THE JUST CONDEMNATION OF ALL

Series: Righteousness Revealed
Romans 3:1-20
Chadron Berean Church

No one wants to go to court, obviously, but many are entertained by it. And the courtroom can be entertaining. For example, listen to these two transcripts from real court exchanges:

In this first one, a doctor is on the stand.

Attorney: "Doctor, before you performed the autopsy, did you check for a pulse?"
Witness: "No."
Attorney: "Did you check for blood pressure?"
Witness: "No."
Attorney: "So then it is possible that the patient was alive when you began the autopsy?"
Witness: "No."
Attorney: "How can you be so sure doctor?"
Witness: "Because his brain was sitting on my desk in a jar."
Attorney: "I see, but could the patient have still been alive nevertheless?"
Witness: "Yes, it is possible that he could have been alive and practicing law."

The next interchange was taken between a lawyer and his client who was on the stand:

Attorney: "She had three children, right?"
Witness: "Yes."
Attorney: "How many were boys?"
Witness: "None."
Attorney: "Were there any girls?"
Witness: "Your honor, I think I need a different attorney. Can I get a new attorney?"

These attorneys weren't the most skilled in asking questions. Their questions weren't even worth considering. In Romans chapter 3, we find something similar. We're going to put mankind on trial in God's courtroom and sinful man gets very creative in asking questions trying to justify himself. Some of the questions aren't even worth considering. They just prove man's condemnation. So far in Romans, Paul has proved the **pagan Gentiles** guilty of sin in chapter 1:18-32. In the first half of chapter 2, Paul proved the guilt of the **moralist** who depends upon his own self-righteousness to get him to heaven. In the second half of chapter 2, Paul proved the **Jews** guilty by kicking out 3 legs from underneath the stool that the Jews were relying upon for salvation: 1) the **Law**, 2) **circumcision**, and 3) **natural birth**.

I. THE <u>LAW</u> CANNOT SAVE THE JEW. (2:17-24)
II. <u>PHYSICAL</u> CIRCUMCISION CANNOT SAVE THE JEW. (2:25-29)
III. <u>NATURAL</u> BIRTH CANNOT SAVE THE JEW. (2:28-29)

He even said that a true "Jew" or "God-praiser" (that's what the word "Jew" means) is one who is one *inwardly* by the Spirit. The outward externals like circumcision or natural birth or their good works that they **relied** upon won't save them or anyone else. You must be born again by the **Spirit** to become a true "God-praiser" (2:28-29). Because Paul said these things, he's going to experience pushback from the Jews. Being a Jew and an ex-Pharisee himself, and having preached the gospel for decades now, he anticipates their typical theological arguments and questions. And if there's one sport that Jews are good at, it's arguing (j/k). It has been called their most popular sport.

IV. A<u>RGUMENT</u> CANNOT SAVE THE JEW. (3:1-8)

1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

After what Paul just got done saying in chapter 2 (that the Jew and the Gentile are on the same level being guilty before God, having broken the "laws" given them (Mosaic Law to the Jews; the "law" of creation and conscience to the Gentiles)) many would ask, Well then what advantage has the Jew? Does it even matter? What good is it to be a Jew?

Objection #1 – If being a Jew inwardly is what counts, then what <u>advantage</u> has the Jew?

After what Paul said previously (both Jew and Gentile are condemned) you might expect Paul to answer with, "None really." But Paul doesn't say that. To our surprise he says the Jew has **great advantage in every respect**. His unexpected response should make us think a little bit deeper about the nature of his arguments and the meaning of that phrase, "to the Jew first" (1:17; 2:9).[1] Even though Jews and Gentiles are on the same footing as sinners before God, and both are saved the same way through faith (10:12), the Jews still have a place of priority and privilege in the outworking of God's program. The equal access of Gentiles doesn't destroy the genuine privileges enjoyed by Israel.[2] Paul will discuss this more in depth in Romans 9-11, but this section in brief.

In Romans 9, Paul lists several **advantages** but here he lists one first. He says, *"First, they were entrusted with the oracles of God."* The **oracles** of God is a reference to the words or utterances of God. God gave them with the Law and the Scriptures. They wrote the Scriptures. If you have a Bible in your hands today, you have the Jews to thank. Having the Word of God, being able to know God and His will precisely like they did (in comparison to natural revelation) was a great advantage. Many commentators pointed out that this term oracles, however, stresses the messianic prophecies and promises of God in particular.[3] God made promises to them and they still belong to them even though His program with Israel is presently on pause because many had rejected, not received, the Messiah. The next objection springboards off this fact. The Jew might have said, "Yes, we have the oracles, but some didn't believe. Doesn't that put God in a bind since God promised to redeem and restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6-7; 3:19-21). So Paul says,

3 What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? 4 May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, "That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged."

