

studies in

ROMANS



Book IV

Romans 2:17-3:20

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by Dr. Lehman Strauss



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**by Dr. Lehman Strauss
Romans 2:17-3:20**

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17. Behold thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,
18. And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law,
19. And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them who are in darkness,
20. An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, who hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law –
21. Thou, therefore, who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?
22. Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?
23. Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God?
24. For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.
25. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.
26. Therefore, if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?
27. And shall not uncircumcision, which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?
28. For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh;
29. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.
1. What advantage, then, hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision?
2. Much every way, chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God.
3. For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?
4. God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.
5. But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man.)
6. God forbid; for then how shall God judge the world?
7. For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory, why yet am I also judged as a sinner,
8. And not rather as we are slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say), Let us do evil, that good may come? Whose damnation is just.

(Romans 2:17-3:8)

CONDEMNATION (CONTINUED)

WHY THE HEBREW IS CONDEMNED (2:17-3:8)

The verses in this section (2:17-3:8) are aimed directly at the Jew. Three key words support this:

1. "Jew" (2:17, 28, 29; 3:1, 9)
2. "Law" (2:17, 18, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27)
3. "Circumcision" (2:25-29; 3:1)

The claim to being a Jew was based on his possession of the Law and the fact that he was circumcised in keeping with God's command to Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14). Repeatedly they boasted, "We be Abraham's seed" (John 8:33) and "Abraham is our Father" (John 8:39). John the Baptist cautioned the Pharisees and Sadducees not to brag on the fact that Abraham was their father (Matthew 3:9).

Then, too, because the Jew was chosen to be the repository of God's Word, namely, the Law, he considered himself in a specially privileged position with God. He used the Scriptures to support his claim that God loved Israel above all the Gentile nations of the earth (See Deuteronomy 7:6-8). There was an ancient tradition that Abraham sat beside the gates of hell and would not permit a circumcised Jew to pass through. He was sure that all the seed of Abraham would enter the eternal kingdom. What Paul discusses in this portion of his Epistle to the Jew was like a slap in the face. Paul covers the ground thoroughly leaving nothing to the imagination.

William Barclay sees Paul introducing here the idea that Jewishness is not a matter of race and circumcision. Jewishness is a matter of conduct. He wrote, "There is many a so-called Jew who is a pure descendant of Abraham, and who bears the mark of circumcision in his body, who is no Jew at all. And equally there is many a Gentile who never heard of Abraham, and who would never dream of being circumcised, who is Jewish in the real sense of the term. To a Jew this would have sounded like the wildest heresy." The Jews could easily applaud Paul for proving the Gentiles worthy of God's judgment, but they could not picture themselves as deserving of the same. So the Holy Spirit guides Paul step by step to prove that the Jew as well as the Gentile is a guilty sinner in God's sight and must therefore be judged.

I. THE PRIVILEGES OF THE JEW (2:17-20)

The Jew claimed privileges in which the Gentiles did not share. Those privileges are definitely related to religion, a subject not mentioned in the first sixteen verses of chapter two. There is no reason why a religious person should be immune from scrutiny. It makes no difference what name the religion goes by. If its followers fall short of that which God requires of them, then they must come under the judgment of God. If there are Jews whose conduct brings God's name into disrepute, they must stand trial before God. The principle must apply equally to all persons including zealous Roman Catholics or fervent Protestants. One's religion is not enough to put him in good standing with God if his religion does not change his behaviour for the better.

The paragraph begins: "*Behold, thou art called a Jew*" (2:17). This was a worthy claim and a high privilege. The term "Jew" was one of three titles, *Hebrew*, *Jew* and *Israelite*. It appears first in Scripture in 2 Kings 16:6, and was used to distinguish him from the Gentile. It was tied closely to his nationality and was a name of which he was proud. Paul spoke of Jews as being "Jews by nature" (Galatians 2:15).

One of the privileges the Jew enjoyed was the fact that he "*rested in the law*" (2:17), that is, he leaned heavily upon it. His reliance on the Mosaic Law was justified for the reason that God gave it to the Jew. When God gave the Law to Moses at Sinai, it was for the children of Israel exclusively. It was never intended for the Gentiles, thus it was never enjoined upon them. The Jew was proud of the fact that he possessed the Law and that it was given to him by God. But he was wrong in supposing that his possession of the Law exempted him from judgment if he failed to practice it.

Paul continues, "*and makest thy boast of God*" (2:17). The Jew rightly glorified in God because Jehovah was the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The God of Israel was the one true, eternal, self-existent God who made the Jews His chosen people. There was no reason why they should not glory in Him.

"*And knowest His will*" (2:18). The religion of the Jews was unique in that it was the only religion to which God had revealed Himself and His future plans. The human penmen

of the Scriptures, with few exceptions, were Jews, and it was in those Scriptures revealed to them by God where He made known His plans and purposes. The will of God for a person's life is very important. Moreover, the greatest tragedy that could come to any person would be to live and die having missed God's will. The Jew was much blessed with this knowledge.

"And approve the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law" (2:18). Having the Law gave to the Jew a perfect standard for testing a thing or a person. After all, the Word of God is truth, and the person who knows and understands it can settle with authority right and wrong. The Scriptures are the final authority in matters of faith and practice, and they were read and explained to the Jew every Sabbath.

All of this developed in the Jew a confidence that he was *"a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which have the form of knowledge and of the truth of the Law"* (2:19, 20). Now there is no question that the Jew who understood and obeyed God's will was qualified to guide, instruct and teach others who did not, like him, know and understand the Law. To be able to train the untaught in moral, ethical and religious matters is most commendable. And no one will deny that these privileges of the Jew did place him in the position to teach and direct others.

The question arises now as to whether or not these privileges exonerated the Jew from the righteous judgment and condemnation of God. To possess the name of "Jew" with all of its rights and privileges, enjoined upon him solemn responsibilities. Has he carried out his responsibilities and obligations? Did he practice what he preached to others? If he did, then he is safe from the wrath of God. If he himself did not obey God's Law, he is equally guilty with the Gentile and is therefore condemned. Actually the Jew is used in this passage as a test case. If the Jew, with his unrivaled opportunities to know God, fails to pass the test, there can be found no hope for mankind anywhere apart from God's grace and mercy. How will the Jew fare under Divine scrutiny?

