

ADDRESSES ON ROMANS

by

Louis T. Talbot D.D., LL.D.

Author of Christ in the Tabernacle, Lectures on Ephesians

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CHAPTER TWO

RIGHTEOUSNESS REQUIRED

Romans 1:18-3:20

TODAY we shall launch into the theme of the Epistle by Paul to the Romans—justification by faith. As we saw in our last lesson, it begins to be unfolded in verses 16 and 17 of chapter one. In these key verses of the epistle we see that the reason the gospel is “**the power of God unto salvation**” is because it reveals “**the righteousness of God.**” And why is this gift of God necessary? Because salvation must be a free gift of righteousness, man cannot attain to righteousness, and the Bible records his repeated failure.

As we enter upon the study of this first division of the epistle, let us look again at our chart.

We have seen that God requires righteousness. We shall find in our study today that man has none of his own. Then in the lessons to follow we shall see that God’s righteousness is revealed in Christ, received by faith, and realized in the life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then Paul turns aside for a long parenthesis, to deal with Israel’s rejection of the gift of God’s righteousness, and God’s covenant with His chosen people, yet to be fulfilled completely. In chapter twelve Paul takes up the theme where he left off at the close of chapter eight, and shows the practical results in the life of the Christian as he lets this righteousness be reproduced in his life by the power of God.

It will help us in our analytical study of the book if we get this broad outline fixed in our minds by repeatedly reading the epistle. As we read, let us note on our chart another way of summarizing the main divisions of the letter, as found in the words at the bottom of the outline: Condemnation, salvation, justification, sanctification, repudiation, consecration.

Let us also count the times the words “righteousness” and “unrighteousness” appear, especially in the opening chapters.

And now let us take one more glance at our chart, noting the three main topics of this first division of the book:

- (1) The Gentile guilty, 1:18-2:16;
- (2) the Jew guilty, 2:17-3:18;
- (3) the final verdict, a guilty world, 3:19, 20.

A COURT SCENE

The gospel is always distasteful to human nature in its unregenerated state, because it reveals the fact of sin, the naked, horrible fact of sin. If we are ever going to know the blessedness of God's remedy for this world, we must realize something about sin and something about God's hatred of it. That is why the first part of Romans, from 1:18 to 3:20, is a court scene.

The whole world is declared to be guilty before God, for man has failed to meet God's requirements.

The gross unrighteousness of the Gentile is first depicted in 1:18-32. Then in 2:1-16 the Gentile moralist is brought before the judgment bar of God, where all his self-righteousness is seen "**as filthy rags**" in His sight. Next the Jew is brought into this court scene, as described in 2:17-3:8. And the verdict is: The whole world is guilty before God (3:9-20); "**for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God**" (3:23).

I. THE WHOLE WORLD GUILTY BEFORE GOD, (1:18-20).

Let us look at the proofs of the unrighteousness of the Gentiles.

Paul shows that they are destitute of righteousness. They have failed to measure up to God's standard. Now we know that God requires righteousness, and He tries man according to His requirements. But before Paul begins to arraign the guilty world, he first reveals God's attitude toward sin.

(1) God's Hatred of Sin

In verse 18 two manifestations of sin are mentioned, upon which the wrath of God has fallen, and upon which His wrath will fall again when the Lord returns in glory. These two forms of sin which God hates are *ungodliness and unrighteousness*.

What is the difference between them?

- Ungodliness is the absence of conformity to the will of God.
- Unrighteousness deals with our relationship toward one another.

Unrighteousness will naturally follow ungodliness. And the wrath of God must fall upon both, unless something takes place.

Many people do not care to hear sermons on the wrath of God. They like to hear that God is love, and that God is good; but the Word of God also says that God is just. Moreover, it plainly states: "**It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God**" (Hebrews 10:31).

Divine retribution is always resented by the natural man; but it is well to remember that the same chapter which contains the beautiful words of John 3:16 also says:

“He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

It is well to remember that the two closing chapters of Revelation not only picture to us the bliss of the redeemed; they also tell us of the eternal doom of the lost.

In Romans Paul deals with the ungodliness and the unrighteousness upon which the wrath of God is going to fall. He shows clearly that man is given a chance to choose between the righteousness of God that is revealed in the gift of His Son and the wrath of God which must fall upon sin unconfessed and unforgiven. If man refuses His righteousness, then there is nothing for him but wrath.

When was the wrath of God revealed from heaven?