Objection #2 – Does Jewish unbelief put God in a bind?

Because **some** Jews failed to believe in Christ (e.g. they rejected the Messiah) the validity of God's promises to them is questioned by the objector. God's character—specifically His ability to keep His Word—is on the line. Arnold Fruchtenbaum paraphrased it this way: Is it not true that Jewish unbelief has canceled out the promises to Israel contained in the oracles of God?[4] Paul's response? ***"May it never be!"*** *"Me genoito!"* in the Greek. For heaven's sake, no! May the thought not even enter your mind! *Me genoito* is the most emphatic way to say no in Greek (strongest negation).[5] This is the first of eleven times we'll hear Paul say that and most of the time in regard to God's righteous character in denying His Word (3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13, 9:14; 11:1, 11; 12:16).[6] Paul says *me genoito* because if anything, the unfaithfulness of Israel is going to prove the greater **faithfulness of God**.[7] By punishing them now for their disobedience or restoring them in the future, either way it is God being faithful to them. Therefore Gentiles should be warned against thinking God's done with the Jews (11:18, 20, 25). God is going to **be found true**. Man's failure can't thwart God's faithfulness to His promises, purpose, and plan. 2 Timothy 2:13 says, *"If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself."* He doesn't change.

Paul then quotes **Psalm 51:4** to reaffirm that God will be true to His Word, saying, *"That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged."* The interesting thing about that quote is that the context is King David, the beloved leader of Israel, admitting his sin of murder and adultery to the Lord. He is saying that God is right in judging his sin. Immediately after he says he was conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5). The rest of the Jews, therefore, should admit they are sinners like David and God is faithful in judging them. His faithfulness to His Word includes his commitment to not only bless but to punish Israel for their sin.[8] With that logic applied, we can better understand his next set of questions where it starts to get ridiculous like the attorneys in the introduction.

5 But if our unrighteousness [remember Paul is a Jew, including himself among the Jewish people here] *demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms).*

Objection #3 – If Jewish unrighteousness demonstrates God's righteousness, then isn't God unjust to inflict wrath on the Jew?

What a crazy question, right? It's as clever as it is brainless. "Since our sin make makes God look good, why should God judge us? Our unrighteousness proves God is righteous so how can God still condemn us for sin if it contributes to His glory and salvation plan?" It's an "end justifies the means" argument. The argument is real, and I have no doubt Paul heard it many times, but it's so ridiculous that Paul even has to say in parenthesis, *"I am speaking in human terms."* That's his

way of reminding us this a **diatribe** argument and not what he really believes because it's near blasphemy. It's ridiculous human philosophy and self-justification. But this self-justification of sin is what happens when the self-righteous person is caught in their sin. They can start to reason unrealistically.

Sometimes I like to watch a certain evangelist's videos on YouTube where he witnesses to people in public. He starts by asking them if they think they're a good person. They all say, Yes. They don't realize it yet, but they're about to find out that by saying that they're self-righteous. So the evangelist says, "Okay, do you mind if we measure your character against God's Law in the 10 commandments?" They agree. So he says, "Great. How about command number 8, "Thou shall not steal"? Have you ever stolen anything?" They usually say yes, but it's been a long time and I've never stolen anything big. "Okay, but you have stolen. How about number 9, "Thou shall not lie"? Have you ever lied?" You know they're lying when they say, No, I've never lied. That's a lie. Most admit to it though. He continues, "Do you covet? Do you lust (commit adultery)?" Yes, yes. Then he says, "According to the 10 commandments you're a lying, thieving, adulterer at heart." At that point, many people really start to retract. They make excuses and justify their sin: "But God is a God of love…. God would never judge me" or "I'm still not as bad as most" or "God wouldn't give me these desires if He didn't want me to satisfy them." There's always an excuse.

The Jew Paul is dealing with here is much more complex in his theology, but sin is sin. While God is love, He's also holy and perfectly just too. Sin cannot go unpunished. Someone must pay for it. Just because human sin and unfaithfulness have been used by God to bring about good and enhance God's glory, it's no less deserving of punishment. A specific example was that they had crucified the Messiah. It was incredibly sinful but they carried out God's sovereign salvation plan so how can they be judged for it (Acts 2:23)? Does that make God unrighteous? Paul's response:

"*6 May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?"*

If God cannot judge the Jew because his sin makes the righteousness of God more evident, then He cannot deal with any sinner—He can't **judge the world**. And every Jew believed God would judge the world. With that sort of reasoning God would have to get rid of all judgment and deny His holy character. Man's unrighteousness merely shows God's right to be their Judge.

