

## CHAPTER IV

### ROMANS 1:18-3:20 - THE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF MAN, THE BAD NEWS

**I**N Romans 1:18-3:20 we now enter into the most devastating unveiling of man in sin and God's reaction to it in all of the Bible. Here sin, in both its hideous profundity and universal inclusiveness, is laid bare in all of its naked ugliness. Further, and even more disturbing for guilty mankind, is God's reaction toward sin which is his manifest wrath; He is not passive in this regard, as if benignly disturbed, but positively angry. Why does Paul, with obvious aforethought, present such a reasoned exposure of the essential human malady? Because the glorious gospel of the saving righteousness of God is predicated upon the loathsome leprosy, the plague of plagues,<sup>1</sup> that so thoroughly infects the whole race of Adam. Good news presupposes bad news; salvation presupposes being lost; mercy presupposes misery; grace presupposes guilt; and saving righteousness presupposes unrighteousness. Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes the vital importance of this passage as follows:

If you understand this section you will never be in difficulties as to why it was absolutely vital that the Son of God should leave heaven and be born as a babe, be born under the law, be born of a woman and live life as He lived it, should go to the cross and die and be buried and rise again; you will never have any trouble in understanding why. But if you are not clear about this section, well then, you will always be in trouble about the gospel itself - as many people are.<sup>2</sup>

#### A. THE GENTILES ARE THOROUGH SINNERS, 1:18-32

The distinction commonly made of Paul addressing the Gentiles as sinners in 1:18-32 and the Jews as sinners in 2:1-3:8 holds true, though not absolutely, for the following reasons. First, in writing to Rome, Paul appears in 1:18-32 to be focusing upon Roman paganism and depravity. Second, the expression "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" in v. 18 appears to describe a universal corruption. Third, as Moo points out, "the knowledge of God rejected by those depicted in 1:18-32 comes solely through 'natural revelation' - the evidences of God in creation and, perhaps, the conscience. The situation with Jews is, of course, wholly different, for Paul holds them responsible for the special revelation they have been given in the law (cf. 2:12-13, 17-29)."<sup>3</sup>

##### 1. Wrath is upon the ungodly who abandon God, vs. 18-23.

###### a. An introduction to the "wrath of God."

- (1) "Wrath" here is God's *expressed* holy displeasure at man's persistent and escalating depravity; it is His reaction to deep-dyed and perverse unholiness.

---

<sup>1</sup> The expression "plague of plagues," is borrowed from the title of Puritan Ralph Venning's penetrating work on the doctrine of sin first published in 1669.

<sup>2</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 1:1-32*, p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 97.

In Romans it is mostly the wrath of God referred to (2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; cf. also Eph. 2:3; 5:6; ; Col. 3:6; I Thess. 1:10; 5:9), except for one reference to the wrath of human government (13:4-5). Paul does write of man's wrath (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; I Tim. 2:8). Murray declares: "Wrath is the holy revulsion of God's being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness."<sup>4</sup>

- (2) Modern theology, as represented by C. H. Dodd, has reacted against the thought of God being angry and indignant toward sinful man since it is said to be unworthy of the New Testament revelation of the love of God. Old Testament expressions of the wrath of God (Num. 11:1; 25:4; Isa. 34:2; Jer. 4:8; 51:45; Zeph. 2:1-2) merely reflect a more primitive past. Hence, "wrath" here is the inevitable consequence of sin, that is inbuilt punishment, 1:27, rather than a divine expression of hatred.<sup>5</sup> Of course intrinsic to this aversion to the obvious teaching of Scripture is a misunderstanding of the character of God, which gives primacy to holiness as the regulator of love. This rationalization of the "wrath of God" in fact appears to be a vain attempt to escape from it.<sup>6</sup>
- (3) But does God really get angry? Could not His wrath or anger merely be an "anthropopathism," that is a divine accommodation and representation of the ever-blessed God to a human emotional expression? And if God is truly angry, then how is it possible for Him to be loving at the same time? Both questions take us to the limits of human understanding and the danger of Stoicism on one hand and God as essentially man on the other. However, consider:
- (a) The Bible never presents God's anger as a charade covering the reality of non-anger. Shedd helpfully explains:

Now when the emotion of anger in a most pure spirit like God comes into contact with moral evil, there is harmony between the feeling and its object. It is a righteous feeling spent upon a wicked thing. When God hates what is hateful, and is angry at that which merits wrath, the true nature and fitness of things is observed, and he feels in himself that inward satisfaction which is the substance of happiness. . . . The feeling of wrath against the wickedness of man and devils, is constantly in the Divine essence. Yet God is supremely and constantly blessed.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, I, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris comments: "It is of course true that God is love. But it is not true that this rules out any realistic view of God's wrath. We must bear in mind that the opposite of love is not wrath, but hate. Wrath is perhaps not an ideal term, for with us it so easily comes to denote an emotion characterized by loss of self-control and a violent concern for selfish interests. But these are not necessary constituents of wrath, and both are absent from the "righteous indignation" which gives us the best human analogy. In any case, "wrath" is the word the Bible uses, and we need the strongest of reasons for abandoning it. It is a term that expresses the settled and active opposition of God's holy nature to everything that is evil." *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. H. Lenski adds: "This fact of the wrath "from heaven" constantly breaks through the clouds of human perversions, false reasonings and philosophies, blatant denials and lies, beneath which men seek to hide in helpless efforts to escape." *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 94.

<sup>7</sup> William Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, I, pp. 177-78. See also John Gill, *Body of Divinity*, pp. 67-72.

- (b) The Bible often describes God as both holy and gracious (Is. 6:1-7), just and a justifier concerning sin (Rom. 3:26), and here in Romans 1:16-18 He saves sinners while at the same time being angry with sinners. Robert Dabney illustrates this true biblical dualism from the life of George Washington who, in determining the destiny of a Major Andre, both loved him and signed his death-warrant.<sup>8</sup>

(4) Application. Arthur Pink writes:

A study of the concordance will show that there are *more* references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness. . . . The wrath of God is a perfection of the Divine character upon which we need to frequently meditate. First, that our hearts may be duly impressed by God's detestation of sin. We are ever prone to regard sin lightly, to gloss over its hideousness, to make excuses for it. But the more we study and ponder God's abhorrence of sin and His frightful vengeance upon it, the more likely we are to realize its heinousness. Secondly, to beget a true fear in our souls for God: 'let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:28-29). We cannot serve Him 'acceptably' unless there is due 'reverence' for His awful Majesty and 'godly fear' of His righteous anger; and these are best promoted by frequently calling to mind that 'our God is a consuming fire.' Thirdly, to draw out our souls in fervent praise for our having been delivered *from* 'the wrath to come' (I Thess. 1:10). Our readiness or our reluctance to *meditate* upon the wrath of God becomes a sure test of our hearts' true attitude toward Him.<sup>9</sup>

b. The revelation of the wrath of God, v. 18a.

A more literal translation here reads, "For being revealed [uncovered, cf. Luke 12:2, emphatic position] is the wrath of God." The present tense here forces us to focus on the present rather than that future apocalyptic revelation of the wrath of God when Jesus Christ returns (II Thess. 1:3-10; Rev. 6:12-17; 19:11-21). A futuristic present is possible here, cf. Matt. 26:2, but unlikely in view of the present emphasis of the revelation of the gospel in v. 17. But how is the wrath of God being presently revealed?

- (1) Lloyd-Jones suggests six ways in which God's wrath is *presently* being uncovered, namely: 1, in human conscience, its troubling, accusatory nature; 2, sin's inbuilt punishment; 3, a cursed, savage creation; 4, universal and inevitable death; 5, history, both biblical and general, the course of human degeneration; 6, the atonement of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup> Two of these seem to be most significant.
- (2) Sin has inbuilt punishment; that is, whatever pleasure may be offered in temptation, yet bitter and unavoidable consequences follow. This seems, in

<sup>8</sup> Robert Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, I, pp. 284-5.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God*, pp. 84-5.

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 1:1-32*, pp. 342-50.

context here, to be of prime importance to Paul where, in v. 27, men and women involved in unnatural sexual relationships, are “receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” Surely this retribution includes disease as well as an evil, unclean, depraved environment. Further, this wrath involves God’s abandonment of gross sinners in vs. 24-32. As Thomas Manton writes:

It may be the greatest expression of God’s anger, if he doth not check us and suffer us to go on in our sins: Hosea 4:17, ‘Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone;’ word, providence, conscience, let him alone: Ps. 81:12, ‘So I gave them up to their own hearts’ lusts, and they walked in their own counsels. It is the greatest misery of all to be left to our own choices<sup>11</sup>

God designs that the ungodly man will fall into a pit that his hands have hollowed out (Ps. 7:12-16).

- (3) Concurrently with the revelation of God’s gospel is the revelation of His wrath. For true believers, God’s wrath, by way of substitution, was poured out upon His Son (Is. 53:6, 10; Matt. 27:45-46). For unbelievers who spurn the gospel, “the wrath of God is abiding [present tense] on him” (John 3:36). Haldane comments: “Above all, the wrath of God was revealed from heaven when the Son of God came down to manifest the Divine character, and when that wrath was displayed in His sufferings and death, in a manner more awful than by all the tokens God had before given of His displeasure against sin.”<sup>12</sup>

- c. The reasons for the wrath of God, vs. 18b-23.

Immediately following the sin of Adam and Eve, we are told that “they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and *the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God* [emphasis added] among the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3:8). As a result of this disobedience, God revealed his anger through punishment and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden. In simple terms, sin causes man to flee from God who in turn responds with anger. Yet in the midst of God’s wrath there was the promise of redemption (Gen. 3:15). So here, man’s perverse flight from God is graphically revealed, yet at the same time this revelation of wrath is the precursor to His saving, righteous grace.

- (1) God in truth is suppressed, vs. 18-19.

On the surface, man’s problem is described as “ungodliness,” ἀσέβεια, asebeia, or active assault on God’s person, and “unrighteousness” ἀδικία, adikia, or active assault upon God’s moral order. However, these are but symptoms of a more basic problem, that is rejection of “the truth” (John 3:19). The embrace of truth has moral consequences. It is truth or error embraced that governs a man’s lifestyle (John 8:32).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Manton, *Works*, XIII, p. 300.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Haldane, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 64.

- (a) It is evident truth about God, v. 18.
- 1) What specifically is this truth that man spurns? Clearly it centers on the God of the Bible, as revealed to inward Gentile/pagan consciousness by means of the external created order, v. 19-20.
  - 2) It is truth that is arresting, that addresses man's soul and finds resistance. Morris comments: "Paul evidently thinks of truth as dynamic, for it can be hindered, which means that it must be doing something."<sup>13</sup>
  - 3) It is truth that frustrated man *attempts* to "suppress," or hinder, or sit upon. Here man's claims to fairly distinguish truth are demolished because sin renders man warped, prejudiced toward unrighteousness. In context, this "suppression" is especially in the religious and moral spheres of life.
  - 4) Illustration. Consider the following contemporary religious/moral issues. In every instance the world scoffs at the plain biblical teaching.
    - a) Evolution. Creations is mocked as unenlightened, rather than the acknowledgment of a faithful Creator (Ps. 19:1).
    - b) Abortion. The unborn child is fetal tissue, not woven by God in the womb (Ps. 139:13-14).
    - c) Divorce. A lifetime union is an old-fashioned concept that does not allow for modern pressures; what matters is personal feelings rather than loyalty (Matt. 19:6).
    - d) Deviant sexuality. Heterosexuality is passe; any sexual relationship is legitimate provided it is loving and does not harm others (Rom. 1:24-32).
    - e) Liberal Christianity. Meaning, especially in the Bible, is subjective, existential, culturally conditioned, that which suits the times (Matt. 22:29).
  - 5) Application. How important it is in evangelism and personal witnessing to be aware of this characteristic of man, of whatever educational level. The more educated or cultured a person may be, the more sophisticated becomes the suppression.

---

<sup>13</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 78.

- (b) It is evident truth from God, v. 19.

For what reasons is man accountable concerning the knowledge of God which he suppresses according to v. 18? Why is it just that the wrath of God is outpoured upon ungodliness and unrighteousness? It is because man has been given a sufficient revelation of God so that he cannot plead ignorance or agnosticism, and thus is “without excuse,” v. 20b.

- 1) This knowledge about God is evident “within them.”

- a) While the context of v. 20 suggests that this knowledge is about the external created order, yet internal consciousness, cf. 2:14-15, seems the primary intent. Man is a creature with observatory powers, so that certain truth about God is evidently discernable; it inescapably confronts him, is *acknowledged within*, and then suppressed. Here is the root of man’s “futile speculation” and “foolishness of heart,” v. 21b.
- b) Illustration. Calvin comments: “Men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him. . . . Upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance.”<sup>14</sup>
- c) Application. This is a vital point with regard to witnessing to a person who professes agnosticism or atheism, which response is in fact willful suppression. Lloyd-Jones comments:

Anthropologists and research workers who have investigated this problem have produced this very vital bit of evidence: the most primitive tribes amongst the pygmies in the heart of Africa, tribes like the aborigines in Australia, and in certain parts of the north-west of the American Continent, wherever you find the most primitive people imaginable, even there is found this sense of a supreme Being, of a supreme God. It is universal in human nature. Even the man who tells you that he does not believe in God, and who boasts in the fact that he is an atheist, even he has got a sense of God. He has to argue against it, and that is why he does so. Whether he likes it or not, he has got it, and he does his best to drown it and to ridicule it and to dismiss it, but it is still there. A universal sense of God - ‘that which may be known of God is manifest *in them*’, deep within the consciousness of man’s being.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, V. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 1:1-32*, p. 369.

Of course such “God-consciousness” is not comprehensive or saving,<sup>16</sup> though it is sufficient to condemn man in his godless manner of living and pagan worship.

- 2) This knowledge is from God “to them.”
  - a) Of prime importance are the questions, “Does man discover God?” (Paul everywhere answers “No”), and “Does God reveal Himself to man?” (Paul everywhere as well as here answers “Yes”). Morris comments: “God can be known only as he chooses to make himself known. The initiative is with him.”<sup>17</sup>
  - b) In I Corinthians 1:21 Paul reveals that “the world through its wisdom did not come to know God,” that is the world, by means of its strenuous searching and scholastic endeavor, was not able to come to a true and saving knowledge of God. On the other hand, Paul continues, “God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” Such true knowledge and saving knowledge was revealed by God through the Gospel and its appointed heralds, cf. Gal. 1:11-12; 4:4; Eph. 1:9; II Tim. 1:8-11.
  - c) Hence, man’s received God-consciousness and God’s revelation of Himself in creation are His communication of Himself that, unlike man’s perverted conception, is wholly authentic. So Haldane adds that, “there is no one who can manifest God to man except Himself, and consequently that all we know of Him must be founded on His own revelation, and not on the authority of any creature.”<sup>18</sup> When man does attempt to discover God, he arrives at those conceptions described in v. 23, namely “an image [of God] in the form of corruptible man and of birds and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

(2) God in creation is denied, v. 20.

