

The Epistle of Paul to the Church at Rome

October 27, 2003

II. CONDEMNATION (Rom. 1:18-3:20).

This section has three main divisions:

- A. **The Case against the Gentiles (1:18-32).**
- B. **The Case against the Jews (2:1-3:8).**
- C. **The Charges confirmed by Scripture (3:9-20).**

We can only assume that Paul began with the Gentiles because he was writing to what was predominantly a Gentile church. And he had emphasized that he was an apostle to the Gentiles in verses 5 and 6, and then in verses 13 and 14. Graham Scroggie, born in England of Scottish parents in 1877, and ministering all over the world (esp. in England, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Canada, and the United States), wrote this about this section on Condemnation:

For a religion to be universally applicable and effectual it must answer to universal need, and it is here shown that the need to which the Christian religion answers is universal. No other religion answers to world-need, and, therefore, no other religion is universal in its scope (*The Unfolding Drama of Redemption*, Vol. III, pp. 137, 138).

We are going to learn some very important truth about mankind in the verses we have come to, truth which God has revealed in His Word, but truth which is constantly denied by mankind. Who are we going to believe, what man says about himself, or what God says about him? Paul's answer to this question should be our answer: "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). The person who rejects the Word of God to prefer the words of men, is a fool. Let us notice what Paul said under the direction of the Spirit of God.

A. **The Case against the Gentiles (Rom. 1:18-31).**

1. **God's revelation to all men (Rom. 1:18-20).**

1:18 Here we come to the word "revealed" again; in fact, it is the first word in the Greek text in verse 18. And it is exactly the same verb and the same tense, voice, and mood – present tense, active voice, and indicative mood. And John MacArthur is perfectly right in saying that it should be translated, "is constantly revealed" (*The MacArthur Study Bible*, p. 1693). It is the verb ἀποκαλύπτω from which the book of Revelation gets its name: ἀποκάλυψις. We could even translate it, *is constantly being revealed*.

Let me explain. When God gave His Word to Moses, to David, to Solomon, and all of the OT writers, and when He did the same with Matthew and John and Paul and all of the other NT writers, He revealed to them what they were to write – word for word! He revealed His Word to them. With each one it was a great disclosure. An alternate meaning of this great verb "revealed" used in both 17 and 18 is that *God took off the cover of His truth, and let these men see it*. He let them see the light of his truth. He revealed to them that which otherwise was unknown and unknowable.

Now the Apostle Paul indicated in verse 17 that that which was made known to the writers of the Old and New Testaments is constantly being revealed to those who are being saved, nothing in addition to what we have in the Old and New Testaments, but what is written in the Old and New Testaments. God revealed it to the writers of Scripture so they could write it, and God reveals what they have written to us in order that we might be saved, and then continue to grow in our understanding of the Word of God.

Now here in verse 18 we have a different kind of revelation. It is a revelation that we see in the providence of

God, in the way He orders the events of human history. This is not a written revelation, but a message from God made known in life. In the past some of these events have been included in Scripture, like the destruction of the world at the time of the flood. Or another couple of examples is seen the events referred to in Luke 13:1-5. But people are just as blind to these events as they are to the Word of God.

Since the terrible fires started in southern California I have heard at least a couple of announcers talking about Mother Nature's hand in all of this, but nothing about God. Who controls the weather? Who makes those Santa Ana winds blow? Who could have prevented these fires by giving southern California some heavy rains? Are events like this just freakish weather, or is the Lord trying to tell us something. Is the Lord telling all of us in our country, not that the people of southern California are the worst sinners in our country, but could it be that message God was giving in our Lord's day: "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." There are undoubtedly many dear Christians who have lost their homes, maybe some who have died have been people of God. I don't know. But Paul was directed by the Holy Spirit to tell us that "the wrath of God is continuously being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold (hold down, suppress) the truth in unrighteousness."

Are we in America guilty? Are people throughout the world guilty? What is the charge against the people of the world, the Gentile world, but also the Jewish world?

There are three charges here:

- 1) Ungodliness.
- 2) Unrighteousness.
- 3) Suppression of the truth.

What is "ungodliness"? Basically it is man's rejection of God Himself, a refusal to render to God the worship, the praise, the obedience which all people owe to Him. Trench explains "ungodliness" as "a deliberate withholding from God of His dues of prayer and service, a standing, so to speak, in battle array against Him (p. 242). "Ungodliness" is rebellion against God. When the people of Israel cried out for the Lord Jesus Christ to be crucified, they were being ungodly. When Jews and Gentiles alike have worshiped idols and all kinds of false deities, they were being ungodly. When Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Ex. 5:2), he was guilty of ungodliness. The case against the Gentiles is headed by man's evil treatment of God. There is a move to get God out of our pledge of allegiance, and off of our coins.

What is "unrighteousness"? It is just another name for sin. It is a refusal to accept what God has declared to be right, and what is wrong. Haven't we been told for a long time that there is really no absolute right and no absolute wrong, that truth is always relative? What about dishonesty, adultery, abortion, homosexuality, even murder? We do our own thing and have done our best to eliminate the word "sin" from our vocabulary and from our lives.

What is "the truth"? The Lord Jesus said in His prayer in John 17, "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). So to suppress the truth is to do all we can to get away from the Bible so we won't have to think about it.

Now it is easy to point an accusing finger at the world, but what about us? Do we always treat God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the way we should? Do we seek Him daily? Do we worship Him? Are we determined to live for Him?

Are there sins in our lives that we excuse or try to overlook, thinking that we will do something about them some day? And how about the Bible? Do you read it daily? Do you apply it to yourself when you read it?

Have you made it “a lamp to your feet, and a light to your path”? Do you delight in it? Do you eat it like Jeremiah said he did?

There are many men who stand in the pulpits of the world who do not believe in the wrath of God. They tell us that God is too good to condemn anyone. Some men who have been evangelical in the past now are saying that there is no hell. What does the Bible say? It says that “the wrath of God” continues to be revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (whoever and wherever they may be), who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.” God is not silent today. People just are too blind to recognize His action when they see it. The wrath of God can be defined as “an abiding and settled habit of mind ... with the purpose of revenge” (Trench, p. 131). God has only had one attitude toward sin, which is expressed here in verse 18, *and that has never changed, and never will change. God’s case against man is overwhelming. We all need to make sure that we are seeking by His grace to please Him.*

November 3, 2003

The wrath of God is a subject which has not been given the attention, especially in recent days, that it deserves. Psalm 7:11 tells us that “God is angry with the wicked every day.” Paul told the Athenians on Mars Hill that God “now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30), and then he went on to tell them why:

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

The day of judgment has been set. We do not know when that will be. But what we do know is that there is no hope of turning to God after we die. If we are to be saved, it has to be now! And with the uncertainty of life, a person is a fool to postpone turning to Christ. When Paul finished his message on Mars’ Hill, we read this concerning the reaction of those who heard him: “Some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again in this matter.” How did they know that they would hear Paul speak about the Gospel again? They didn’t! And they were putting themselves in the same danger as those men did who “mocked.”

But now as we go on into verses 19 and 20 we have the first of two reasons as to why some people are going to experience the wrath of God. And this is in addition to all of the examples of the wrath of God which we have in the Bible, such as, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the destruction of the world at the time of the flood, the plagues that God brought upon Egypt, and on and on.

But here is the first reason. And as we look at it I want you to remember what Paul told the Athenians about the coming judgment of God. He said that God “will judge the world in righteousness.” He is going to judge unrighteousness *righteously*. Some people are always saying, in defense of the wicked who haven’t heard the Gospel, that God will not judge people and send them to hell if they have not heard the Gospel. So they are saying, in effect, that if God judges such unrighteous people, that he would not be righteous. Now let us see what the Bible tells us about that.

1:19 These two verses show why God will be righteous in sending any person to hell who does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at what God has done for every person who has ever been born into the world. “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them.” Our psychologists don’t tell us this. And a lot of Christians don’t know this, but God has planted in every human heart the realization that there is a God. “God hath showed it unto them.”

We have two interesting words in the first part of this verse. The first is an adjective, “known.” It means that God has disclosed a notable truth to man so that it is not only known, but well known. What is the result? It is

“manifest in them.” What does “manifest” mean? It means that God makes it evident, very apparent, that He exists!

And where did God disclose it to men. Paul said, “in them.” This means that it is an inner conviction of the heart, down where it requires no proof to convince us that it is true. But how do we know that it is there? “For God hath showed it unto them.” We are told here what God did for Adam and Eve when He created them, and He has put this conviction in the heart of every child who has been born from that day to this. God did it! “God hath showed it unto them.”

What is the meaning of the word “showed”? “Manifest” and “showed” are from the same root. The word “manifest” is an adjective taken from the verb “showed.” “Manifest” is a translation of the Greek word φανερόν; “showed” is the translation of the Greek word ἐφανερώσεν. They have the same relationship to each other as the verb *reveal* and the noun *revelation*. So anything that is revealed is a revelation, and a revelation is something that must be revealed.

Now all three of the words that we have been looking at in this verse, “known,” “manifest,” and “showed,” are words which speak of truth that has been revealed by God to every person who has ever been born. I don’t know how the Apostle Paul, speaking under the direction of the Holy Spirit, could have made it any clearer. People may be convinced later on, or try to convince themselves, that there is no God, but God has made sure that that truth is embedded in the mind and heart of every person at birth. Any person who says that is not true is arguing with the infallible, unchangeable Word of God!

Paul enlarges further on this truth in verse 20.

Now we know that God is invisible. God is present here this morning. Read Psalm 139 if you want to learn about the amazing presence of God although He is invisible. And this is what makes these verses, 19 and 20. God has placed in the human heart a strong conviction that there is a God Whom neither he nor anyone else has ever seen. “From the creation of the world” means that what Paul says here about human beings and their knowledge that there is a God, goes back to the very beginning of time, to the beginning of creation. “Clearly seen” as Paul went on to say means “being understood.” We use the word *see* that way, don’t we? If someone explains a difficult mathematical problem to us, and we understand it, we say, “Oh, I see!”

What is it that God has revealed about Himself? “His eternal power and Godhead.” This is the equivalent of saying, “His eternal sovereignty and Deity.” What tremendous truths these are! We come into this world on a solid basis of true theology, knowing that there is a God, a personal God, that He is eternal, and that He is powerful!

I love to think about these truths in connection with children. We have four children, and we did not have to try to prove to any one of the four that there is a God, or that we could talk to Him. We didn’t have to prove that He hears our prayers, or that He is good. Sometimes children are so convinced of the power of God that they have no hesitation in asking Him to do the impossible.

“Being understood by the things that are made” is translated in the NASB, “being understood through what has been made.” So there is not only the inner conviction of our hearts but the external evidence that we are everything in this world, and the earth itself, were made, i.e., created.

But now look at the way verse 19 ends. “So that they are without excuse.” Nobody can truthfully say when he stands before God in the day of judgment that he didn’t know there was a God. People boast about what they are going to tell God when they stand before Him at the Great White Throne judgment. But no one will be

surprised to see that there is a God. No one will even be inclined to say, “Oh, I didn’t know that You existed.”