In setting forth these privileges of the Jew it is not Paul's intention to be ironic. These same privileges Paul himself

possessed and, in his pre-converted, pharisaical state, counted them his gain (Philippians 3:4-9). The Jew possessed them all.

Paul is leading to his next line of truth, namely, the difference between knowing the Law and obeying it. Great is the advantage of having such privileges as those if the heart of the Jew corresponds in reality to them. This brings us to the all-important question, Did the Jew practice what he believed and taught?

II. THE PROFESSION OF THE JEW (2:21-24)

With unerring sharpness and preciseness the Apostle probes deep into the spiritual condition of the Jew. He proceeds to ask five questions, the answers to which make up the formal charge that these highly privileged people did not practice what they professed. The Jew had the truth and the ability to preach it to others, but he himself did not obey it, thereby exposing himself to the judgment of God.

When Paul says, "*Behold, thou art called a Jew*", he is implying that one could be *called* a Jew but who, in practice, was not a Jew. This was exactly the case with many of them. While the sins of the Gentiles were open before the eyes of all, the Jew sinned under his cloak of religion. He leaned strongly on his privileges but he did not obey what he had been taught. If a man calls himself a Jew, and has the Law, he should behave in accordance to that Law.

Paul's first question: "*Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?*" (2:21). In substance this is a formal charge that these highly privileged people were not practicing those things they professed and preached. The claims of the Jew in verses 17-20 were valid, but they increased his responsibility not to leave himself untaught. When our Lord instructed the multitude concerning the Scribes and Pharisees who sit in Moses' seat, He said, "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matthew 23:1-3). When the Jew taught, he did it with the authority of God whose Word he proclaimed. But while he was a spokesman for God he was guilty of committing the same sins he condemned. What our Lord said to the multitudes was a terrible indictment against some Jewish

teachers. What they taught was correct, but the teachers themselves were false.

The second question follows: "*Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?*" (2:21). The Law said, "Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15). The Jew knew the Law, and when he preached it he knew he was representing God who gave the Law. The person who acts as a herald of God's Word should not be guilty of committing those sins forbidden by the Word. Paul testified, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away" (I Corinthians 9:27).

The third question, "*Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?*" (2:22). The Seventh Commandment forbade this sin, stating clearly, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). David was a national hero in Israel, yet he was guilty of committing adultery. The Lord Jesus Christ stated and interpreted this commandment in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:27, 28), and later He emphasized its importance when answering the Pharisees (Matthew 19:3-9).

In the fourth question Paul asks: "*Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?*" (2:22). God's first words to Israel, when He gave them the Ten Commandments, were a warning against every form of idolatry (Exodus 20:1-6). Idolatry was an evil the Jews were taught to detest. It was an ugly thing to be shunned. The word "sacrilege" (Gr. *hierosuleō*) means *to rob temples, to pillage idols from shrines*. This is possibly the sin alluded to by the town clerk at Ephesus (Acts 19:37). Vine says, "The treasures of the idol temples perhaps attracted the avarice of some Jews, who would excuse themselves on the score of the wickedness of idolatry." God anticipated just such a covetous spirit among His people after they would enter the Promised Land, hence they were forbidden to desire the silver and gold in the images of heathen temples (Deuteronomy 7:25, 26).

Finally, Paul asks, "*Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you . . .*" (2:23, 24). This last of the five questions is a clincher, verse 25 explaining verse 24 as it drives home the

serious indictment. All five questions implied that the Jews were guilty of the sins mentioned. Because the Jews made no attempt to practice what they preached, God's name was not respected among Gentiles. The people who had God's Law should have been living a holy life, but instead, they were doing those very things forbidden by the Law. The Jew was the worst hypocrite of all. The man with special privileges who is called to guide others must not dishonour God by disobeying His Law. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Both Isaiah (52:5) and Ezekiel (36:20-23) mention how the bad behaviour of the Jew caused the Gentiles to scoff at God. These Old Testament references, Isaiah 52:5 in particular, were what Paul had in mind when he said, "*as it is written*" (2:24). Every Jew knew that the captivities of both Israel and Judah were the judgments of God upon their sins. Any reproach cast upon the people of God reflects upon God. There must be something more than mere profession of religion.

Let not one of us Christians fail to apply this lesson to our own lives. The hypocritical character of the professing Christian does much harm to the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, "we (Christians) must all appear . . . that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Corinthians 5:10). The professing Christian who is a hypocrite is no better than the professing Jew who is a hypocrite. God's indictment against religious hypocrisy is not an indictment against any one religion. It is an indictment of all those who have received God's truth. And we Christians, more than any people since the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, have been highly privileged because we have had the Word of God with its inspired, inerrant revelation of the will of God. The practical conclusion to this portion of our study is a warning to every saved person.

III. THE PRETENSE OF THE JEW (2:25-29)

The person who has in his possession the inspired Word of God is expected to have a life-style with behaviour that is commensurate with that Word. If pagans, who never had God's Law shown to them, devise evil practices, we more or

less expect such behavior of them. But the man who has God's Word, and considers his calling as from the Lord, is expected to walk worthy of the Lord Who called him. In the verses before us (25-29) the pretender, the hypocrite, will be exposed. While the message is directed to the Jew, I must say again that the same sins are found in people of all religions including Christianity.

What was the pretense, or cloak, behind which the Jew sought to conceal his real self and his sins? The key word in these verses is "*circumcision*", appearing not less than six times. Circumcision was the mark on the body of the Jewish male child commanded by God when He made His covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14). This mark identified the Jew as belonging to God's national creation. To the Jew, there was no better cloak behind which he could conceal his real self than his circumcision. Now do not lose sight of the fact that circumcision was important to God and Israel, having a deeply spiritual meaning. The importance God attached to it was disclosed almost five hundred years after Abraham, when God would have put Moses to death if Zipporah his wife had not surrendered their son for circumcision (Exodus 4:24-26).

But circumcision had a deeply spiritual meaning. A full understanding of its spiritual significance is recorded in both the Old and New Testaments. As a matter of fact, many Jews are surprised when told that there is more teaching on the true meaning of circumcision in the New Testament than there is in the Old Testament. For a better understanding of Paul's teaching in Romans, we will start in the Old Testament.