Specifically, what is this evident knowledge about God that confronts all men, without exception, in their ungodliness and unrighteousness, as mentioned in v. 19? Clearly the challenge of man, “Show me God and I will believe,” is untenable, that is its intimation that God is not evident.

---

<sup>16</sup> “It would probably be a fair paraphrase of his [Paul’s] argument to say that people have never lived up to the highest and best that they have known. But God intends that they should. They are guilty in his eyes when they do not.” Morris, *Romans*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Haldane, *Romans*, p. 66.

## (a) His invisible essential attributes, v. 20a.

To begin with, God is described as being essentially invisible. His fundamental attributes transcend visible definition (Ex. 33:20; John 1:18; 6:46; I Tim. 6:16; I John 4:12), and here they are described as “His invisible things [attributes],” more specifically “His eternal power” (infinite sovereignty and omnipotence) and “divine nature” (full deity).

## (b) His visible expressed attributes, v. 20b.

- 1) Yet Paul declares a paradox when he further explains that the invisible God is clearly seen. How can this be? The answer is that while God in essence is not seen, yet that expression of his attributes in creation is a most visible display of His person. As Calvin plainly states, “God is in himself invisible; but as his majesty shines forth in his works and in his creatures everywhere, men ought in these to acknowledge him, for they clearly set forth their Maker.”<sup>19</sup>
- 2) Psalm 19:1-6 presents a similar paradox. The creation of God “tells” and “declares,” v. 1; it “pours forth speech” and “reveals knowledge,” v. 2; yet, “there is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard,” v. 3. Hence the Psalmist is describing the deafening proclamation of the silent heavens. As Spurgeon notes, “Sun, moon, and stars are God’s traveling preachers; they are apostles upon their journey confirming those who regard the Lord, and judges on circuit condemning those who worship idols.”<sup>20</sup>
- 3) Since the creation of the world, even before the Fall, God’s expressed glory has been “clearly seen” in that same creation. It is not a dimly perceived vista, but a brilliant display that even now shines through even the disorder that corruption had brought about. However, it is a clarity with limitation, for this revelation is not of saving grace, but transcendent greatness and intricate design.

## (c) His visible obligating attributes, v. 20c.

As a consequence, man, as described in v. 18, is without excuse. The assumption here is that man denies the force of this general revelation by offering countless reasons for his godless lifestyle; but this denial is unreasonable, irrational, and the greatest foolishness. In spite of these excuses, God denies their validity in the light of the evidence in creation

---

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 70.

<sup>20</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, I, p. 306.

alone.<sup>21</sup> Here then we are led to consider in the verses that follow man's innate hatred of God which causes him to oppose the most compelling evidence and perversely deny the natural order of things (Isa. 5:20).

(3) God in the heart is renounced, v. 21.

We now commence a descent into the vortex of the heart of sinful man. The rebellious rejection of evidence in v. 20 leads us to enquire as to what is at the root of this problem. It is more profound in its dark complexity that we could possibly imagine. Man is not merely in a state of denial, but rather he militantly opposes God at every hand (Ps. 2:1-3). Jonathan Edwards has a significant sermon on this matter entitled, "Men Naturally Are God's enemies" in which he declares:

[Men] are enemies in the natural relish of their souls. They have an inbred distaste and disrelish of God's perfections. God is not such a being as they would have. Though they are ignorant of God; yet from what they hear of him, *and from what is manifest by the light of nature* [emphasis added], they do not like him. By his being endowed with such attributes as he is, they have an aversion to him. They hear God is an infinitely holy, pure, and righteous Being, and they do not like him upon this account; they have no relish of such qualifications: they take no delight in contemplating them. It would be a mere task, a bondage to a natural man, to be obliged to set himself to contemplate those attributes of God. They see no manner of beauty or loveliness, nor taste any sweetness, in them. And on account of their distaste of these perfections, they dislike all his other attributes. They have great aversion to him because he is omniscient and knows all things; and because his omniscience is a holy omniscience. They are not pleased that he is omnipotent, and can do whatever he pleases; because it is a holy omnipotence. They are enemies even to his mercy, because it is a holy mercy. They do not like his immutability, because by this he will never be otherwise than he is, an infinitely holy God.<sup>22</sup>

(a) Through increasing dishonor, v. v. 21a

Here is an expansion upon the thought of man's inexcusability. "Knowing God [through the witness of creation], they did not glorify [honor] Him as God." Thus there is a vast gulf between the acknowledgment of God and love for God; He calls for praise and esteem, not grudging patronage. Yet to first concede that God is, and then attempt to contrive denial of Him, is to grossly insult Him; it is "ingratitude" as Paul here states, concerning our being and the world around us, of the highest order. It is like a child attempting to deny his known parentage and resultant upbringing. Lloyd-Jones writes: "Man does not thank God for His mercy, for His goodness, for all His dealings with us in providence. We take the sunshine for granted; we are annoyed if we do not get it. We take the rain for granted. . . . He is 'the Father of mercies'; and yet people go through the whole of their

---

<sup>21</sup> Refer to James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, I, pp. 153-60, where he deals with many common excuses such as lack of evidence, the heathen, the truthfulness of the Bible, the problem of evil, etc.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, II, p. 131.

lives and they never thank Him; they ignore Him completely. That is how they show their attitude towards God. In this way they suppress the truth that has been revealed concerning God.”<sup>23</sup>

(b) Through futile speculations, v. 21b.

Man’s condemnation here is heightened when it is understood that he “reasons” or “speculates,” albeit vainly, so that the God of Scripture might be dethroned. In other words, with premeditation, man purposely distances himself from God. This he does by means of philosophic and abstract metaphysical reasoning. So Edwards declares: “The natural tendency of the heart of man is to fly from God, and keep at a distance from him, as far off as possible.”<sup>24</sup> This attitude was evident when man determined to eliminate the Son of God and thus gain his “inheritance” (Luke 20:14; cf. John 1:10).

(c) Through darkening foolishness, v. 21c.

Foolish speculation leads to darkness which man finds acceptable. This fellowship in darkness leads to a pursuit for increasing degrees of darkness, as the following context suggests. Confronted with the light, man prefers darkness (John 3:19; cf. Eph. 4:17-19). Of course to such men, this darkness is light, and therefore the most intense and binding darkness (Matt. 6:23; John 9:41).

(4) God in glory is debased, vs. 22-23.

More specifically, how was God dishonored by means of foolish speculation according to v. 21? This raises the perspective of God by the Apostle Paul as being honorable, that is glorious in incorruption, or in a word, *holy*. Thus man degraded God to an unholy level, as was the case when Israel sinned at the foot of Mount Sinai, in His very presence (Ex. 32:1-10).

(a) His glory is exchanged for foolishness, v. 22.

- 1) “Asserting [themselves] to be wise” describes man as promoting his cleverness in the realm of theology, as he distances himself from God.
  - a) Through humanistic philosophy and arrogant scholarship.
  - b) Through progressive, evolutionary, cultural elitism.
  - c) Through rhetoric, oratory, and clever reasoning.

---

<sup>23</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 1:1-32*, p. 382.

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, *Works*, II, p. 131.

## d) Illustration. Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments:

Instead of accepting revelation they became philosophers. And what is a philosopher? A philosopher is a man who starts by being skeptical about everything. That he is an agnostic. ‘I am going to have the data’, he says, ‘and then I am going to apply my mind to it. I am going to reason it out and I am going to work it out’. And that is exactly what such men have done; they became foolish and wicked in their reasonings, in their thoughts, in their own conjectures and speculations and surmisings.<sup>25</sup>

And surely liberal theology and much of modern biblical criticism have been but children of this movement.

- 2) Yet in this boasted man-made advance comes the opposite result, that is man-made foolishness or ungodliness. The word μωραίνω, mōrainō, here is used in Matthew 5:13 of salt losing its savor, and in I Corinthians 1:20 of God making foolish the wisdom of this world. However here it is man making a fool of himself.
- 3) Application. Man became like Esau, skillful in the realm of the earthy, yet foolish in his carnal reasoning that cost him his birthright and disfavor with God (Gen. 25:27-34; Mal. 1:2-3; Heb. 12:16-17).

## (b) His incorruption is exchanged for corruption, v. 23.

In view of Paul’s exalted understanding of God, the extent of man’s foolishness is now described as seemingly incomprehensible, the height of madness, involving the most irrational transaction in the history of the human race.

## 1) The only true and living creator God.

Paul speaks of “the glory of the incorruptible God,” which confession is pregnant with transcendent and holy meaning (I Tim. 1:17; 6:14-16).

## a) His glory.

This δόξα, doxa, describes the weight of magnificence of God’s person, that is the fulness of His attributes.

## b) His incorruption.

Focus is brought upon His righteous and undefiled character, or His holiness, so worthy of reverence and admiration.

---

<sup>25</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 1:1-32, p. 377.

## 2) The hierarchy of created beings.

There seems to be a descending order here whereby man is portrayed as increasingly degenerate; he plumbs the depths of corrupt worship seeking ever more novel ways of debauched religion. This plunge of mankind may also be reflected in architecture, music, art, literature, etc., though the focus here is upon religion.

## a) Man.

His worship of “an image in the firm of corruptible man” is but subtle self-worship, especially evident in Greek and Roman idolatrous human imagery. In worshiping works of human representation made by his hands, man in fact worships his own sinful image in his desire for non-threatening religion; his creativity here is sinful artistry.

## b) Animals.

*Birds*, the ibis; *quadrupeds*, the bull, cat, cow, hippopotamus, wolf; *crawling creatures*, the crocodile, snake, scarab (dung) beetle.

## 3) The incredible trade-off.

The realm of the absurd is now entered whereby man trades wealth for rubbish, beauty for ashes, truth for error, light for darkness. Man attempts to divorce God, to force His abdication, and establish his own reign (Ps. 2:1-3).

## a) The example of Israel.

God’s people exchanged a cast metal calf for their saving God (Ps. 106:19-21), a fountain of living water for broken cisterns (Jer. 2:11-13), the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12-13; Matt. 27:3-10).

## b) The exchange of God for man.

Robert Mounce comments:

The essential sin which gives rise to idolatry is selfishness. When a man creates his own god he can control it. It exists for his own pleasure and profit. This sort of god requires from him no particular standard of ethical or moral behavior. To worship an idol is ultimately to worship oneself. Idolatry is self-deification. Disguised as a religious exercise, idolatry finds wide approval as an acceptable form of worship. It debases

because it obscures the revealed purpose of God and leads man to the blind conclusion that he can worship himself as a viable substitute.<sup>26</sup>

2. Wrath is upon the ungodly who God abandons, vs. 24-32.

Whereas vs. 20-23 describe man's active and persistent rebellion against general revelation in creation, now God's response is described in a three-fold declaration of His "handing over" of sinful mankind to the fulfillment of unbridled desires. Such abandonment is reminiscent of God's "handing over" of Israel to its lusting for exotic food in the wilderness (Num. 11:1-34, especially vs. 18-20). Notice that in all three instances, vs. 24, 26, 28, outward sinful actions originate from lustful hearts, degrading passions, depraved minds.

a. God abandons the ungodly to their lustful hearts, vs. 24-25.

There is a judicial and punitive sense involved here. God delivers men in sin over to punishment by means of the affliction of their own sin (Ps. 7:12-16). For man, he discovers that the supposed sweetness of his sin turns to bitterness; his pleasure becomes a gnawing cancer. John Murray comments: "God's displeasure is expressed in his abandonment of the persons concerned to more intensified and aggravated cultivation of the lusts of their own hearts with the result that they reap for themselves a correspondingly greater toll of retributive vengeance."<sup>27</sup>

(1) Abandonment to carnal corruption, v. 24.

- (a) Defilement by means of sexual perversion, lewd revelry, and cultic prostitution seem to be indicated here. It is as if mankind, not at peace in his sinning because of God's troubling of his conscience, says "Leave me alone; let me indulge my sin undisturbed; cease from convicting me." To this God eventually responds, "All right, I will abandon you, confront you no more, and withdraw the offer of grace."
- (b) Notice that here we deal with lusting in the realm of the natural order, the misuse of revealed sexual functions; but in v. 26 we descend into the even lower regions of human depravity, that is the invention of unnatural functions, the reversal of God's plan for the union of a man and a woman.

(2) Abandonment to creature worship, v. 25.

- (a) Here we see how man's perversity robs himself of objectivity; where the advancement of self is concerned, truth becomes dispensable and error preferable. Here Paul defines man's devolution rather than evolution, his decline into pantheistic humanism, which only the gospel can reverse (I Thess. 1:9). Man arrogantly prefers the worship of himself and the

<sup>26</sup> Robert Mounce, *Themes From Romans*, p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> Murray, *Romans*, I, pp. 44-45.

gods of his own making rather than the worship of God, and when such self-idolatry reaches a certain extremity, God responds as He did with Israel, “Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone” (Hos. 4:17). In his desire for autonomy, God consigns man to the tyranny of human rule. While, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31), it is infinitely worse to then be abandoned by that same God.

- (b) However, Paul cannot allow even his mere mention of human defamation of the great Jehovah to stand alone. Rather, by way of contrast, he must eulogize and praise the transcendent glory of God by calling Him “blessed,” εὐλογητός, eulogētos, and “forever.”

b. God abandons the ungodly to sexual perversion, vs. 26-27.

Here Paul does not merely describe another category of sin, but rather a plummeting of mankind into the deepest crevices of human corruption, that which is unnatural, the reversal of natural sexual functions, the defiance of God’s creative purposes. In general, this extremity of sinning causes God to abandon mankind to this sewer form of existence. However, this is not to deny that His mercy reaches down even to such perverted depths, as the Apostle indicates in I Corinthians 6:9-11, that is when the repentant cry is like that which Charles Wesley describes:

Depth of mercy! Can there be  
 Mercy still reserved for me?  
 Can my God His wrath forbear?  
 Me, the chief of sinners, spare?  
 I have long withstood His grace,  
 Long provoked Him to His face,  
 Would not hearken to His calls,  
 Grieved Him by a thousand falls.  
 Pity from Thine eye let fall;  
 By a look my soul recall;  
 Now the stone of flesh convert,  
 Cast a look, and break my heart.

(1) Abandonment to unnatural lesbianism, v. 26.

- (a) Why does Paul mention women first? Charles Hodge answers: “Paul first refers to the degradation of females among the heathen, because they are always the last to be affected in the decay of morals, and their corruption is therefore proof that all virtue is lost.”<sup>28</sup>
- (b) The Apostle does not hesitate to describe this relationship as a “degrading passion,” that is a lustful attraction often mistakenly called love. Contrary to some modern opinions which give precedence to love

---

<sup>28</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on The Epistle To The Romans*, p. 42.

over holiness in the character of God, such homosexuality is illicit because it is first unholy and an inversion of the natural order of sexual relations. Further, it is an arrogant attempt by woman to turn from her dependance upon man.