So there is here a twofold revelation from God. The first is in our consciences; the second is in creation. So when God judges such people for their “unrighteousness,” He is perfectly righteous in what He does.

Now as we go on to verses 21, 22, and 23, we see what men have done in spite of what God has done to make Himself known. And we see evidence of this every day.

2. Man’s rejection of God (Rom. 1:21-23).

1:21 Note that it is God Who has made the approach to man, not man to God. But man, because of his sinful nature, has rejected the evidence that there is a God, that is, “when he knew God,” that there is a God to Whom he is responsible, he did not, and does not, glorify Him as God. He did not humble himself before God. He did not seek to learn more about God. Instead, he chose to live as though there is not God. “Neither was thankful.” He was thankful for the truth that God had given him, nor recognize that God was the source of his very existence and the Provider and Supplier of all of his needs, or give Him proper worship. Instead, he “became vain in his imaginations.” The word “imaginations” in Greek is the word from which we get our word, *dialogue*. It speaks of the way man turned away from the truth and has tried to reason things out for himself. But in doing so he “became vain.” He became foolish (a fool), and morally he became wicked. In Eph. 4:17 and 18 Paul speaks of unregenerate Gentiles who “walk in the vanity of their mind.” And then he added:

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness (Eph. 4:18-19).

This is happens when anyone suppresses the truth. Review Rom. 1:18b. Man is born a sinner ever since the sin of Adam. But things go from bad to worse when man turns away from the truth in his conscience, or the testimony of creation, or the testimony of Scripture. Consequences are overwhelming not only for time, but often for all eternity.

And so “their foolish heart was darkened.” This is the work of the Devil. Cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-4. When the light is rejected, then darkness overcomes the sinner. And how great that darkness can be! Pride takes control.

1:22 Man has always boasted in his wisdom. The biggest fools in the world as those who reject the truth of God in preference for their own wisdom. Paul indicted the wisdom of the world in his letter to the church at Corinth. Read 1 Cor. 119-25. For a man to treat the truth of God with contempt is to bring himself to the level of a simpleton.

But not only does the suppression of the truth affect the sinner, his ideas about himself, and his ideas about who he is and what he can do, but, as verse 23 shows, it changes his ideas about God.

1:23 Man makes his own god. He becomes an idolater. He turns from “the incorruptible God” to lifeless images of men, birds, fourfooted animals, and creeping things.

God is incorruptible; man is corruptible. God does not get older and wear out and finally die, like man does. Man rejects the incorruptible and chooses the corruptible. God is not only incorruptible, but unchangeable. He does not and cannot change. He cannot get better or worse because He has always been perfect, and always will be. And yet man in his sin and spiritual blindness prefers the corruptible. God’s revelation of Himself to man is totally righteous. Man’s response is totally unrighteous and worthy of divine judgment.

Stifler makes this interesting comment in his commentary:

There was the Apollo of the Greeks, the eagle of the Romans, the bull of the Egyptians, and the serpent of the Assyrians. Paul may be giving in this verse the historical development of idolatry, from its highest phase to its worst (p. 32).

November 10, 2003

And now we come to the third point in God's case against the Gentiles. It is:

3. God's rejection of man (Rom. 1:24-32).

1:24 Three times in these verses, in 24, 26, and 28, we have the same verb: *παρέδωκεν*. *God handed them over*. It was like He said, "You don't want Me, then you are going to experience the consequences." And this threefold use of *παρέδωκεν* indicates that God does this in three successive stages, according to Brown in the JFB series. Robertson said, "These people had already willfully deserted God Who merely left them to their own self-determination and self-destruction . . ." (IV, p. 30). Lenski adds this which helps us to understand the nature and full extent of what God does in such situations:

This is more than permission to fall into uncleanness, and it is less than causing this fall. God's action is judicial. At first God always restrains by moral suasion, by legal and other hindrances; but God is completely cast off, when the measure of ungodliness overflows, his punitive justice hands the sinners over completely (*παρέδωκεν*) to their sins in order to let the sins run to excess and to destroy the sinners. Thus God uses sin to punish itself and the sinner. Since they are determined on self-destruction, justice decrees that destruction (*Romans*, p. 108).

Here, in the first use of *παρέδωκεν* it is apparent that when God's restraining hand off of any person, persons or nations, man, because of the evil nature of his heart will proceed to destroy himself. And they do it "between themselves," *i.e., with each other*. All of society can be affect, as was the case in Sodom and Gomorrah.

How did their sin get started?

1:25 It started with the rejection of the truth which God has placed in every man's heart. So in these days when people do not read the Bible, nor even have a Bible in their homes, they can be guilty of turning the truth of God into a lie. *Idolatry is one of the many indications that those who are involved in it, are under the judgment of God!* Some say that men originally sought to worship God by working His creatures, but it was not long until the creatures themselves were the objects of man's worship. Idolatry is lit., the lie.

The saddest part about idolatry is that it robs God of the glory which rightfully belongs only to Him. The Creator is forgotten; the creature is deified. And this definitely is not the way things are supposed to be. Paul, after mentioning the Creator, add, "Who is blessed forever. Amen." This showed that Paul had not made the stupid mistake that millions of Jews and Gentiles were making in his day. Remember that the Caesars used deifying titles, like Augustus, and demanded that their people worship them. Long ago God had said through His prophet Isaiah, "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isa. 42:8). But men give His glory to graven images in spite of what He has said.

There are many professing Christians who worship images of Christ claiming that they are worshiping Christ. These verses condemn that, and call such worship idolatry. However, false worship does not have to have graven images. Our generation is often described as one in which God has been humanized, and man has been deified. Celebrities of all kinds are treated with worship-like adoration, and it often makes no difference what

they do, people still adore them. Americans as a whole are guilty of this form of idolatry.

And then we come to the Apostle Paul's second use of the verb *παρέδωκεν*.

1:26 Lenski ties this and the following verses with what has gone before by pointing out that as the word "uncleanness" in verse 24 describes the sin of verse 23, so the phrase in verse 24, "to dishonor their own bodies between themselves," or *with each other*, is described in verses 26 and 27.

And here in these verses we see that just as idolatry is evidence of the judgment of God, so is homosexuality!

When people reject God, He gives them over to be dominated by the "vile affections" that are in their hearts. Notice the expression in verse 24, "through the lusts of their own hearts." This is what the homosexual is demonstrating, the "vile affections" that are in his heart. "Vile" means that they are shameful, disgraceful, corrupt. Paul used this word in 1 Cor. 15:43 to describe the offensiveness of a dead body. "Vile" speaks of that which is contemptible, despicable. "Affections" are in this context uncontrollable sexual lust. Man, who thinks of himself as free, not subject to anyone or anything, finds himself the hopeless slave of the passions that are in his heart. God graciously restrains sin, even with unbelievers, otherwise life would be impossible in this evil world in which we live. But when He withdraws His restraint, as is the case in verses 26 and 27, then that sinner is plunge into the depth and filth of sin – even affecting women. Rosie O'Donnell let the world know that she was a lesbian. Now she has been demonstrating how corrupt she has become. We are reading in these verses about modern America, but the curse of homosexualism literally envelopes the world. I don't see how we can deny the fact that we are headed for the Great Tribulation!

Verse 26 deals with the lesbians; verse 27 deals with male homosexuals.

1:27 Men do the same as the women. Adultery is wrong, and it will bring the judgment of God. Cf. Heb. 13:4:

4 Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

But at least there is some explanation for adultery. In verse 27 women do that which is contrary to nature, turning to other women for their sexual gratification, and now we read that men do the same, "leaving the nature use of the woman," *i.e.*, in marriage. Instead they "burn," they are set on fire, and there is no fire so hot and so uncontrollable, as that which women show to another women, and men show to other men.

But that is not all that the Apostle Paul had to say. He went on to say that those who engage in such activity will be "receiving in themselves that recompense of the error which was meet." The NKJV translates this phrase, "receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due." What is the penalty? HIV! Aids! And a lot of other possibilities. You see, as we learn in Rom. 6:23, "the wages of sin is death." Death is the penalty, also the reward, for sin. This has been clear since the beginning of human history. And that penalty does not end with physical death. Death is not only physical, but it is also spiritual, and can ultimately lead to eternal death. This is the reward that you never want to receive. You would think that when homosexuals see other homosexuals dying such a terrible physical death, they would turn from their sin. But they are blinded to it all, and they cannot turn from their sin unless they turn to God. It is only through the Gospel that sinners can be delivered from the tyranny of sin.

But we are not finished with God's portrait of the depravity of man. Do you know what depravity means? It means that by nature man is evil, corrupt, immoral, a sinner by nature and so a sinner by choice. The rest of our

chapter gives us conclusive proof of all of this. Even with all of the tragic evidence of sin around us every day, still men and women, young people and children, persist in their sin. That is what verses 28 through 32 tell us.

1:28 Even after all of the evidence we have of sin all around us, and even in us, this verse tells us that people still do not want to have anything to do with God. And we see that all of the time. The Democrats – and I don’t see how any Christian can be a Democrat (although some Republicans are just as bad) -- the Democrats supports ungodliness. Let the President or any of his Cabinet say anything about God, and they are going to hear about it. The Democrats really believe in the separation of church and state – they want to keep anything having to do with God out of our national affairs. They support abortion, and a judge put on hold our President’s attempt to stop partial birth abortion before the ink in his signature was dry. Our courts will let a man who has mercilessly killed a couple of dozen women, and maybe more, spend the rest of his life in jail instead of giving him the death penalty. The Bible tells us that murder is a sin, and if governments don’t deal with it as sin punishable by death, that government will come under the judgment of God. We wonder why our children are becoming murderers when we subject them to all kinds of violence on TV and in the movies, and then tell them by the way we deal with criminals that even if you kill someone, the chances are that you can get away with it. The Democrats put our President’s judicial recommendations on hold, or flatly reject them, because they don’t want anyone to upset their godless policies. The battle lines are being drawn. The enemy is closing in on Christians who are seeking to live to please the Lord. We need to pray that the Spirit of God will open blinded minds to what is really going on, so that they will repent and turn to the Lord. Legally it is OK to be a homosexual, but the Word of God declares that it is definitely a judgment from God.

But now let’s see how this chapter ends.

We have seen that idolatry in any form is a judgment from God. We have seen that homosexuality and lesbianism are judgments from God. Now in verses 28 through 32 we are going to see that God judges sin with sin.

What ominous words these are: “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge. For the third time we read that “God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient”! This goes back to verse 21 and 22. (Read.) This states very clearly that man’s problem is mental. The Bible tells us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy [One] is understanding” (Prov. 9:10). In Prov. 1:7 says practically the same thing: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” We have it again in Psa. 111:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do His commandments: His praise endureth for ever.” Job was talking about the weather, about the wind and the rain and the lightning, as what God does, and then Job said what God has said to men. The words are in Job 28:28:

28 And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

We are so God-less that we talk about Mother Nature as in charge of the weather! Who is Mother Nature? If you can find her, I can assure you that Mother Goose is her next door neighbor. God is in charge of the weather. He created the sun, and He keeps it shining. If we could really do away with God, you and I and all of creation would be gone. He holds everything together, and sometimes He shows us that He does.