Frequently God exhorted His people to obedience. On one of those occasions He said, "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul." This exhortation was followed with the words, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked" (Deuteronomy 10:16). If they obey the Lord, then, says Moses, "The LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart . . ." (Deuteronomy 30:6).

The spiritual meaning of circumcision in the above verses is obvious. We know that physical heart surgery is not intended, but rather the cutting away, the removal, of sin. The word *heart* is used in Scripture as the seat and source of life, and it is therefore the controlling force of man's emotional and volitional nature. God describes the human heart as being "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Our Lord said, "For out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19). These evils must be removed from the heart by a Divine process of spiritual surgery. The process includes both human responsibility and Divine enablement, both of which are found in the two Deuteronomy passages. God said to Israel, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart", and then He followed that command with the statement, "The LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart." Where there is desire and willingness for holiness of heart, the Lord stands ready as the source of power to cleanse (circumcise) the heart. David saw the wretchedness of his heart, and so, desiring cleansing he prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). David had come to God to be circumcised in his heart. It was a solemn indictment upon the Jew when God said, "All the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart" (Jeremiah 9:26). (See also Leviticus 26:41).

The Bible speaks also of the circumcision of the ear. The Lord said, "To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it" (Jeremiah 6:10). The uncircumcised ear will not hear and heed the Word of the Lord. In the Parable of the Sower and the Seed our Lord said, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 13:9); "Take heed *what* ye hear" (Mark 13:24), and "Take heed therefore *how* ye hear" (Luke 8:18). The spiritual meaning of the circumcision of the ear should be clear to all. Is the Word of God coming to us through our ears? Or are we like those to whom God said, "We have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5:11). To what, or to whom are we listening? "He that hath an ear,

let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Do we have circumcised ears so that we are hearing God's Word?

Then, too, the Bible speaks about the circumcision of the lips. Moses understood the spiritual meaning of circumcision in this respect. When God called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses sought to get excused on the ground that he was "slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." Even after God assured him, "I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say", Moses objected (Exodus 4:10-14). Not long after Moses' refusal to speak for God, he confessed the real reason why when he said, "I am of uncircumcised lips" (Exodus 6:12, 30). The little member of the body, created by God as the vehicle of speech, Moses had not surrendered to the Lord. When he confessed that his lips were uncircumcised, it was a step in the right direction. Isaiah came face to face with the same condition in his own life when he cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." Immediately, God sent an angel with a live coal of fire from the altar and caused it to touch Isaiah's mouth. Then He said to Isaiah, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (Isaiah 6:5-7). Our Lord said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34). The heart, ears and lips need to be circumcised.

Now with these Old Testament Scriptures before us, Romans 3:25-29 becomes more easily understandable. "*For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision*" (3:25). Paul is saying to the Jew, "You have the mark of circumcision on your body, but you do not so much as try to conform to God's Law. Your heart is turned away from the Lord, your ears are not open to His Word, and your words do not honor Him." The Jews' circumcision identifies him as a member of a particular race, but for all practical purposes he was in God's sight as one who had never been circumcised.

"*Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision*" (2:26)? In other words, if an uncircumcised Gentile exercises himself to obey what he knows to be right

in God's sight, he has a better standing before God than does the disobedient circumcised Jew. The worth of an ordinance in any person can be measured by that person's behavior, by the moral and spiritual success it achieves in the life.

The conclusion of the matter is that a true Jew is not the man who is merely a Jew outwardly, and the real circumcision is not merely that of the body. That which is external does not in itself constitute a right relation to God. The real Jew is the person who, in his heart, surrenders his will to God's will and seeks to obey God's Law (2:28, 29). But the Scriptures prove that the Jew has failed, thus he stands exposed and condemned before God. He has no hiding place.

IV. THE PREROGATIVE OF THE JEW (3:1-8)

The chapter division at this point in the Bible is unfortunate. The first eight verses, at least, are a necessary part of the latter section in chapter 2. It is important, therefore, that we include these verses in our present theme, "The Condemnation of the Jew." Paul concluded that since the Jew did not obey the Law God gave to him, he stands condemned with the Gentile.

At this point the Holy Spirit, directing Paul in his writing, anticipates some questions that would arise in the mind of some Jews. Paul, himself a Jew by birth, might have raised these same questions. To ask these questions is the Jews' prerogative. The question and answer method of teaching raises objections and attempts to answer them. A Jewish objector might argue that if what Paul said is true, then the Jew is placed on the same level as the Gentile. And if this is true, he has some questions he would like to have answered.

The first question: "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision" (3:1)? If he is condemned as is the Gentile, what advantage is there in being born a Jew and being circumcised? If God chose the Jew, doesn't he have some preeminence over the Gentile? Isn't there some privilege or benefit to which he is entitled? The validity of such questioning should not be doubted. It is an intelligent question demanding a correct, intelligent answer. The question is in two parts. The first part, "*What advantage then hath the Jew?*" Paul answers in these verses in chapter 3. The second part, "*What profit is there of*

circumcision?” he answers in chapter 4. A fuller and more detailed account of the whole Jewish question we will see in chapters 9-11.

The answer: “Much every way: chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God” (3:2). To possess God’s living Word, the Old Testament Scriptures, is a great advantage. Notice that word *chiefly*, meaning first and foremost, from every angle. No matter how one looks at it, the Jew had a chief advantage over the Gentile when God made him the repository of the Holy Scriptures. The Jew possessed what the Gentiles did not have, namely, the written utterances of God. The word “oracles” (Gr. *logia*) denotes the whole of the inspired Scriptures. If the Jew failed to appreciate this advantage, then he was the loser. Nevertheless this was his outstanding advantage. He who has the Scriptures is at a greater advantage than he who does not have them.

The second question: “For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect” (3:3)? Before looking further at this question and the answer Paul gives, it should be observed that not all Jews come under the condemnation of God. There were many Old Testament saints who were saved. I make this point here because it appears likely that this second question could be asked by a saved Jew. What if some Jews disobeyed God and were unfaithful to Him? Does that mean that God’s faithfulness becomes invalid? Does God cease to be faithful because some Jews were unfaithful? Shall the unbelief of some cancel out the faithfulness of God? The Jews who knew the Old Testament Scriptures would never forget the unconditional covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. So they reasoned that since God initiated that covenant, if He refused to keep it because some Jews were unfaithful, then God Himself would be unfaithful. The question might come from a sincere, honest believing Jew or it could come from an excuse-making unbelieving Jew.

