’s Word, that is a horrendous display of spiritual ignorance and personal arrogance before a holy God who sacrificed everything for those who truly deserved nothing. It should always be about Christ and what can I do for others on His behalf.

For instance, our spiritual gifts are never for us – never! They are always for the edification of the body of Christ – always. If I have the gift of mercy,

it is not so that I can be merciful to myself, but merciful to people who most likely do not even deserve it. The American church at large has got to be one of the most confused churches in all of history. We have literally lost our perspective on what it even means to be a Christian. We have become so enamored with ourselves and our personal lives and our personal goals and agendas, that we no longer even know how to think biblically. We are much more interested in personal satisfaction than personal sacrifice. We are adept at criticizing others while at the same time simply whitewashing our own sins and shortcomings. We have expectations of others that we never meet ourselves.

At a personal level as a pastor, I praise God for faithful men, faithful women, and faithful families who love God, love His Word, and who love His church with all of their heart, and who are willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to be what God wants them to be. These kinds of people are truly a rare and dying breed. Unfortunately, many churches are trying to make people comfortable with non-confrontational messages and non-threatening innovative services. The problem with that approach, however, is that if you try to make the gospel message innovative, then what you have is “**another gospel**” as defined in [Galatians 1](#). Churches seem to be getting bigger and bigger and true disciples getting fewer and fewer. Now, all of this leads into [Hebrews 12:1](#) which says,

¹Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

I wonder if you could honestly say that you are in the race and actually running the race. Many Christians are just jogging, some walking, and some sitting in the race – but they definitely are not running the race, and certainly not running with endurance. Many Christians are simply spectators criticizing those who are actually running the race – and for some strange reason the church has become satisfied with that unbiblical perspective. The biblical word for “race” is the Greek word “agon” from where we get the English word “agony”. A legitimate race is demanding, consuming, and grueling, and it takes a lot of preparation to even be ready for it. It requires the utmost in self-discipline and training. It requires the utmost in personal determination and com-

mitment. Unfortunately, many Christians are not actually in the race, but rather they are sitting on the sidelines watching the truly committed Christians run the race in their stead.

The word for “endurance” means that a person has a genuine determination to keep going no matter what the obstacles or the sacrifices are that they may have to make. There will always be both – obstacles and sacrifices. Nothing makes less sense than being in a race that you have no desire to win. If you are just content to be saved and go to heaven, then you are definitely not in the race. The word for “weight” refers to anything that diverts the believer’s attention and diminishes their enthusiasm for the things of God. It is whatever the believer allows into their life that depletes their spiritual sensitivity to the things of God.

The spiritual lesson in all of this is simply that the gospel message summons all who believe to persevere in their biblical faithfulness to Jesus Christ. One of the worst testimonies that the church can have is a believer who decides to quit running the race that is set before them. Unfortunately, the Christian culture in which we live is filled with people who seem to think that they deserve a life without any problems. Such a life is unscriptural and demeaning to both Christ and the gospel that He preached. Sometimes affliction and discomfort are avoidable. I remember Dr. Eddie Idefonso sharing about how in the middle of the night down in the country of Columbia how he was suddenly awakened from his sleep and told to leave behind everything that he had and flee into the jungle immediately. Why? It was because rebel soldiers were headed their way to kill them – and off into the night he fled. However, there are simply times when the consequences of living by faith are unavoidable. Dr. John MacArthur states in his commentary on Hebrews that *“to the person of faith, no affliction is escapable that requires denial or compromise of God’s Word”*.


The Scriptures are replete with example after example of individuals who were willing to accept the worst that the world had to offer because they more deeply desired the best that God had to offer. There was Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and all of the apostles. There were

all of those mentioned in [Hebrews 11](#) and there have been many that have followed. I guess that the revealing question is simply what is it worth to you to be truly committed followers of Jesus Christ? Will we still demand all of our security, our creature comforts, our personal preferences, and our private lifestyle conveniences? Are we truly willing to change our personal priorities and goals to achieve biblical faithfulness? What does the Christian life really mean to us and like this last portrait of individuals in [Hebrews 11](#), what kind of cost are we truly willing to pay in order to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ? There is no such thing as a no-cost Christianity. There is no such thing as a no-risk Christianity. It simply does not exist. It never has, and it never will. The demands and the costs of being a fully devoted and genuine follower of Jesus Christ are enormous, and I pray that you will never let anyone convince you otherwise.

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