Twice in our Bibles, once in Psa. 14:1, and again in Psa. 53:1, we read these words: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” But that is not what the Hebrew text says. Lit. in both chapter the Hebrew needs to be translated, “The fool hath said in his heart, ‘NO GOD.’” Many feel that what the fool says, instead of denying that there is a God, that he says, “NO GOD FOR ME”! The fool says, “I don’t want have anything to do with God.” In the thought that we have from Romans 1, fools are people who do not want to have God in their knowledge. They don’t want to have anything to do with God. They don’t want Him or His Word, nor do they

want to have anything to do with His people. They wish that it was true that “there is no God.”

I hope you are getting the picture here. Before Adam sinned, he loved God, and he loved being with God. But after he sinned, he hid himself from God. God didn't tell him to hide. That was just what he did. And men have been trying to hide from God ever since. This is what is wrong with our country. We don't want to have anything to do with God. Oh, we will listen to someone sing, “God, Bless America,” at a world series game, but after the singing is done, they would prefer that God not stay for the rest of the game.

Well, what is price that has to be paid when we tell God to stay out of our lives. Oh, we might not verbalize our feeling, but that is how we feel naturally. The fact that you and I want God, we want to learn of Him, we look to Him to take care of us and to provide for us, if evidence of the grace of God in us.. We want to be like Him, and we are looking forward to seeing Him some day, and being with Him for all eternity. But the fact that these statements describe us is all due to the work of the Gospel in our hearts bringing about the new birth, making us new creatures in Christ.

But what happens to people who do not want God, nor do they want to give Him any place in their lives?

Verse 28 tells us that “God gave them over,” the same word *παρέδωκεν*, “to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.” What is “a reprobate mind”? It is a mind which has the disapproval of God. The NASB translates “reprobate” as “depraved.” It is a mind which does not think like God thinks. In fact, it is a mind that rejects the thoughts of God which are revealed in His Word.

But notice the words “to do.” Our thinking controls our doing. There are two very important verse in Proverbs with reference to the way we think and how this affects what we do, even the way we talk. Here are the verses, and I am reading from Prov. 23:6-7:

6 Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats:

7 For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.

(Repeat the verses.)

Now look again at our text. God judges those who reject him, or even those who just ignore Him, by delivering them over to a life without God. But we can make an added statement about the verb “to do.” It is a present, active verb which means *to do and to keep doing*. Lenski said this:

God gave men up to a mind that acted the fool in moral matters. Instead of doing what their own natural moral sense approved as fitting and proper from the moral standpoint ... they kept doing what they themselves adjudged as not being fit and proper morally. Reprobating God, the only effective moral guide and control, their own mind became reprobate by leading them to doing constantly what even they knew and acknowledged as bad (*Romans*, p. 118).

And then Lenski asked this question: “What do you think of a mind which reasons like that?” (*Ibid.*). Calvin called “a reprobate mind,” a mind that is *perverted*.

Years ago I wrote this paragraph in my notes regarding “not convenient”:

These are things “forbidden, shameful.” These would be things contrary to man's nature (as described earlier in this chapter), contrary to his duty as a creature of God, and so contrary to the will of God.

Note: The implied emphasis on the absolute nature of right and wrong.

1:29 “Being filled with all unrighteousness” – that is, all kinds of unrighteousness. And then he gave an extended list. If a person is “filled” with unrighteousness, then there is no room for righteousness. This kind of a person doesn't go back and forth between good and evil; his life is all evil before God. Let me give

you a brief word of explanation for the following sins. *Be sure to notice that the Apostle Paul made frequent references to the Law of God.* And he brings in the Law in his discussion of sin in anticipation of the point that he will make in Rom. 3:20:

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Now let us consider the meaning of the following sins.

- 1) "Fornication" – This is not in all MSS, but it is in some, so I define it. Thayer says that it is a word for all illicit sexual intercourse (p. 532). Haldane says that it "includes all of the violations of the seventh commandment (p. 67). The seventh commandment is "thou shalt not commit adultery."
 - 2) "Wickedness" – Man's inclination to do evil, that which makes a man indulge in sin.
 - 3) "Covetousness" – It speaks of man's intense desire to get all that he can for himself, and to get it any way that he can. It is often linked with the grossest of sin. Cf. Ex. 20:17.
 - 4) "Maliciousness" – This is the habit of a person's mind which makes him do wicked things. See 2).
 - 5) "Full of envy" – The word "full" shows how this is dominant in the human heart. Envy differs from covetousness because it does not necessarily mean that a person wants to be equal to another person, nor to have what he has, but he just wants to see the other person pulled down, and deprived of what he has. Pilate knew that this was the reason the Jews wanted Christ crucified. Cf. Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10.
 - 6) "Murder" - Envy led Cain to murder Abel. As we have just see, envy made the Jews to murder our Lord.
 - 7) "Debate" is argument, strife, contention, quarreling. This is one of the major sins of politicians. But it is in all of us.
 - 8) "Deceit" – Cf. Rom. 3:13. This is trickery. Judas was guilty of this sin. It is dishonesty in business.
 - 9) "Malignity" – This is the attitude that puts the worst possible meaning on others actions, charging them with the worst possible motives. So it is a false accuser.
 - 10) "Whisperers" – This is when a person makes a secret attack on another while trying to keep anyone else from knowing where the attack comes from.
- 1:30** 11) "Backbiters"– The word means *to talk down someone*. This is the person who loves to spread scandal, even publicly, whether a person is present or not, and whether a person knows it or not. What the "whisperers" do in secret, the "backbiters" do in public.
- 12) "Haters of God" – Cf. Rom. 5:10; 8:7.
 - 13) "Despiteful" – The person who does wrong, regardless of how it affects others, just for the pleasure that he gets out of it. Like "the Green River killer. But a person can be "despiteful" without being violent.
 - 14) "Proud" – Haldane says that this describes "persons puffed up with a high opinion of themselves, regarding others with contempt, as if they were unworthy of any intercourse with them" (p. 69).
 - 15) "Boasters" – He is a person who boasts about what he does not have. Thayer calls him "an empty pretender" (p. 25).
 - 16) "Inventors of evil things" – This is the person who is always looking for something evil to do.
 - 17) "Disobedient to parents" – The rebellion of children against their parents is sin, and a violation of the fifth commandment.

1:31 The five words in this verse all begin with an *alpha privative*, an "a" attached to the beginning of a word to turn the word from a positive to a negative. One of the five, "implacable," is not in the best MSS, but I include it because it is in the Textus Receptus from which we get our KJV.

- 18) "Without understanding" – which Lenski translates at "senseless." He is unwilling and incapable to understanding the truth of God's Word.
- 19) "Covenant breakers" – This person refuses to abide by any agreement. He is dishonest, saying he will and then he doesn't.

20) “Without natural affection” – This is a mother who forsakes her child. Or a father who will desert his family. It speaks also of a child who turns against his parents. Obviously it is the destruction of the family. We see this often today.

21) “Implacable” – This is the word that does not appear in the best MSS. This is the person who refuses to be reconciled to another person with whom he has had trouble. He would rather be at war than to make peace.

22) “Unmerciful” – This is a person who is totally unlike God Who is always rich in mercy. This is the person who does not respond to those in trouble. He would rather see the trouble increase rather than to provide any relief.

1:32 Now we come to a conclusion of this charge against all men, but particularly of the Gentiles.

“Who” speaks of all people who fall into any or all of the categories above. “Knowing” means *to know fully*. The verb is ἐπιγινόντες, an aorist, active participle. They are fully acquainted with the fact that God has declared His displeasure with all of these sins. But they continue to do them. And not only that but they applaud, they approve, they encourage those who do them – which only adds to their condemnation, and increases their judgment before God.

Years ago I came across the following sober and frightening summary of this last verse of Romans 1. It is found in Volume XIX-II, pp. 82 and 82 of Calvin’s commentary on the Bible:

Though this passage is variously explained, yet the following appears to be the correctest interpretation, that men left nothing undone for the purpose of giving unbridled liberty to the sinful propensities; for having taken away all distinction between good and evil, they approved in themselves and in others those things which the knew displeased God, and would be condemned by His righteous judgment. For it is the summit of all evils, when the sinner is so void of shame, that he is pleased with his own vices, and will not bear them to be reprov'd, and also cherishes them in others by his consent and approbation. This desperate wickedness is thus described in Scripture: “They boast when they do evil” (Prov. 2:14). “She has spread out her feet, and gloried in her wickedness” (Ezek. 16:25). For he who is ashamed is yet healable; but when such an impudence is contracted through a sinful habit, that vices, and not virtues, please us, and are approved, there is no more any hope of reformation.

November 17, 2003

John Brown, a Presbyterian pastor in Edinburgh, Scotland in the late 1800's, had this to say about this latter part of Romans 1:

The details in the latter part of the first chapter of the downward course of mankind, are absolutely frightful, and we might have been apt to suspect the apostle of exaggeration, were there not abundant evidence, in the pages of contemporary pagan literature, that the darkest features of the picture are drawn from life (p. 14).

Those word were written about 1880. If Dr. Brown were alive today he would say Romans 1:18-32 is a description of contemporary life. How we need to be praying that the Lord will never let us be pleased with any sin in any way. Instead, we as Christians need to love what God loves, and hate any and every thing which is displeasing to Him.

Now we go on to the next point in this book of Romans. But let me review the message of the book thus far.

I. PRESENTATION (Rom. 1:1-17).

Briefly to summarize these first seventeen verses, the Apostle Paul identified himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, separated by God for the preaching of the Gospel. He was prepared and eager to fulfill his calling in

Rome and was not ashamed of his message in any way because he knew that the Gospel, and only the Gospel, was the message of salvation for all people whether they are Jews or Gentiles. In the Gospel the righteousness of God has been revealed, a righteousness to be received by faith.

Having made all of this clear, Paul then went on beginning with the eighteenth verse of chapter 1 to show that all men are under the judgment of God because of sin. And so we give the next major division of the book the title:

II. CONDEMNATION (Rom. 1:18-3:20).

We have just completed:

A. The Case against the Gentiles (1:18-32).

One reason that the Gentiles are called “heathen” is because the Gospel was not given initially to them. The OT teaches us that especially from Abraham on, God’s dealings were with Abraham and his descendants. And, as Paul will emphasize in chapter 3 of Romans, they were at a distinct advantage over the Gentiles because the Word of God was given to the Jews. But that did not mean that God had left the Gentiles totally in the dark. God placed in every man’s heart the consciousness that there is a living God with Whom we have to do. Also creation itself was another way in which God manifested His presence. Creation had to have a Creator. But man has closed his heart to all of this. Even when men have recognized the existence of God, instead of seeking Him, they turned to idols, and worshiped them. So when men show that they do not want to have anything to do with God, God gives them over to their sin, not only to commit sin, but to be brought under the dominion of sin. So it is very clear that the Gentile world is under the judgment of God and desperately in need of a Savior.