The Old Testament is full of various instances when God struck in wrath.

- At the time of the flood,
- at the tower of Babel,
- in the plagues upon Egypt and the wicked Pharaoh,
- in the judgment sent upon the blasphemous Herod,
- and in many other instances,

God warned man of the consequences of sin. Upon those who had spurned His reproofs, His wrath fell.

The wrath of God is not operative now as it was in Old Testament days. However, in II Thessalonians 1:8, 9 we see that *this wrath is to be revealed again*, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall return with all His holy angels, **“in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”**

Unregenerate man makes light of sin, but never does our holy God make sin to appear as a trivial thing. He makes clear that certain wrath will fall upon Jew and Gentile outside of Christ.

The two words **“ungodliness”** and **“unrighteousness”** are characteristic of the world today.

In the face of all the crime and lawlessness of our own generation, how solemn are these words of Paul, as the Holy Spirit prompted him to write!

“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18).

(2) *The Light Rejected*

The Gentiles, as well as the Jews, had adequate opportunity to turn to God. But they held the truth in unrighteousness. They possessed the truth, but *suppressed it*. That is what the word “**hold**” means here—“*to hold down*.” And this rejection of the light justifies the wrath of God.

People wonder why the heathen are in their present state of hopelessness and despair. Paul tells us why.

It is because they once knew God and held the truth, but they held it down by unrighteous living. Consequently, they went into darkness. And every man will end in darkness who so chooses. It is a serious thing for God to reveal light to a person. If after receiving light, my unsaved friend, you go on living unrighteously, you are headed for darkness.

In verses 19 and 20 the apostle tells of the opportunities the Gentile nations had of knowing God through nature and conscience. The flaming sun by day, the burning stars by night, and the whirling earth indicate one great Person, one Supreme Personality. Only the fool believes there is no God (See Psalm 14:1).

God’s character, “**the invisible things**” of His Being, “**are clearly seen**” in what He has done, just as human character is revealed in the acts of man.

“**His eternal power and Godhead**” are “**understood by the things that are made.**” “**The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge**” (Psalm 19:1, 2). God would have given the Gentile world more light, but they closed their eyes to the light which they had. Therefore, “**they are without excuse.**”

These words take us back to the time before the Bible was in existence.

God spoke then through nature. When God created the sun, the moon, and the stars, He put them in their places “**for signs, and for seasons**” (Genesis 1:14). We understand the purposes of the “**seasons,**” but what about the “**signs**”? He evidently spoke through signs. Those nations that God gave up at the tower of Babel went on living unrighteously, in spite of; God’s warning through “**signs,**” so that “**they are without excuse.**”

If God is going to hold every pagan without excuse for being idolatrous, what will He say to people in so-called Christian lands, who not only have the revelation of God in nature and in conscience, but who also have the revelation of God in Christ and in the Bible!

We often excuse the heathen by saying that they do not know better. God says they do. The heathen deliberately turned their backs on the knowledge of God when they had the opportunity to know Him. They preferred ungodly living. In the verses before us we find the description of the people up to the time of the tower of Babel. There was no distinction between Jew and Gentile then.

At one time everyone knew the true light of God. But after sin entered the world, men suppressed the truth, until at the tower of Babel God gave them up. They hated everything that pertained to God, and loved unrighteousness.

Then from Genesis 11 on through Malachi you have the history of Israel.

God called Abraham and formed a new nation, through whom he was to give the world Christ and the Bible. What were the Gentiles doing then? They were walking in their own ways. The heathen in China, Africa, and other countries are descendants of these people who forgot God. They are just like their fathers because they love unrighteousness. You hear people say that the heathen want missionaries to go to their lands and preach the gospel, and hundreds of thousands are open to the message. But when the missionary begins to preach against such a sin as having more than one wife, we find that often the heathen do not want the truth, any more than the people do who live in this country of the open Bible.

All men once had the light, but they refused to have God in their knowledge. And the dark picture of man's degenerate condition out of Christ is graphically portrayed for us here in this first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

II. MAN'S EVOLUTION DOWNWARD, (1:21-23).

Paul describes man's downward course in verses 21-23 of this chapter. Let us pause here to note the five steps specified in this bill of indictment:

(1) **“When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God.”** There are thousands of people in America who know that there is a personal God; yet they glorify Him not as God.