(2) Abandonment to unnatural homosexuality, v. 27.

- (a) There may be the inference here that man neglectfully turned from his loving headship role over woman (Eph. 5:25) with the result that woman turned to woman.
- (b) Elsewhere in the Bible homosexuality is plainly condemned (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; I Cor. 6:9; I Tim. 1:9-10). However, in contemporary Christendom attempts have been made to avoid the obvious here, especially with the claim that idolatrous cult prostitution is described rather than a “loving” relationship.<sup>29</sup>
- (c) Note that such a relationship involves “burning desire” (cf. Gen. 19:5) which Paul does not describe as natural or inherited, as if the homosexual was not responsible for his depraved cravings, but unnatural. On the contrary, such lusting remains unnatural, as is the case with pedophilia and bestiality. However, it must be born in mind that this present sensual age is more affected by the rationale of indulgent feelings rather than truth and righteousness.
- (d) Such perversion reaps a designer reward, a recompense tailored to justly frustrate the sinner by turning his “delightful” sin into vexing punishment. This was the case with Haman’s commensurate punishment when hung on the gallows he had fiendishly prepared for Mordecai (Esther 5:14; 7:10). So homosexuals “receive in their own persons the due penalty of their error,” that is a variety of consequences including a violent and perverse lifestyle, reduced longevity, fearful diseases including Aids that offer the prospect of an agonizing death.
- (e) Again, as with the lesbian, we do not declare God’s abandonment to be absolute because homosexuals are converted and their desires can be reversed as specialist Christian ministries prove.

c. God abandons the ungodly to depraved minds, vs. 28-32.

Man’s fundamental problem is his mind; above all else he has a mental disease that is the controlling influence in his existence. Everything else, his actions, motives, pursuits all flow from this root cause, so that he is mentally futile in his

---

<sup>29</sup> In this regard a most blatant and biased article titled “homosexuality” is published by Inter-Varsity Press in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Especially note the concluding comment regarding the Apostle Paul’s teaching: “His three scattered references [to homosexuality] fit together in an impressive way as an expression of God’s will as he saw it,” II, p. 657.

pursuits (Eph. 4:17), mentally hostile toward righteousness (Col. 1:21), and mentally defiled (Tit. 1:15). His only hope is a renewed mind (Rom. 12:2), the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16). However, man's predicament escalates, like a growing tumor that spreads corruption, while at the same time he claims to be perfectly healthy in his mind, never better. To such willful and increasingly entrenched blindness, such intense depravity in the mind that reaches its climax in v. 32, God eventually responds with His abandonment of man to his flaunted lifestyle. Such an overall way of mentally perverted living is now described.

(1) Abandonment to immoral behavior, v. 28.

- (a) The assumption here is that man, though fallen, yet had a basically orthodox understanding of God in his mind (cf. 2:15). However, the mental sin tumor enlarged causing mankind "not to think it worthwhile to focus on the true knowledge [ἐπίγνωσις, epignōsis,] of God any more," but rather false images, mental delusions.
- (b) Consequently God responds by abandoning such men to this ingrained madness, that is those who are so advanced in their disease and thoroughly enamored with it. Such reprobates are punished by being left to their folly, namely consignment to innumerable wares and enticements at Vanity Fair where, claiming to see, they are left to the imprisonment of their darkness (John 9:40-41).

(2) Abandonment to a variety of sin, vs. 29-31.

Here is a symphony of sin comprised of various sinful symptoms or instrumentalities that are all used to play the Satan's music. They are indications of man's mental disease. Every sinner has his skilled speciality just as there are skilled specialists in an orchestra. That these are especially artful sinners is indicated by their description as being "filled" or highly proficient. The following three-fold division is based upon grammatical considerations.<sup>30</sup>

(a) Four sins commencing with "unrighteousness," v. 29a.

"Unrighteousness" focuses on unholiness, ungodliness, essential sin, with the following three being resultant.

(b) Five sins commencing with "envy," v. 29b.

The "fullness" of their corruption is manifest in the way their energy is so devoted toward these particular sins.

---

<sup>30</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 95, n.

- (c) Twelve sins commencing with “gossip,” v. 29c.

The focus here is upon vocal, high-handed opposition that rages against civil standards and God Himself.

- (3) Abandonment to the promotion of sin, v. 32.

- (a) As pagan men indulge themselves in the aforementioned catalog of 21 representative sins, what is their moral state of mind? Certainly there is no ground for exoneration, as if they were ignorant, since they are “knowing well [ἐπιγνόντες, epignontes] the righteous decree of God.” The emphasis here is upon present awareness, thus Murray observes: “The most degraded of men, degraded because judicially abandoned by God, are not destitute of the knowledge of God and of his righteous judgments [soul-hardening efforts notwithstanding]. In terms of 2:14-15, conscience asserts itself.”<sup>31</sup>
- (b) However this knowledge is inclusive not only of the fact of sin, but also guilt before God and its consequences, namely death, akin to the civil death penalty that also has spiritual ramifications (cf. 6:23). This penal judgment is readily acknowledged by man to be his due; further, he is unashamedly culpable, and at the same time a braggart about his exploits.
- (c) Yet the bottom of the barrel has still not been reached, for it is one thing to be personally intoxicated with sin and quite another to boldly, arrogantly, and enthusiastically promote such a cause amongst others. This is most offensive of all to Paul for the reason that it reflects man’s unholy attempt to storm the holy ramparts of heaven, to instigate a rebellion of the most insolent proportions. Certain deep-dyed sinners are content to debase themselves in relative isolation, but not here. Rather, the energetic advancement of human depravity is applauded. It is like the contemporary “gay pride” promotion of the homosexual community.
- (d) Illustration. Dr. James Montgomery Boice relates:

Dr. John Gerstner, Professor Emeritus of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, was teaching about the depravity of man, and to make his point he compared men and women to rats. After he had finished his address there was a question-and-answer period, and someone who had been offended by the comparison asked Gerstner to apologize. Gerstner did. “I do apologize,” he said. I apologize profusely. The comparison was terribly unfair . . . to the rats.” He then went on to show that what a rat does, it does by the gifts of God that make it ratlike. It does not sin. But we, when we behave like rats, behave worse than we should and even worse than rats. We are worse than “beasts” in our behavior.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Romans 1-4*, p. 198.

## B. THE JEWS ARE THOROUGH SINNERS, 2:1-3:8

The identification of the addressees of the section that follows, especially in vs. 1-16, is of vital importance. Clearly Paul anticipates that many who have read thus far would have been disturbed at such an ugly revelation of the pagan world. They would have been eager to distance themselves from such revolting barbarism, as well as Greek and Roman debauchery. Who then might react this way? Obviously the religious who are moralistic would likely object. And it is for this reason, along with other more specific matters, that most commentators believe that in general, Paul primarily has the Jews in mind. This is not to deny that Paul has Gentiles in mind who are attending the church at Rome (cf. 2:9-10; 3:9; 7:1; 11:13). Yet the argument at this point strongly focuses on the self-righteous Jew for the following major reasons. First, according to Murray, “the propensity to judge the Gentiles for their religious and moral perversity was peculiarly characteristic of the Jew.”<sup>33</sup> Second, v. 4 suggests by implication the Jews as being the objects of God’s kindness, while vs. 9-10 lead up to the explicit statement of v. 17. Third, as Moo points out, “In 1:18-32, Paul describes those people whom he accuses of perverting their knowledge of God (Gentiles, primarily) in the third person: “they” turned away from God; God handed “them” over. In chap. 2, however, it is the second person singular, “you,” that Paul uses in making his accusation (2:1-5, 17-29).”<sup>34</sup>

## 1. The Jews’ accountability before God, vs. 1-16.

It is common for man to judge categories of sin according to certain outward features and physical manifestations, and describe them as perverted, savage, disgusting, and uncivilized. Whereas other crimes that are void of violence and brutality are regarded to be less serious. So Paul now addresses this problem in the light of the preceding catalog of such repulsive wickedness. The moralistic Jew would readily express self-righteous outrage at such a loathsome scene. However, God looks on the condition of the heart and judges intent, not mere symptoms (I Sam. 16:7). Thus it would be true to suggest that Christ’s greatest condemnation fell of the Scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees rather than the criminal element of Jerusalem (Matt. 23:1-39).

## a. The impartial judgment of the Jew, vs. 1-4.

Like Nathan the prophet who jolted King David with his accusatory declaration, “You are the man!” (II Sam. 12:7), so Paul now startles the Jew with a similar charge of serious guilt, notwithstanding his smug claim to relative civility. Dr. J. Gresham Machen recounts a French novel titled *The Disciple* by Paul Bourget.

It describes . . . the simple and austere life of a noted philosopher and psychologist. He was engrossed altogether in the things of the mind. His lodging was up four flights of stairs. His daily existence was an inevitable routine. Coffee at six o’clock, lunch or breakfast at ten, walk until noon, work until four, visits of scholars and students three times a week from four to six, dinner at six, short walk, bed promptly at ten. An inoffensive, scholarly man if there ever was one, a man who, in the words of his caretaker, “wouldn’t hurt a fly.” But one day this peaceful routine was strangely broken into. The philosopher was summoned to a criminal inquest. A

<sup>33</sup> Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 125.

former pupil of his was accused of murder. He had been a brilliant young man, who had climbed those four flights of stairs full of enthusiasm for what he regarded as liberating doctrines only too well. In the prison he wrote an account of his life for the eye of his revered master. In it the abstract becomes concrete. The terrible story is told of the way in which those supposedly liberating doctrines work out in actual practice.<sup>35</sup>

Who was the greater sinner, the violent student of his philosopher master?

(1) For their practice, vs. 1-3.

In considering the declared similarity of the Jews' sins with those of the Gentiles, one formal difference ought to be noted and that is the Jews' penchant for cloaking their transgressions in contrast with the more open display of the pagan world. This point is especially implicit in 2:21-23, 28-29, Matthew 23:25-28.

(a) Of Gentile sins, v. 1.

- 1) The “therefore” probably connects us with the major thought of 1:18-19, that is that the Jews qualify for judgment since they are, with the Gentiles, involved in “all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” In judging they have a standard by which their own sin is judged. Thus they are sinners of the same kind, who sin just as the Gentiles do, and this is confirmed by their hypocritical spirit of judgment.<sup>36</sup>
- 2) The Jew is “without excuse,” just as is the Gentile, 1:20, though on the grounds of greater accountability, 2:4, 9, 24.
- 3) But how can it be said that the Jews “practice the same things” as the Gentiles? Most likely Paul is referring to the catalog of sins in 1:29-31, which he on other occasions attributed in a similar way to society that included Judaism (Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5, 8; I Tim. 1:9-10; II Tim. 3:2-4).

(b) Of God-defined sins, v. 2.

- 1) A more literal translation here reads, “Now we know that the judgment of God is according to truth [the real facts], on those practicing such things.” The inference is that, in contrast with the partial judgment of the Jew in v. 1, God is impartial as v. 11 confirms. Because of God's omniscience, there must be agreement on the part of the Jews that God has all of the facts at hand, and thus His verdict is more reliable, indeed unimpeachable.

---

<sup>35</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>36</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 129-130.

- 2) Illustration. Following John Bunyan's imprisonment for preaching at an illegal conventicle (assembly) in 1660, his trials before several magistrates proved to be less than the epitome of British justice. Later his wife made an impassioned plea before several judges as follows:<sup>37</sup>

*Wom.* He preacheth nothing but the Word of God, said she.

*Twis.* He preach the Word of God! said *Twisdon*; and withal she thought he would have struck her; he runneth up and down, and doth harm.

*Wom.* No, my Lord, said she, it's not so; God hath owned him, and done much good by him.

*Twis.* God! said he; his doctrine is the doctrine of the devil.

*Wom.* My Lord, said she, when the righteous Judge shall appear, it will be known that his doctrine is not the doctrine of the devil.

(c) Of inescapable sins, v. 3.

- 1) "Hear me again, oh religious man! Follow my reasoning, consider the consequences of what I just proposed, v. 2, which you undoubtedly agree with. If you sin as the pagan does, and you certainly do, then how can you possibly escape from the universal, impartial Judge?"
- 2) So Paul raises the question of the natural man's inclination to hypocrisy, to regard himself as a modest sinner in the light of all of the big sinners out there! Why does a man regard himself as a modest sinner? Because he considers himself to be religious, pious, righteous, spiritually advanced, knowledgeable, moral, according to his *own* estimate.
- 3) But Paul pricks this empty bubble with the substance of his logic. If the pagans won't escape according to their actions, then neither will the Jew. The true judgment of God, v. 2, will find the religious man wanting; his boasted flimsy covering will be stripped away so as to leave him naked, exposed, cringing in guilt before God.

(2) For their presumption, vs. 4.

Paul now asks another rhetorical question which addresses the matter of the history of Israel and its rebellious attitude toward God, particularly its shameful presumption toward God's covenant faithfulness and forbearance, as reflected in Nehemiah 9:5-31.

- (a) The Jew took God's "kindness" and "forbearance" and "patience" for granted and confused it with "just acceptance." His "temporary

---

<sup>37</sup> John Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 61.

tolerance” or “truce” was mistakenly understood as “reconciliation” and “peace.”<sup>38</sup>

- (b) Why did God patiently wait upon Israel while it arrogantly persisted in sin? It was His desire that such an extended opportunity would be an encouragement to repentance. So Peter alludes to this teaching of Paul in II Peter 3:15, “and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you.” But God’s people wilfully ignored this hiatus of grace, this long pause of mercy, being contemptuously persuaded that repentance was not necessary
- (c) What is the repentance that is sought? It is a “change of thinking” regarding personal sin in particular, man, God, Christ, the Bible, etc. that issues forth in saving faith and resultant godliness. Does God call all men to repent? Yes (Acts 17:30). Can man naturally repent? No (Heb. 12:16-17). Is true repentance a gift of God? Yes, even as is faith (II Tim. 2:24-25). Is it man’s responsibility to repent? Yes (Acts 26:20). If a man will not repent, then what? Judgment (Matt. 11:20-22).
- (d) Illustration. Stephen Charnock comments:

All the notices and warnings that God gives men, of either public or personal calamities, is a continual invitation to repentance. . . . [God’s longsuffering] doth, as it were, take us by the hand, and point us to the way wherein we should go. . . . His patience stands between the offending creature and eternal misery a long time, that men might not foolishly throw away their souls, and be damned for their impenitency.<sup>39</sup>

- b. The impartial judgment of Jew and Gentile, v. 5-16.

The warning of certain judgment for *all* men, introduced in v. 3, now dominates Paul’s exhortation in vs. 5-16. The anomaly here is that whereas the pagan, with a less definitive revelation of God’s righteous demands, needs no such warning, yet the Jew, “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,” 9:4, needs a severe wake-up call, akin to being severely hit over the head with a piece of two by four.