The answer: “God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged” (3:4). Paul replies with the emphatic negative,

"God forbid", meaning away with such a thought, or dismiss any such idea. In the first place, God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) because it is impossible for Him to lie (Hebrew 6:18). "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). The word *faithful* is a verbal adjective meaning reliable, dependable, trustworthy. Faithfulness is an essential attribute of deity, without which God would cease to be God. Moses wrote to Israel, "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant . . ." (Deuteronomy 7:9). Jeremiah said to God, "Great is Thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:23). There is falsity in every man, but never so with God. Man's failure does not mean that God can fail.

At this point in his reply Paul appeals to Scripture, quoting David's confession in Psalm 51:4. Vine says, "David's confession there is made, not to establish God's truth, but that God might be seen to be righteous. David's sin and confession had the effect of vindicating the unerring character of God's dealings. David was willing to condemn himself to the utmost, that the justice of God's punishment might become evident. The words of the quotation suggest a law court scene, in which the righteousness of the verdict of the Judge compels an acknowledgment on the part of the accused. This must inevitably be the case where God is Judge. The effect of the quotation is to show that the Apostle's argument is consistent with the teaching of the Old Testament. That God had given His promises to Israel did not provide a guarantee that any unrepentant Jew would escape doom." God did not fail to send the promised Redeemer because Israel was unfaithful, nor will He fail to bring the nation into possession of the Promised Land. The failure and unbelief of men cannot change God.

The third question: "But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance! (I speak as a man)" (3:5). Set in contrast here are two opposites; the unrighteousness of man and the righteousness of God. The question simply stated is this; If our sins cause God's righteousness to appear in a clearer light, how then can God punish men for that which exalts His glory? This kind of perverted reasoning only shows the amazing cleverness of the human

heart to justify its deceitfulness and sin. It is nothing less than satanic ingenuity which says, "Since man's unrighteousness gives to God an opportunity to demonstrate His righteousness, then God should not penalize man for his unrighteousness."

Before examining Paul's answer, I should offer some comment on his statement in parentheses, "(I speak as a man)." He used a similar statement in the Epistle to the Galatians when he said, "I speak after the manner of men" (Galatians 3:15). Here in Romans 3:5 it seems that Paul himself raises the question of an imaginary objector, and then adds that he is deeply aware of the fact that he used language which is natural and normal for humans to use when speaking of human relations. The student must not entertain that idea that Paul's words were not divinely inspired. It is not uncommon for men to discuss whether God is right or wrong. To do so is to speak merely as a man and to show the finiteness of the human mind.

The answer: "God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world" (3:6)? It will help the reader at this juncture to keep in mind the fact that this text is included in the section of the Epistle which is dealing with Condemnation, or Judgment. Sin and its inevitable consequent judgment is the subject in all of the passages from 1:18 to 3:20, so that the emphasis in 3:5 is on the word "*judge*". The judgment of God is according to truth (2:2) and is therefore a righteous judgment (2:2) so that His estimations and conclusions as Judge are unquestionably accurate. Now if the unsound reasoning in verse 5 had any correctness in it at all, then God cannot judge any sin or any sinner. Every Jew believes that future judgment was a part of God's future plan (Genesis 18:25; Deuteronomy 1:17). Every Jew knew that God judged the earth in Noah's day and Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham's day. Paul dismissed the reasoning in verse 5. "*God forbid . . .*" His answer vindicates the sovereignty of God.

If the reader will go back and review the arguments beginning with chapter 3 verse 1, he will see that the first questions were logical and reasonable. But with the third question the Jew's argument becomes more untenable and perverted. This is a normal reaction on the part of the sinner. Back him in a corner and pin him down with God's truth,

and he is desperate and frustrated. His excuses become more vehement and ridiculous.

Verses 7 and 8 amplify and enhance what Paul taught in the verses preceding them. Here the sinner presses his questioning, with renewed vigor, in which he challenges God's right to punish him. But evil can only produce evil, therefore if the objector continues in sin, he only heaps upon himself greater condemnation in the day of judgment, "*whose damnation is just*" (3:8). The ground upon which the Jew rests his hope of exemption from Divine judgment has been blasted from under him. It is his prerogative to ask questions, but the answers to the questions of the unregenerate mind cannot be found in human reasoning. The whole idea that good can come from our wrong behavior is contrary to the teaching of God's Word.

There is a practical lesson here for us all, especially for those persons who have not accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a very real danger in avoiding the admission of sin and need of the salvation which God offers. The delay is personally dangerous because it will give sin extended time to grow, and this in turn will weaken the will and build up a greater resistance to the saving Gospel of Christ. You have no idea when your final opportunity to receive Christ will have passed. Trust Him now!

9. "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;

10. As it is written, *There is none righteous, no, not one:*

11. *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*

12. *They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

13. *Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:*

14. *Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:*

15. *Their feet are swift to shed blood:*

16. *Destruction and misery are in their ways:*

17. *And the way of peace have they not known:*

18. *There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

19. *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

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."*

(Romans 3:9-20)

IV. THE HUMAN RACE IS CONDEMNED

The scene before us in these twelve verses is still that of a courtroom drama. The trial has been in progress where, step by step, God completed His case against the Heathen (1:18-32), the Hypocrite (2:1-16) and the Hebrew (2:17-3:8). All three classes have been tried and proved guilty. The trial was one of justice and fairness throughout for all. The Divine Prosecutor will now wrap up the case against the entire Human Race. The last vestige of self-righteousness must be destroyed so that man will see himself as he actually is in God's eyes, morally and spiritually bankrupt. The entire human race is now summoned before the judgment bar to hear God's final and authoritative verdict.

A. The Charge is Pronounced (3:9)

"What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin" (3:9). Here Paul changes from the use of the third person in chapter three, verse one to the first person, thereby including himself. "Are we Jews better than the Gentiles? Do our national and religious privileges give us an advantage over them?" The evidence of the Jews' guilt in 2:17-29 stands, hence the swift and decisive answer, *"No, in no wise."* He is making it plain that no man, Jew or Gentile, can shelter himself behind special privileges and expect to escape the judgment of God. The Jews were no better than the Gentiles; neither have the Gentiles surpassed the Jews. The one is neither better nor worse than the other.

