

Lesson 4

Chapter Three

The dilemma for Jewish Christians was the fact that their own brethren did not accept the Messiah.

All Mankind is Under Sin (3:1-20)

Having made the argument in the preceding chapters that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin, Paul now moves to address the significance of this. All mankind needs redemption from sin. This redemption rests in the gospel. Yet, before expanding upon this truth, Paul reaches out to his Jewish brethren asking what **advantage then has the Jew** (3:1a). If being a Jew didn't mean that the descendents of Abraham were morally superior to the pagan nations, what was the covenant with Abraham all about? For that matter, he adds, **what is the profit of circumcision** (3:1b). This question corresponds to his statement in the previous chapter that circumcision is of profit if one keeps the law (2:25). The advantage and profit of Jewish identity related to the role the Jews played in leading to the Christ. To the Jews were **committed the oracles of God** (3:2b). "Oracles" in Greek is *logia*, literally "words, messages" (Newman). In classical pagan usage *logia* referred

to a divine word given by a deity in a shrine. Biblical writers use the term to refer to

the revealed word of God (see Acts 7:38; Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 4:11). God's very word was entrusted to the Jews. Without that word all that led to the Messiah could not have come about.

The dilemma for Jewish Christians was the fact that their own brethren did not accept the Messiah to which God's word had pointed. Paul asks, with them, **what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?** (3:3). Paul begins with this question to address the problem of Israel's rejection of the gospel. How could it be that the majority of the very people to whom the gospel first came rejected the Messiah that was sent to them? Had God been untrue to His promises? Wasn't the Messiah sent to save Israel? Paul will return to this issue in greater detail in chapters 9-11, but first he must address the problem of sin and God's solution to this problem. Did man's unbelief nullify God's faithfulness? **Certainly not!** (In the Gr. this is literally

"may it never be")—**let God be true but every man a liar.** (3:4). God always tells the truth. The one thing that Scripture says is "impossible" for God to do is to lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Man's unbelief does not change God's nature. There is more than meets the eye in God's relationship with Israel. He will return to this later.

Human beings often construct arguments that sound intelligent and reasonable, but are little more than veiled attempts to hide their own desire to do wrong. Paul voices one such argument that may have been discussed within the religious circles in his day. He asks, **if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?** (3:5a). In this question Paul illustrates how the worldly mindset would see things. This compels him to explain that this is not the spiritual view of things. He says parenthetically, **I speak as a man.** (3:5b). The answer to his hypothetical question, is clear—**certainly not!** (3:6a, again Gr. "may it never be"). If God wanted us to sin so that His righteousness would be magnified there would be no way He could **judge the world** (3:6b). Paul offers another veiled philosophical argument, asking, **if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner** (3:7)? Imagine the rationale here. The carnally minded intellect reasons, "if I sin or lie, doesn't it make the goodness and the truthfulness of God more

Human beings often construct arguments that are veiled attempts to justify the desire to do wrong.

apparent?” It would seem that some of the Jews who rejected Jesus had used the message of forgiveness in Jesus Christ as way to slander Christians. Paul says, that some had **slanderingly reported** and **some affirm that we say** (quote) **“Let us do evil that good may come”** (3:8). Paul then adds, concerning those who would say such things, **their condemnation is just** (3:8b).

The question of Israel’s rejection of the gospel, introduced with the question, “Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?” is then left, to be resumed again in chapter nine. Paul returns again to the point he began in 1:18: not only is the Gentile under sin, but so also is the Jew! He asks, **are we better than they?** (3:9a), including himself as a Jew. To which he answers, **not at all** (3:9b). How could it be that the Jew, one of God’s chosen people, who had the word of God, the covenants, the Messiah, and the Law, was not better than the godless, wicked Gentile? Because of what Paul has just demonstrated in the

It is easy to see the sin of others, but Paul points out that Scripture had never suggested that the Jew was immune to the problem of sin.