(2) They gave no thanks—**“neither were thankful.”** What a thankless age we are living in! Look at the average prayer meeting today. In our country approximately seventy-eight million of the one hundred and twenty million people never enter a church.

(3) They **“became vain in their imaginations;”** that is, vain in their reasonings.

Rome, in her glory, defied the world with her philosophy. She produced gigantic reasoners, but look at what happened to her civilization. Likewise today, men worship the intellect. They ridicule the Christ of the Bible and atonement for sin by the blood of His cross. Only one result can follow such sin, even as it was in the days of Paul:

(4) **“Their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.”**

Note here the word **“darkened,”** implying that the human heart was not **“dark”** in the beginning; it once knew God, but was **“darkened”** because of sin.

(5) They became idolatrous, **“and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to fourfooted beasts, and creeping things”** (v. 23).

This is not the evolution we hear about in certain educational circles today. It is the record of the downward course of fallen man. And these things are true of people everywhere who reject Christ and His gift of salvation. The world today is rushing on to the worship of the Antichrist, when there will be such idolatry as was never seen before.

My unsaved friend, **“now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”** (II Corinthians 6:2).

III. THE DEPTHS OF HUMAN DEGRADATION DESCRIBED, (1:24-32)

Verses 24-32 of chapter one show how conduct is affected when men turn away from God.

The unspeakable sins described here were characteristic of idolaters in Rome, and they are characteristic of many today in so-called Christian lands. And **“God gave them up,”** so degraded and low had they become!

Greek and Roman literature and sculpture corroborate these things. On my way from Australia to this country, I visited a great museum in Naples. An officer, seated before a certain corridor, pointed to a sign, written in Italian and in English, saying, “Prepare for what is to follow.” And no wonder! No wonder Paul wrote to the Roman Christians as he did! The scenes portrayed in marble and in coin were unspeakably vile. They had been dug up from the ruins of the city of Pompeii— and what a corrupt city it must have been!

Men may talk glibly about the evolution of man, but there is no ascent in Paul’s letter to the Romans. It is a graphic picture of the downward course of unregenerated man. Men may deny it. They may defy it. But it is God’s revelation. And only by faith in God’s Son, our Saviour, can helpless, hopeless, lost sinners wash their robes white. Only the blood of Calvary’s Lamb can cleanse from the terrible defilement of sin.

The darkness and degradation of the pagan world but prove that a godless people cannot attain unto righteousness. And this court scene of the opening chapters of Romans prepares the way for the revelation of the righteousness of Christ. How did such a condition begin? Men knew God, but refused to have Him in their knowledge, and darkness followed.

History ever repeats itself, and today we are witnessing the downward course of our own civilization, ever gaining a rapidly-increasing momentum.

Parents, mold your children for God. The climax of sin has not yet been reached, and will not be until the Antichrist is revealed. Before that event, the true church must be taken away, caught up to **“meet the Lord in the air.”**

Then the cup of iniquity of a godless world will be full. While we are yet in this age of the grace of God, mold your children for Him, for heaven, and for eternity.

IV. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS GENTILE—GUILTY! (2:1-16).

But someone will say: "I am not guilty of the vices described in chapter one. I would not think of sinking so low."

And that is true of hundreds and thousands today. Many are not guilty of murder and deceit and uncleanness. The moral man is in this class. But the Holy Spirit of God knows that he, too, is a hopeless sinner and needs a Saviour. Therefore, He addresses such a man in the words of Romans 2:1-16. We are still in the court room; only another type of humanity is being examined, the self-righteous, moral man, who is depending on his own works to take him to heaven.

"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself: for thou that judgest doest the same things" (2:1).

These words may well include the civilized Greek or the self-righteous Jew, though Romans 2:17-3:8 are directed especially to the Jew.

There were men of culture, intellect, and refinement in Paul's day—moralists.

Socrates was an idolater, yet he was a moralist. He would agree with Paul's condemnation of the base and the low, set forth in chapter one. And such as Socrates needed to be convicted of the sinfulness of their own pagan hearts. Moreover, those in polite society often do **"the same things"** as do those they judge and condemn.

These words remind us of the Lord's parable of the publican and the Pharisee (See Luke 18:9-14).

The publican represents the licentious sinner; the Pharisee, the moralist. **"The Pharisee stood and prayed . . . with himself"**—*not to God*. He extolled himself, judged the publican, and went to his house a sinner still. But the publican **"went down to his house justified,"** because he acknowledged his sin and asked the Lord to cleanse him.