- (1) God’s universal justice, vs. 5-10.

Whereas the Jew was forever making distinctions between himself and the Gentile, that is with regard to his racial superiority according to divine right, Paul is at pains to point out that in terms of His righteous demands, God is not so discriminatory. His election of Israel was unto holiness (Deut. 7:6-8; 14:2).

---

<sup>38</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Charnock, *Works*, II, pp. 526, 527.

(a) This justice accumulates to the Jew first, v. 5.

- 1) God's patience presents a storehouse of gracious opportunity to the heart that is penitent. However, at the same time, the impenitent accumulate a storehouse of indignation that shall be inherited at the final day of judgment. For the impenitent, that day will be "the day of wrath;" for the penitent, that day will usher in "glory and honor and immortality, eternal life," v. 7, cf. v. 10.
- 2) Paul seems to recall the proverbial obstinacy and hard-heartedness of Israel which Stephen condemned in Acts 7:51, 53. But a day is coming of final settlement, and no one will be excluded from divine scrutiny (Rev. 20:11-15). Then will come that "revelation" and "righteous judgment" which is according to truth, that lifting of the lid whereby the "secrets of men" will be exposed, v. 16.
- 3) Illustration. Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments:

That is the day. The day the books will be opened and all this wrath that men have been treasuring up for themselves will be produced in evidence against them. They will be punished. And what will be revealed . . . is the righteous judgment of God. Nobody will have any complaint; everybody will see God's righteous judgment. And that is why the Book of Revelation tells us earlier that some people, when they see it, will say to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us' [Rev. 6:16]. There will be no excuse; there will be no plea. God's judgment is always according to truth, and on that great day the truth, the righteousness, the justice will be finally revealed.<sup>40</sup>

(b) This justice accumulates to the Jew first and the Gentile, vs. 6-10.

For the authentic Christian, these five verses have presented a seeming serious problem since, on the surface they seem to conflict with the essence of the Gospel, namely that the repentant and believing sinner is saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ's merits to the total exclusion of human deeds, (3:21, 24; 4:1-25; Gal. 2:15-16; 3:11; Eph. 2:8-9). Now undoubtedly this is the true gospel, so what in reality does Paul mean here? Recall that, as we have already seen, Paul is addressing the presumptuous Jew, especially as indicated in vs. 4-5. So at this point it is no use describing judgment in gospel and grace terms to this religious person who does not understand the gospel or grace. So leaving the gospel aside, Paul describes the outward justification of man as the self-righteous Jew will understand, namely the judgment of his works, whether good or bad. The good deeds here are in fact authenticating or external justification based on free justification (Eph. 2:8-10); the bad

---

<sup>40</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 2:1-3:20*, p. 73.

deeds are also authenticating of judgment without grace (Rev. 20:11-15).<sup>41</sup>

- 1) It is established in the Old Testament, v. 6.
  - a) In quoting Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12, Paul addresses the Jew on his own ground, that of the Hebrew Scriptures. However the declaration concerning “every man” is universally encompassing, and infers that the God of Israel is the moral Sovereign of the universe; in view of vs. 9-10, clearly Paul has this wider perspective. Yet for the Jew who hears Paul’s exhortation, the issue is not covenantal security via circumcision, but “deeds” that are pleasing to God.
  - b) The New Testament makes several references to the fact that God’s judgment will be according to human works (Matt. 7:21; 16:27; 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; II Cor. 5:10; 11:15; Gal. 6:7-9; II Tim. 4:14; I Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 22:12). Certainly the unbeliever will be judged by his faithless deeds, his ungodly deeds, his unholy deeds. But so will the nominal child of God, and even the genuine child of God. In the latter instance, this fruit will be judged as validation, such as in Matthew 7:15-20, where the expectation of a good fruit tree is that it produce good fruit.
- 2) It recognizes heart righteousness, v. 7.
  - a) God’s righteous judgment delights in and approves of those who “obey the truth,” in contrast with those who “disobey the truth,” v. 8. To “obey the truth” is to respond to the gospel (Gal. 5:7) with a life of virtue and holy affections, akin to “the obedience of faith,” 1:5; 16:26.
  - b) This is a grace response, not a legal performance, even though the gospel is not made prominent. Here are the distinguishing responses of a true child of God that are reflective of the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-13). There is perseverance (Matt. 24:13; Heb. 3:14), unlike the seed that falls on rocky ground (Matt. 13:20-21); there is desire for the glory to come (5:2; 8:18-23), honor or recognition (II Tim. 2:19-21), immortality or incorruption (I Cor. 15:50-53 ), and eternal life in its consummate sense as intimate union with God (I John 5:20). God’s judgment will be, “Well done, ood and faithful servant” (Matt. 5:14-30).

---

<sup>41</sup> For helpful comment on this whole problem refer to MacArthur, pp. 125-130; Moo, pp. 139-144; Morris, pp. 147-149; Shedd, pp. 38-39.

- c) Leon Morris describes those approved of God as follows:

Their trust is in God, not in their own achievement. He [Paul] refers to those whose lives are oriented in a certain way. Their minds are not set on material prosperity or the like, nor on happiness, nor even on being religious. They are set on glory and honor and immortality, qualities which come from a close walk with God. The bent of their lives is on heavenly things.<sup>42</sup>

- 3) It recognizes heart unrighteousness, v. 8.

a) God's righteous judgment is displeased with and disapproves of those who "disobey the truth," whether for the Jew it be the Law written on tables of stone, or for the Gentile it be the Law written on the conscience (2:12, 14-15). After the manner of 1:25, truth is wilfully jettisoned while unrighteousness is embraced, the inevitable result being the outpouring of God's "wrath and indignation."

b) Here God is offended, even intensely angry with bold sinners, not merely irritated. The focus here is upon God's "wrath," ὀργή, orgē, reflected in active judgment (v. 5; Col. 3:5-6), His outward emotion, and "indignation," θυμός thumos, illustrated by the Jew's rage against Christ at Nazareth (Luke 4:28-29), His inner revulsion. John Gill comments: The wrath of God is *the heat of his great anger* (Deut. 29:24); it is his anger not only kindled and incensed, but blown up into a flame; it is the *indignation* of his anger, the *fury* and *fierceness* of it (Isa. 30:30; 42:25; Hos. 11:9).<sup>43</sup> This divine abhorrence to sin will ultimately confront all men except a just means of placation be provided for the repentant sinner.

- 4) It is rewarding to the unrighteous, v. 9.

a) There is repetition here concerning God's nondiscrim-inatory justice, yet emphasis is placed upon the *experience* of His wrath and resultant *feelings*. Hence the souls of the wicked will undergo "tribulation," θλίψις, thlipsis, anguish and affliction, as well as "distress," στενοχωρία, stenochōria, stressful confinement (cf. Rom. 8:35; II Cor. 6:4 where Christians have similar feelings). The fact that they will have like company will offer no consolation, as the ungodly often glibly claim.

b) First the Jew, on account of his high accountability (Jer. 25:29; Amos 3:2), and then the Gentile, representing the

<sup>42</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>43</sup> John Gill, *A Body Of Doctrinal And Practical Divinity*, p. 69.

whole human race, will have their sin exposed and condemned. The Jew will not be able to claim exoneration through Abraham; the Gentile will not be able to claim ignorance as a mitigating circumstance.

5) It is rewarding to the righteous, v. 10.

- a) Again there is repetition here, but added to “glory and honor” is “peace,” holy contentment, the experience of soul bliss at being the object of God’s approval. But does this whole fulness of blessing come *because* a person “does good”? No, in terms of “doing good” being a justifying ground of obtaining acceptance with God. Yes, but only in the sense that a father is pleased *because* his son does good; however, this “doing good” in no way obtains sonship, it merely reflects it.
- b) Again, in blessing, the Jew is to have priority, and this may well have prophetic significance for Paul (11:12). Commenting on Revelation 16, Jonathan Edwards writes concerning the future of the nation of Israel:

Without doubt, they will return to their own land; because when their unbelief ceases, their dispersion, the dreadful and signal punishment of their unbelief, will cease too. As they have continued hitherto, with one consent, to dishonor Christ by rejecting the gospel, so shall they meet together to honor him, by openly professing of it with one mouth, and practice it with one heart and one soul, together lamenting their obstinacy, as it is said they shall (Zech. 12:11-12), and together praising God for his grace in enlightening them. And as they have hitherto continued a distinct nation, that they might continue a visible monument of his displeasure, for their rejecting and crucifying their Messiah, so after their conversion will they still be a distinct nation, that they may be a visible monument of God’s wonderful grace and power in their calling and conversion.<sup>44</sup>

(2) God’s nondiscriminatory justice, vs. 11-16.

In mentioning God’s certain judgment of both Jew and Gentile in vs. 8-9, Paul has raised a problem that continues to be asserted today with the oft heard question, “What will happen to the heathen, those who have not heard the revelation of the gospel, or even Scripture?” The implication is often that God would not judge those with diminished responsibility. So Paul responds here with the explanation that the Gentiles are indeed responsible for their sin.

---

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, V, p. 135.

(a) It is intrinsic to His nature, v. 11.

- 1) Illustration. As John MacArthur comments, this impartiality is like “the popular symbolic statue of justice . . . a woman blindfolded, signifying that she is unable to see who is before her to be judged and therefore is not tempted to be partial for or against the accused. Sometimes she is also pictured with her hands tied, suggesting she cannot receive a bribe.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, as Abraham well understood (Gen. 18:25), God, being omniscient and holy, is fair with all of mankind.
- 2) God will judge Israel according to righteousness, and not with deference to its favored elect status or responsibility in being the custodian of His Law. As He is (Acts 10:34), so He commands (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 10:17). Likewise with the Gentile, God’s righteousness will fall on him with the same impartiality. However, note that God is partial and discriminatory in election, the distinction being that His sovereign choice of certain sinners unto life is always just through holy, justifying grace.

(b) It is according to appropriate revelation, v. 12.

- 1) The term “Law” here refers specifically to the Jewish Torah or first five books of the Old Testament; this is the meaning of 90 percent of Paul’s use of this term.<sup>46</sup> Therefore the first statement in this verse refers to all who are not under its dominion, specifically the pagan world. Yet in not having Moses to guide them, the Gentiles still suffer the wages of sin, just as the Jew does. Paul is making a categorical statement that though the Gentiles do not have the Torah, yet they are accountable in terms of having offended God’s righteousness. But how can this be? Clearly from v. 11 we conclude that this judgment of “perishing” must be equitable. But by what means then does the Gentile have any knowledge of God’s righteous demands while being ignorant of the Law?
- 2) On the other hand, “all who have sinned under [with] the Law” obviously refers to Israel being especially accountable as a transgressing nation. In Luke 12:41-48 the Lord Jesus particularly addresses this point of greater responsibility. But why is the Jew to be *judged* while the Gentile *perishes*? What meaning distinguishes these words? Lloyd-Jones answers:

It is that the standard which God applies to the Jew is a higher and a severer standard than that which He applies to the Gentile. Now that does not make any difference to their ultimate destiny, but it

---

<sup>45</sup> John MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>46</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 145 n.

does seem to indicate that there is a difference in the punishment. God demands more of the Jew than the Gentile because He has given him the law.<sup>47</sup>

- 3) The overall point here is the reiteration of that already pressed home in 1:18; 2:6-10, namely the inevitable judgment by God of the whole human race. But further, as Moo concludes, “It is clear from these verses [vs. 11-12] that Paul argues for universal human sinfulness, and a sinfulness of such a nature that condemnation must be the outcome.”<sup>48</sup>
- (c) It is based on doing rather than hearing, v. 13.
- 1) In simple terms, what counts is not so much having the Law as was Israel’s privilege, or the reading of the Law as was the custom in Synagogues, or even the hearing of the Law every Sabbath by the Jewish populace, but the doing of the Law. Obviously Paul believes that this priority has been inverted. While repeating the essential thrust of vs. 6-10, his focus is upon the disobedient and hypocritical Jew (Matt. 7:24-27; 12:50; 23:1-3).
  - 2) The “justification” that Paul describes must be of the same sort that is implied in vs. 6-10, though it also incorporates the “justification” that James 1:22; 2:21-26 describes, that is the outward evidence that vindicates the profession of inward saving grace.
  - 3) Application. Thus we might paraphrase here, “It is not the hearers of the gospel and doctrine and music and good Christian literature and Christian radio and preaching and tape cassettes who are acceptable before God, but those who evidence godliness resulting from this ministry.” True heart religion is consistently effecting.
- (d) It regards Gentile law-keeping, v. 14-15.

These verses form a significant parenthesis that answers the question raised, but not answered, in v. 12 concerning the Gentile’s source of his knowledge of the righteous demands of God apart from the Jewish Torah.

- 1) Their law is not Mosaic, v. 14.
  - a) Paul posits the case of a Gentile who lives righteously as a God-fearer such as Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2). He lives a moral life that parallels the ethics of the Jew derived from the Law, yet he is ignorant of the Law. The answer is that he acts by

---

<sup>47</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 2:1-3:20*, p. 107.

<sup>48</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 147.

“nature” or φύσις, phusis, which word was used in 1:26-27 to describe natural sexual functions. Murray describes this capacity as “done by native instinct or propension, by spontaneous impulse as distinguished from what is induced by forces extraneous to ourselves.”<sup>49</sup> This is a universal capacity, and it concerns a fixed rather than a relative code. Hence, the heathen are not ignorant of right and wrong as some would suggest.

- b) This innate moral sensitivity is to be distinguished from the witness of nature in 1:20. Boice quotes C. S. Lewis who perceptively recognizes this basic standard in man’s everyday manner of living. In “the initial argument in his classic defense of the faith, *Mere Christianity*, Lewis begins with the observation that when people argue with one another, an angry person almost always appeals to some basic standard of behavior that the other person is assumed to recognize.

They say things like this: ‘How’d you like it if anyone did the same to you?’ - ‘That’s my seat, I was there first’ - ‘Leave him alone, he isn’t doing you any harm’ - ‘Why should you shove in first?’ - ‘Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine’ - ‘Come on, you promised.’ People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups.” What interested Lewis about these remarks is that the people making them are not merely saying that the other person’s behavior just does not happen to suit them, but rather that the behavior of the other person is wrong.<sup>50</sup>

- c) Thus the Gentiles are “a law to themselves,” or literally, “they themselves are [a] law,” that is, as distinct from the Jews they have their own law which is still a revelation from the same God. For this reason the Gentile is morally accountable, not innocent.

2) Their law is internal, v. 15.

The connection here is that the moral doing of the Gentiles, v. 14, indicates a state of moral being, v. 15. However, from whence comes this moral being, what exactly is it, and how does it effect the Gentile?

- a) Clearly it is God who “writes” a moral transcript or “the work [singular, cf. plural in v. 14]” of the law” on “their hearts.” Indeed it is God’s inscription on “all hearts,” even

---

<sup>49</sup> Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 73.