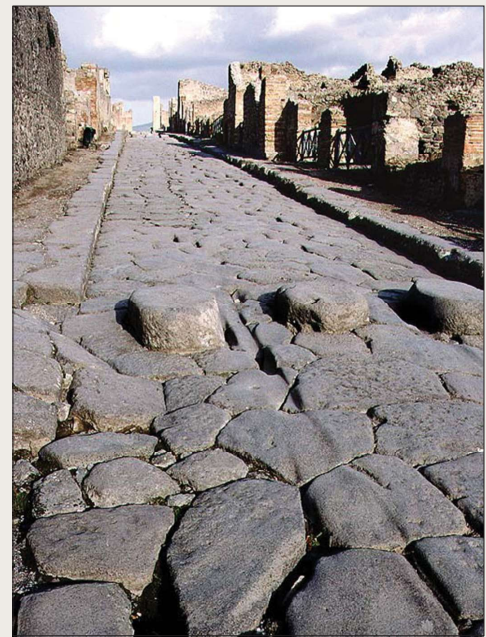
previous chapters, that all are under sin. The apostle himself summarizes the point he makes, declaring, **we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin** (3:9c). This was not something that Paul was asserting through resentment or bitterness. Scripture itself had declared the same. Paul paraphrases portions of a number of Scriptures, to show that all are sinners. He declares, **there**

is none righteous, no, not one (3:10; Psa. 14:1-3; 53:1-3). The Holy Spirit doesn’t just say such things about the Gentile, but about all men. He quotes further, **their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit** (3:13a; Psa. 5:9) and **the poison of asps is under their lips** (3:13b; Psa. 140:3). It is easy to see someone else’s sin, but Paul calls the minds of the Romans to recall, the fact that the word of God never suggested that the Jews were immune to the problem of sin. On the contrary, of all who sin it must be said, **there is no fear of God before their eyes** (3:18; Psa. 36:1).

Of whom were these words written? Paul answers, **whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God** (3:19). Paul includes paraphrases (mainly from the Psalms) in the term “law.” Like Jesus, Paul held the Law of Moses, the Prophets

and the Psalms (which included all books of poetry) as the “oracles,” the *logia*, of God (3:1) and thus the “law”

of God (Luke 24:44). God’s word holds all mankind under sin— the Jew and the Gentile. Why is it important for Paul to show that all are under sin? In order to show that the Mosaic law was not intended as the ultimate solution to sin. Paul explains, **by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight** (3:20a). To the Jew, this statement would border on heresy! The Law of Moses for Jews in Paul’s day, as it



Roman road from the city of Pompeii. Courtesy of FreeStockPhotos.com.

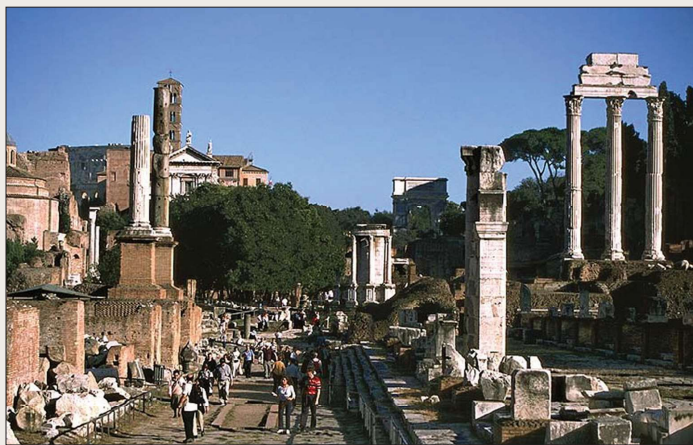
would be for Jews even to the present, was considered the highest gift of God to mankind and the source of salvation. The third century A.D. Jewish teacher Joshua, is quoted in the Mishnah as saying, “Great is the Torah which gives life to those that practice it in this world and in the world to come” (*Sayings of the Fathers*, 4.7). Paul is by no means heretical. He himself, before his obedience to the gospel, “concerning the law” was a “Pharisee” (Phil. 3:5), which he himself considered “the strictest sect” of Judaism (Acts 26:5). Instead, Paul will show what the Law did accomplish. He says, **by the law is the knowledge of sin** (2:20b). Later in chapter seven Paul will expand upon this, illustrating that knowledge of the fact that something is sin, does not liberate one from sin, but simply defines the nature of misdeeds.

