

# The Letter to the Romans

A Scripture Study Course at Holy Comforter - St. Cyprian  
Fall 2008

## Part One - Humanity is Lost without the Gospel

- I. Background
  - A. Paul wrote the letter sometime in 56 AD while he was in Corinth. He had a strong desire to visit the Romans but his immediate plans were to go to Jerusalem to deliver a collection he had gathered for that Church in its time of need: "***At present however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints.***" (Rom 15:25)
  - B. It is significant that Paul had never been to Rome. Why did he write? All of his letters were either to a community he had founded or visited and to address some specific issues. His purpose in the Letter is broader. The letter comes very close to being a theological treatise. It is likely addressed to the Community in order that Paul may lay some groundwork for a later visit and likely also to protect them from error. In particular, Paul seems concerned to set forth a theology of justification and salvation that addresses the attacks of the Judaizers. It also seems that Paul wrote to the Romans in response to a vision he received from the Lord: "***Take courage Paul. For as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness at Rome.***" (Acts 23:11) Lastly, Paul may have planned to move his theater of operations west to Rome. As Jerusalem was his base in the East, so Rome could become his base in the West. This flows especially from the fact that he had expressed a wish to bring the Gospel to Spain, "***I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain***" (Rom 15:24). A fifth factor may have been a series of visions in the Book of the prophet Daniel which likely had a great effect on Paul's historical world view. (See below)
  - C. The Layout of the letter.
    1. Chapters 1-8 The problem of righteousness
      - a. 1:18-3:20 The bad news of sin.
      - b. 3:21-8:37 Discourse on salvation, sanctification, mortification and suffering.
    2. Chapters 9-11 the problem of the Jews' rejection of the Messiah
    3. Chapters 12-15 Practical questions of behavior
    4. Chapter 16 a letter of introduction for Phoebe and final greetings.
  - D. An important aside about Justification and Salvation

II. Chapter 1:1-17

A. *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God <sup>2</sup>which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, <sup>3</sup>the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup>and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup>through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, <sup>6</sup>including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; <sup>7</sup> To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. <sup>9</sup>For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, <sup>10</sup>asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup>For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, <sup>12</sup>that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. <sup>13</sup>I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. <sup>14</sup>I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish: <sup>15</sup>so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. <sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup>For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."*

B. Outline

1. Person v. 1
2. Prophecy - v. 2-3
3. Power - v. 4
4. Prerogatives - v. 5a
5. Purpose - v. 5b-6
6. Prayers and praises - vv. 7-12
7. Prospects - vv. 13-15
8. Portrait (of the Gospel) - vv. 16-17

C. The content of the greetings follows the basic structure of any ancient letter in that it has the three basic ingredients.

1. The person and title from whom the letter came: "***Paul, a slave Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle.***"
2. The person(s) to whom it is addressed: "***to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy.***"
3. Greetings: "***Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*** Note the specific Christian theme here. Secular letters use the standard Greek word, "chairein" meaning simply "greetings" but Paul

uses Semitic and Christian element in saying grace and peace.

- D. **"Paul, a slave of Christ, called to be an Apostle and set apart..."** Why would Paul have been called? He was the greatest student of Gamaliel the greatest Rabbi (Rabbon) of the age. This made Paul an effective witness to the Jews who might well have rejected the testimony of the more simple Galileans who were the 12. But no one could have said Paul was simple-minded or uninformed. He was a brilliant and well trained pharisee. Thus the Jews could have no excuse for rejecting his testimony as ignorance. Paul had credibility and it seems that our Lord wanted to offer every opportunity for the pharisees by raising up one of the most brilliant and articulate of their own number to show them the way. Most still did not listen but we see how Paul was their prime preacher. His brilliance even enraged his opponents so much that some sought to kill him and he could no longer openly transverse Jerusalem and other areas where Jews predominated. But always attempted to preach the Gospel to the Jews wherever he went and turned to the Gentiles as well. Lastly, we might also say that there is a certain pattern that the biggest enemies of the Church can often become her greatest and most articulate defenders because they are informed of the opposite position and because they transfer their zeal to the tasks of the Church. This was certainly the case with Paul.
- E. The Greek word "dulos" can be translated either as servant or slave. Here it is understood to a title of honor. In the Old Testament there was no more of an honorable title than to be called a servant of God. A servant of God has a special role in God's work. Note how Paul transfers the title "servant of God " to "servant of Christ Jesus" thus making reference to the divinity of Christ.
- F. **"Called"** Paul declares that he was called and set apart by God for his role. In God's work no one ever calls himself. God must call and it is this fact that gives the prophet or evangelist authority. In the Old Testament, when the prophets were questioned as to their authority they referred to the story of their call. For example see Jeremiah 1, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1-3 etc. These "call" stories are not mere fluff. They establish the authority of the prophet who has that authority because he is called and set apart by God. Thus Paul indicates the same of himself. Elsewhere (Acts 9) we see the call of Paul described. It is in virtue of this call that he has authority and rightfully calls himself an apostle.
- G. **the gospel** - in Greek "evangelium" literally means "good news." Is it? What does it mean to call it good news?
- H. **descended from David** - (verses 3 and 4 are probably an ancient creedal formula). This part refers to his human origins and it is an important statement of faith about the Lord since it shows how he fulfills the whole expectation of the Old Testament which is best announced by Nathan in his oracle to David by which it is promised that an heir of David would be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. See 2 Samuel 7:12ff
- I. **"established as Son of God..."** This refers to the taking up of Christ's human nature into glory by his resurrection of that nature unto glory after the passion. Paul is not saying that Christ, in his divine nature as the second person of the blessed Trinity (and thus eternally the Son of God) was not the Son and only