Now we are ready for the next point under CONDEMNATION, which is:

B. The Case against the Jews (2:1-3:8).

We need to understand that spiritually and morally, by nature, there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. All are born sinners. All are under the judgment of God. We are all descendants of Adam, and under the curse of sin. But because of the way God had chosen to give His Word to the Jews, the Jews were inclined to feel that they were not in the same position before God as the Gentiles. In fact, they were inclined to feel that they were better than the Gentiles, and closer to God because they were Jews. Furthermore, they felt that the only way that the Gentiles could get right with God, was basically to embrace the religion of the Jews. That is why in the early church circumcision became such an issue. Jews did not feel that Gentiles could be saved unless they were circumcised. Paul gets to that subject here in chapter 2.

As we have noticed, at the end of chapter 1 Paul mentioned “the judgment of God.” And Paul said that men know that there is going to be a time when they will stand before God to be judged. But they go on sinning anyway! Now that theme, “the judgment of God,” continues on into chapter 2. (Read the first two verses.) And it goes right on down to verse 16. (Read.) Notice that in verse 16 Paul again mentioned the Gospel. In verse 17 Paul makes it clear that he has been speaking to Jews from the beginning of chapter 2, and his emphasis continues to be on the Jews until we get through verse 8 of chapter 3.

So I am going to call the first part of this section dealing with the Jews, but secondarily also with the Gentiles:

1. The righteous judgment of God upon all (2:1-17).

2:1 The word “therefore” indicates that Paul is taking the truth that he has presented in chapter 1 and apply it to any Jews who would read this epistle. The Jews were well known for their criticism of Gentiles, which also involved belittling them. But the verb which Paul used here indicated that Jews generally did more than criticize; they passed a sentence on the Gentiles, condemning them like they were acting on God’s behalf. But Paul told them that they were “inexcusable,” they had no defense. They were as guilty as the Gentiles. This word, ἀναπολόγητος, is only used one other time in the NT, and it is in Rom. 1:20 where it is translated, “without excuse.”

Paul’s language is very strong here, as is indicated by “O man,” because it is very important that every person understands that he, or she, is under the judgment of God., a judgment from which there is no human way out! But why did Paul say this? Because they did the same things that they were condemning the Gentiles for doing. Paul was speaking in the singular here (including the word “doest”) because he wanted every Jew to recognize that he was guilty before God. “Doest” is from the Greek verb, πράσσω, which means to do something habitually. The present tense of πράσσω emphasizes the practice of sin, that which they did over and over. So in judging the Gentiles, they were judging themselves. This is the verb that appears twice in 1:32 where in each case it is translated “do.”

So if we judge someone else for sin we are committing, we are incriminating ourselves.

2:2 To help the Jew see that he really was under divine judgment, Paul declared that God was righteous in judging all who did such things (referring back to the latter part of chapter 1). And the Jews were recognizing this by being critical of the Gentiles because of their sinning. Stifler said that “what is known needs no proof.” So the Jews were right in the criticism of the Gentiles, but very wrong in that they did not see their own guilt.

2:3 And so Paul asked the Jew if he felt that by pointing out the sins of the Gentiles that this would exempt them from the judgment of God. Haldane brings out that to escape the judgment of God would mean that they would not be judged by God, and so they would not be condemned by God, and so would escape the verdict. The condemnation of others often produces a self-righteous effect upon ourselves. And so Paul asked them the question that we have in this verse. Everyone who reads the Bible needs to answer the questions that are found in the Bible, and this question is no exception.

2:4 Here Paul gave the Jews another question to answer. He was obviously thinking about Jews who really knew the Lord. On what basis had they been saved? Was it because they were Jews? Were there things in their lives which made God look upon them with favor? Why had God saved them? Upon what basis has anybody been saved, whether Jew or Gentile? Was it because God especially needed what we could do? These are questions that we all need to ask, not just once in a while, but very frequently.

To answer these questions we need to go to verses like Eph. 2:8-9. Or Titus 3:3-7:

3 For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

In the second chapter of Titus Paul wrote about “the grace of God that bringeth salvation ... hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). None of us deserved to be saved. We deserved just the opposite. One of the greatest mysteries of all time is why God loved us enough to send His love to die for us.

So Paul had in mind the Gospel as he wrote to Jewish believers. And he asked them if they were not despising “the riches of His,” *i.e.*, *God’s*, “goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” He didn’t say anything about the fact that they were Jews. Being Jews was not a factor as to why God had saved them. It was a big factor in why they needed to be saved.

To despise the “goodness and forbearance and longsuffering” of God meant that they had thought little or nothing of these glorious attributes of God as they related to their salvation.. When we are thinking about why and how we were saved, we need to think about God, not ourselves!

“The riches of His goodness” – “Riches” always speaks of an abundance. This word is sometimes translated in our KJV as “gentleness,” or “kindness.” But we understand “goodness.” Vine says that this word speaks of “goodness in action” (II, 165). The more we know about salvation, the more we realize how unworthy we have been, as Jacob once said, “of all the mercies, and of all the truth,” or faithfulness, which God had bestowed upon him. See Gen. 32:10. God in His goodness has blessed us with “all spiritual blessings in Christ.” Foundational to all is His love for us. All of these blessings certainly were not deserved. If God had given us what we deserve, He would have had nothing to do with us. But His goodness is not all.

“Forbearance” – This speaks of the way He has put up with us instead of immediately judging us. God has shown great self-restraint in putting up with us in our sins and in our rebellion against Him. He has tolerated us far beyond what we deserve. When we look back upon our lives, we marvel that He did not go ahead with His judgment of us.

“Forbearance” and “longsuffering” go together. God’s forbearance is amazing, but what is so amazing about it is how long He puts up with us in our sin. If we had been in His position, we would have proceeded with the judgment which we so greatly deserved. Don’t you marvel today at God’s forbearance and longsuffering with people in their pride, their selfishness, their greed, their immorality? We can always see why He should judge others, but we are so slow in realizing how many reasons we have given Him to bring us to judgment.

Paul was saying to this Jew which represented the whole nation, “Instead of having a lot of merits in your favor, you were daily piling up demerits.” So when we look at ourselves in our sin, and then God in His absolute holiness, we can look and look but never find a single reason why He should have saved us, but many reasons why He should not!

But it is all of this summed up in “the goodness of God” that has brought us “to repentance.” It was not our merit, but His mercy which brought about our salvation. According to 2 Tim. 2:25 even repentance doesn’t come from us, but it is a gift of God. And so we sing, “Boasting excluded, pride I abase; I’m only a sinner saved by grace.”

2:5 Our trouble was with our heart. This was the problem with the Jew. It was hard and unrepentant. And this is what adds to our condemnation. Paul was talking to a Jew, but we need to see how these same truths apply to us as Gentiles.

What is a hard heart? It is a stubborn heart, an obstinate heart. It is a heart that refuses to change even when it knows that it is on the wrong course. When Paul told the Athenians that God “now commandeth all men every where to repent: because He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17: 30-31), we read the “some mocked” (Acts 17:32), they were showing that they had hard and “impenitent” hearts. People know that they need to repent and turn to God, but they feel safe and content just to put it off, or to turn it down altogether, thinking that there is no reason to be in a hurry about getting right with God. And they think that things are just at a standstill. But what is actually happening? Instead of enjoying “the riches of God’s

goodness” (v. 4), they are amassing a treasure of a different kind – they are treasuring up unto themselves “wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” That day is coming. The time has already been appointed. We have some evidence of what it is going to be like even in history. Think of the great Flood. Think of Sodom and Gomorrah. Think of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the captivity which followed with its sword, pestilence, wild animals, and famine. God’s wrath has been and is continually being revealed. But the full “revelation of the righteous judgment of God” is yet to be revealed. Ultimately it means HELL! Cf. Rev. 20:11-15. John the Baptist in his preaching said,

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

As terrible as the final judgment will be, it will be a “righteous judgment of God.” Why? Verse 6 gives us the answer.

2:6 To “render” is *to pay off what is due* (Thayer, p. 61). Here is Robert G. Lee’s *Payday Someday*. And it will be “to every man according to his deeds.” Even the good works of men are as “filthy rags.” Cf. Isa. 64:6:

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

To try to present our good works to God instead of trusting in the work of Christ is an abomination to God. And people will realize that in that day when it will be too late to change.

Verses 7 through 11 make it clear that there are only two classes of people in the world, not Jews and Gentiles, that is, not a division along racial lines as the Jews would like for us to think, but a division of those who obey the truth of God, and those who do not.

2:7 Here in verses 7 and 8 we have a $\mu\grave{\epsilon}\nu$ and $\delta\grave{\epsilon}$ contrast, which translated into English means *on the one hand, but on the other*. So we would read, “To them on the one hand,” and then follow in verse 8, “But unto them *on the other hand*.” Paul was explaining the two and only two possibilities, although there are certainly differing degrees within both categories. Paul was not teaching that we are saved by what we do, but he was indicating that what we *do* is evidence of what we *are*.

As we come to verses 7-10 an important point needs to be made. *We know that the Apostle Paul was not teaching salvation by works. But he was indicating here that the way a person lives is the evidence that he is saved, or that he is not saved.* This is a truth that is often, we could even say, most frequently, overlooked when we speak of salvation. As Paul will go on in this chapter to show that a person can know a great deal of truth, like the Jews did, without really being saved. We often meet people who claim to be saved, but their lives are a denial of their claim. They may understand the Gospel, and be able to tell us what it is, but they still live like people who know nothing of the Gospel. I have known church officials who were unfaithful to their wives, who would swear when they got made, who were dishonest in business, who would not hesitate to tell a lie if it could be for their advantage. There are many who profess to be Christians who never read the Bible, never attend church, and I could go on and on. But somewhere in the past they have made a profession of faith, they have gone forward in some evangelistic meeting, or they have been baptized and belong to a church, and so they say very confidently that they are Christians. Paul is going to be mentioning Jews in this chapter who thought that they were the people of God because they were Jews, or because they had the law and tried to live by it, or because they were circumcised. But they gave no evidence in their lives that they really knew the Lord in salvation. Paul knew all about them because he used to be one of them!

We used to have a Baptist evangelist here in the State of Oregon who preached that if you did not know *when* you were saved, you could not be sure that you were saved. That is not what the Bible teaches. What Paul taught, and what John taught, and what James taught, and what Peter taught, *and what our Lord taught*, was that

if you are saved, your life will show it. Concerning swearing James taught in James 3:10, “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.” And then he immediately added, “My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (Jas. 3:10). Earlier in that same epistle he raised the question, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” (Jas. 2:14). And then he went on to explain, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (Jas. 2:17). And then to make clear what he meant he told those who were objecting to such teaching, “Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works” (Jas. 2:18b). He even added: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (Jas. 2:19). But we don’t believe that devils, or demons, are saved, or ever will be saved. But they believe that there is one God. At that point their theology is right. People think that because they believe the Bible, or believe in the Deity of Christ, and even believe that He died for sinners, that they are saved. But you can believe all of that with your head without really knowing the Lord in your heart..

Salvation includes repentance of sin before God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, renouncing all confidence in ourselves or in our works. I have been listening to some tapes by John MacArthur on Luke 9, especially this verse:

23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me (Luke 9:23).

MacArthur believes that when the Lord said this he was preaching the Gospel, and I agree with him. To be saved means to be changed. As Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:17:

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

We have weakened the Gospel by not telling people what it really means to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the changes that the Lord makes in our lives. It is ridiculous for believers to be arguing about whether a person can accept Christ as Savior, without accepting Him as Lord. You can’t receive the Lord as your Savior without having Him as your Lord.