Righteousness Apart From Mosaic Law (3:21-31)

What mankind (both Jew and Gentile) needs, Paul now sets forth: **the righteousness of God apart**

from the law (3:21a). The means of making man right with Himself, which the Law of Moses did not offer, God now has **revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets** (3:21b). The word of God which was entrusted to the Jews prophesied what God was going to do. This system of righteousness demands that mankind accept Jesus as the sacrifice for sin, putting trust in Him. Paul says this system is **the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ** (3:22a). The Law of Moses did not demand faith in Moses (except in the sense that the Israelites had to believe that Moses spoke what God had said to him). The Law of Christ demands that those who accept it believe that Jesus is the Son of God and brings to man God's system of righteousness apart from the Law of Moses. It is available **to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference** (3:22b).

One of the challenges to conversion in our day, as in Paul's day, is leading people to understand their



The Roman Forum. Courtesy of FreeStockPhotos.com.

own sinfulness and thus their need for salvation. Paul declares that **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** (3:23). There is no morally accountable soul who has

not, does not, and will not sin. The entire world, whether knowingly or in ignorance, is "under law toward Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21). This law defines sin in this age. Whether it comes from the violation of law (1 John 3:4), failure to follow law (Jas. 4:17), or acting without faith (Rom. 14:23), when sin occurs it separates man from God (Isa. 59:1-2) and leaves us spiritually dead in sin (Eph. 2:1). Sin is personal in nature. While consequences of sin can effect others (Exod. 20:5), the guilt of sin cannot be passed on or inherited (Ezek. 18:20). Man is not sinful by nature. Children have a nature that is heavenly (Matt. 18:4). Sin comes from individual misdirected desire that blooms into sin (Jas. 1:14-15).

If all have sinned, how can there be any hope? The only hope for mankind rests in forgiveness. Man's only hope is to be **justified freely by His grace through the redemption**

The only hope for mankind rests in forgiveness. God has always been the One who "justifies" mankind.

that is in Christ Jesus (3:24). Even under the Old Law, forgiveness did not come from the various sacrifices and rituals which the Israelite was expected to do. It has always been the case that God is the

One who "justifies" mankind. God said, "Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked" (Exod. 23:7). Man can-

not earn justification, it is offered "freely." It comes by God's gift of grace offered in the sacrifice of Jesus, **whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood** (3:25a). "Propitiation" in Greek is *hilastērion*, meaning "the means or place where sins are forgiven." In the Greek Old Testament this word referred to the "mercy seat" that sat on the ark of the covenant. It was at the "mercy seat" where God met with Israel (Exod. 25:22), where He instructed Israel (Exod. 25:22), where He "appeared" to Israel (Lev. 16:2), and where He granted mercy and propitiation. The word *hilastērion* was used only twice in the New Testament, here and in Hebrews 9:5 in reference to the "mercy seat" on the ark of the covenant. Paul, through the Holy Spirit, teaches the Romans that Jesus is mankind's "mercy seat." It is in Christ that mankind meets with God (John 14:6), sees God (John 14:9), hears God (Heb. 1:2), and finds mercy and propitiation.

Paul tells the Romans that, **in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed** (3:25b). In what sense did God "pass over" sin? While the Law of Moses commanded sacrifice for sin, the Hebrew writer explains, "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). What such sacrifices did was remind Israel of their sin year after year (Heb. 10:3). The sacrifices of the Old Covenant looked ahead to Jesus' sacrifice. This enabled God to **be just and the justifier of the one who has faith**

in Jesus (3:26b). By allowing the horrifying and unimaginable deed of God becoming man in Jesus Christ, then suffering and dying upon a cross for the sins of mankind, God demonstrated His justice in demanding a penalty for sin, but also His mercy in offering the means of forgiveness for sin.