<sup>50</sup> Boice, *Romans*, I, p. 237.

the Jew. But what the Gentile has is sufficient to make him accountable even if it is not as definitive as the Torah.

- b) Note that it is “the *work* [emphasis added] of the Law” that is inscribed on the heart and not the Law itself. This fine distinction, if valid, simply avoids, as Murray states, “a state of heart and mind and will far beyond that predicated of unbelieving Gentiles [cf. Jer. 31:33; II Cor. 3:3].”<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, could they “do instinctively the things of the Law,” v. 14, without having the Law, at least a form of it, on their hearts?
- c) What then has God inscribed on Gentile hearts? They seem to have no inclination to keep the Sabbath according to the Torah, yet there is an understanding of basic righteousness and accountability that results in a sense of guilt and a propensity to worship. Morris adds, “Theodoret pointed to Joseph’s brothers and to Abimelech (Gen. 20:4-5) as people who gave evidence of knowing right and wrong and who lived before the giving of the law by Moses.”<sup>52</sup> A significant passage that may address this issue is Ecclesiastes 3:9 where God is described as having “set eternity in their [the sons of men] heart.” Concerning this Delitzsch comments that God,

has also established in man an impulse leading him beyond that which is temporal toward the eternal: it lies in his nature not to be contented with the temporal, but to break through the limits which it draws around him, to escape from the bondage and disquietude within which he is held, and amid the ceaseless changes of time to console himself by directing his thoughts to eternity.<sup>53</sup>

This consideration probably incorporates not only the internal stamp of morality in 2:15, but also the comprehension of external omnipotence and design in 1:18. Thus God’s revelation in these two passages is to be distinguished as follows:

<b>Romans 1:20</b>	<b>Romans 2:15</b>
external revelation	internal revelation
evidence of power/design	evidence of law
addresses mind	addresses heart/conscience
knowledge of God’s being	knowledge of God’s law

- d) How then does this revelation of “the work of the Law written in their hearts” effect the Gentiles? Paul attributes to

---

<sup>51</sup> Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 74.

<sup>52</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 126.

<sup>53</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, p. 261.

them a “conscience,” συνείδησις, *suneidēsis*, literally meaning “knowledge with,” which responds to moral engraving on the heart. This response is sometimes accusatory and sometimes gives approval. However, the moral engraving is the standard and *not* that of the conscience. Conscience is more human in its assessment as contrasted with God described in v. 16. We must beware of “Jiminy Cricket morality,” derived from the fairy tale *Pinochio*, that glibly sings, “And always let your conscience be your guide.” Morris warns, “If we are looking for the proper line of conduct, we should notice that in the Bible it is the revelation God has made that is to be our guide, not any subjective process. A conscience may be oversensitive (I Cor. 10:25) or not sensitive enough (I Tim. 4:2).<sup>54</sup>

- e) To sum up, the Gentiles or heathen are sufficiently aware of God’s being and His morality; therefore they are accountable, and thus qualify to be judged. Concerning this truth being evidenced in a wide variety of unevangelized pagan cultures, refer to Don Richardson’s *Eternity In Their Hearts*.

- (e) It regards the secrets of men’s hearts, v. 16.

The theme of judgment introduced in 2:5, and especially directed toward the religious Jew, has veered once again toward the pagan in 2:11-15 so that Paul concludes his necessary detour with v. 16. The connection with the preceding vs. 14-15 is one of contrast. Whereas man is constantly judging himself via his conscience, either accusing or approving his response to “the work of the Law written on their hearts,” and such personal estimation is flawed through human weakness and limited knowledge, God on the other hand, knowing “the secrets of men” will judge impeccably according to the gospel of Christ Jesus.

- 1) This “day” is the same as that in v. 5, “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” The judgment of man will be of no account, and especially his own religious self-judgment. Why is this so? Because God alone truly knows the crevices of our heart, even every hidden nook or high shelf, and better than ourselves (Ps. 139:1-4; Heb. 4:13).
- 2) What will be the basis of God’s judgment? To begin with Paul describes it as “my gospel,” as in 16:15. This is not a “Pauline gospel,” a gospel of his own conceiving or modification, but the one and exclusive gospel which came to him by revelation (Gal.

---

<sup>54</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 127. Refer also to Franz Delitzsch who writes, “Nothing is more commonly read, than that conscience is a voice of God within us. Surely, literally and logically regarded, this is wrong.” *A System of Biblical Psychology*, p. 159.

1:6-9, 11-12) and was recognized by James, Peter and John to be identical with the gospel they proclaimed (Gal. 2:7-9).

- 3) More specifically, the basis of God's judgment will be "through Jesus Christ." The Son of God will be the appointed judge (John 5:22, 27; Acts 17:31), and his Messiahship the primary issue of judgment (John 3:18; 5:24). However, it is erroneous to suggest that men will be judged solely on the basis of their regard for Jesus Christ. Such unbelief may be the supreme sin, but it is not the only sin, otherwise the judgment of 2:3, cf. 1:28-32, would not be valid.<sup>55</sup>

## 2. The Jew's hypocrisy before God, vs. 17-29.

The thrust now toward the self-righteous, hypocritical Jew is more specific than ever. However it is one thing to observe hypocrisy and quite another to have it exposed in such a way that the hypocrite is convicted. A classic illustration of this problem is provided in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian and Faithful are confronted with the hypocrisy of Talkative. This child of Prating Row loves to talk about Bible doctrine when it suits, as well as base talk at the ale-bench, while at the same time his life at home and work "is as empty of religion, as the white of an egg is of savor." So the problem for Faithful is how this religious masquerade might be exposed. Christian's suggestion is that Talkative be challenged concerning personal sin and his own state of heart rather than that of others. This subject Talkative balks at and in fact withdraws from the pilgrims' company claiming to be peeved at such judgmental enquiry.<sup>56</sup> But a further problem arises. Suppose the Jew were to confess his hypocrisy, at least to himself, and yet claim covenant security, especially by means of circumcision. How then is he to be confronted as still being in jeopardy under God's judgment? How is a hypocritical Christian to be dealt with who yet clings to hope in baptism?

### a. What do they say? vs. 17-20.

Paul returns to the thought of v. 13, namely the anomaly of a Jew being a mere "hearer of the Law."

#### (1) They boast in Judaism, v. 17.

The conditional "if" statement here refers to a situation that is assumed to be true. Thus Paul describes *outward* and *confessional* religious symptoms that are very real, yet are void of any behavioral and moral parallel. Hence their nominal characteristics involve boasting in:

- (a) "The name 'Jew.'" A "Jew" was originally a member of the tribe of Judah, though after the Babylonian exile the name more broadly encompassed any Hebrew or citizen of Israel. However, while Paul

<sup>55</sup> Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 78.

<sup>56</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 121-125.

continued to call himself a Jew (Acts 22:3), here the boasting is one of racial superiority based on physical descendancy, physical signification through circumcision, and physical nationalism. Yet he

- (b) “The Law of Moses.” Literally the Jew “reclines” (cf. Luke 10:6) on the Law, he is its exclusive custodian, he is its official interpreter, he is its visible embodiment, he claims that it is his ground of being and doing. Yet he does not obey the Law!
- (c) “The God of Abraham.” Boasting in the unique and only true God of the covenant was not in itself wrong, quite to the contrary (Jer. 9:23-24); but such bragging was akin to the false recognition given to God by the Pharisees in Matthew 23:14 and Luke 18:11. It was a carnal security that neglected personal accountability. John Murray adds: “That the apostle should have referred to this in connection with what is by implication an indictment demonstrates perhaps more than any other prerogative enumerated how close lies the grossest vice to the highest privilege and how the best can be prostituted to the service of the worst.”<sup>57</sup>

(2) They are exercised in the Law, v. 18.

While being eager Bible students and *knowledgeable*, yet they are like the Pharisees and Sadducees who were reprimanded for their lack of biblical *understanding* (Matt. 22:29; John 5:39).

- (a) They “know the [God’s] will,” unlike the Gentile (Ps. 147:19-20), that is they comprehend it agreeably.
- (b) They “approve the things that are essential [best],” that is they especially appreciate the Shemah (Deut. 6:4), the Great Commandment (Deut. 6:5), and the Decalogue (Ex. 20:1-17).
- (c) They have been well “instructed [catechized] out of the Law,” by both parents (Deut. 6:6-7) and the Jewish leaders (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 24:8:33:10; Neh. 8:8).

(3) They have the light of God, v. 19.

From privileges and status we now move to perceived responsibilities which are inevitably corrupted. Here the Jew comprehends part of the truth, but it is the absent portion that results in the abuse of his partial knowledge. It is like believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ while being ignorant of the purpose of this event.

- (a) Israel was to have been “a guide to the blind” and “a light to those who are in darkness,” of course supremely through Messiah (Is. 42:6-7;

---

<sup>57</sup> Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 82.

49:6; 60:1-3), though nationally as well (I Kings 8:41-43). What ought to have been is implicit in v. 24.

- (b) However, the missionary prayer of King Solomon was not heeded (I Kings 8:57-61). For while the Jews of Paul's time wanted Gentile admiration and recognition that their God was the only true God (I Kings 8:60), they were not prepared "to be wholly devoted to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments" (I Kings 8:61).

- (4) They have wisdom and truth, v. 20.

There is no direct condemnation of the Jew here; rather it is implicit in terms of the hypocrisy already stated in vs. 1-8, and his proud and lordly presentation of the truth.

- (a) Yes, the Jew ought to "correct the foolish" and "teach the immature." This is proper pastoral responsibility, but the Lord Jesus Christ also revealed the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders in this regard (Matt. 23:1-3).
- (b) Yes, the Jew ought to uphold "the Law," though he should have understood it as more than mere "embodiment," or *μόρφωσις*, *morphōsis*, that is "outward form" or "framework" as used in II Timothy 3:5.

- (5) Application. Before Paul "lowers the boom," so to speak, there is a fearful reality presented here, and that of the most insidious hypocrisy. For just as the police officer, a lawyer, and judge have sworn to uphold the law, yet while presenting the posture of a law keeper, they actually break the law! So it is possible for a Bible teacher, a church leader, the amen chorus of the church, to be no less hypocritical than the Jew here described. For this reason, as with Paul here, it is vital that doctrine always be presented along with its necessary practical expression.

- b. What do they do? vs. 21-23.

Here is Paul's sudden put-down and piercing response to the set-up of vs. 17-20. But how does Paul know about the details of this exposure? Two areas are significant here. First, there was his rabbinical training in Jerusalem as a Pharisee that included tutelage under the esteemed Gamaliel (Acts 22:3; Phil. 3:5). Second, there was his instruction by way of special revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11-12; I Cor. 11:23; 15:).<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Cf. J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin Of Paul's Religion*, pp. 43-68.

- (1) Knowing of teaching others, they do not teach themselves, v. 21a.
- (a) Recalling the exalted roll of teaching in Judaism, even as he had personified while being rabidly anti-Christian, Paul obviously focuses on those exercising a responsible position of religious leadership, especially the Rabbi, Pharisee and Scribe, who Isaiah denounced (Isa. 50:1-20) and Christ exposed (Matt. 23:1-3; cf. Jas. 3:1).
  - (b) Similarly, Paul would today denounce conservative Christendom in this interrogative manner. It is the measure of sinful human nature that a man or woman of any number or reputable professions or callings may in fact live a life that denies the creed he or she has formally confessed, the politician who lives one way and campaigns another, the doctor who professes the Hippocratic oath and performs abortions, the attorney who seeks ways to avoid the law he has sworn to uphold, the liberal seminary professor who signs an orthodox doctrinal statement and teaches a liberal agenda, the Sunday School teacher who sweetly moralizes to children and is immoral during the week, , the church choir member who sings a different song at home.
- (2) Knowing of stealing, they steal, v. 21b.
- (a) The Eighth Commandment is invoked with regard to the “preacher” or “proclaimer,” who would use his position of influence to “devour widow’s houses” (Mark 12:40), to commit sophisticated larceny, under the guise of “needy religious causes”!
  - (b) However is Paul, in all of these situations as here, merely addressing Jewish leaders, that is teachers and preachers, and not the common people? No since he seems to be addressing both categories in vs. 21-23, especially in the light of v. 24 where Israel’s ungodly reputation is revealed in Isaiah 52:5 as being attributed to “the house of Israel, ” and “the house of Israel” in Ezekiel 36:17-20. There is also the possible inference that those who listen as pupils are no better than their masters.
- (3) Knowing of adultery, they are adulterous, v. 22a.
- (a) The Seventh Commandment is invoked by the “sayer” of the Law, that is concerning “adultery,” or *μοιχεία*, *moicheia*, the more specific term for sexual infidelity.
  - (b) But what of the many who might claim not to be violators of this commandment? Surely Paul, the special student of the Lord Jesus, has in mind here not simply the “act” but also the “attitude” of heart (Matt. 5:27-28). In John 8:6-9, when Jesus Christ writes on the sand, it is a reasonable suggestion that he wrote specifically of the similar sins of these murderous Scribes and Pharisees, causing them to retreat, even their method of legalizing prostitution by means of allowing quickie

divorces for the most insignificant marital offences.<sup>59</sup> Though Moo's comment is important here, that "Paul's purpose in Romans 2 is to convince Jews of the inadequacy of their works."<sup>60</sup> Hence the Apostle focuses on the experts of the Law to show the demerit of their transgressions.

(4) Knowing of idolatry, they are pseudo-idolatrous, v. 22b.

The Second Commandment is invoked by the "abhorrer" or "loather" of such objectionably odorous idolatry. Such a person, typical of Judaism, finds the stench of pagan worship to be revolting. But while Paul does not charge the Jews with being overt idolaters, he does infer that they hypocritically "rob temples." The KJV is less literal, "Dost thou commit sacrilege?" What does he mean here? In general, it seems that while the Jew was expressly forbidden from gaining personal profit from a captured idol (Deut. 7:25), yet he devised ways by which he could gain and at the same time skirt explicit transgression, as the Talmud illustrates of a Jew "taking an idol and selling it to a Gentile."<sup>61</sup>

- (a) The actual evidence for the Jews, contemporary with Paul, literally "robbing pagan temples" is quite slim. Though does not Acts 19:37 suggest this possibility?
- (b) Alternatively the Jews, contemporary with Paul, did avoid paying their tithes and temple tax, and siphoned off, as Josephus indicates, money due to the temple treasury.<sup>62</sup>

(5) Knowing of the Law, they break the Law, v. 23.

- (a) This reiteration of vs. 17-22 is encompassing and not simply incidental. But the final question is intended to be humiliating because of the assumed truth that the Jew certainly does bring shame to God's character. Murray adds, "Transgression of the law is a dishonoring of God; it deprives him of the honor due to his name and offers insult to the majesty of which the law is an expression."<sup>63</sup>
- (b) Application. To give a contemporary paraphrase: "You who proudly carry in your hand a gold embossed, fine leather, reliably translated, full reference Bible, and vociferously defend its full inspiration, and at the same time are reputed to be a cheat in your money dealings and morally loose, do you in fact insult the God of that same book?" The answer is "yes" in a manifold way.