It might prove helpful to remind ourselves here of God's three-fold ethnic division of the human race, namely, "the Jews . . . the Gentiles . . . the Church" (1 Corinthians 10:32). God sees the entire human race divided in these three classes. Every person is either an unsaved Jew, an unsaved Gentile, or a member of the Body of Christ which is His true Church. All who are not in God's Church are under the sentence of condemnation and death.

Paul continues, *"For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin"* (3:9). The word

“proved” (Gr. *proaitiaomai*) means to bring a charge against, being a judicial term used in a court of law. It includes the idea of the charge having been proved. The summary of the matter is that the whole world of mankind, Jew and Gentile, except those who are in Christ, is charged with sin, and the charge stands indisputable and without distinction.

The charge is spelled out explicitly in three words, “*all under sin*.” Paul is not saying here that *all are sinners*, though it is true that all are sinners, but he is saying that all are *under sin*. It is a term he used on other occasions (see Romans 7:14 and Galatians 3:22). The idea is that all are under the power, dominion and condemnation of sin. The sin principle is the power controlling the unsaved man. The word “*under*” suggests the idea of *subjugation, authority*. Sin is the ruling power.

After World War I, about 1920, I was taken ill with the disease of diphtheria. When the family physician had diagnosed and pronounced my illness, he placed a sign on the outside of our house which read, “Under Quarantine.” The sign on the house did not change my condition. It made me no sicker nor did it make me well; it merely stated my condition. That sign reading, “Under Quarantine” told every passerby that in that house there was a person with a contagious disease. When Paul wrote “*they are all under sin*,” he was posting the announcement that all persons outside of Christ, Jews and Gentiles, are under the rule, the dominion of sin. They are confined, held prisoner in the kingdom of sin and darkness, bound by the sin principle and controlled by sin’s power.

The word “sin” in different forms appears in the Roman Epistle not less than forty-eight times. There are several Greek words used in the New Testament for sin, and all of them are deeply significant. Here in 3:9 the word is *hamartia*, and is literally *a missing of the mark*. According to God’s standard of righteousness every person has missed the mark. W. H. Griffith Thomas wrote, “Another means overstepping a boundary; another, falling instead of standing; another, being ignorant instead of knowing; another, diminishing what should be rendered in full; another, disobeying a voice; another, disregarding a command; another, willfully

careless." Until man sees that sin is a dreadful and fatal disease, and that it is not curable by human means, he will never know his plight nor will he come to appreciate the importance and necessity of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. The Charge is Proved (3:10-18)

At this point God brings forth the evidence to prove "*that they are all under sin.*" He does so by presenting a vivid and accurate moral portrait of every member of the human race. It is not a pleasant one. As a matter of fact, it is ugly. Here we see the *natural man*, the person outside of Christ apart from the grace and mercy of God. It is what every unbeliever is, and what every believer once was. Coltman says, "If Hebrews, chapter eleven deserves to be called 'the Hall of Fame,' the passage before us could properly be entitled, 'The Rogues' Gallery.' And what is not so nice is that your picture and mine are here. For here we once all lived." While this picture shows the entire human race as sinful and under condemnation, it also exposes in detail the total personality of each individual member of the race.

This composite picture of humanity is proved from the Holy Scriptures to be accurate. Paul begins with the words, "*As it is written*" (3:10). It is not man as Paul sees him, but as he is presented in the Word of God. Here is an appeal to the highest authoritative standard of right and wrong. The Greek word Paul used (*gegraptai*) is in the perfect tense and means, "It has been written, and it presently remains on record." The Divine record is a permanent one. The Psalmist wrote, "For ever, O LORD, Thy Word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89). To this testimony Peter added that "the Word of the Lord endureth for ever" (I Peter 1:25). Our Lord collaborated the permanency of the Scriptures when He said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). The indictment from the Scriptures is therefore legal, just and final.

The Scriptures Paul uses are a collection of Old Testament texts from the Psalms and the Prophets. Both Jews and Christians used this method of stringing together a collection of quotations from the Old Testament for the express purpose of proving a particular point. Barclay says that it was a common method of Rabbinic preaching called *charaz*,

which literally means *stringing pearls*. When the texts were all brought together and arranged in order, they were known as *Testimonia*. We are now going to view a divinely given testimony depicting the *character, communication and conduct* of the natural man.

In verses 10-12 sin is shown to be in human *character*; what a man is.

"There is none righteous, no, not one" (3:10). The quotation is from Psalm 14:1-3. Where is the man or woman who is perfectly right by God's standards? The natural man is incapable of being right or doing right in the sight of God. The Scriptures tell us that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Corinthians 2:14). Now keep in mind the fact that this is God's view of man; it is as God sees and knows man considered from the Divine vantage point. It is man's character as seen when "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men" (Psalm 14:3; 53:2). There is a human viewpoint of what is right, but it is far removed from God's standard. In the days of the Judges, we are told, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). Now mark well the fact that men did not do what was *wrong*, but what was *right*. But he did what was right "*in his own eyes.*" It was right as man understood right to be, yet it was one of the lowest periods in Israel's history, a period of idolatry, infidelity and immorality.

"There is none that understandeth" (3:11). The absence of righteousness results in a lack of understanding. We live in a day when there is much knowledge with little understanding. The natural man is destitute of spiritual comprehension. The wave length by which spiritual truth comes to man cannot be tuned in by the human mind independent of the work of the Holy Spirit. When Paul prayed for the Christians in Colosse, he requested of God that they "might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9). And then, in the same context, he said to them that at one time, before they were children of God, "You . . . were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind" (1:21). In our age of scientific enlightenment we have never had so much educated ignor-

ance. The person who rejects the knowledge that comes from God is left with a "reprobate mind" (Romans 1:28), which is a mind void of sound judgment. Our Lord told of those who hear the Word of Christ's Kingdom "and understandeth it not" (Matthew 13:19).