The hardest man in the world to deal with, in pointing him to Christ, is the self-righteous moralist.

He knows not the holiness of God or the sinfulness of the human heart. **"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"** (Jeremiah 17:9), but the moralist has lived under restraining influences; he thanks God that he is not as other men, and refuses to get down on his knees before a holy God and acknowledge himself a sinner. He sits in judgment on the vile man described in chapter one, taking his place by the side of the judge.

Therefore, Paul in Romans 2:1-16 uses language more severe, even more startling, regarding the moralist than that concerning the pagan.

I want to ask you, my friend, are you in this class?

You agree that the bandit and the thief and the murderer are sinners, yet do you acknowledge your own sin? Let me warn you that it will be more tolerable for the pagan in China before the judgment bar of God than for you, if you go on refusing the light of God's salvation, offered as a free gift in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Scotch Christian associated with D. L. Moody, once saw an old man walking down a country road, and invited him to get in his carriage. He asked the stranger if he knew the surrounding country, upon which the old man began to tell all about the people of the district.

Then the Scotchman said, "I am a foreigner in these parts, and am looking for heirs to a great inheritance. The name of the family for which I am looking begins with 'S.' I am told that many of them live here."

"You say the name begins with 'S.' Is it the Smith family?" the old man asked eagerly.

"No; it is a larger family than the Smith family," the Scotch Christian replied. "It is the 'Sinner family,' and the fortune to which they are heirs is one they have not claimed— '**the exceeding riches**' of God's grace."

Immediately the stranger, who happened to belong to the Smith family and was so eager for earthly riches, lost interest in his unclaimed inheritance in Christ. He thought he was good enough and did not need the cleansing blood of the only Saviour from sin.

To such men Paul's warning is sounded in terms most severe: "**Thinkest thou this, O man . . . that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?**" (Romans 2:3).

And to you, my friend, let me say: If you are a cultured, moral man, it is "**because of the goodness of God**" (v. 4); it is not to your credit. God gave you Christian parents perhaps, an open Bible, restraint on every hand. Why? To lead you "**to repentance**" (v. 4). And if you reject His grace, then you justly bring upon yourself His wrath.

Nicodemus represents all that culture, education, and influence can do for a man, humanly speaking; but to him the Lord Jesus said: "**Ye must be born again**" (John 3:3-8).

This is the imperative of Christianity: "**Ye must be born again!**"

To be circumstantially righteous—as men term "**righteous**"; to be kind and generous and philanthropic and moral because of repressive influences and environment and early training—these things cannot fit the sinner for the presence of God. To condemn the harlot, yet to be filled with pride; to praise virtue while practicing vice, may be all that man requires, but not so with a holy God.

An unsaved man in the city of Chicago was showing his Christian friend his beautiful new home. One thing for which he was especially thankful was the fact that the poor and the base and the low were not his neighbors; he lived in a very select community.

But almost with every sentence he took the name of the Lord in vain. Little did he care that because of **“the hardness”** of his **“impenitent heart”** he was treasuring up the **“wrath”** of God. Little did he realize that, like the rich man **“in torments,”** he could take no riches into eternity. To the rich man in torment Abraham said, **“Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented”** (Luke 16:25). The memory of rejected light, eternal life spurned, is the portion of the lost, never-dying soul.

In verses 6-16 of chapter two Paul puts before the moralist the principles that will govern the righteous judgment of God:

(1) *The Judgment of God Will Be According to Deeds* (v. 6-10). It will not be according to words or profession.

This does not refer to salvation by works, for no man by his own strength can do the things described here. Salvation is the free gift of God; and only by the grace of God can a sinner, washed in the blood of Christ, **“by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life”** (v. 7). **“Glory, honour, and peace”** will be the portion of every sinner saved by grace, **“to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile”** (v. 10).

(2) *The Judgment of God Will Be Without Respect of Persons* (v. 11). Jew and Gentile, rich and poor—all are alike in the sight of God; **“for there is no respect of persons”** with Him.

(3) *The Judgment of God Will Be According to the Light Men Have Had* (vv. 12-15).

“For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law” (v. 12).

“The law” here refers to the Mosaic Law. The heathen **“without the law”** shall **“perish”**—note the word—because *they had another law, the law of conscience, to which they turned a deaf ear.*

“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another” (vv. 14, 15).

This reminds us again of the words we have already considered: **“They are without excuse!”** (1:20).

