

Sin and Condemnation: The World's need to get right with God

(65)

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[Romans 1:18-3:20](#)

(Continuation from 04/23/17)

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

[Romans 3:1-8 \(NASB\)](#)

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.

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.

([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 arguments, 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.

04-30-17

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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 revelled 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.

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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 religious 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.

04-30-17

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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)?

The Realization of Sin, [Romans 3:1-20](#)

All men are unrighteous; the evidence in men themselves is overwhelmingly plain. Therefore, God had to give them over to their vileness and their wickedness ([Romans 1:18-32](#)).

This condition is not cured by moralism. It is not removed by law, not even by the Jewish moralist's use of law. Utter hopelessness lies in that direction ([Romans chapter 2](#)).

There is one great advantage in having God's Word, and the Jew as well as we Christians have that advantage. That Word works *the actual realization of sin* ([Romans 3:1-20](#)) and thereby prepares for the gospel, for faith in the revelation of the saving righteousness of God in Christ ([Romans 3:21](#), etc.).

One grand section follows another in a perfect order of thought up to the very gospel righteousness which alone removes man's unrighteousness. We must study [Romans 3:1-20](#) as a whole, must see that its climax is reached in [v. 19-20](#), must note that its thought is focused in the final clause: "through law sin's realization."

[Romans 3:20 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁰ "Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

Then all of the details of the whole section ([Romans 3:1-20](#)) fall into their proper places. They form a powerful structure for the support of the main fact, the actual realization of sin, from which the door of gospel faith opens into righteousness that is righteousness indeed.

What, then, is the thing over and above of a Jew? or what the benefit of the circumcision? Much every way. In the first place, because they were entrusted with the sayings of God.

The "thou" the big "you" addressed to the moralist in [Romans chapter 2](#) is dropped.

04-30-17

Series: The Book of Romans

Romans 2:1 (KJV)

¹“Therefore “**thou**” art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.”

Romans 2:1 (NASB)

¹“Therefore “**you**” have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”

Paul is through with the moralist. He has destroyed moralism, the gospel’s great opponent, in both its Gentile and especially its Jewish form. Paul is now addressing the Romans, his own Christian readers, all of them. He is not fencing with a Jew (as representing all Jews) or with some Jewish Christian who still harbor’s wrong Jewish notions. There is not an imaginary opponent whom Paul pierces with skillful thrusts.

In this passage, nobody is trying to upset what Paul has said about Jews as contrasted with Gentiles by hurling at him the objection that then being a Jew and being duly circumcised would amount to nothing, the Jew might as well be a Gentile, and the whole old covenant might as well be erased. The assertion that Paul “**is compelled**” to meet this objection, otherwise all that he has said is reduced to absurdity, is the view to which we have referred.

How can this view be maintained when Paul himself said to the moralist in [Romans 2:25](#) that “**circumcision (most assuredly) does profit, does benefit**”?

Romans 2:25 (ASV)

²⁵“**For circumcision indeed profiteth, if thou be a doer of the law: but if thou be a transgressor of the law, thy circumcision is become uncircumcision.**”

Romans 2:25 (NASB)

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.**”

He now proceeds to expound what he himself said. He has even defined a real Jew for us as being one who has this benefit ([Romans 2:28-29](#)), which benefit, of course, the Jewish moralist neither had nor even knew about.

Romans 2:28-29 (NASB)

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.”**

Paul’s οὖν “**oun**” “**then**” [Romans 3:1](#) refers back to [Romans 2:25](#), to his own word:

Romans 3:1 (NASB)

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

Romans 2:25 (NASB)

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.”

“Circumcision does profit,” and he now asks: “**What, therefore, is the thing over and above belonging to the Jew,**” the thing that puts him ahead of all Gentiles? The copula or linking verb is often omitted in the Greek. Paul does not only admit, he himself asserts, both in [Romans 2:25](#) and in this passage, that the Jew, every Jew (representative, call it collective) has more than other men in mind.

Romans 3:1 (NASB)

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

Romans 3:1 (AMP)

¹“**THEN WHAT** advantage remains to the Jew? [How is he favored?] Or what is the value *or* benefit of circumcision?”

This is true also with regard to the alternate question which is added by conjunctive “or” (cf., [Romans 1:21](#) and [Romans 2:4](#)) which merely restates the question and thereby emphasizes, impresses it: “**or what is the benefit of the circumcision?**” the article to indicate the special, i. e., the covenant circumcision of the Jew, for other Orientals also practiced circumcision.

Romans 1:21 (NASB)

²¹“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God **or** give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

Romans 2:4 (NASB)

⁴“**Or** do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”

The question itself asserts that such benefit exists and repeats the declarative assertion made in [Romans 2:25](#).

Romans 2:25 (NASB)

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.”

And now the prompt answer: “**Much every way!**” Call him by his common name “**the Jew**” or use the abstract “**the circumcision**” as a designation for all Judaism, every way these are looked at, “**much**” in the way of advantage is and always has been theirs.