"There is none that seeketh after God" (3:11). How contrary to modern religious belief that all men are seeking God, some in one way and some in another! Not having the righteousness of God nor the knowledge of God, man is not turning toward God but away from God. Man can never find God as long as he refuses the one pathway that leads to God. When the first man Adam sinned, did he seek after God? Definitely not! The historical record says that "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). The sinner does not search for God, asking for mercy and forgiveness. It was God Who sought the first sinner (Genesis 3:9), and He has continued to take the initiative. "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). The words in Isaiah 55:6, "Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near," were not addressed to Egyptians or Babylonians or Assyrians, but to the children of Israel who knew God.

"They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable" (3:12). They have turned aside, or deviated from the right way, which is God's way. They knew the right way but refused to take it. The prophet Isaiah expressed it correctly when he said, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way . . ." (Isaiah 53:6). Give the unsaved man credit for his best efforts, the fact still remains that he is not going God's way.

Sin's power is so dominant in his life so as to render him *unprofitable*, or *useless* to God. The word "unprofitable" (Gr. *achreioō*) is also used of milk that has turned sour, that has gone bad, and is therefore good for nothing. Our Lord used this term when He said, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30). God did not create man unprofitable. Paul says, "They have *become* unprofitable."

"There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (3:12). There are people who are educated, clever, successful, wealthy and

philanthropic who have done much good in providing for the poor and alleviating suffering. In that respect they have done good when one is judging goodness by human standards. But then, look at that word *doeth*. The tense of the verb suggests continuous action, doing good continuously without change or interruption as a course of life. God says that there is not one such person.

In the Gospel according to Mark there is recorded an interesting conversation between the Lord Jesus Christ and one known as the *rich young ruler*. The story is written in three Gospel records. Matthew said he was a *young man* (19:20), Luke added the fact that he was a *ruler* (18:18), and all three described him as being *rich* (Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22; Luke 18:23). The three accounts give to us the composite title, *rich young ruler*. I am concerned here merely with the young man's opening remark and our Lord's reply in relation to their use of the word "good."

He addressed Jesus as "Good Teacher," or as the Authorized Version has it, "Good Master." It is the adjective *good* which demands our attention. Jesus replied, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God" (Mark 10:17, 18). One commentator has Jesus saying to the young man, "You should not have called me *good*, for God only is *good*, and I am not God." I am not in agreement with any such interpretation of Christ's statement. It is blasphemous to say that Jesus Christ disclaimed Deity. Contrariwise He frequently claimed equality with the Father. What the Lord Jesus was conveying to the young man was the Divine viewpoint of that word *good*. In substance our Lord was saying "You addressed me as 'good.' Now God only is good. If I am good, then I am God."

In effect Jesus is saying that the young man had an inadequate and a superficial concept of goodness. Anyone who gives thought to the idea of goodness should include God in his thinking because God only is good. The rich young ruler did not know who Jesus was. Had he known He would have obeyed the command the Lord was about to give him. Actually the young man was addressing Deity while he regarded the Lord as merely a human teacher. It was a thoughtless and superficial use of the word *good* as evidenced by the young man's high view of himself as seen in

verse 20. Had he the right view of God's goodness, he would have seen himself as a sinner and obeyed the command of Christ.

In verses 13, 14 sin is shown to be in human *conversation*; what a man says. These verses are dealing with sin as is evidenced in the speech of man. Now keep in mind the fact that this portrait of man is composed of descriptions taken from the Old Testament, for God would impress upon the reader the authority of His Word. He is here using different parts of the human body to show how far man has departed from what God created him to be. The Great Physician begins His examination of the sinner's body by having a look into his mouth.

"Their throat is an open sepulchre" (3:13). The quotation is from a Psalm which says, "For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre . . ." (Psalm 5:9). And what is an open sepulchre? It is an opened grave in which a dead body has been placed. An open grave will emit a foul odor, a stench. When our Lord ordered the stone to be removed from the grave of Lazarus, Martha said to Him, "Lord, by this time he stinketh" (John 11:39). The stench came from the rottenness within. Just so, the unclean and defiling speech of some persons is like the noxious odor of a decaying body. The speech of many a person reflects the foulness that is in the heart. Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 13:34).

"With their tongues they have used deceit" (3:13). The tongue is a flatterer (Psalm 5:9), and it delights in lies (Psalm 62:4). We all know about the slick-tongued smooth talker who attempts to cover up with words the corruption in his heart. With nice words he entices and deceives. The sinner with a graveyard throat will try to cover up his rottenness with nice words. But he must know the warning of Jesus Christ Who said, "I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).

"The poison of asps is under their lips" (3:13). The Old Testament verse reads, "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips" (Psalm 140:3). The asp is a poisonous viper, a deadly Egyptian cobra. Under the lips is a sac containing a death-dealing venom.

The venom of defilement and destruction is common in human speech. You and I know that this is an accurate description of us all, for we all have been guilty of striking at others with venomous words. A religious asp can kill the life of a church or destroy a family. Inflicting injury upon others with words seems to be a pleasurable pastime with some people, including professing Christians.

"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (3:14). The Psalm from which the Holy Spirit drew, to complete this part of His portrait of man, says, "His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity" (Psalm 10:7). There are some moral, decent and upright people who never once used indecent language, yet the potential lies in every man. Our text in Romans says we are loaded with it, the word *"full"* conveying the idea of being heavily laded with. Profanity is rapidly becoming a commonly accepted form of speech. Vulgar and profane words are heard on the street, in public offices, stores, restaurants, television and radio programs and in many homes. This foul speech is heard coming from women as well as men. The obnoxious and profane forms of speech are inexcusable. They only expose the corruption that is in the heart.

In verses 15-18 sin is shown to be in human *conduct*; what a man does.

Paul continues, *"Their feet are swift to shed blood"* (3:15). Each description of man adds to the evidence that he is depraved. Paul is but reiterating here what the Holy Spirit said of man centuries before. A Proverb says, "For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood" (Proverbs 1:16). The Prophet Isaiah wrote, "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood" (Isaiah 59:7). History is a record of man pursuing the way of strife and bloodshed. The Sixth Commandment says, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13), but man has ignored this Commandment as he does all of God's laws. Men will kill at the slightest provocation. This pronouncement in Romans 3:15 applies to all, Jews and Gentiles. The first recorded sin of Adam's posterity was murder. The first son in the first home killed his brother (Genesis 4:8). No murderer ever preceded him, no comic books, movies or television programs were present to show him how to kill, yet he murdered his own flesh and

blood. Cain's religion was too sophisticated to shed the blood of a lamb but not too sophisticated to shed the blood of his brother Abel. (See I John 3:11, 12). Today we are seeing that the sinner's feet are swift to shed blood.