So the judgment of God is not going to be based merely upon what we say we believe, but upon what our lives show that we are. Verse 7 is a believer; verses 8 and 9 are about an unbeliever; verse 10 is a believer again.

Verse 7 has to do with those who are righteous before God. “Patient continuance” is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. They live with eternity in view, ending finally when we are with the Lord in the fulness of “eternal life.”

2:8 Here, “on the other hand,” we have an entirely different group. The “contentious” are those murmur against the Word of God, those who quarrel with God, those who show “their natural enmity against God by disapproving of His government or authority” (Haldane, p. 85). They “obey unrighteousness.” What will they get? Their reward begins with “indignation and wrath” here in verse 8, two words for anger, the first being outbursts of anger; the second, continuing wrath. But there is more in verse 9.

2:9 Continuing from verse 8 and the result of “indignation and wrath, there will be “tribulation,” or affliction; and “anguish.” The first speaks of man’s spirit and how he will be in great anguish; the second speaks of his physical distress. Trench (p. 204) says that it speaks of a man in a cell who can “neither stand, walk, nor lie in it at full length.” And Paul says that these apply equally to Jews and Gentiles who do not know the Lord.

2:10 Here Paul reverted back to those he was describing in verse 7, the righteous, those who really know the Lord. Note we have here again, as in verse 7, “glory” – the ultimate condition of the Lord’s people. Instead of tribulation and anguish, they are honored by God, and are at peace. These are those who do that which is “good” in God’s sight. And note again that Paul emphasized that this will be true of both Jews and

Gentiles, not because of their race, but because of their faith. Cf. 1:16; 2:9.

2:11 This explains the last words of verse 10: “To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.” Whether a person experiences eternal blessing or eternal judgment does not depend upon their race, but upon their faith. The Jew may be mentioned first in each instance because he is the one who has had the greatest light. And so both with respect of blessing or judgment he is mentioned first.

“No respect of persons with God” lit. means that *God does not accept the face of anyone*, according to Hodge, p. 53. There is none of this in God, but there is hardly anything else in man. It was very apparent in Paul’s day also. The Jews hated the Gentiles, and the Gentiles hated the Jews. This truth was taught in the OT, so no devout Jew would deny it. Cf. Deut. 10:7; 1 Sam. 16:7; 2 Chron. 19:7; Job 34:19. Isa 64:6.

So this is one major difference between God and men. Our tendency to respect persons is an evidence of our depravity.

November 18, 2003

2:12 This verse gives us a very important statement regarding the heathen, or the Gentiles, who do not have the Law. They will perish! And this is explained even more in verse 14. Even though they do not have the Word of God, they will perish because they are sinners. The latter part of this verse has to do with the Jews. They have the Law, and they will be judged by the Law, which means that they, too, apart from God’s intervention by His grace, will die, because no one is able to keep the Law perfectly. So instead of being saved by the Law, they will be judged more severely because they have the Law. Cf. Rom. 3:19-20.

Haldane pointed out from this verse that some expositors agree that all Gentiles are guilty before God, but that they will not be condemned. “But the language of the Apostle precludes the possibility of such a supposition. It is not said that those who have sinned without law, but that they shall ‘*perish without law.*’ The language, then, does not merely assert their guilt, but clearly asserts their condemnation” (p. 88).

Note that the translators of the KJV felt that verses 13-15 were parenthetical and explanatory of the statement in verse 12, and that the thought of verse 12 is completed in verse 16. So let us go on to see how Paul explained both the guilt and condemnation of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews.

2:13 The Jews are the ones who heard the Law. This implies that they knew it, understood it, and accepted it. But the Law required more than all of that. It required obedience. Bishop Moule said, “Law is never for a moment satisfied with applause, with approbation; it demands always and inexorably obedience” (p. 64). The big issue is how can men be “just before God.” God is the Judge. He is the One Who must approve or reject men. The Jews were not saved because they had the Law; the Law required perfect obedience. Cf. Gal. 3:10, 21; Jas. 2:10; and what we have just seen in Rom. 3:19-20. There are no second chances.

But at this point Paul moved back to the Gentiles in verse 14.

2:14 We learned in chapter 1 that God has given all men a twofold testimony of His existence. The first is in the consciousness of God in the hearts; the second is that creation itself demands a Creator. Now Paul is going to tell us another interesting truth from revelation. It is this: THE VERY TRUTHS CONTAINED IN THE LAW BY NATURE ARE RECOGNIZED EVEN BY THE GENTILES SO THAT THEY KNOW THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD, THAT IDOLATRY IS WRONG, THAT IT IS WRONG TO TAKE THE LORD’S NAME IN VAIN, THAT IT IS WRONG TO STEAL, TO MURDER, TO LIE, ETC. What does this show? See verse 15.

2:15 This is an amazing fact revealed in Scripture, but not admitted by men, and usually denied even by believers who are not as knowledgeable about the Word of God as they should be. (Read v. 15.)

“Which show” could be translated, *which prove*. What God wrote upon the tables of stone, He has written upon the heart of every man, both Gentiles and Jews. Man by nature understands that there are some things that are right, and other things that are wrong, not in a relative way, but in an absolute way which admits no compromise! And we need to understand this. Men by nature do not understand the grace of God, or the Gospel. These have to be preached, or declared, to them. But God has written upon human hearts enough to for them to understand what is right and what is wrong before God.

Now there are three expressions in this verse that we need to understand:

- 1) “Their hearts” – This is the inner man. This is where this knowledge is, where he understands the truth contained in the Law. So man by nature not only knows that there is a God, but he has a basic understanding of what pleases and displeases God; what is right before God, and what is wrong. So the KNOWLEDGE is there, in his heart.
- 2) “Their conscience” – This is where approves of what God has written upon his heart, and consequently he disapproves of everything else.
- 3) “Their thoughts” – This speaks of man’s God-given ability to arrive at proper moral judgments. The words “the mean while accusing or else excusing one another” means that what God has written in our hearts is the basis upon which we not only judge ourselves, but each other. Going back to 2:1, this was what the Jews were doing to the Gentiles, condemning them of sin, but because of the blindness of their own hearts, failing to see that they also were guilty before God and deserving of His final judgment.

All of this means that from the knowledge that God has placed in our hearts, we know that there is a God and we need to seek Him, to know Him, and to learn from Him what He has done and can do to take away the guilt that we feel in our hearts. We know that in addition to all that God did for us at creation, His Spirit has come to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment. See John 16:7-11.

So now we can see why God’s judgment of sinners is a “righteous judgment” (Rom. 2:5). And we can see why all men are “without excuse” (Rom. 1:20; 2:1).

2:16 And so we should not be surprised to learn that God has declared that He has already set a judgment day, but He has not told us when that will be. *But it is already on the divine calendar!* Cf. Acts 17:31. Jesus Christ will be the Judge. As the Judge He is the only One Who will be excluded from judgment. He is without sin! “According to my Gospel,” which means that a part of the Gospel message is the prediction of judgment. This is what we are saved from—from the penalty of our sins. Christ bore our sins on the Cross. Our penalty has been paid in full. And there is no other way of salvation. Paul called it “my Gospel” not because it was different from what John preached, or what Peter preached. There is only one Gospel. Paul called it “my Gospel” because he had made it his own by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and because this was the message which he always preached.

These are amazing truths, aren’t they, truths which we would never have known if God had not revealed them in His Word. But they are the truth! And we need to keep them in mind for ourselves, for all other people, and especially when we are able to speak to sinners about Christ and the Gospel.

November 24, 2003

William R. Newell has pointed out in his commentary on Romans that there are SEVEN GREAT PRINCIPLES OF GOD’S JUDGMENT revealed to us in this second chapter of Romans:

- 1) It will be “according to truth” (v. 2).
- 2) It will be according to accumulated guilt (v. 5). And I would add that it will be a “righteous judgment.”

- 3) It will be according to our “deeds,” or works (v. 6).
- 4) It will be without “respect of persons” (v. 11).
- 5) It will be according to our performance, not knowledge (v.13).
- 6) It will include “the secrets of men” (v. 16).
- 7) It will be according to reality, not religious profession (vv. 17-29).

This last point is what we come to now.

2. The particular case of the Jew (Rom. 2:17-29).

What Paul has already written about God’s judgment upon sin, applies equally to Jews as well as to Gentiles, but because of the place the Jews have had in the plans and purposes of God, their case demands greater attention than Paul has given to them up to this point.

2:17 Do you know what a protasis is? And what about an apodosis? These are words which we use in grammar to distinguish between. A protasis is the subordinate clause in a conditional sentence which is usually introduced with the word, “if.” An apodosis is the principal clause in a sentence, and it is usually introduced with the word, “then.” So when we say, “If you think it is going to rain today, then you had better take your umbrella with you.” The, “if you think it is going to rain today,” is the protasis; “then you had better take an umbrella with you,” is that apodosis.

Well, we have a protasis in verse 17 and an apodosis in verse 21 in these verses we have come to beginning with verse 17. Some of the Greek authorities say that verse 17 should somewhere have the word “if” in it. The NASB does. So does the NIV. And the ESV does also. When you get down to verse 21, you find in a “then” in the ESV, a “therefore” which is just like a “then” in the NASB, and a “then” also in the NIV. It is not quite as clear in the NKJV, but it begins in verse 17, “Indeed you are called a Jew,” and then in verse 21 there is a “therefore.” The old KJV has a “therefore” in verse 21, but the protasis is not as clear here in verse 17 as it should be. But nevertheless it is there.

Some Greek scholars think that verse 17 should begin, “But if,” as it does in some MSS. Others have “behold.” It is very clear in all translations that if the Jew makes all of the claims for himself that he obviously did, and which are mentioned in verses 17 through 20, then he ought to be able to give the right answer to the questions which Paul addressed to him in verses 21, 22, and 23.

So paraphrasing what Paul said here, it would read something like this: “Look, since you are called a Jew ...” Or, “Look, if you call yourself a Jew and the Gentiles call you a Jew also,” because it was true that both Jews and Gentiles used this term for the Jews, setting them apart from all other people who were classed as Gentiles. By this the Jews meant that they were a special group of people, and there is no doubt from Scripture itself, that they were!

The term “Jew” comes from Judah, and goes back to the time when the northern kingdom of Israel was separated from the southern kingdom of Judah. And the very term excluded the Gentiles, making the Jews think that they were superior.

“Restest in the Law” – but obviously they did not rest, or trust, in the Lord. They took special pride in the fact that God had given them the Law, but He had not done a similar thing for the Gentiles. “Makest thy boast of God” – which means that they felt that God had given them special favor and a privileged relationship with Himself which He had not given to any other nation. Note that instead of being humbled by the goodness and grace of God, it made them puffed up with pride.

2:18 The boastful claims continue with “and knowest His will.” So they knew more, they claimed, than the Gentiles did. To a certain extent this claim was true, but we need to remember here that the Apostle Paul said that “knowledge puffeth up” (1 Cor. 8:1). Again they were claiming that this indicated that they were the favored people. “Approvest the things that are more excellent” means that because they had the Law they were able to discern between that which pleased God, and that which was displeasing to Him. Brown in the JFB series said that their approval was in thought, but not necessarily in action. And all of this was because they were “instructed out of the Law” from their earliest Jewish training. Hodge says that the Greek verb for “being instructed” refers to oral instruction pointing to all of the effort and time that was put into their learning.