(4) *The Judgment of God Will Reveal “The Secrets of Men”* (v. 16).

Not only will the overt acts of every man have to stand the test of the judgment of God, but the very secrets of the heart will be revealed.

Where is the moralist who can stand that test?

Moreover, he will have to face the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he has rejected here on earth; for **“the Father . . . hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father”** (John 5:22, 23; compare John 5:18-29).

“According to my gospel,” wrote Paul, every self-righteous man will have to face the judgment bar of God. According to the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord, whom Paul loved and exalted, will God judge all men. What we do with Jesus now determines what He will do with us for all eternity.

He died for us, that we need not **“come into judgment”** (John 5:24). But he leaves the choice to us. Will you, my unsaved friend, not let Him be your Saviour? For the Christian, sin *has been judged at the cross*. If you accept Him now, you shall not come into judgment. But if you reject Him as your Saviour, you must one day meet Him as your Judge! You cannot escape the eternal Son of God!

V. THE PROUD JEW—GUILTY! (2:17-3:8).

Let us remember that we are still in the court scene, where man is being tried according to the holy standard of God. Righteousness is required, but guilty man has none of his own.

Of all classes of all time who boasted in their own self-righteousness, possibly the Pharisaical Jew of Paul’s day would head the list; and yet in Romans 2:17-3:8 he, too, is stripped of every vestige of the cloak of self-righteousness.

And who was so well fitted as Paul to arraign the ritualistic Jew! Until he met the Son of God, he gloried in all the things the Jews gloried in. He himself had been a proud Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin.

To the Philippian Church he wrote, saying: **“If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless”** (Philippians 3:4-6). But Paul’s privileges only increased his condemnation. After he met the risen Lord, he could say also, **“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ”** (Philippians 3:7).

Paul knew whereof he spoke when, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he wrote Romans 2:17-3:8. He took five Jewish claims to superiority, and showed how they were all true, but only added to Israel’s responsibility and to her condemnation, if she failed in God’s great purpose for her.

(1) The Jew Gloried in His Name (2:17).

And well he might! **“Behold, thou art called a Jew,”** Paul wrote. No name, except the name of the Lord, has been more honored.

The word “**Jew**” comes from “**Judah**,” and means “*praise*.” The tribe of Judah gave to the world the Redeemer, according to the flesh; it was the most privileged of all the twelve tribes of Israel. But the Jew, together with the Gentile, crucified the Lord. Then why boast in his name? The Pharisee did that— and he was a hypocrite!

Likewise today, literally thousands bear even a higher name—“**Christian**”; and yet to them the Lord must say, as He did to certain members of the Church at Sardis: “**Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead**” (Revelation 3:1). We must be more than nominal Christians, church members, my friend, if we expect the eternal blessing of the child of God.

(2) The Jew Rested in the Law (2:17)

He boasted in the Law of Moses, in the observance of ceremonies and ritualism. But the very law in which he rested sentenced him to death unless he obeyed it—and this he could not do! Only One has ever kept the whole law, the Lord Jesus Christ.

“As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.”

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:10, 11, 13).

But Israel, as a nation, refused her Messiah who came to keep the law for every sinner. And vainly she rested in the law, which no one but the Lord Jesus could ever keep; for He is God, and God is holy.

(3) The Jew Knew the Will of God (2:18)

How much the greater his condemnation! While pagans all around him bowed down to gods of wood and stone, the Jew knew the revealed will of God, made known by special revelation by the Old Testament Scriptures, by His providential leading— by the Lord from heaven, “**God . . . manifest in the flesh.**”

(4) The Jew Approved “the Things That Are More Excellent, being Instructed Out of the Law!” (2:18)

Again, what a responsibility!

(5) The Jew Was Confident That He Was “a Guide of the Blind” (2:19)

He considered himself “**a light**,” even as Paul said to him: “**And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law**” (2:19, 20).

These are the superior claims of the Jew which Paul mentions here, and every one of them but added to his guilt before God, in that he did not receive the light they gave.

Then Paul asks some searching questions:

“Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?” (2:21-23).

Setting himself up as a teacher of the law, the Jew heeded not its commandments.

- Preaching that a man should not steal, he was the most pitiless usurer of Paul’s day.
- Saying that a man should not commit adultery, he did not obey the spirit of this commandment.
- And, keenest thrust of all, pretending to abhor idols, he **“trafficked in idols,”** made his living by selling to poor, benighted pagans what he knew to be false gods! This is the **“sacrilege”** he committed.