became thus after the resurrection. Rather, the glorification of his Human nature (as previewed in the transfiguration) is referred to here.

- J. ***Jesus Christ our Lord*** - this is not a throw away line. The Greek word for Lord (Kyrios) is used in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) to translate "Yahweh" Thus Paul is bestowing the divine Name upon Jesus: "Jesus Christ our Yahweh" This is a strong affirmation of the divinity of Jesus. Thus the essential Christian creed is contained in these two verses: "Jesus rose from the dead gloriously and is Lord, equal to the Father."
- K. ***"...to bring about the obedience of faith"*** This is an important phrase and Paul repeats it at the very end of the letter at 16:26. Thus, the very first time uses the word "Faith" he uses it in this context of obedience which is a work, or fruit, of faith. There are precepts, knowledge and commands to which we must be obedient in regard to our faith. Paul no where suggest that, because we are saved by faith that there is nothing to which we must be obedient. Later, we shall see that when Paul says we are justified apart from works of the Law he does not mean the moral law (commandments) but speaks rather of the ceremonial precepts. More on this later. But here note that faith and obedience are tow sides of the same coin. If we have true faith we will be obedient and we cannot have a saving obedience apart from faith. Who has not obedience cannot claim to have faith. Yo can tell a tree by its fruit. If there is no good fruit (obedience) then there is not a good tree (faith).
- L. ***"I long to see you..."*** There is an interesting theory that the reason for Paul's longing is based on his historical world view rooted in Daniel 2, 7, and 9. In these passages Daniel prophesys that there would be four empires that would dominate and oppress Israel. The fourth would be smashed by one, like a son of man who would establish a universal kingdom of all the saints. The kingdoms were these:
1. Babylon whose dominance and oppression ended with the conversion of its king, Nebuchadnezzar who issued a decree that Yahweh was the God of gods.
  2. Assyria whose dominance and oppression ended also with the conversion of Cyrus who was so moved as to restore the land to the Jews and rebuild their temple for them.
  3. Greece whose leader, Alexander repented of conquering the city of Jerusalem had a vision and repented of his intention and even befriended the Jews.
  4. Rome - still unconverted but many of the Jews knew it to be the forth kingdom according to the prophecy. Paul thus saw it to be an enticing apple. He likely longed to be instrumental in bringing about the conversion of Rome according to prophecy of Daniel and see the establishment of the Universal Kingdom of the Lord. This also explains the focus on Rome in the early Church and shows that it is no accident that Peter and Paul both ended up there. Paul never saw the conversion but it did happen when Constantine converted in the 4th Century and made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. This contributed immensely to the Catholic (universality) of the Church.
- M. ***"that I may share with you some spiritual gift*** (charisma pneumatican)."