However, God has His children, His born-again ones, those who are in Christ and therefore are a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17). They have their "feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15). Their goal is to take the gospel of Christ to the unsaved that they might be converted. Of them Paul added this testimony, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Romans 10:15)!

"Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known" (3:16, 17). You have only to keep up with the news media from day to day to know that wherever man walks on this earth, whether in the jungles of the uncivilized or in our modern cities of culture and education, destruction and misery are present. War, murder, rape, drug addiction, alcoholism, burglarizing and hunger stalk the human race. There is no respect for human life or private property. The accounts recorded in every daily newspaper in the world substantiate what God has written in His Word. The destruction of man is greater than his production. Man appears to be making progress scientifically, industrially, agriculturally and educationally, but sinful human nature leaves a trail of destruction and misery in its path. Our Lord described the true condition in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, "Broad is the way that leadeth to *destruction*, and *many* there be which go in thereat . . . narrow is the way which leadeth unto *life*, and *few* there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13, 14). I purposely italicized the four words, *destruction*, *many*, *life* and *few*. The *many* have chosen the way of destruction; *few* the way of life. All who have chosen the way to destruction, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (II Thessalonians 1:9).

Of every unsaved person it must be said, *The way of peace they do not know*. I personally can testify that, after a half-century in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ, the majority of sinners do not want to know God's peace. The

pathway that is characterized by peace is through Jesus Christ. More will be said about this fact when we come to study Romans 5:1: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." There is only one way of peace. Jesus Christ "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20). "There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22; 57:21).

"*There is no fear of God before their eyes*" (3:18). This last quotation is from Psalm 36:1. Here we see the utter depravity of the human heart. There are unsaved people who have no sense at all of God's presence and power in the universe. Men and women go through an entire lifetime as though God does not exist. This is the accurate picture of every person apart from Jesus Christ. They have no reverence for God. This final comment in Paul's description of the people without Christ is the most pertinent and pungent of them all. It is the most serious charge of all. Solomon said, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge," and "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). Both *knowledge* and *wisdom* (wisdom is the right use of knowledge) come to those that fear God, so there is then something worthwhile which is the possession of all those who look to God in holy awe and reverential trust.

We have seen man's photograph, his full length portrait. His depravity was shown in his *character*, or what man is (3:10-12); in his *conversation*, or what he says (3:13, 14); in his *conduct*, or what he does (3:15-18). These verses are not teaching that all persons are guilty of every offense mentioned and that there are no degrees of moral behavior. The point is that all men apart from Christ, and we all came into this world apart from Christ, are depraved, corrupted by the sin nature and sin principle.

Possibly some of you are boasting now that you have never been guilty of doing some of these things. Please remember, these Scriptures in Romans are describing what we *are* rather than what we *do*. The potential and possibility lie within every person apart from Jesus Christ. If you have not committed all of the sins suggested in this vivid description of the natural man, you have nothing to boast about. And if you are still inclined toward defending yourself, consider the closing verses in this section of the Epistle.

C. The Conclusion is Positive (3:19, 20)

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (3:19). The word "know" (Gr. *oida*) suggests a positive knowledge, a knowledge that is commonly accepted as sure and certain. The evidence was presented, and there cannot be a doubt in anyone's mind as to what the verdict should be. Sometimes in a human court it is difficult for both judge and jury to determine guilt. But the trial we have just witnessed was held in Heaven's court with the omniscient and righteous Judge presiding. The final ruling to be handed down was not decided on mere circumstantial evidence but upon a *positive knowledge*. The conclusion is positive.

In all fairness to his countrymen the Jews, Paul wants them to know they are included in the verdict. "Now we know that what things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law . . ." (3:19). He had just quoted from the Jewish Scriptures that proved all men to be sinners (3:9-12), and now he wants them to know that they are included in the final verdict. The heathen stands condemned on the basis of *creation*, the hypocrite on the basis of his *conscience*, but the Jew on the basis of the *commandments*. The Jews were "*under the law*," thus they could offer no defense because they violated the commandments. Being *under the law*, which they had violated, they are likewise *under sin* (3:9). Every Jew knows that the Law was not given to Gentiles but to Israel, therefore he must know also that his failure to keep the Law brings him under its condemnation. For the Jew who admits to this, grace and mercy will be extended to him, but to those who reject the truth, judgment without mercy is certain.

One reason God gave the Law was "*that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God*" (3:19). Every mouth, Jews as well as Gentiles, will be silenced in the day of judgment. The word "stopped" (Gr. *phrassō*) means *to stop up, close up, fence in*. God will close up every mouth so that there will be a silent world. The mouth of the heathen, the hypocrite and the Hebrew, all will be closed tight. Some persons have boasted that if there is a future judgment, they will stand before God and defend

themselves. I don't like to hear a man talk like that. When the sinner stands before God, there will be no defense.

This same word is used in Hebrews 11:33 where we read of the mouths of lions being physically stopped. A Gentile king had Daniel cast into a den of lions fully expecting those beasts would destroy Daniel. However, a bad case of lockjaw fastened itself upon every lion in that den. Then Daniel testified to the king, "My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me . . ." (Daniel 6:22). God who shut the lion's mouth will shut the sinner's mouth in the day of judgment. Every excuse will be destroyed because of the overwhelming evidence. That will be the day of no defense, the day the human race stands mute before God.

"Guilty before God," will be the final and irrevocable verdict. It is God's pronouncement, not man's. This is really the best thing God could do for the sinner, prove his guilt and shut his mouth. You see, until the sinner is fully aware of his guilt and deserved judgment, he will never realize his need of God's saving grace. William Barclay tells about William Jay, of Bath who, when an old man, said, "My memory is failing, but there are two things that I never forget — that I am a great sinner, and that Jesus Christ is a great Saviour." The Holy Spirit's goal in this first section of the Book of Romans is to bring us all to see that we are great sinners. My dear friends, if you wait until you die to find out if you are a condemned sinner, that will be too late. Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? The Bible says, "He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). "Condemned already!" Humanity in general, apart from Jesus Christ, is brought under Divine judgment, "Guilty before God."

