

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

(66)

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

(Continuation from 04/30/17)

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.)

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 Objection That Paul Attacked God's People

Romans 3:1-2 (NASB)

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

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

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 hear 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?**"

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 below **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,

⁵whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."

05-28-17

Series: The Book of Romans

They have the privilege...

- 1) of possessing God's Word.
- 2) of reading, hearing, seeing, obeying, and living God's Word.
- 3) 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.”

05-28-17

Series: The Book of Romans

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,
¹⁸and know *His* will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,
¹⁹and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,
²⁰a 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 Israel, **"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

05-28-17

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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,

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

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

⁴Again 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.'"

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

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

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

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

⁹Go 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.

²You 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,

²so 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.