7 But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.

Because Paul taught salvation by grace apart from works or the Law, and maybe that for the believer when sin abounds grace abound all the more (5:20), many accused Paul of antinomianism (anti-Law) or teaching license. This is the idea that God's grace gives you license *to sin* rather than free you *from sin*. But if what they said is true—that our sin can't be punished because it glorifies God—then why would they give him a hard time for teaching license? See how he's trapping them in their hypocrisy. At this point, Paul says, *"Their condemnation is just."* This charge isn't even

worth refuting. Get a new attorney. If anyone thinks that God should overlook his sin because in some sense it glorifies God, that person deserves condemnation. Now we come to the conclusion on this entire "bad news section" of Romans that began in 1:18.

V. THE CONDEMNATION OF ALL MEN. (3:9-20)

9 What then? Are we [Jews] *better than they* [Gentiles]*? Not at all; for we have already charged* [a courtroom term] *that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;*

The charge: all men are under sin.

Paul doesn't just say that all men are sinners. He says **all are under sin**—meaning all are under the power and penalty of sin (singular; not sins). That's the **charge**. They sin because they're sinners at heart. They're born with a sin nature. All men are guilty, condemned, and powerless to save themselves from sin. They are in bondage and condemned. To prove it, Paul strings together several OT passages in a rabbinic practice known as "pearl stringing."

10 as it is written,
"There is none righteous, not even one;
11 There is none who understands,
There is none who seeks for God;
12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless;
There is none who does good,
There is not even one."
13 "Their throat is an open grave,
With their tongues they keep deceiving,"
"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 paths,
17 And the path of peace they have not known."
18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

What Paul has done here is he has strung several OT passages together to demonstrate the universal sway of sin over men. How many **righteous** are there? **None**. How many who do good? Understand? Seek God? None. How many have **turned aside**? **All**.

The evidence: what man is, says, and does.

It's plainly evident from what man **is** (vv. 10b-12), **says** (vv. 13-14), and **does** (vv. 15-17). His character, conversation, and conduct is evidence against him. Theologians call this man's depravity because it shows that sin has permeated every aspect of man's being. The natural, unspiritual man is far enough from God that God must make a first move to save him, at the least convicting him

of sin, righteousness, and judgment through the work of the Spirit (John 16:7-15) so that he believes and is saved (Eph. 1:13). What's interesting about the context of these verses is that they refer to wicked people *within* Israel, reminding the Jews in his audience that they can't claim special exemption from sin. So with the charges laid against them, he moves into the application.

19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

The <u>verdict</u>: all are accountable to God, without excuse, and unable to save themselves.

Paul reminds us that we are all **accountable to God** according to the law given them. The Mosaic **Law**, which he will deal with in depth, is like a chain; if you've broken one link, you've broken all of it. You're guilty. To be justified by the Law, you have to keep it perfectly (Matt. 5:48; Rom. 2:13; Jas. 2:10). Obviously no one does and therefore, no one is going to be justified by keeping it. It's impossible for men, born in sin, to not break it. The Law was intended, Paul says, to **reveal sin.** To give us a **knowledge** of our sin. Like an x-ray machine, it can reveal our faults, but it can't fix us. It verifies that men are sinners, but it cannot justify a sinner. When we study the Law honestly, we quit deceiving ourselves and trying to justify ourselves before God, thinking we're good people. We see we are guilty as charged and deserve death for our sins. We see our lack of righteousness and our need for it. We see that we are condemned and need a Savior.

Some people like to think that when they stand before God, they're going to give Him a piece of their mind and justify themselves. They're going to tell Him… But what does Paul say? **Every mouth will be closed.** It's not going to be like *Judge Judy* where people are bickering and justifying themselves and cracking jokes. There will be no opportunity to make your defense. You won't have any argument to make. Not in God's courtroom.

Make Jesus your perfect <u>Advocate</u> by trusting Him as Lord and Savior.

At the end of the day, we have two options in God's courtroom after receiving the verdict. We're all guilty. All men are under sin. And you can 1) pay for your sin and unrighteousness, being condemned to hell forever apart from God or 2) let Christ pay for your sin in full on the cross and accept by faith the free gift of His perfect righteousness, walking out of the courtroom scot-free. Don't try to defend yourself or justify yourself. Admit you are guilty and make Jesus Christ your Advocate, your Attorney. He's the best attorney in town and He happens to be related to the Judge. 1 John 2:1-2 says, *"If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins."* His righteous sacrifice satisfies (propitiation) God's wrath against our sin.

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[1] Moo, *Encountering Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 56.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Romans*, 2023 Ed., https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/

romans.pdf

[4] Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Romans* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2022), 84.

[5] Rene Lopez, *Romans Unlocked* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2005), 68.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Moo, 65-66, writes, “In thus allowing the Roman Christians to 'listen in' on this dialogue, Paul warns his mainly Gentile audience that they should not interpret the leveling of distinctions between Jew and Gentile in terms of God's judgment and salvation as the canceling of all the privileges of Israel.”

[8] Moo, *Encountering Romans*, 57.