- N. **"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power God for the salvation of everyone..."** The good news is that Christ suffered on behalf of sinners in atonement for sins and rose glorious on the third day to call all unto this salvation. But this good news is not just an historical event (i.e. of the past). It is alive and active in the believer today who can, by the power of God die to sin and be alive in the Grace of God, as a whole new creation. Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel, are we?
- O. **who believes: Jew first, and then Greek.** How do we lay hold of this Good News? By faith. Faith is a work of God to which we agree and this puts us in saving touch with Jesus Christ. It is more than just an adherence to a formula. Faith is a way of knowing and being by which we truly say and live that Jesus Christ is Lord to the Glory of God the Father. Note that in saying the Greeks are called unto salvation Paul really shocks his Jewish listeners. More shocks are in store for them. Note also that earlier in verse 14 Paul also makes a further distinction regarding the Gentiles: Greeks and non-Greeks (Literally Greeks and barbarians). The Jews usually made this distinction recognizing a certain culture among the Greeks. The distinction was especially related to language and culture. Thus Greeks referred to all those who spoke the Greek language and/or were influenced by that culture. The barbarians were all the rest, largely uninfluenced by the Greek language or culture. They spoke "bar bar," hence the name barbarians. The word did not always carry the negative impact as does the word today. That the Jews are called first is an historical fact. God called them and set them apart. He first addressed himself to them. "Salvation is from the Jews" John 4:22. Nevertheless this saving message is to go out to all the world (Mark 16:15 et var.
- P. **the righteousness of God** - the Greek word here is "dikaiosune" and is translated as justice or righteousness. It is helpful to refine our notion of God's justice so that we are more biblical. Today the word "justice" makes us think of the opposite of God's mercy. In fact, a good biblical understanding does not divorce God's justice (righteousness) from his mercy. A good biblical definition of God's justice is his fidelity to his promises. The Hebrew word for this concept is "Sedeq" Biblically then, God is just because he is faithful to his promise of salvation. It is good to look at some Old Testament texts and see how closely the notions of salvation and justice are related (i.e. God's justice is salvation) This helps us to better understand what was in Paul's mind when he speaks of God's justice and righteousness.
1. Is. 46:13
  2. Is. 51:5-8
  3. Ps. 143:1-2
  4. Daniel 9:16
- Q. **From faith to faith** - probably refers to the Old Covenant and the New one.
- R. The one who is righteous by faith will live. Paul could mean this in two ways and probably intends both
1. The one who is righteous....by faith will live.
  2. The one who is righteous by faith....will live.

## Humanity Lost Without the Gospel

### III. Chapter I:18-32

A. *<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup>For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; <sup>21</sup>for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. <sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. <sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, <sup>27</sup>and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. <sup>28</sup>And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. <sup>29</sup>They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, <sup>30</sup>slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. <sup>32</sup>Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.*

#### B. Outline

1. Revelation - v. 18a
2. Root problem - v. 18b- 21a
3. Results in their minds- vv. 21b-23
4. Results in their body - vv. 24-27
5. Results in their behavior - vv. 28-31
6. Recalcitrance - v. 32

C. ***The wrath of God*** - this phrase does not mean that God is angry like we are. He is not throwing temper tantrums and fuming in heaven. The wrath is in us. This phrase is best understood as the utter incompatibility of sin with the holiness of God. Wrath is the "non-faith" of the world and all the resulting evil that issues from the willful suppression of the truth. St. Thomas Aquinas reflecting on this passage says that God is said to be wrathful only in a metaphorical sense because he produces the same effects as one who has wrath not that he himself is angry. The effect results from the utter incompatibility of sin and the holiness of God. There is an eschatological projection that takes place here since it is projected

ultimately to the moment the sinner experiences this most profoundly in the presence of the Holy One. But the wrath is not only for later we experience now in the crime and rebellion and indecency all around us.