Listen to me, my friend. You would not rob a bank, but would you steal from God? You would not bow down to a god of wood or stone, but do you make a god of money, pleasure, pride?

Most of the idols in Buddhist temples today are manufactured in so-called Christian lands. Can you and I stand the test of these searching questions penned by Paul?

Missionaries tell us that their own countrymen are their greatest obstacle in dealing with the heathen. How can they explain the sale of opium? How can they justify the shipment of Bibles and whiskey on the same vessel? No wonder the natives scoff at the corrupt lives of many officials, when they think all these foreigners represent Christianity!

The proud Jew had no answer to offer to these questions.

Neither can you and I escape the condemnation of God if we reject His grace. Paul gave a sweeping summary of the indictment against the Jew in verse 24:

“For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.”

“As it is written” in the Old Testament, Israel was to be a witness to Jehovah before the Gentiles. But, as a nation, she failed.

What about your testimony, my Christian friend? What about mine?

Shall we bring reproach upon the Lord who bought us with His own blood?

In verses 25-29 of this second chapter Paul shows how outward ceremonies and sacraments and ritual will not save the soul.

The Jew boasted in circumcision, the token of God's covenant with Abraham. But it takes more than an outward symbol to save the soul. Many today trust in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper who know no more of the significance of these sacred ordinances than did the Jews know about circumcision.

Baptism is an outward sign of an inward change of heart; it represents death to sin with Christ, and resurrection with Him. It means that the Christian should walk with Him **"in newness of life."** And it would be better for that man not to partake of the Lord's Supper who denies the efficacy of His shed blood and broken body—these are things of the heart!

Paul knew that this argument would be a terrific blow to rabbinical pride and ceremonies. He knew it would raise objection. How was he to reconcile the place and privilege of Israel with God's promise to that nation? Therefore, in the opening verses of chapter three, with no break in the thought, he asks and answers the questions that would naturally come to the mind of a strict Jew.

His first question is significant:

"What advantage then hath the Jew?" (3:1). And his answer is equally impressive: **"Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God"** (3:2).

To the Jew God gave the Old Testament Scriptures; and these Paul calls **"the oracles of God."**

Advantage? Inestimable advantage! God's Holy Word is a treasure-house in itself—and with the advantage goes a tremendous responsibility!

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (See Hebrews 2:3).

The Gentile needs to remember his debt to the Jew—Christ and the Bible. And the best way to thank the Jew is to give back to him the gospel of our Lord and Israel's Messiah. No wonder Satan wants to wipe out the Jew!

Paul has already answered the second question raised here; therefore, he simply asks it again: **"What profit is there of circumcision?"** (3:1).

We look again at the closing verses of chapter two for the answer: **"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God"** (2:28, 29).

The third question is asked in verse 3: **"For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith [faithfulness] of God without effect?"**

In other words, the Jew might argue, saying that God promised blessing to Abraham and his seed, and would keep his promise whether the Jew believed or not. But such reasoning fails to take into consideration the fact that God also promised a curse for disobedience and unbelief, as well as blessing for obedience and faith.

The church today, like the Jew of old, has her eyes upon the blessing, and seems to have forgotten the curse. Many like to read about heaven, but close their eyes to the fact of a hell.

Yes; God did promise national blessing to Israel, and He will keep His Word. *But God ever requires personal, individual faith* on the sinner's part, whether he be Jew or Gentile. The answer to this third question is found in verse 4: **“God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.”**

Then last of all Paul raises a fourth question that might come to the mind of a Jew:

“But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?” (3:5).

In other words, if man's unrighteousness prepares the way for God's grace, and so exalts the righteousness of God, then is sin not a necessary part of the divine plan? If so, surely God will not judge sin. Would God not be unjust in punishing Israel's unbelief, when His forbearance would be exalted by Israel's unbelief? And quickly Paul answers the question: **“God forbid!”** *“Perish the thought!”*

The very fact that God will judge the world shows that sin was not foreplanned. **“God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?”** (v. 6).

What a lawyer Paul was! A prosecuting attorney, as it were, against the sinful human race who had utterly broken God's holy law, and fallen short of the righteousness He requires!

VI. THE VERDICT—“ALL HAVE SINNED” (3:9-20).

“What then? are we [Jews] better than they [Gentiles]? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin” (3:9).

