

**A Just Condemnation!**

“1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? 2 Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3 What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? 4 By no means! Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.” 5 But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) 6 By no means! For then how could God judge the world? 7 But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? 8 And why not do evil that good may come? -- as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.” (ESV 3:1-8)

**A. Objections Refuted** (3:1-8)

**Issues Raised:**

Does the faithlessness of the privileged Jewish people nullify the faithfulness of God? (v.3) --- **Not at all!**

Is God wrong to condemn if our unrighteousness serves to bring forth the righteousness of God? (v.5) --- **Not at all!**

Should it be justifiable for people to do evil so that good may come from it? (v.8) --- **Not at all! God Forbid!**

**Objections**: 1) Paul’s teaching undermines God’s covenant, (v.1-2)

2) Paul’s teaching nullifies God’s faithfulness, (v.3)

3) Paul’s teaching impugns (challenge as false) God’s justice, (v.5-6)

4) Paul’s teaching falsely promotes God’s glory. (v.7-8)

**Answers Given:** (John Stott – Romans Commentary)

Paul makes a shift to speak about the advantage of being born a Jew, but honored privileges imply duties and responsibilities.

* Those who are untrustworthy should expect God to be faithful to his threats as much as he is to his divine promises of special blessing. (v.4)
* In actual fact, God’s righteousness stands out all the more in contrast to the dark background of human sin (Rembrandt’s ‘Night Watch’). “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” (Gen. 18:25)
* Rom. 3:8 is answered more fully later on in the context of Rom. 6:1, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound.” (For instance: This is like the modern-day argument to establish a gambling casino because the huge profits they would receive might be used to benefit the advance of education --- such subtle deception.)

We must remember that Paul is dealing with the greater context: that of God’s wrath being poured out upon humanity. Paul presses the case that **ALL** have been condemned and are under the grip of sin. Recognizing sin’s deep seated deception, he reiterates that human depravity cannot alter the unchanging nature of God who is just and faithful to keep His promises. God’s righteous verdict abounds even when judged by those who are self-deceived by the *“lie”*(3:4, 7).

**A contemporary parallel to the Jewish inherited birthright:**

I am a Jew I am a Christian.

I was born into the nation Israel I was born in a Christian family.

I am a child of the covenant community I am a member of the church community.

I was circumcised the eighth day I was baptized as an infant or as an adult.

I regularly pay the temple tax I regularly give a tithe.

I give alms as a faithful Jew I give to charities as a Christian.

I regularly take part in the Passover I regularly receive the sacrament of holy communion.

I am a Jewish rabbi, a teacher of God’s Law I am a Christian leader, a teacher of God’s Holy word.

*“For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.”* (Rom. 10:1-3)

The one true advantage that Paul actually mentions is that the Jews had been ***“entrusted with*** ***the oracles of God”***(v.2).

**B.** **Sin’s Consequence – The Total Depravity of Mankind** (Rom. 3.9-20)

“9 What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all! For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, 10 as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. 13 Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. 14 Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 in their paths are ruin and misery, 17 and the way of peace they have not known. 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.’ 19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Rom. 3:9-20)

We learn from Romans 3:20 that instead of setting us free, the law in reality becomes our tutor teaching us how sinful we really are.This concludes Paul’s reasoning of the full extent of human depravity, theologically considered to be total.

**The Question Revised:**

Strangely, Paul asks the same question from before but seems to reverse his proposition concerning the Jewish advantage. He uses both the positive and negative statements to confirm that the presence of sin is overwhelmingly pervasive. When sin is present righteousness is absent. {**Total Depravity**}

1. Sin’s essential nature does violence to the nature of God, therefore at its core resides ungodliness.
2. Sin affects the whole nature of mankind, every part for it is pervasive – total depravity
3. O.T. teaching confirms that sin is universal

With the use of ‘we’ here in verses 8 &9, Paul also shifts to include those having a superior standing with God – believers in Christ. For by nature, everyone is a *‘child of wrath’* (Eph. 2:1-3). Paul uses a series of quotes from the O.T., not all being literal in translation but all consistent in meaning, from the Psalms, Isaiah & Ecclesiastes.

In vs.10-12 we are confronted with the universality and deplorable pervasiveness of sin (Eccl. 7:20, Ps. 14:1-3, 53:1-3).

Paul’s use of law here most probably relates to the whole of the O.T. and not to a more restricted meaning

In vs.13-14 Paul uses the specific example of the sin of the tongue (Ps. 5:9 ; 140:3 ; 10:7).

Overall there are 6 bodily parts used to illustrate our sinfulness – (feet, eyes & 4 parts dealing with speech)

In vs.15-18 Paul addresses the sinful ways in which we conduct our lives (Isa.59:7, 8 Ps.36:1)

Human war provides us with a blatant example, but sin manifests in more subtle ways as well.

In vs. 19-20 the whole world signifies the inclusion of the Gentiles

**In Summary:**

* Paul moves us forward toward this undeniable conclusion that all, both Jews and Gentiles alike, are under the just condemnation of sin (3:9).

*“Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin’?”* (Prov. 20:9)

*“Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”* (Eccl. 7:20)

* Paul’s universal aim is unmistakable: the human race is **‘Totally Depraved’**!

*“All both Jews and Greeks…” “None is… No not one…” “No one …” “No one …” “All have … together they have” “No one … Not even one…” “every mouth …" “… the whole world…” “…no human being…”* (‘no flesh’)

* Paul opposed any trust in merit, the reliance upon moral good works --- our methods of self-salvation.

*“Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes*.” (Ps. 36:1)

*“The human heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”* (Jer. 17:9)

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How is it consistent to say that the Jews have an advantage and yet they are not better off?
2. Discuss the true meaning of Paul’s conclusions about sin – (eg. the true meaning of ‘Total Depravity’)
3. What are some contemporary parallels to Jewish trust in their inherited birthright as the basis for salvation?