Paul asks the brethren, **where is boasting then** (3:27a)? To which he answers, **it is excluded** (3:27b). Paul refutes the false view of righteousness, held by some, that their obedience to the Law gave them reason to boast. No degree of obedience could take away sin. Years later, in writing to the Philippians Paul would list such a boast of false righteousness using himself as an example (Phil. 3:3-6). He then declared, “what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ” (Phil. 3:7), going so far as to call them “rubbish” (Phil. 3:8). What excludes boasting is **the law of faith** (3:27d). There are several ways that the gospel is referred to in Scripture. It is the “new covenant” (2 Cor. 3:6). It is the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). It is “the Way” (Acts 24:14). Here Paul calls it “the law of faith.” This must be understood as the system of faith that is revealed in Jesus Christ. It is a mistake to imagine that this “law of faith” has no commands, ordinances, or divine regulations.

Just as the Law of Moses brought the knowledge of sin, so the Law of Christ defines what is and is not sin in this age. One does not follow the “law of faith” by simply believing that he should or should not do something that he imagines in his heart. On the contrary, Paul will explain later in this very epistle that saving faith comes from what is revealed in the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

Paul summarizes, declaring, **therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law** (3:28). This is simply a way of restating the assertion of verse twenty—“by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight.” The contrast is Moses versus Christ, not obedience versus a feeling in the heart. God is not **the God of the Jews only**, He is **also the God of the Gentiles** (3:29). There is only **one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith** (3:30). Does this mean that the Law of Moses was worthless? Paul asks, **do we then make void the law through faith?** (3:31a). To which he answers, **certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law** (3:31b). Paul is not claiming that the Law of Moses is still binding. In writing to

the Corinthians, referring to the Law of Moses he spoke of it as “passing away” (2 Cor. 3:11). Instead he asserts that the gospel provides the power needed to allow divine law to be effectual for mankind. Just as Paul considered statements from the Psalms “law,” (3:10-18), the gospel of Christ is now “law.” The Law of Christ brings not only the knowledge of sin but the means to conquer sin. The Law of Moses provided sacrifices that offered forgiveness. However, they did so by passing

The Law of Moses provided sacrifices that offered forgiveness, but it did so looking ahead to Jesus.

over the “sins previously committed” (3:25) and looking ahead to the sacrifice of Jesus. This gave the forgiveness promised to those in the past under the Law of Moses the power needed for such forgiveness to stand. It gives to those “under Law to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21) the power for our forgiveness to be established as well. Jesus called this “fulfilling” the Old Law (Matt. 5:17).

Questions

1. What is the Greek word translated “oracles” in this text (3:2)? _____
How do Biblical writers use this word? _____
2. What is “impossible” for God to do (Heb. 6:18)? _____
3. Explain the phrase “let God be true and every man a liar” (3:4). _____

4. What were the two arguments used to justify sin which Paul refutes?
 - a. _____ (3:5).
 - b. _____ (3:7).

5. What had some slanderously accused Christians of teaching (3:8)?
 “Let us _____”
6. How does Paul summarize the point of what he had written so far in the epistle (3:9)? _____

7. From what book are most of the paraphrased quotes taken that Paul uses to show that all mankind is under sin (3:10-18)? _____ Explain why Paul includes this book in referring to what “the law says” (3:19). _____

8. What can not come about “by the deeds of the law” (3:20)? _____

9. How is the “righteousness of God apart from the Law” witnessed by “the Law and the Prophets” (3:21)? _____

10. What is the standard that defines what sin is in this age (1 Cor. 9:21)? _____

11. List three ways that one can be guilty of sin:
 _____ (1 John 3:4); _____ (Jas. 4:17);
 _____ (Rom. 14:23).
12. To what does the Greek word *hilastērion*, translated “propitiation,” refer in the only other place it is used in the New Testament (3:25; Heb. 9:5)? _____
13. List three descriptions of the gospel elsewhere, and one description from this text:
 _____ (2 Cor. 3:6); _____ (Gal. 6:2);
 _____ (Acts 24:14); _____ (3:27c).
14. The statement, “man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” is a restatement of what previous assertion (3:28, 20)? _____

15. In what sense does the Law of Faith “establish” the Law of Moses (3:31)? _____

16. How did Paul describe the Law of Moses to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 3:11)? _____

17. What did Jesus say that he came to do to the Law (Matt. 5:17)? _____