2:19 Consequently they felt convinced, they believed with all of their hearts, that they were in a position to help everyone else, but unaware of their own many spiritual needs. They felt fully qualified to guide the blind, to give light to those in darkness, to instruct the foolish, and to teach the babes. And so they believed that it was the Gentiles who were blind, in darkness, foolish, and untaught.

It is true that all are spiritually blind, meaning that they can't see where they are going. But, as our Lord said, if you have a blind man leading another blind man, both are going to fall into the ditch. See Matt. 15:14; Luke 6:39. “A light to those who are in darkness.” But, again, quoting our Lord, “If the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness”(Matt. 6:23). Truth in the head, but not in the heart, is not light, but darkness. And yet the Lord has given His Word that we might have light, have the truth, in a world that is characterized by darkness. A blind man in darkness has a twofold problem. Give him sight, and he still has the darkness.

2:20 The boasting continues. “An instructor of the foolish.” The word “foolish” is defined by Thayer as meaning that the Jews considered the Gentiles as almost incapable of understanding the truth, of perceiving and judging the truth if it were given to them. And so the Jews were not inclined to think that there was truth that they needed to know, or that the knowledge of Scripture was more than an academic matter. A person does not really understand the truth until it makes a difference in his or her life.

“A teacher of babes” – They felt that they had to deal with the Gentiles as you would babies, infants, starting at the ground and working up. Not only do all of these terms reflect the pride of the Jews, but also their scorn for the Gentiles. In many things the Jews were right. They believed that they had “the form of knowledge and of the truth in the Law.” “Form” speaks of the absolute and unchanging character of the Word. Calvin said that “the form” could never mean just an outline or a summary, but that it was the complete truth, perhaps, as far as it had then been revealed. The Jews felt that they had a right to claim these titles simply because, as Paul said, “Thou hast ...”

These were tremendous claims made by the Jews. But how much of it was true? Beginning with verse 21 the Apostle Paul asked some questions of the Jews to make them see (which he already did see, but which they did not see) what their own great needs were before God. And so now we are ready for the apodosis. Paul wanted them to see that the Word was not given just for them to hear, but nothing else. His questions bring out the importance of being “doers.” We need to be hearers first, but not stop there. We need to follow up with the doing. Paul was applying Rom. 2:13.

November 25, 2003

2:21 The questions that Paul asked in this, and in the next two verses, are questions which we all need to ask ourselves.

First, regarding teachers. *The teacher is not just to be a channel of information, but he is to be a living example*

of what he teaches. This was the charge that our Lord brought against the scribes and the Pharisees. Listen to what He said to the people and to His disciples about their teaching. These words are found in Matt. 23:1-4:

- 1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
- 2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
- 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.
- 4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

God holds us responsible for the truth that we *know*, but according to Rom. 2:6 He is going to judge us also according to our deeds. A grave responsibility rests upon the teacher of the Word. Remember what James said in his epistle which lays such a strong emphasis on *doing* what God has told us to do in His Word. I am reading from the NKJV:

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1-2).

Paul began by reminding the teacher of the Law that he should be his own first student. I remember that Dr. Mitchell used to say very frequently that the truth we get in our hearts needs to drop down about eighteen inches until it gets into our hearts. How can we expect our teaching to affect the lives of those we teach if it has not affected our own lives? And this applies not just to pastors, but to everyone who teaches the Word, even fathers and mothers who teach their children. We need to be very, very careful that we are teaching the truth of the Word of God, but we need to be equally careful that we are seeking by God's grace to be and do what we are telling others that they need to be and do. One of my teachers used to tell us in seminary that when we point a finger at anyone else, we are pointing three fingers at ourselves. It is just as important, or even more so, for me to hear what I am saying to you today, as it is for you to hear it. I need to be my own best pupil.

Next Paul moved on to the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal." Again referring to our Lord's words in Matthew 23, listen to the charges He brought against them. First in Matt. 23:14:

14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

And then also in Matt. 23:25:

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

Paul warned Timothy about "the love of money" and about riches in general when he said,

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (1 Tim. 6:9-11).

My Dad, who was a business man, not a pastor, but a Christian, told me before I ever went off to school to prepare for the ministry, that there were three things that could ruin a pastor: laziness, women, and money. His words were very, very true. And evidently Paul knew, from his days as a Pharisee, that the love of money was a problem in the lives of many Pharisees. So Paul was actually placing a twofold indictment against the teachers in his day: stealing and covetousness.

I find it very alarming that in many of our seminaries today the students are taught to tell churches what they expect in the way of a salary and other benefits when they are being considered for the pastorate of a church. Can you imagine the Apostle Paul doing anything like that?

2:22 Paul's next question had to do with adultery. Perhaps you have noticed that the ten commandments of the Mosaic Law are interrelated. Stealing and coveting are related, as we have just seen. So are adultery and coveting related because the first thing the Jews were told not to covet, was their neighbor's house. The second was "thy neighbor's wife," which was adultery.

However, the Lord Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, explained it even more in detail. Listen to His words found in Matt. 5:27 and 28:

27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

It is the look that leads to lust, and the lust that leads to sin. James explained it in his epistle with these words:

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (James 1:13-15).

Perhaps you remember also the occasion mentioned in John 8, verses 1 through 11, where the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Him who they said had been taken in the very act of adultery and, according to Moses, should be stoned. But the Lord responded by saying, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7b). Do you remember what happened? We are told in verse 9:

9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

What did this mean? It meant that they were all guilty of the very sin of which they were charging the woman.

December 1, 2003

Barnes, in his commentary, made this statement:

There is no doubt that this was a crime very common among the Jews ... The Jewish Talmud accuses some of the most celebrated of their Rabbis, by name, of this vice (Grotius.). Josephus also gives the same account of the nation.

In Matt. 12:39 our Lord called the Jewish leaders "a sinful and adulterous generation." He may have been speaking of them in a spiritual sense, but many commentators feel that our Lord meant it literally because adultery had become so common among the Jews, and even among their leaders.

What credibility would a teacher have who taught that adultery was evil, and yet practiced it himself?

But then the Lord went on to another violation of the ten commandments: idolatry! Paul asked them if they "committed sacrilege," which usually means robbing temples, or stealing things that those who worship in the temples would consider sacred. But probably what Paul had in mind here was doing what those who worship idols do, and that would be letting anything else have the place in their hearts which God alone should have. Take, for example, the way the Lord responded to the Devil when the Lord took Him up into a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, promising those kingdoms to Him if He would fall down and worship him, that is. the Devil. But the Lord responded with these words:

Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Matt. 4:10).

So to worship anyone but the Lord, or anything but the Lord (money, possessions, positions, and the like), is committing sacrilege. Very, very few people would escape such a condemnation. And certainly the Jews were not exempt. Malachi, in his day, charged the people of God with robbing God of tithes and offerings, and then

using what should have been given to the Lord for their own personal and selfish purposes. Cf. Mal. 3:8-9. This was another point that Paul probably had in mind.

Paul would have made a good prosecuting attorney. But he has one more question to ask, and we find that in verse 23.

2:23 To make their boast in the law, would mean that they felt superior to the Gentiles because God had given them the Law, but He had not given it to the Gentiles. But even though they had it, had they broken it (which they and everyone else surely had), instead of glorifying God had they brought dishonor upon Him?

Again quoting Barnes, he made an excellent point in commenting upon this verse. This is what he had to say: By boasting of the Law, they proclaimed their conviction that it was from God. By breaking it, they denied it. And as actions are a true test of man's real opinions, their breaking the Law did it more dishonor than their boasting of it did it honor. This is always the case. It matters little what a man's speculative opinions may be; his practice may do far more to disgrace religion than his profession does to honor it. It is the life and conduct, and not merely the profession of the lips, that does real honor to the true religion. Alas, with what pertinency and force may this question be put to many who call themselves Christians!

We honor God when we obey Him, and we dishonor Him when we do not obey him. And Paul went on to remind the Jews that this is what was happening.

2:24 Although the Jews boasted because of their relationship to God (Rom. 2:17), and boasted because God had given them the Law, yet because of their sins in disobeying the Law, they had caused the Name of God to be blasphemed by the Gentiles. This is what Nathan the prophet told David about his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, to conceal his sin. Cf. 2 Sam. 12:13-14:

13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

The Lord told His people through Isaiah the prophet that He was sending them into captivity because “My Name continually every day is blasphemed” (Isa. 52:5). This is what Paul told Timothy to tell those who were servants:

1 Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed (1 Tim. 6:1).

What does it mean to blaspheme the Name of the Lord? It is to cause someone else to speak evil of the Lord. Sometimes when a non-Christian has had trouble with a Christian because the Christian has treated them in an ungodly manner, the non-Christian will say, “Well, if that is what it means to be a Christian, I want nothing to do with it.” To blaspheme is to despise. Whenever we who are Christians act in a way that a Christian should not act, we bring reproach upon the Lord’s Name.

Next Paul brought up circumcision was an advantage that the Jews were prone to bring up as giving them a place above the Gentiles.

2:25 Paul himself, as an unbeliever, took great pride in the fact that he had been “circumcised the eighth day” (Phil. 3:5). But that had not saved him. Circumcision became a major problem in the early church as Gentiles began to be saved. Some said, as we learn in Acts 15:6, that if a man were not circumcised, he could not be saved. The Jews evidently felt that the failure to answer all of his questions in verses 21-23 in the right

way, would not condemn them if they had been circumcised. Paul probably felt this way himself before he was saved. But Paul told them that if they did not keep the Law, they were no better than the heathen Gentiles because it was not having the Law, or being circumcised, was the important part. What was important was obeying the Law. Without obedience to the Word of God, their circumcision would become uncircumcision.

But then in verse 25 Paul went on to speak of the Gentiles.

2:26 On the other hand, if a Gentile sought obey the Law, or as Paul expressed it, “keep the righteousness of the Law,” then the fact that he was uncircumcised would be counted for circumcision.

We need to keep in mind that the Apostle Paul here in verses 25 through 27 is speaking hypothetically, which he often does in getting his point across. No Jew by circumcision could be saved even if he sought to obey the Law. But a Gentile who sought to keep the Law, even though he was uncircumcised, was better off than a circumcised Jew who used his circumcision as a substitute for obeying the Law. Robert Haldane expressed it this way:

The supposition, then, as to the obedience of the Gentile, though in itself impossible, is made in order to prove that, before the judgment seat of God, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision enters at all into consideration for justification or condemnation. If an uncircumcised Gentile keep the Law, his uncircumcision would avail as much as the circumcision of the Jew. The reason for this is, that the judgment of God regards only the observance or the violation of the law, and not extraneous advantages or disadvantages, and as is said above, with God there is no respect of persons. In reality, then, the Jews and Gentiles were on a level as to the impossibility of salvation by the Law; in confirmation of which truth, the inquiry here introduced is for the conviction of the Jew on this important point. But what is true upon a supposition never realized, is actually true with respect to all who believe in Jesus. In Him they have this righteousness which the law demands, and without circumcision have salvation (p. 102).