---

<sup>59</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*, II, pp. 333-334.

<sup>60</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 165.

<sup>61</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 137.

<sup>62</sup> MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, p. 157.

<sup>63</sup> Murray, *Romans*, I, pp. 84-85.

c. What does the Law say about them? v. 24.

Paul pointedly asks, “Do you in fact know what the Law you boast in [the Bible you carry] says about you?” So he quotes Isaiah 52:5, though Ezekiel 36:17-20 is more explicit (cf. II Pet. 2:2).

(1) Their lives are watched by the Gentiles, v. 24a.

While a watching world ought to have found God commended in the national lifestyle of Israel (I Kings 8:59-60), yet the opposite was the case. This was the supreme shame in the midst of God’s creation.

(2) Their lives cause the Gentiles to blaspheme God, v. 24b.

In simple terms they responded: “If God is reflected by these obnoxious, complaining, hypocritical Jews who claim to be His chosen people, then we denounce that God as being a fraud, and partner to the crimes of the Jews.” So as John MacArthur well comments concerning our parallel situation today: “It would be better for many Christians, true believers as well as false, to hide their religious profession. Their living is such an obvious contradiction of Scripture that the cause of Christ is mocked and scorned by the world,”<sup>64</sup>

d. What significance is circumcision? vs. 25-29.

An observer of Paul’s confrontation with the Jew might well ask the question: “How is it possible for the Jew to so shamelessly maintain his proud self-esteem and nationalism in the face of such shameful condemnation by the Gentile?” as in v. 24. The answer, that really goes without saying, is in a word, “circumcision.” Whereas the current teaching was that, “no person who is circumcised will go down to Gehenna [hell as the lake of fire],”<sup>65</sup> so Paul now commences to destroy the religious hypocrite’s last bastion, namely sacramental/ritual/covenantal regeneration.

(1) It is significant, not effecting, v. 25.

(a) Some background on circumcision. According to Genesis 17:9-14, circumcision was ordained of God as signification of the covenant He had made with Abraham and his *seed*. For this reason the *seed organ* was cut. Note that at that same time, the name “Abram” meaning “exalted father,” was changed to “Abraham” meaning “father of a multitude” (Gen. 17:5). As a modern conservative Jew puts it, “For Jews circumcision today, as in the past four thousand years, is not a detail of hygiene. It is the old seal of the pledge between Abraham and his Creator, a sign in the flesh, a mark at the source of life.”<sup>66</sup> However,

<sup>64</sup> MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, p. 158.

<sup>65</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 167; also Hodge, *Romans*, p. 63.

<sup>66</sup> Herman Wouk, *This Is My God*, p. 140.

even Jeremiah became aware that a physically circumcised Hebrew could yet be “uncircumcised of heart” (Jer. 9:25-26).

- (b) Circumcision is “significant,” that is, it is an authentic “sign” when it points to a “practicer of the Law.” But for the lawless, circumcision has no significance and in fact is invalidated; it is not regenerative. Later in 4:9-12, the point will be made that Abraham was justified through faith, and hence regenerated, before he was circumcised. Therefore Paul is *not* repudiating circumcision as a sign of national Jewish identity, as 3:1-2 indicates. Rather he is negating a function of circumcision that never really existed.
- (c) Application. While Christian baptism does not identify with circumcision in every regard, yet here the parallel is close. Water baptism is significant when it points to a converted or regenerated heart, but it is impotent in producing regeneration. Nevertheless, many nominal Christians are vainly trusting in an outward washing or sprinkling while their hearts remain unclean. Refer to C. H. Spurgeon’s confrontation with this heresy in his famous sermon titled *Baptismal Regeneration*.<sup>67</sup>

- (2) It is significant for the Gentile, vs. 26-27.

The implications of this right teaching on circumcision are encouraging for the Gentile. Otherwise, he is *ipso facto* excluded from the favor and grace of God because of an absent physical qualification.

- (a) His obedience is as circumcision, v. 26.

Positing that a Gentile “keeps the righteous requirements of the Law,” this expression suggests the Mosaic law which an uncircumcised “God-fearer” reveres and obeys, such as Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2; cf. 13:26), or a lesser disciple of the God of Israel. How then is he to be regarded? God will reckon circumcision to him, even as any observer ought to do, because God regards the doing of righteousness as the justifying evidence of his sonship. He may not have the circumcision of Abraham, but he is nevertheless a child of Abraham because he does “the deeds of Abraham” (John 8:39).

- (b) His obedience shames the transgressor, v. 27.

If a Gentile has a heart for God, a heart that is alive to God, a heart that loves God, a heart that *actively pleases* God, and thus is circumcised of heart, though he be physically uncircumcised, this man is the judge of the ungodly, circumcised Jew, since he pronounces shame upon him, he declares his hypocrisy (Matt. 8:5-12, especially vs. 11-12).

---

<sup>67</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, X, 573.

- 1) The word “judge” is emphatic here, and it relates to the Jew “having the letter of the Law.” This circumcised religionist has the Bible in his hand and mind, a comprehensive data bank, doctrinal comprehension, but his disgraceful godlessness will ensure severe condemnation by the mere presence of the godly Gentile, without a word being spoken (Phil. 3:2-3).
  - 2) Illustration. In an office situation, the unbaptized member of The Salvation Army who manifests genuine graces of the Spirit will stand out in obvious silent judgment upon the baptized Baptist who manifests the works of the flesh.
- (3) It is significant for the real Jew, vs. 28-29.

The definition of an authentic Jew, especially for Paul here, is a matter of different opinions by conservative Christians. Some suggest that in this church age, it is the true Christian who is now the real and only spiritual Jew, and that since God has finished forever with Israel as a nation, there is no such thing in His sight as a national Jew. This I believe is *not* what Paul has in mind here, especially in the light of 3:1-2; 11:1-36; Acts 22:3; Gal. 6:16. A genuine Jew is one who, having been circumcised of the heart, is also circumcised of the flesh, and identifies geographically with those of the same commitment, cf. 9:6.

- (a) It does not signify a real Jew, v. 28.

A literal translation reads, “For not the one in outward manifestation is a Jew, neither is the one in the outward manifestation of fleshy circumcision.” What is it that essentially identifies a Jew? Negatively, it is not the outward rite of circumcision, even though the rite itself is not nullified (3:1-2; Acts 16:3). At best, circumcision identifies a professing Jew.

- (b) It does signify heart circumcision, v. 29.

- 1) The *sine qua non* of true Jewishness is “heart circumcision” which operation is “by the Spirit,” which is more probable than “in the spirit,” though as Morris writes, “either way gives good sense,”<sup>68</sup> (cf. 7:6; II Cor. 3:6-7). In such a case, the true Jew receives his affirmation of Jewishness from God, which for him is what really matters, and not as was commonly sought in Paul’s time according to “the letter,” the praise of man (John 5:41-44). Above all else, a true Jew has a heart that is made by God, owned of God, and consecrated to God.

---

<sup>68</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 142. “Spirit” is supported by Calvin, Hodge, Moo, Morris, Murray, “spirit” by Haldane, Lloyd-Jones, Shedd.

## 2) Illustration. Dr. Lloyd-Jones concludes this section as follows:

If we want to make sure that we are unlike the Jews in this respect [that Paul is challenging], we must examine ourselves. The Jews did not, they never would. They put up this citadel around themselves and said, ‘We are the Jews, you must not talk to us. Go and preach to the Gentiles, do not preach to us.’ They are like the lady, if I may say so, who once complained of my preaching in Westminster Chapel and said, ‘This man preaches to us as if we are sinners!’ Unthinkable! You see, if you erect that kind of citadel around yourself you will never know that you are a hypocrite. . . . So let every man examine himself. Let us take these searching questions which Paul addresses to these Jews of old and let us turn them upon ourselves. . . . You can only be sure that you have answered them truly and faced them honestly when you look at yourself and say, ‘In me, that is to say, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing,’ when you abhor yourself and hate yourself, and get down on your knees quietly, in your own room, not on the street corner, not in a public place, but in your own room with the door shut and the blinds drawn and acknowledge it before God and break your heart before Him, reminded again that if we do confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and so cleanse us from all unrighteousness [I John 1:9]. Oh, may God give us honesty and truth in our inward parts that we may allow the Scriptures to search us.<sup>69</sup>

## 3. The Jew’s status before God, 3:1-8.

Most translations reveal a barrage of nine questions in these eight verses.<sup>70</sup> Clearly they represent the anticipation of Paul to vociferous objections from the Jew who struggles to feel secure through covenant circumcision in view of his unmasked hypocrisy. The preceding context could especially cause the carnal Jew to question the viability of his national existence.

## a. Concerning Jewish identity, vs. 1-2.

A literal translation here reads: “Therefore what advantage does the Jew have? What is the profit of belonging to the circumcision?” There are two parallel statements here so that “the circumcision” is a synonym, and an appropriate one here, for “the Jew.”<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 2:1-3:20* p. 158.

<sup>70</sup> It is for this reason that many commentators, including Lloyd-Jones and Moo, regard this passage as one of the most difficult to interpret in Romans.

<sup>71</sup> Morris seems almost alone in pointing out the use of the definite article here so that “the Jew” and “the circumcision” are in parallel, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 152. Paul does not forget to defend circumcision; rather he is speaking of corporate identity in both expressions, (cf. ἡ περιτομή, *hē peritomē*, Rom. 4:9; Gal. 2:7-9; Phil. 3:3; 1:10).

- (1) Is the Jew still privileged? v. 1.

In the midst of his strong condemnation of the Jew who trusts in external religious insignia, Paul has plainly stated in 2:25 that there is “value,” the same Greek word as “benefit” here in 3:1, in circumcision when it identifies the Israelite who evidently is circumcised of heart. Paul has not declared that Judaism does not exist anymore, as he will later expound upon in chapters 9-11.

- (2) Yes, through the oracles of God, v. 2.

Concerning this forthright answer here, Murray comments that, “Paul was not afraid of being accused of bibliolatry when he thus assessed the inscripturated Word.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, the written Word of God is identical to the spoken Word of God (II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:19-21).

- (a) Preeminently or chiefly, to Israel and no other nation has been given the sacred trust, the great responsibility of being the custodians of “the oracles of God” or literally “the speakings of God,” τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ, ta logia tou theou, and circumcision identifies those who belong to such a privileged race. The point is that God has not only given an inscripturated book to His people, but He has spoken to them exclusively in a personal way giving many immutable promises (Deut. 4:7-8; Ps. 147:19-20) . Thus to the Israelites belong “the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh,” 9:4-5.
- (b) Thus the Christian is forever indebted to the Jew in this as well as other numerous ways. Concerning the Jewish Masoretes who, during the ninth century, produced the present text of the Old Testament, F. F. Bruce writes that,

they treated it [the Old Testament text] with the greatest imaginable reverence, and devised a complicated system of safeguards against scribal slips. They counted, for example, the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book; they pointed out the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the whole Hebrew Bible, and made even more detailed calculations than these. . . . and they made up mnemonics by which the various totals might be readily remembered.<sup>73</sup>

- (c) Illustration. Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments:

But I want to emphasize this by putting it to you negatively. If the greatest privilege that can ever come to man is to be spoken to directly by God, it is equally true to say that there is no greater loss that a man can suffer than that God should cease to speak to him. ‘Behold’, says the

<sup>72</sup> Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 93.

<sup>73</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, p. 117.

prophet Amos, threatening a recalcitrant people, ‘Behold, the days are come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord’ [Amos 8:11]. . . . The Christian is a man who ought to be wretched and miserable if he feels that he does not hear God speaking to him.<sup>74</sup>

b. Concerning Jewish unbelief, vs. 3-4.

Paul’s theoretical (? cf. v. 8) antagonist is still smarting from the condemnation of 2:17-29. Hence, at the mention of “the oracles of God,” he recalls that this present state of unbelief parallels Israel’s past history even back to the rebellion in the Sinai wilderness. At the same time, back of this recollection and the whole argument is foundational trust in the Abrahamic covenant which the Jew clings to, notwithstanding disobedience to “the oracles of God.” If this covenant is unconditional, is not Israel’s existence guaranteed?

(1) Does unbelief nullify God’s promise, v. 3.

Translate as follows: “If some of them were unfaithful [in Israel’s past history], will not their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God?” As Hodge well explains:

Has he [God] not promised to be a God to Abraham and to his seed? Has he not entered into a solemn covenant to grant his people all the benefits of the Messiah’s kingdom? This covenant is not suspended on our moral character. If we adhere to the covenant by being circumcised and observing the law, the fidelity of God is pledged for our salvation. We may therefore be as wicked as you would make us out to be, that does not prove that we shall be treated as heathen.<sup>75</sup>

(2) No, since God remains true, v. 4.

- (a) Paul’s immediate response is the strongest possible Greek negative, μή γένοιτο, *mē genoito*, “May it never be,” or, “it is unthinkable,” or “perish the thought.” He is repulsed by such tricky reasoning, typical of casuistry.
- (b) Such reasoning impugns the character of God since it makes Him to be indifferent to unrighteousness amongst His people, or complicit in the tolerance of sin; it is repulsive in terms of it demeaning His holiness. Rather, in the midst of a world where every man is a liar and godless, let the fact reign that God alone is righteous and true. In a world of pervasive wickedness, let the truth of God’s integrity be upheld in *judgment* (as vs. 5-6 demand) along with covenant faithfulness (Neh. 9:32-33; Ps. 96:13; Amos 3:2).

<sup>74</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 2:1-3:20*, pp. 168-69.

<sup>75</sup> Hodge, *Romans*, p. 70.

- (c) Paul quotes the Septuagint version of Psalm 51:4 to support his defense of God's character. David, in admitting his total guilt, was in effect saying that should anyone rise to defend him, then let his unqualified confession vindicate his judgment by God. In other words, let God's judgment stand as true and right. So here, though the whole world should testify falsely, let God's character stand as true and right; let God, above all else, be vindicated as just and righteous in every situation.
- (d) Application. But is not the same sort of reasoning found in the Christian church today? It is the attitude that clings to an evangelistic decision and baptism and church membership and the doctrine of eternal security as the guarantees of going to heaven, in spite of disinterest in spiritual truth and blatant godlessness. But such belief insults God's character and the power of His gospel. Rather, true Christians shall be saved and false Christians shall be judged, and God shall be vindicated as always just.

c. Concerning God's righteousness, vs. 5-6.

The perverse line of reasoning increases in its intensity. While the previous argument of vs. 3-4 dealt with "their unbelief" in relation to God's firm covenant with Abraham, here, in a similar vein, the suggestion concerning "our unrighteousness" is a blatant and clever attempt to justify sin, to even present it as beneficial. Surely Paul draws from experience in personal encounter here, and is not merely theoretical. And surely the tenor of the argument is Jewish.