Then follows the humiliating picture of man's failure—all quoted from the Old Testament, with which the Jews were familiar! **“As it is written”** (3:10) in **“the oracles of God,”** which the Jews claimed to believe; a man is a total failure, as touching righteousness.

Did you ever go to a photographer to have your picture made? I remember well how I had to have my photograph taken before the commencement exercises at the Moody Bible Institute. I had a boil on my face, but the picture had to be made within the time limit. Much to my comfort and surprise, the photographer assured me that he could “touch up” the proof so the defect would not show in the finished picture.

When we have our pictures made, we want all the blemishes and wrinkles taken out; we really do not want our true likenesses reproduced. But when God gives us a picture of ourselves, He leaves in all the blemishes, that we may see our need. And what a picture of fallen man do we behold in the verses we have just read!

In verses 10-12 we see what man is negatively; in verses 13-18, what he is positively, and what he has done.

Let us look first at what man is negatively:

- **“There is none righteous”**; all have fallen short of God’s standard of righteousness.
- **“There is none that understandeth”**; the intellect is darkened.
- **“There is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way.”**

As Isaiah expressed it: **“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:6).

- **“They are together become unprofitable,”** worthless.
- **“There is none that doeth good, no, not one.”**

And in verses 13-18 man’s overt acts of sin are pictured in all their blackness.

My unsaved brother, do not rebel against the truth of this inspired record. You will never appreciate God’s grace until you acknowledge that you are lost and undone—a hopeless sinner, but for God’s matchless love. Verses 13 and 14 show us what we are, apart from the cleansing blood of Christ: deceitful, malicious, full of cursing and bitterness against God and man; while verses 15-18 show us what the sinner has done, prompted by a heart filled with murder, strife, and enmity against God.

What fearful verdict against sinful man, both Jew and Gentile!

Verses 19 and 20 summarize the case. The trial is over; the court scene comes to a close; **“every mouth”** is **“stopped”**; and **“all the world”** is **“guilty before God”**; **“for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”**

He requires righteousness; man has none of his own; he cannot keep God’s holy law.

Some expect to be saved because of church membership, the observance of sacraments, good works, and morality. But Paul tells us that **“by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”**

There are men today who would pay thousands of dollars to buy their entrance into heaven; yet they refuse to acknowledge their unrighteousness, and be saved by grace. They refuse to accept God’s photograph of what they are. Many church members belong to this class.

While I was pastor in Texas, I was preaching one Lord's Day on this subject—how God makes guilty people righteous. I explained about Calvary and told how the death of Christ was substitutionary for us. After the service, I decided I would stop the first ten people I met going home from church, and ask each one what he was depending upon for his salvation. All of them gave every answer except the real one; they were depending upon being morally good and doing good works. Yet Paul declares emphatically that no man can be justified in this manner.

In chapter 3:20 the announcement is made final that by the deeds of the law shall no man be saved.

As W. R. Newell has aptly said; in commenting on these words:

“We can never do anything to improve ourselves. We may be justified in our own: eyes, or in the eyes of our friends, but not in the sight of God. After we have done our best, we shall still be guilty before God. We have failed to reach the standard God demands. This demands a penalty; our sin must be fully punished. How can a few, paltry ‘good works’ justify us? Paul cuts off any self-recovery. We are all going to certain judgment before God. If anything is done for us, it must be done by God Himself. We are condemned criminals!

“There is no theme more important than this one. These; truths are the most vital of the whole Bible. *If we are established in the truths of the first three chapters of Romans, we shall never be led astray by false doctrines.* All heresy in the world today has its origin in false conceptions of sin. The adherents of the cults cannot understand Calvary. Some call sin a misfortune; some say sin does not exist; others say that sin surely must not be punished; but the majority ignore sin. I really believe that not one person out of ten in professing Christendom realizes that we are all sinners, that every sinner is rushing toward the righteous judgment of God. Surely it behooves us to study carefully this great theme set forth in Romans: **“The just shall live by faith.”**”

My unsaved friend, put yourself in the sinner's place; go, to the foot of the cross of Calvary, and let God create in you a new heart.

There is no other way to heaven.

God requires righteousness; man has none of his own; **“but now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested”** (Romans 3:21).

These words **“but now”** bring us to the second division of the epistle, which we shall study next time. They tell us of the Saviour who died for sinners. Will you not accept Him today? **“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29).

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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