I call your attention again to the place Paul is taking us in Rom. 3:20:

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

So the argument of Paul is this: Suppose that the Law could save, who is better off, the Jew who feels that his circumcision is sufficient without obedience to the Law, or the Gentile who, although he is uncircumcised is seeking to keep the Law. The answer is: the Gentile. But in actuality neither can be saved by keeping the Law, and so the Jew is not moved one step closer to God by his circumcision. Remember we are in the section of Romans where Paul is seeking to show the Jews their condemnation before God.

But Paul makes one more point regarding all of this in verse 27.

2:27 Therefore it follows that since circumcision does not enter at all into the consideration of salvation, if a Gentile seeks to keep the Law, or actually keeps it (purely a supposition), and the Jew does not keep the Law, then isn't the Gentile in a position where he can act as a judge over the Jew? Again quoting Haldane: The reason of this conclusion is, that in the comparison between the one and the other, the case of the circumcised transgressor would appear much worse, because of the superior advantages he enjoyed (*Ibid.*).

Paul's reason for what he has just said in verses 25 through 27, is given in verses 28 and 29.

2:28 At this point the Apostle left his suppositions behind, and declared plainly what the truth is. We come again to the term, or title, the “Jew.” Go back to verse 17. To be a Jew, and to be able to be called a

Jew, was the equivalent of saying that a person was a child of God. The Gentiles called the Jews, Jews, and the Jews spoke of themselves as Jews. “Behold, thou art called a Jew” (Rom. 17:1). But just because you are called a Jew, and have Jewish blood running in your veins, and look like a Jew, and behave like a Jew, is that what it takes to make you a child of God? There was a time when the Apostle Paul would have answer that question with a resounding, “Yes!” But would that have been the right answer? No! Paul said here in verse 28 that it was not a matter of outward looks or behavior, but as he went on to say in verse 29, it all has to do with the inward part of man, with his heart. Not even circumcision can make you a Jew, a child of God, one who is truly saved.

2:29 Man by nature is a sinner, and his sin makes him a hypocrite. We have learned in chapters 1 and 2 of this great epistle of Paul to the Romans, that man has a God-given consciousness that there is a God, and that this awareness of God’s existence is intensified by creation. Even reason itself tells us that creation must have a Creator, and that Creator has to be more than a man; He has to be God. More than that, we have learned that God gave the Law to the Jew, and that the purpose of the Law was not that man would and could be saved by keeping it, but that, as we have also seen looking ahead to Rom. 3:20, “by the Law is the knowledge of sin.” So man, trying to make himself acceptable to God, works on the outside. The Jew looked upon himself as being especially favored because of God’s special dealing with him. God gave Him circumcision, and God gave him the Law. These three made him think that these outward gifts were sufficient for salvation. *But man is never changed working from the outside to the inside. The change must be made inside, and then changes will begin to appear outwardly.*

So verse 29 gives us the truth. To be a child of God, there must be an inward change, not by the circumcision of the flesh, but by the circumcision of the heart and the spirit, not by the Law. True salvation is not to seek the approval and praise of men, but the approval of God. The Jews gloried in their name, and they gloried in their circumcision, neither of which was sufficient for the salvation of their souls.

Now Paul was addressing his fellow-Jews. He was not saying that “Jew” and “Christian” are synonymous terms. But what he said here about the Jew, is equally true of the Gentiles. It is the Gospel according to Rom. 1:16 that is “the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” – not only to the Jew, but also to the Greek, or Gentile, and there is no other way to be saved.

How many Gentiles there are who seek to make themselves acceptable to God by what they do! They do good works. They pay their money to the church. But none of those things can change the heart. Only God can change the heart, and He does it through the Gospel. Only the Gospel brings the praise or the approval of God. The Gospel does not tell us about what man is to do for himself, but what God has already done in Christ to make helpless and hopeless, defiled sinners, into saints. God gives a new heart. The change has to take place inside first, and then the outer changes will come. See 2 Cor. 5:17.

Now as we approach chapter 3, Paul has placed the Jews and the Gentiles on the same level as far as sin is concerned, and as far as salvation is concerned. And so the Jew then asks the question with which chapter 3 begins, “What advantage then hath the Jew?”

January 19, 2004

3. The Jew’s defense (Rom. 3:1-8).

There are three. The first is in verses 1 and 2. The second is in verses 3 and 4. The third is in verses 5 through 8. Bishop Moule explained the situation here very clearly. He wrote:

As the Apostle dictates, there rises before his mind a figure often seen by his eyes, the Rabbinic disputant.

Keen, subtle, unscrupulous, at once eagerly in earnest yet ready to use any argument for victory, how often that adversary had crossed his path, in Syria, in Asia Minor, in Macedonia, in Achaia! He is present now to his consciousness, within the quiet house of Gaius; and his questions come thick and fast, following on this appeal of his, alas, almost impenetrable conscience (p. 78).

And so in raising these objections Paul was answering questions which he had answered many, many times. I think that we can see how defensive unregenerate Jews would have been, and often were. To them it seemed like Paul was ignoring history, that he was a traitor to his people, that it meant nothing to him that God had chosen and called Abraham, that the Law had been given to Moses, and that the prophets were Jewish. And all of this was in response to what Paul had just written, and what he undoubtedly had taught many times, that the Jew was under condemnation just like the Jew, and perhaps under greater judgment because the Jew had been given more light.

And so the question which Paul had heard by the Jews in their own defense, was, is there then any advantage that the Jew has over the Gentile?

January 26, 2004

Having seen the objections raised against the doctrine of sin by which Paul had shown that both Jews and Gentiles were all under divine condemnation, we now move on to consider:

C. The Charges confirmed by Scripture (Rom. 3:9-20).

3:9 The Jews were never ready to give up their contention that they had advantages before God which placed them before the Gentiles. By this they meant that it was more likely and easier for God to save a Jew than it is for Him to save a Gentile.

But Paul's denial of that conclusion is very strong. "No, in no wise" is the equivalent of saying, "Absolutely not!" And when he went on to say, "We have before proved," it was like saying, "Go back over what I have just written, and read it again." The words "before proved" would be better translated, *already charged*. He had shown that Jews and Gentiles alike were "under sin." Cf. Gal. 3:22, "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

What does it mean that we are all "under sin"? This is where all of us are by nature, held in bondage, under sin's dominion, and unable to escape. It is both a statement of the total depravity of the human nature, but also the hopelessness of our situation.

So from the evidence in man's experience, Paul has charged everyone with sin, the Jew just like the Gentile. The charges themselves are very convincing. But now the Apostle Paul is prepared to confirm those charges by his references to the Word of God.

Before we get to those verses let me give you four important points that Dr. Lloyd-Jones made four observations about what we have covered so far, especially about the Jews. And they are well worth our consideration:

1) First is "the tragic blindness of the Jews with regard to their own Scriptures" (*The Righteous Judgment of God*, p. 192). Cf. 2 Cor. 3:12-16. Even the Apostle Paul, with all of the knowledge of Scripture which he had

before he was saved, was totally blind to the meaning of Scripture. We see the same thing in Gentiles today, and often with people who attend church on a regular basis. They know many of the facts of Scripture, but they don't see its application to their own lives.

2) Doctrinally, the passage which we are considering at the present time shows the universality of sin. Every person who has ever lived, with our Lord as the one exception, was born under sin. So it makes no difference whether a person is a Jew or a Gentile, his or her problem is sin. All people are sinners by nature. David was referring to this when he said, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and In sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa. 51:5). We will see more about this in the verses which follow.

3) These chapters at the beginning of Romans teach us "the terrible character of sin" (*Op. cit.*, p. 194). And we need to realize that it is only because of the gracious restraining hand of God upon all people that we are not a lot worse than we are.

4) And then finally, Dr. Lloyd-Jones mentioned that it is important for us to understand these opening chapters of Romans in order to understand our need for the Gospel. The Gospel, as Paul told us in Romans 1:16 is "the power of God unto salvation." Reading this we all should be inclined to ask, "Salvation from what?" And the answer is, "Salvation from sin, its power, its degradation, and from its penalty.

And now we come again to:

3:10 "As it is written." I emphasized the meaning of this expression last week. It means not only that the evidence of man's sin has been written down, but also that *it stands written*. The Word of God is not going to change. The charge is written down, and the Lord sees to it from generation to generation that the record remains. What power there is in those words, "It is written"! It points to the Scriptures as the ultimate authority concerning the truth. And so we see that Paul reserved his greatest evidence for God's judgment upon man until the last where he would hope it would bring deep conviction of sin to every reader.

Paul had just stated that the chief advantage that the Jew had over the Gentiles, was that the Word of God had been committed to them. God has never dealt with any nation like He has dealt with the Jews. But how tragic it was that these Jews were blinded not only to the truth of Scripture, but also to the character of God. Remember that just as it is necessary for people, Jews and Gentiles alike, to know that they are sinners before they will show any interest in the Gospel, so it is necessary for all people to understand something of the nature of God before they can understand the awfulness of sin, and how sin in any form is totally abominable to God.

The quotations found in verse 10, 11, and 12 are from Psalms 14 and 53. Let us turn to those passages and read them, noticing how similar they are. Like all repetition in Scripture, the fact that these verses in Romans are found twice in the OT, and once here in the NT, is unquestionably an indication of how very important they are.

(Read Psalm 14, and then Psalm 53.)

There are six statements in all here in Rom. 3:10-12, all taken, as we have seen, from Psalms 14 and 53.

The first is: "There is none righteous, no, not one." No one measures up to what he has to be in order to be accepted by God. That applies both to character and works. Salvation is "not of yourselves" and "not of works." Everyone stands condemned by this statement. And Robertson said that "this sentence is like a motto for the rest, a summary of what follows" (IV, 344). Adam Clarke said,

God Himself is represented as looking down from heaven to see if there were anyone who feared and sought after Him; and yet He, who cannot be deceived, could find none! And therefore we may safely conclude there was none to be found.

This statement can be made for all generations from the beginning of time, and it will be until the end of time. All six of the statement given from Psa. 14 and Psa. are universal in their application.

3:11 The second is: “There is none that understandeth.” This included the Jews. When they put the Gentiles down, they were exalting themselves. They thought they understood about their relationship to God, and had no hesitation in saying that it was better than any Gentile. But by nature they were just as confused. To understand means *to able to put things together*. Nobody is able to understand the reason for man’s sinful behavior. Human psychology and psychiatry do not have the answer. And when anyone tries to explain the sinful nature of man, he is branded as a fool. And this is exactly what the Bible says. See 1 Cor. 2:14.

The third of these six statements is: “There is none that seeketh after God.” In Rom. 8:7 Paul wrote that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” When Adam sinned, he did not seek God; he hid from Him. The Bible tells us at the end of the story of Zacchaeus that “the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). No man, woman, young person, or child will ever seek God on his own. Man can go through the most trying circumstances because of disease or war or financial reverses. He may curse God, but he will not seek God. The only time that anyone will seek God is when the Lord is dealing with him by His Spirit. So when God looks down from heaven He has never found a single person who seeks Him. “There is none that seeketh after God.” You and I can see evidence of this every day we live.