(1) Does God's faithfulness oppose His wrath? v 5.

- (a) Major premise: "our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God." In other words, there are advantages to sin, and God ought not to overlook them; He should tolerate sin.
- (b) Major conclusion: "therefore God would be unjust to inflict judgment upon those sinners who instrumentally enable God's righteousness to shine." But this is not necessarily so since God was righteous before sin actively originated. A rose in the midst of weeds has outstanding beauty, yet in standing alone its beauty remains. Evil means do not justify good ends.
- (c) The prime concern of the troubled antagonist here using Rabbinical argumentation,<sup>76</sup> is that of God's "inflicted wrath," which plainly indicates that the wrath of God, cf. 1:18; 2:5, is more than an attitude; it involves active punishment.

---

<sup>76</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 65.

- (2) No, since He is also Judge of the world, v. 6.

Paul's revulsion at such a line of argumentation, the shamelessness of it, is indicated by his care in personally distancing himself from it by having declared in v. 5, "I speak according to human fashion." Now follows his repeated categorical denial of such even more obnoxious casuistry, cf. v. 4. The logical response is to declare that such reasoning in fact paralyzes God's righteous dealings with man, His judgment of man. Why? Because any sin in the universe would inevitably be confronted with God's righteousness. But this being so, then all sin, in enabling such a reflection, would have to be tolerated. Thus God would never be able to in fact judge any form of sin. As Hodge writes, Paul's "answer is complete and satisfactory; it is a *reductio ad absurdum*."<sup>77</sup>

- d. Concerning God's glory, v. 7-8.

Paul's theoretical(?) antagonist, now extends the argument to a yet lower level of reasoned depravity. For to suggest that sin should be tolerated so as to reflect God's righteousness is one thing; but then to recommend the propagation of sin so that God's greater glory and goodness be displayed is to sink to an all time low.

- (1) Why judge a Jewish sinner who glorifies God? v. 7.

The argument here is similar to that of v. 5, though there seems to be a throwback to vs. 21-23 as well. That is, Paul's Jewish opponent is reasoning, if you charged me with law breaking, then I also charge you with law mishandling. If I lie with the result that the contrasting truth of God being declared upholds His glory, then why should I be judged as a sinner? Should I not be allowed to continue being a stimulus to God's glory?

- (2) Why not allow evil to be a stimulus to good? v. 8.

We take the main thrust of this verse to be an extension of the Jewish argument of v. 7, and not Paul's response.<sup>78</sup>

- (a) This logical extension of the thought of v. 7 suggests, perhaps with a proud sneer, that the promotion of evil will in turn promote greater good. So again, Paul's former condemnation of Jewish sinners is really counter-productive; it opposes the promotion of God's glory!
- (b) In the midst of this wicked inference, Paul suddenly injects a comment that indicates that he himself has been charged with such slander or blasphemy, βλασφημέω, blasphemēō. This recalls the charge of 6:1 and the perverse accusation that Paul's gospel promotes licentiousness,

<sup>77</sup> Hodge, *Romans*, p. 74.

<sup>78</sup> The commencement of v. 8 with καί rather than δέ is decisive here.

though the parallel is not exact.<sup>79</sup> In other words Paul responds, “What you recommend, I have already been charged with and strenuously denied. The principle of your reasoning is an affront to God’s righteousness and grace.”

- (c) Thus Paul curtly responds, “Their judgment is just.” The distortion and absurdity of such a challenge requires no further comment, especially since the response of v. 6 is equally applicable here. That is, if evil be promoted for the prosperity of good, then it is impossible for evil to be judged. As Hodge comments: “By reducing the reasoning of the Jews to a conclusion shocking to the moral sense, he thereby refutes it.”<sup>80</sup>

- (3) Application. While the Jew is specifically the object of Paul’s concern here, it is also true that the religious Gentile is represented. It seems that the religious person in particular is so adept at justifying his ungodliness; he is devilishly clever in maintaining a cloak of righteousness while inwardly there is nurtured every manner of evil (Matt. 23:25-28). In simple terms, the charges that Paul has been facing in 3:3-8 fall into two timeless categories.

- (a) Presumption in the face of God’s grace, faithfulness, and forbearance.

Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ or baptism or church membership, my sovereign covenant status with God makes me secure. Therefore I need not worry about personal sin; in fact I should sin all the more so as to really enter into the greater riches of grace. This is human depravity at its worst and evidence of counterfeit faith.

- (b) Making excuses for and rationalizing personal sin.

This religious person has been particularly disturbed by Paul’s surgical exposure of deep corruption in 2:17-24. He writhes in the pain of personal guilt; but instead of expressing repentance, he uses contorted and deceitful logic to excuse himself. This is human evil at its worst which Isaiah 5:20-21 denounces, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight.” Thomas Manton comments on these verses: “When men lean upon their own wisdom, they can expect to make no better judgment. Reason is not only blind, but mad. . . . Every sin hath a thousand shifts and fig-leaves. . . . Therefore take heed of making your bosom your oracle and neglecting constant application to God for wisdom.”<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> “In chapter 6 Paul is dealing with the abuse applied to the doctrine of grace, whereas in 3:5-8 he is dealing with an assault upon the justice or rectitude of God.” Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 98.

<sup>80</sup> Hodge, *Romans*, p. 75.

<sup>81</sup> Manton, *Works*, XV, pp. 217-18.

## C. THE JEWS AND GENTILES ARE THOROUGH SINNERS, 3:9-20

In all of Scripture there is surely no passage which so compactly and comprehensively indicts the human race as being thoroughly sinful as in vs. 10-20 here, even as there is surely no passage which so compactly and comprehensively presents the gospel to all of the human race as in vs. 21-26 that follow. This leads us to reflect upon what is such an important factor with regard to our basic understanding of anthropology, that is whether man is essentially good or evil. Here biblical Christianity is adamant that man's bent is toward unrighteousness, and upon this premise western civilization has been built. On the other hand, the assumption of humanism, secularism, and materialism that man is essentially good or amoral has not only required a focus that is myopic and highly selective, but is also a stubborn refusal to face the clearest evidence on a universal scale of man's natural corruption. Upon one's convictions in this area will be determined one's convictions concerning government, law and order, education, child-rearing, and social relations in general.

## 1. The universality of sin declared, v. 9.

- a. An understanding of the main thrust of this verse is not difficult, although one word remains exceedingly difficult.<sup>82</sup> We might put it this way, "What then? Are we [Jews/Christians/Gentiles?] better/more advantaged than they?" or alternatively "excusing ourselves?" The negative response and context suggests, as most translations state: "What then? Are we [Jews] better than they? Not at all."
- b. Paul the Jew, in identifying with a common Jewish form of boasting, yet repudiates such a claim. Thus, "Are we Jews superior, in view of our covenant standing 2:17, and advantages 3:2, and therefore qualify for judgment concessions, which the Gentile has no hope of receiving?" No, in terms of standing before God, the only test is manifest righteousness or unrighteousness, whatever the racial background may be. Here this prelude to the gospel knows of no recognition of racial superiority (Gal. 3:26-29). Here there is also no place for anti-gentilism by Jews or anti-semitism by Gentiles.
- c. The reason that Paul gives for disallowing racial partiality on God's part indicates the grand purpose of 1:18-3:20, namely that he might "charge/accuse" both the Jew and Gentile. He has intended to meticulously slay human boasting of whatever sort and at the same time bring about a humiliation of man as being, not only thoroughly polluted, but also wholly captive to sin.
- d. Thus man, the whole human race, Jew and Gentile, are "all under sin." The "all" factor of total and comprehensive universality will be taken up in the proof that follows in vs. 10-18. The fact of all being "under sin," demands further consideration. This term, ὑπ[ὸ] ἁμαρτίαν, hupo hamartian, while literally meaning "under sin," has a far stronger content, since it indicates being under captivity to sin, under the reign and dominion of sin, under sin's lordship. The point is than

---

<sup>82</sup> The textual problem concerns the meaning of προεχόμεθα, proechometha, and whether it be interpreted as a middle or passive voice. Older support for the middle voice, as followed here includes Luther, Calvin, then Alford, Hodge, Shedd, and more recently Moo.

mankind is not merely on parole, he is not in a limited detention center, but incarcerated in such a way that it is impossible for him to escape, at least humanly speaking. In other words, human nature is wholly enslaved to sin, and according to his nature, so man will respond. The extent of this enslavement will also be illustrated in the verses that follow.

(1) By way of illustration, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments:

If you visited a foreign country, the thing which would be of primary interest to the people of that country, the first thing they would want to know about you, is not the color of your hair or your eyes, not your bank balance, or whether you are a nice person - the first thing they would want to know is what country you belong to. Are you a citizen of this country or are you a foreigner? They would want to know the realm to which you belong. And that is something which is absolutely basic to a true understanding of the Christian faith, the Christian gospel. It does not start with details. And that is where many people go wrong about this gospel - the people who think that if you are living a good life you are a Christian. You may live a very good life and not be a Christian at all because you are not in that realm. There are good people under sin, in the realm and dominion of Satan. It is the realm to which you belong that really matters and really counts. Now then, Paul says - and this is the staggering statement - *all*, both Jews and Gentiles, are under sin, under the dominion of sin, and belong to the realm of sin. That statement, of course, includes such things as this: that all mankind by nature is under the guilt of sin, under the power of sin, and under the pollution of sin. It is his fundamental statement, and everything else follows from this.<sup>83</sup>

(2) In I John 5:19 we read, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” Here our perspective of man “under sin” is adjusted, since this subjection is also “under the evil one.” If man is under sin, at the same time he is in subjection to the realm of Satan; his citizenship is in the kingdom of darkness. Hence the child of God is an alien and transient in this realm, and constantly subject to harassment; but the child of this world is at home in this environment, and readily yields under its overwhelming authority.

2. The universality of sin inscripturated, vs. 10-18.

This montage of Bible passages, drawn from the Septuagint, has every indication of being carefully crafted, especially when the repeated emphasis on universal corruption is noted in vs. 10-12, while a contrasting focus follows on individual body parts in vs. 13-18.<sup>84</sup> Alfred Edersheim describes such a collection of closely related passages of Scripture according to the rabbinic expression, “the stringing together of pearls.”<sup>85</sup> This

---

<sup>83</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 2:1-3:20*, pp. 189-90.

<sup>84</sup> Murray well states the purpose here: “The apostle places together various passages which when thus combined provide a unified summary of the witness of the Old Testament to the pervasive sinfulness of mankind.” The result is “the precipitate of the Biblical teaching and it is particularly relevant to the charge made in verse 9 that all are under sin.” *Romans*, pp. 102, 103.

<sup>85</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*, I, p. 449.

concluding statement purposely draws attention to the finality of what God has repeatedly declared.

a. The breadth of human depravity, vs. 10-12.

“As it is written” could be more literally expressed, “As is has been written.” The perfect tense of γέγραπται, gegraptai, as frequently used in the New Testament regarding the timeless authority of Scripture, means that the truth was written in the past and still stands written in the present with the same authority (Matt. 2:5; 4:6- 7, 10). This section relates directly or indirectly to Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20, and presses home the thorough pollution of the human race. Jonathan Edwards comments concerning Paul’s emphasis here:

If the words which the apostle uses, do not most fully and determinately signify an universality [of sin], no words ever used in the Bible are sufficient to do it. I might challenge any man to produce any one paragraph in Scripture, from the beginning to the end, where there is such a repetition and accumulation of terms so strongly, and emphatically, and carefully to express the most perfect and absolute universality [of sin].<sup>86</sup>

(1) None are righteous, v. 10.

Paul gives first place to his quintessential term, “righteous/righteousness/justify.” The standard required of God must be His perfect righteousness (Lev. 19:2; Matt. 5:48), and thus all men are unrighteous. Note that concerning the use here of Psalm 14:1-3, David addresses the “atheistic fool” in v. 1 to begin with; then he moves from the particular in v. 1 to the more universal in vs. 2-3. This statement is not considering or denying particular grace, or variations in civil behavior on a horizontal level; it simply has regard to the whole human race, as the seed of Adam (5:12), in the sight of God, which therefore qualifies for judgment. If man attempts to relieve his feelings of guilt by considering himself with other men, on a relative basis, he deceives himself; there is even honor among thieves and the Mafia. But what really counts is God’s estimate of myself in the ultimate “Supreme Court”! Note the climactic parallelism, that is the climax of absolute exclusiveness.<sup>87</sup>

(2) None understand God, v. 11a.

That is, no human being has rightly discovered God, or even independently understood God in terms of His revelation of Himself, both general and special. The finite cannot discover the infinite; man’s focus is distorted because his perspective is always filtered through the dirty lenses in his soul. As a result he has “foolish understanding” (I Cor. 2:14), that is “darkened understanding” (Eph. 4:13). As Haldane states, “All men are naturally

---

<sup>86</sup> Edwards, *Works*, I, p. 194.

<sup>87</sup> The categories of Hebrew parallelism used here are taken from Ronald Barclay Allen, *Praise! A Matter Of Life And Breath*, pp. 50-54.

ignorant of God, and by neglecting the one thing needful, show no understanding. They act more irrationally than beasts.”<sup>88</sup>

(3) None seek for God, v. 11b.

This second line completes the synthetic parallelism in v. 11, that is the developed thought and further details added to the first line. Many in this world seek after understanding, but we are talking exclusively about the only living God of Abraham, and such understanding is not detached, but rather involves the pursuit of the whole heart, a passionate and singular thirst (Ps. 119:2, 10, 58). Notwithstanding God’s particular invitations (Isa. 55:6; Jer. 29:13), man avidly seeks after religion and a pantheon of other gods, designer gods, security blanket gods, sentimental gods, all counterfeits.

(4) None are profitable, v. 12a.

Because they “are inclined to lean away from [God],” ἐκκλίνω, *ekklinō*, it is inevitable they “become useless,” that is like sour milk, moldy cheese, a bad apple, bitter fruit, stale bread, rancid meat, etc. The corruption may have variety to it, but the root cause is defection from God, just as Adam and Eve fled from God (Gen. 3:8-9) with resulting universal consequences.

(5) None do good, v. 12b.

In 2:4, the “kindness” (NASB, NIV) or “goodness” (NKJV) of God is described, the word being χρηστότης, *chrēstotēs*. Shedd describes this characteristic as follows. It is “not the attribute by which God *is* good (holiness), but by which he *does* good (benevolence).”<sup>89</sup> So here, none does that which is morally good according to God’s estimate because he has the wrong inclination. Note that whereas v. 10 speaks of a state of righteous being, here the conclusion of this section speaks of doing righteousness as a result of being, and in terms of Paul’s argument to this point, 2:17-24, this is a vital matter.

(6) None is without exception, v. 12c.