"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" (3:20). This verse must be examined both contextually and exegetically in order to understand its meaning. In the first place, the word "therefore" does not convey what Paul is actually saying. I prefer the use of *because* over *therefore*. Barclay, Coltman, McClain, Vine, Williams, along with

others, agree that the American Standard Version gives the clearer meaning with the use of *because*. God has pronounced man guilty for two reasons: (1) *because* he is a sinner; (2) "*because* by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight." Verse 20 is a vital and an integral part of verse 19. My personal feeling is that the verse division here is not necessary. The two verses should be read together as follows: "*Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Because by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*" Thus the argument for man's guilt and condemnation is strengthened. The conclusion is positive.

Another matter we must not overlook is the absence of the definite article before "*deeds*" and "*law*." Paul is not here speaking specifically about *the* Law of Moses. While the Mosaic Law would be included, he has in mind law in a general sense. "*By works of law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight*" is, in my judgment, the better rendering of what Paul is saying. I believe this is important because there are those persons, Seventh Day Adventists in particular, who cling to some aspect of law as necessary to salvation. There is some form of legalism in almost every religion. Some stress the necessity of obedience to the ceremonial aspect of *the* Law, others its moral details, and still others the law our Lord dealt with in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, chapter 5 through 7. Paul is saying that no one will be declared righteous by God because he observed some law, any law. The sum total of human efforts to comply with any or all kinds of law cannot justify a sinner in God's sight. The conclusion is positive.

"*For by the law is the knowledge of sin*" (3:20). Law does serve a purpose. Law intensifies the awareness, the consciousness of sin. God did not give the Law as a goal for sinners to strive after so that they could be saved, but to convince all men that they are sinners and in need of His grace. This important subject is covered quite full in Romans, chapter 7.

We have now concluded our study of the Condemnation section of the Epistle. Have you grasped fully the main point God is teaching us? Have you learned that you are a sinner and that nothing you could do will ever justify you in God's sight? If you have come to an understanding and appropriation of this important fact, you are now ready for what is to follow. You are ready for salvation.

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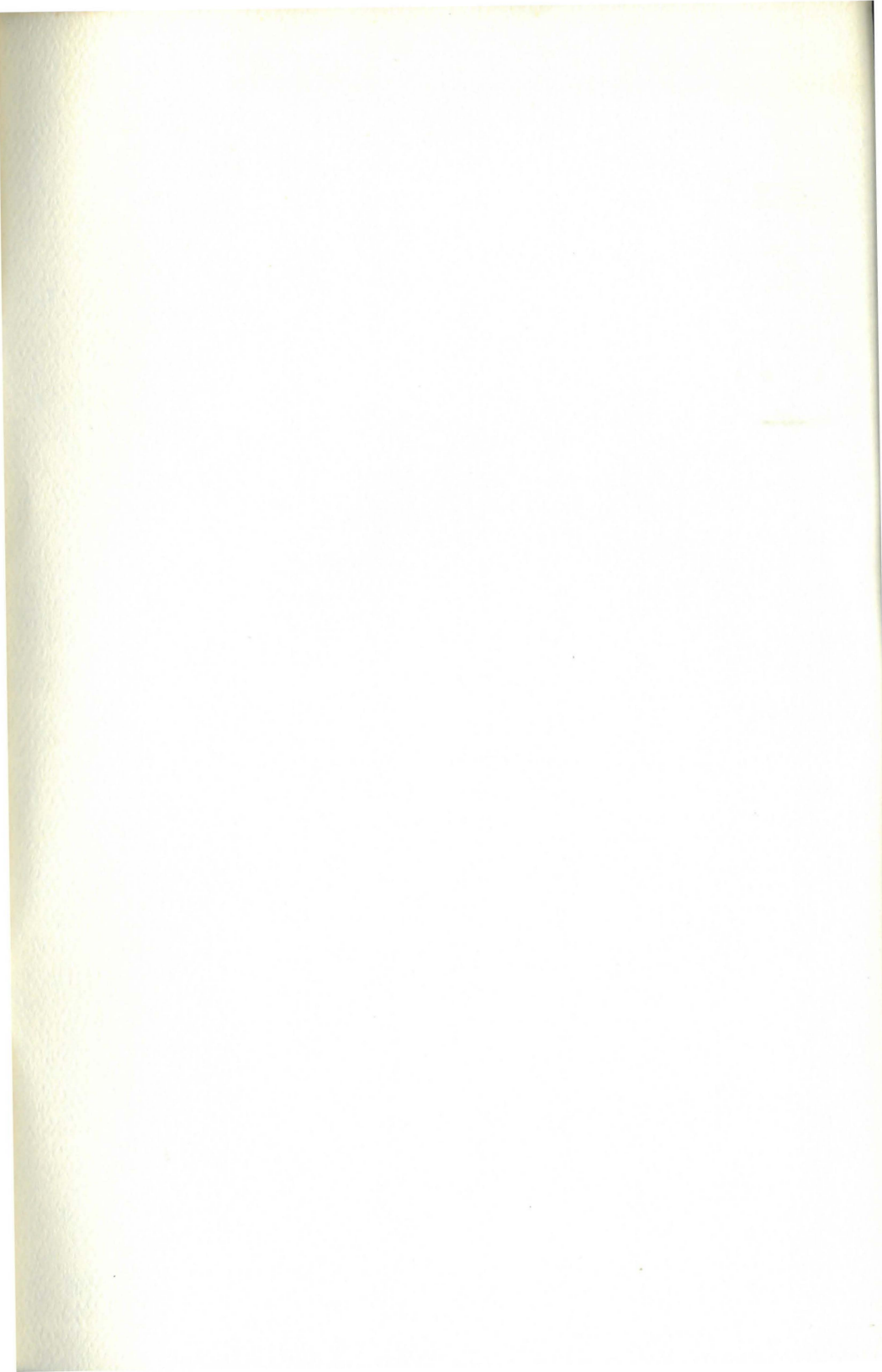
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