Apparently no one knows who wrote the words to the hymn that tells about seeking the Lord, but whoever he or she was, he really had a grip on the truth. Most of you know the words:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my heart to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior, true,
No, I was found of Thee.

There are plenty of religious people in the world, plenty of church goers. And there are many people who never go to church who will pray when some problem arises. But Paul was talking about people who seek *God!* He was speaking about people who want to know God, to worship God, to be accepted by God, to glorify God, and to live for Him. Nobody seeks God for Himself. No one seeks God to learn from Him how to be accepted by Him. But there are lots of people who want to tell God all that they are doing for Him. Paul was right when he said, “There is none that seeketh after God.

3:12 The fourth statement from Psalms 14 and 53 is: “They are all gone out of the way.” This is what Isa. 53:6 says, isn’t it? We have a verse in our Bible Memory book that says the same thing, but in different words. I refer to Prov. 16:25, “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” And you will find this same verse Prov. 14:12. This explains why there are so many cults and false religions in the world. Man is naturally inclined to choose error instead of the truth. Even the Jews to whom God gave the Law have mostly tried to use it as a way of salvation. Just as it is true that man left to himself will not seek God, so it is also true that if he decides to turn to God, he will go the wrong way every time. This along with all of these other statements is sin. Sin is not only doing what is wrong in God’s sight, but it is also a failure to do what is right in God’s sight.

The fifth statement is: “They are together become unprofitable.” Sandy and Headlam in the ICC, p. 75, say that “unprofitable” means that “they are like milk that has turned sour and bad.” This means moral corruption. The trend in the world is always downward. People who substitute anything for the truth of the Gospel always become worse rather than better, and move farther away from God rather than to Him. And notice that they always have plenty of company: “They are together become unprofitable.” The person who does not seek God for Himself, and so goes astray, has plenty of company.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said that “wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many

there be which go in thereat” (Matt. 7:13).

The final statement in these three verses (10, 11, and 12) is; “There is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Notice how Paul keeps saying that there are no exceptions to what he is saying about who are still in the same condition spiritually in which they were born. To be righteous is to measure up to God’s standard of righteousness. To do good is to do what it good in God’s sight. In Rom. 8:8 Paul said, “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” It is hard for us to understand this but we are told in Isa. 64:6-7:

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

7 And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.

This concludes what we can call the first group of indictments against the human race. These are descriptions of man as God sees him.

Now because all of the above is true, the Apostle Paul is going to show us how sin has affected man’s mouth, then how it has affected man’s ways, and finally how it has affected his relationship with God.

The first, how sin has affected man’s mouth, is in verses 13 and 14. There are four statement there for us to consider. The second is verses 15 through 17, where three statements are made. The last stands by itself and is the most tragic of all, how sin has affected man’s relationship with God. This is in verse 18.

3:13 Three of four statements are in this verse having to do with man’s mouth.

“Their throat is an open sepulchre.” The word that is translated “throat” here is actually the Greek word from which we get our English word, larynx. This is where our vocal cords are and so that which gives us our voice. The Bible has a lot to say about our mouths, our tongues, the way we talk. I have never smelled a body that was decaying, but the odor apparently is sickening. When our Lord approached Lazarus’ tomb, his sister Marysaid, “Lord by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days” (John 11:39). This statement is taken from Psa. 5:9 where David was speaking of his enemies, and he said,

9 For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.

This speaks of foul, offensive language, that which is corrupting and wicked. Shedd said in his commentary, “Little is known of Jewish literature, other than the Old Testament Scriptures; but some portions of Greek and Roman literature stink like a newly opened grave” (p. 69). Such speech is shameful beyond description. The garbage that comes out of some people’s mouths, is unbelievable. Paul even had to warn believers not to use corrupting language. Cf. Eph. 4:29

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

Next Paul said, “With their tongues they have used deceit.” All of these terms are indications of man’s depravity. This statement is probably also, like the preceding one, from Psa. 5:9, and is the LXX’s rendering, “They flatter with their tongue.” Flattery is always deceitful, and is used to obtain the speaker’s objective. So man because of sin is guilty of language which cannot be trusted.

And then Paul said, “The poison of asps is under their lips.” Dr. Lloyd-Jones tells the asp or the adder has poison contained in a little bag at the root of its lips. Its fangs lie in a horizontal position in its mouth, but when it gets ready to strike, it throws back its head, opens its mouth, the fangs drop down, and as the snake strikes its victim the fangs press on that bag of poison which is injected into the victim, and unless the victim receives

immediate attention, it will die.

This can be likened to the enticements that come from the world to attract people to places where they are going to be poisoned. Much of our present day entertainment is poison like that, and many a young person has become the victim, which often ends in death. The drug scene is like that. And it is taking people to hell every day.

The fourth and last statement about the tongue and the mouth is in verse 14.

3:14 “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” “Full of cursing” means that the wicked will take words which are usually used in prayer, and turns them into cursing. This includes the Names of Deity, or Their attributes. Nothing is sacred or out of bounds for unregenerate sinners. “Bitterness” is speech which shows bitter hatred. It is illustrated by the response of wicked men in the judgments of the book of the Revelation when instead of repenting of their sins they curse God for what He is doing.

February 2, 2004

Verses 19 and 20 give us a twofold conclusion that the Apostle Paul had reached after speaking of both the Jew and the Gentile in their relationship with God:

- 1) First, in verse 19, both Jew and Gentile are “guilty” before God – guilty of sin and deserving of nothing but judgment at the hand of God.
- 2) Second, in verse 20, no man can save himself. If he could, it would have to be in accordance the Law given to Moses. But the Law was not given for that purpose. It was given to convince men that they are sinners in violation of God’s Law.

So then the question has to be faced: How can a man become righteous before God? This ought to take us back to Rom. 1:16 and 17. There Paul declared that he was not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation. In the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. But what is the righteousness of God? It is the absolute and total moral perfection of God. But that is not all that Paul had in mind. What Paul was concerned about was how guilty sinners can achieve the righteousness that it takes to be acceptable to God.

Man’s immediate answer is, “I will make myself acceptable to God.” And so he starts to work at it in his own way. He will probably start by quitting some of the bad things that he has done. Maybe he has occasionally used the Lord’s Name in profanity. So he decides that he will try to quit that. He doesn’t know anything about church, but he decides that he will try that. He doesn’t know the difference between churches, but he decides on one, perhaps where the most people seem to be going. The offering is taken, and he feels that this is probably another way in which he can please God. Man’s first response to the conviction of sin usually is that *he must do something about it*. The question of the rich young ruler is characteristic of both Jews and Gentiles. You will see it in two NT passages: Mark 10, beginning with verse 17, and also in Luke 18, beginning with verse 18. Luke gives us a similar account in Luke 10, verse 25, but that was asked by a lawyer who was trying to trap Jesus by the answer that He would give.

Man’s response to the conviction of sin always is, “What can I do to get rid of this load of sin?” Years ago I heard Dr. Lewis Johnson say that he believed that eventually the rich ruler was saved because of what we read

in Mark 10:21, “Then Jesus beholding him loved him...”

However, there is a verse that is given two times in the book of Proverbs which we need to know, and to keep in our minds. I am referring to Prov. 14:12 and 16:25. (Quote.) We often hear people saying (and sometimes they are professing Christians who say it, “You can do whatever you want to do,” or, “You can become whatever you want to be.” Man has been able to accomplish many things which in the past were thought impossible, such as walking on the moon. But there is one thing that man has never been able to do, and he never will! *Man cannot make himself acceptable to God. Man cannot save himself from the eternal judgment of God.* How do we know this? Because the Bible says so!

Cf. Eph. 2:8 and 9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5. Salvation is not a reward for good things that we do, but salvation is God’s gift to sinners who could never get it any other way. The person who sins (and this includes every Jew and every Gentile) will die under the judgment of God. Who has sinned? Cf. Rom. 3:23; Ecc. 7:20, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” There are many good people upon the earth according to our standards. We met many of them on our recent trip to Texas. And in Denver those who help you are not allowed to take tips. And they are perfectly do help you without pay. They were really good to us. But nobody is good according to what God requires. God is absolutely righteous, and He requires righteousness from all who would be accepted by him. But we learned from Rom. 3:10, where Paul was quoting from Psalm 14 and Psalm 53, that “there is none righteous, no, not one.” And this was God’s conclusion when He looked down from heaven to see if there were any that really understood their need of God, *and He did not find a single one!* Besides, if you could live righteously from this day on, what about all of the sins that have been charged against us in the past?

So we come to this conclusion. We need a Savior. We can’t save ourselves, and none of our fellow human beings can save us because they are in the same plight that we are. Therefore, there is only One to Whom we can look for our salvation, *and He is God! And this is why the Gospel is so very, very important.* Cf. Rom. 1:16 and 17.

And so I repeat: As we come to Rom. 3:19 and 20, Paul has brought us to the place where we have to admit two things:

- 1) We are all guilty before God.
- 2) There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves.

And this is what makes the rest of Romans 3 so amazing, and so wonderful, and so very, very, true. And what God has done, is not just one way out of many for us to be saved. *It is the only way.* Cf. John 14:6; Acts 4:12. And so now we are ready for Rom. 3:21-31.

(Read Rom. 3:21-31.)

In our outline this is:

III. JUSTIFICATION (Rom. 3:21-5:21).

A. Justification explained (Rom. 3:21-31).

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes a very good point regarding the passage before us that we need to be aware of as we come to deal with the doctrine of justification. It is this: The Apostle here is not teaching righteousness as an attribute of God (although we all should know that it is forever true that God is a righteous God, and that there is no trace of unrighteousness in His character, nor in His works). But the question here is not whether or not God is righteous, but how can man partake of God’s righteousness which is the only standard which can

possibly accepted by God. In other words, how can the righteousness of God become mine. How can my sins be removed from the charges which are against me in heaven, and be replaced with the righteousness of God instead? This is the Gospel. This is the only way of salvation. There is no other. This is where hopelessness goes, and by God's help my salvation is secured.

But there is another point that we need to make clear with respect to the expression, "the righteousness of God." Going back to Rom. 1:16 and 17 remember that Paul said there that the Gospel was the power of God unto salvation for in it the righteousness of God is revealed. The Gospel is a revelation of the righteousness of God. Many who have written on Romans have pointed out that the word "and upon all" in the KJV do not appear in the better MSS. There is a note to that effect in the NKJV, but it is left out entirely in the NIV, the NASB, and in the even more recent translation of the Bible, the ESV. In support of this omission William R. Newell explained it this way:

Since we find this righteousness is God's accounting or holding righteous a man who believes, rather than a conferment of a quality [of righteousness] upon a man, we must read the passage thus [that is, omitting the three words "and upon all] (p. 111).

3:21 Everything from Rom. 1:18 to 3:20 is very dark and condemning. But at this point we see where our help comes from, and what God has done to meet us in our helpless and hopeless condition. Nobody will ever see their need of salvation until they are convicted of their sinful, lost, and hopeless condition before God. Paul is now ready to deal with the major, major question, how can guilty sinners be forgiven of their sins, and be declared righteous before a holy God?