Surely Paul is motivated here on account of the tendency of individuals who claim to be exceptions to the universal rule that has been declared. Sinful man delights in nominating himself as exceptional! The expression here intimates the comment: “But surely even just *one* might be the exception here on account of a special life that has been particularly good!” The response is an absolute and emphatic, “No!”<sup>90</sup> The awful truth is that none of us is exceptional, and just in case we think otherwise, the following vs. 13-18 force us to face ourselves individually.

---

<sup>88</sup> Haldane, *Romans*, p. 126.

<sup>89</sup> Shedd, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 37.

<sup>90</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 167n.

b. The depth of human depravity, vs. 13-18.

When you tell a man that all men, including himself, are sinners, he still attempts to find refuge in the fact that there remains a certain camaraderie in such a corrupt association, which is very much misplaced. Some, in jest, will express the fact that in hell they will have plenty of company, that Satan will not be lonely, etc. Though the foolishness of such a conclusion is well illustrated by our common antipathy to the dentist's chair. When we painfully suffer in that situation, do we find solace in the fact that at that very time, and throughout the country, thousands of others are in fellowship with us in our hour of trial? No, of course not! So here Paul presses on with his conclusion in such a way that leading us from universal guilt to particular and thorough guilt, we finally cease to contrive excuses and shut out mouths under the weight of just condemnation.

The argument here revolves around body parts, six in all being controlled by a bad heart, though five of these are associated with the head. The first four all relate to speaking which is but a venting of a wicked soul. This section relates directly or indirectly to Psalms 5:9; 10:7; 36:1; 140:3; Isaiah 59:7-8. Paul seems to have purposely selected these verses for the reason that the distinctive body parts, each being an instrument of corruption, plainly describe the thorough corruption of the individual. When a man understands his own sinfulness in this light, he realizes the absurdity, indeed the impossibility of his ability to live righteously and acceptably in God's sight since, "a bad tree [cannot] produce good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). So Lloyd-Jones warns: "Are you ready for me to hold before you now the most terrifying mirror that you have ever looked into in your life? I warn you now, if you want to be on good terms with yourself, you had better read no further."<sup>91</sup>

(1) Their *throat* has the stench of sin, v. 13a.

The open throat, being the upper vent of the thoracic region of the human body, is especially useful for burping, though not necessarily so for friends when we have been eating garlic or onions! So, quoting Psalm 5:9, the outrush of speaking from a putrid heart is likened to the foul updraught that rushes forth from an opened grave (Matt. 15:18).

(2) Their *tongues* are deceptive, v. 13b.

If the throat is the vent of the inner human region, then the tongue is the exhaust fan that thrusts the bad breath outward. Here man is described as having spiritual halitosis! The imperfect here of *δολιόω*, *dolioō*, stresses that man continually "keep[s] deceiving." The fan never seems to stop! And what, more specifically, does man have to say? Certainly gossip, profanity, slander, and vulgarity are to be included. But surely deeper corruption is regurgitated, including pride, arrogance, boasting, ambition, self-assertion, atheism, rationalism, scepticism, humanism, etc.

---

<sup>91</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 2:1-3:20, p. 210.

- (3) Their *lips* are poisonous, v. 13c.

If the tongue thrusts forth man's bad breath, it is the lips that attempt to give an attractive presentation to that which is in fact a hidden deadly poison. Quoting Psalm 140:3b, which also presupposes the "sharp tongue" of Psalm 140:3a, the allusion may be to the Egyptian cobra that has poison bags beneath its lips. So as man speaks, the venom is hidden behind smiling, beguiling and appealing lips, that is until the unsuspecting victim draws close and is fatally bitten. "Poison" here is *CCC*, ios, which describes that which corrodes metals, and in James 3:8 refers to the toxic poison of the tongue.

- (4) Their *mouth* curses, v. 14.

Quoting Psalm 10:7, the fullness of the mouth is a result of the fullness of the soul; here the mouth of the wicked is the megaphone of the heart, and thus it broadcasts with vocal and public hostility. What specifically are his grievances? With shades of the rebellion of Psalm 2:1-3, he complains of God's existence and thus curses and mocks Him (Ps. 10:3-4, 11); he boasts in his autonomy (Ps. 10:5-6); he denigrates the virtuous, the unfortunate, the afflicted, since they have not asserted themselves as he has (Ps. 10:8-10). But how opposite is to be the mouth of the child of God (Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6).

- (5) Their *feet* shed blood, v. 15.

In vs. 15-17 we have selections from Isaiah 59:7-8. Here the feet, which to be precise, are more vehicles of the arms that shed blood; further, they also give mobility to the mouth; yet all of these bodily features are but the unfailing servants of the sinful heart. However, the rapidity here indicates the zeal of the ungodly. John MacArthur comments that,

a baby born in the 1980's [in the U.S.] is more likely to be murdered than an American soldier in World War II was of being killed in combat. Whether in peace or in war, man kills man. The mass exterminations of the Nazis and Marxists in our own century have their counterparts in past history. The notorious Chang Hsien-chung in seventeenth century China killed practically all of the people in Szechwan province. During that same century in Hungary, a certain countess systematically tortured and murdered more than six hundred young girls.<sup>92</sup>

- (6) Their *paths* are warlike, vs. 16-17.

The picture here is a variety of paths before which man must choose. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, for the advancing pilgrim there is the alternative path to the Village Morality that leads away from the path to the Wicket-gate; there is not only the straight and narrow way, but also the broad way; at the foot of the Hill Difficulty, where the straight way ascends directly ahead, are optional paths, one leading to Danger and the other to Destruction; there is the alternative of the more comfortable path that leads to Doubting Castle.

---

<sup>92</sup> MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, p. 190.

- (a) They lead to conflict, v. 16.

Job 5:4 correctly describes man as, “born for trouble, as sparks fly upward.” James 4:1-2 explains the source of this turmoil, even though he addresses wayward Christians: “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.”

- (b) They don’t lead to peace, v. 17.

It seems intimated that a way of peace is available, a way of truth,<sup>93</sup> righteousness and justice which Isaiah 59:8b, 14-15 describes. But, as Haldane comments, “the most savage animals do not destroy so many of their own species to appease their hunger, as man destroys of his fellows; so satiate his ambition, his revenge, or cupidity [avarice].”

- (7) Their *eyes* are void of the fear of God, v. 18.

The final quotation is taken from Psalm 36:1 to draw our attention to the distinctive and fundamental role of the “eye.” This verse is concluding and climactic, cf. with v. 10. All of the other bodily members have an expressive function, whereas the eye receives impressions which are stored in the mind to which the soul responds; the eye is a receptor rather than a transmitter (Matt. 15:11). Furthermore, we have here the root cause of all of the various sinful manifestations that have just been considered.

- (a) What is it to “fear God”? It is to revere and rightly acknowledge His holy being, and not momentarily but continually as the ground of a person’s living (Ps. 16:8a). Such perception is disturbing to the unbeliever and delightful, though undiminished, to the believer.
- (b) What is it here to “not fear God”? In context, it means to have had some disturbing confrontation with God, cf. 1:19-21; 2:14-15, and yet at the same time, rather than respond with appropriate “terror,”<sup>94</sup> revolt against God himself in a most determined manner. Now this is an astonishing attitude since, as Haldane explains: “They are more afraid of man than of God - of his anger, his contempt, or ridicule. The fear of man prevents them from doing many things from which they are not restrained by the fear of God.”<sup>95</sup>
- (c) Here is the fundamental solution to the catalogue of particular sins enumerated from 3:18 to this point since, “by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil” (Prov. 16:6; cf. Ps. 128:1). If a person has now

---

<sup>93</sup> Haldane, *Romans*, p. 128.

<sup>94</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 169.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

come to see their sinfulness in a fuller and more fearful light, then certainly the fear of the Lord has begun to dawn upon us; if we fear God on account of our sin, then let us press on with Paul as he leads us to that fear of God resulting from the remedy of His saving grace (Heb. 12:28-29).

3. The universality of sin accentuated, vs. 19-20.

In this summation of the consequences of the preceding indictment of the human race, one truth rises above every other issue. In v. 19, man is to be accountable “to God;” in v. 20, man is considered “in His [God’s] sight.” This vertical relationship is Paul’s supreme concern, and it remains the greatest issue for any person of any age, race, sex, or social status, since the fall of Adam. To this end the law is of instrumental significance, yet we have to be careful in discovering what exactly Paul means by “the law” in these verses.

a. The law brings accountability before God v. 19.

(1) So to retranslate, “Now we know [cf. 2:2],” or “it is common knowledge that whatever the law says, it speaks to those in [not “under”] the law.”

(a) In view of the preceding context where only Psalms and Isaiah have been quoted, “law” here must refer to the whole of the Old Testament, and may even include that revelation given to the heart (2:15). Consider I Corinthians 14:21 where Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11-12 and designates this as “the law.” Hodge states,

The word νόμος, *nomos*, means that which binds the reason, the conscience, the heart, and the life, whether it be revealed in the constitution of our nature, or in the decalogue, or in the law of Moses, or in the Scriptures. It is the word or revelation of the will of God, considered as the norm or rule to which men are to conform their faith and practice.<sup>96</sup>

“Law” is a representation to man of God’s unchanging righteousness; the representation may change, but never the righteousness.

(b) Who are those “in the law”? While Paul has just quoted the Jewish law and the Jews remain the hardest to convict of their sin, the universality of the following “every mouth” and “all the world” must also guide us here. Surely if “all the world” is to become accountable, then Paul must have in mind the Jew first with inscripturated law, but also the Gentile with the law on his heart. Ultimately, both Jew and Gentile are “in the law,” in a relationship with the revealed righteousness of God.

---

<sup>96</sup> Hodge, *Romans*, p. 80. Also note Murray, *Romans*, I, pp. 105-6.

- (2) Thus the purpose of the law is revealed in a twofold sense.

The work of the law is now clearly distinguished from that of the gospel. Here the law of God is a merciless and relentless accuser that bludgeons the self-righteous to the ground. To attempt to rise up in proud protest is only to be rightly crushed.

- (a) “That every mouth may be closed.”

Here is a courtroom scene in which the accused is so confronted with the evidence of his crime, its enormity, ugliness and wilfulness, that he knows he is rightly to be condemned. Any protestations are utter foolishness. The head drops, the blush is of shame, the bubble of pride has been shattered (Dan. 9:7). This has been Paul’s purpose from 1:18 onward. Man is naturally a prolific talker and boaster. But when the presupposition of the gospel, the bad news, is rightly preached as it ought to be, it so confronts man that his mouth becomes closed on account of undoubted guilt, like Job (Job 40:3-5; 42:1-6).

- (b) “That all the world may become accountable to God.”

The evidence is so compelling concerning man’s guilt that he is required to answer. But what can he say? He is like a man whose crime is recorded on video tape, and at his trial the recording is played before he and the judge. So in Luke 12:2-3 we are told, “But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.” Of course the startling truth is that God will have all men to come to this state of condemnation and speechlessness before His bar.

- b. The law brings the knowledge of sin, v. 20.

- (1) The law is not an instrument of justification.

This negative reiteration of the truth of v. 19 draws attention to the Jew’s perverted use of the law, that is as a means of maintaining acceptance with God following circumcision. Paul’s frequently used term “the works of the law” (cf. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10) focuses on the requirements of the law,<sup>97</sup> whether moral, civil, or ceremonial,<sup>98</sup> and the misplaced perception that fulfillment of such requirements, produced through cooperation with grace, would maintain justification before God is wholly negated. Such justification was ordained through faith (9:31-32). Such justification, or right standing

---

<sup>97</sup> Moo comments, “‘Works of the law.’ then, as most interpreters have recognized, refers simply to ‘things that are done in obedience to the law,’” *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 209.

<sup>98</sup> These terms are mentioned merely as a concession to some popular usage even though Paul makes no such distinctions.

with God, can only come through justification by faith in Christ's atoning righteousness (1:17; 3:21-26; cf. Ps. 143:2). The giving of the law *followed* Israel's redemption out of Egypt. So "Why the law? It was added because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19), that is to accentuate the reality of sin.

(2) The law is an instrument of sin diagnosis.

In other words, the law is diagnostic rather than remedial; it exposes but it cannot heal; it accuses but it cannot pardon; it is essentially good but functionally impotent.

(a) To "all flesh."

1) All Jews, without exception.

No Jew will be justified by the law. According to the right use of this inscripturated law revelation of the Old Testament (2:17-24), all Jews are not only under the scrutiny of God's law righteousness, but also proven to be thorough sinners.

2) All Gentiles, without exception.

No Gentile will be justified by the law. According to the right use of this internal law revelation to the heart (2:15), all Gentiles are not only under God's law righteousness scrutiny, but also proven to be thorough sinners.

(b) Illustrations.

1) The x-ray machine.

An x-ray machine is an excellent diagnostic means of revealing deep-rooted disease not previously known. But an x-ray machine is quite useless insofar as healing the problem it exposes is concerned.

2) The scalpel.

The surgeon's knife is able to cut below the surface, usually with resulting pain, so as to expose internal corruption, but it cannot attempt to heal by means of eliminating vital organs.

3) The magnifying glass.

By means of close focus, a seeming small problem is shown for what it really is, a mortal disease. However, the magnifying glass is quite incapable of healing that which it exposes.

- (c) The law is a revelation of God’s ethic (righteousness) without dynamic.

The law, whether revealed to the Jew or Gentile, is a summary of the righteousness of God, but it is incapable of producing righteousness. You can plaster the Ten Commandments everywhere in a nation, but this will not in the slightest produce true heart righteousness. The law is a summary of righteousness without any power to produce righteousness. However, in the Lord Jesus Christ there is perfection of ethic and fulness of dynamic. Therefore the answer to the problem of sin in the Christian is the Lord Jesus Christ, not Moses (Rom. 7:1-4; 8:1-4).

- (d) The law accentuates the knowledge of sin.

1) Therefore, “through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” That is, through the revelation of the holiness and righteousness of God comes the “knowledge” ἐπίγνωσις, epignōsis, of man’s thorough sinfulness. The use of ἐπίγνωσις, epignōsis, here is appropriate since its compound form stresses an advance in the knowledge of sin, a greater comprehension of personal corruption.<sup>99</sup> Without a knowledge of this truth, the gospel of justification through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ is meaningless.

- 2) Illustration. Lloyd-Jones comments:

When you are speaking to a highly moral, good, philanthropic person, one who never seems to have done any harm to anybody, and is always doing good, but who does not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, what you say to him is this, ‘Is there this fear of God before your eyes? How do you stand before God?’ You do not talk about their lives, you talk about their status, their standing, their position face to face with God in the judgment. And there they, like everybody else, are guilty, they cannot answer. ‘All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God’, ‘all the world’ is guilty before God. And the first thing that the gospel of Christ does is enable us to escape from the wrath to come.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Cf. 1:28; 10:2; R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 285-86; Hodge, *Romans*, p. 86.

<sup>100</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 2:1-3:20, p. 227.