- D. ***is indeed being revealed*** - though the Gospel sheds light and helps to articulate this wrath it is also revealed clearly for all to see apart from the Gospel. Paul will now develop this point: that the wrath is evident. Here the point to emphasize that it is a revelation - it is revealed clearly for all to see. Almost as if sin itself testifies to its own connection of to wrath, fear, death, confusion and decay. You can tell a tree by its fruit. The effects of sin testify to its evil origin and essence.
- E. ***those who suppress the truth*** - this is the sin. The truth about God is suppressed. Note that Paul says suppress. Thus it is not a case of failing to have discovered the truth by accident. What can be know of God is plain to them through the natural law of the created order. The mind can come to know the basic truths about God even apart from the Bible. This is because the created order is itself a revelation. Creation is a revelation - a word from God - but we suppress it and this is the sin. The result is total disorder as Paul will shortly describe.
- F. ***For what can be known about God is evident to them...*** This is a critically important line since it shows us that Atheism and agnosticism are acquired. They are a moral problem not an intellectual one. In effect it is a sin of the intellect. By virtue of our human intellect we are endowed by God with the power to look at his creation and draw conclusions about basic moral issues and conclude with certainty that he exists. If we fail to do this there is sin and there are consequences. Paul develops in verses 20 + 21 how they do in fact know and yet that they failed to act on this knowledge properly. The result was that their senseless minds were darkened. There are other places where scripture speaks of the revelatory quality of creation
1. Acts 14:16
  2. John 1
- G. ***They are without excuse...*** why? Because God has endowed creation with the dignity of being a revelation and endowed the human being with the mind and ability to discern Him in this creation. But they (we) fail to do so. This is not God's fault, it is man's.
- H. ***they became vain in their reasoning and their senseless minds were darkened. While claiming to be wise they became fools...*** This sin of the intellect leads to deeper and deeper confusion about the most basic matters (see below). Foolishness and a general lack of common sense are the result of this sin and lead to further sin and degradation for such people.
- I. Idolatry is then describe in verse 23. The essence of idolatry is to place any creature as the sum total answer to all the questions in their lives.
- J. ***Therefore, God handed them over to impurity through the lusts of their hearts for the mutual degradation of their bodies...*** The ultimate sign of this darkness and confusion is sexual confusion, especially homosexuality. The questions of sexuality go right to heart of the human person. Thus confusion about sexual issues are illustrative of the deepest confusion and disorder. What Paul is basically saying is, "You show me a society that permits and promotes homosexuality and I will show you a community that is deeply confused, under tremendous wrath,

- and headed for ultimate destruction. This has resulted from a suppression of the Truth." Vv 26-28 set this forth vividly. A similar portrait is set for in Eph 4:17-24.
- K. Vv 28-32 Show that this is not the end of the evil but just its beginning. For, if the evil is not stopped it grows and infects every relationship. Note how vividly in these verses Paul describes the breakdown of family piety and general lack of decency and respect. Children become particularly unruly.
- L. The Litany of sin that results from suppression of the truth next follows. Note well that this litany includes all who suppress the truth. Thus it is not a description of homosexuals particularly but of all who suppress the truth:
1. **Wickedness** - *adikia*<sup>1</sup> this is the precise opposite of the Greek word "daiosune" which means justice. Thus the wicked man seeks to rob people of what is justly theirs. This extends beyond humanity for the wicked man also fails to render to God what is rightfully His - Obedience and worship.
  2. **Evil** - *poneria* literally means "villainy." This is more than just badness. It is a deliberate will to inflict harm, to corrupt and inflict injury. There is thus seduction and premeditation implied in this word.
  3. **Greed** - *pleonexia* which the Greeks defined as "the accursed love of having." Greed is the insatiable desire for more and when it consumes a person they will go to great lengths to get what they want. Such a person will frequently trample others and act unjustly to attain what they want. They will justify this action by many means.
  4. **Malice** - *kakia* is the most general Greek word for badness and is used to describe the person who is devoid of every quality which would make him good. Thus a general orientation toward vice occupies the person described by this word. He is generally a bad person.
  5. **Full of envy** - *phthonos* is well translated as envy. Envy is defined as "sorrow at another person's goodness or excellence because I take to lessen my own excellence." It is an enemy of virtue since the envious person, rather than imitate the excellence and holiness he sees instead tries to draw the excellent person to a lower level. Thus he undermines and discourages goodness in others. Envy is a deadly thing indeed since it seeks to crush goodness and excellence.
  6. **Murder** - *Phonos* is also well translated as murder but it must be remembered that Jesus widened the scope of this sin to include hatred, and unrelenting anger held in the heart.
  7. **Rivalry** - *eris* is more literally translated as strife which is born of envy, ambition, the desire for prestige and prominence. Thus rivalry captures the concept but does not fully capture the fact that it is an active strife not just a healthy competition. The sinner says "I need to be on the top of the heap and so I must go attack all competitors to my lofty title."
  8. **Treachery** - *dolos* is also translated as deceit. It describes the quality of a person who has a tortuous and twisted mind and cannot act in a straightforward way. He plots tricky ways to fake people and take what he

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<sup>1</sup>Because the Greek words are often more hard-hitting and clarity they are included extensively in this refecton.

can from them based on this deceit. He sees every person as another "sucker" to be tricked out of his money.

9. **Spite** - *kakoetheia* means literally "evil-naturedness" and can be translated in an extended sense as "the spirit which puts the worst interpretation on everything." In effect such a person is a cynic and never presumes good will of any one but always assumes the worst of them. Cynicism is very destructive of trust and the cynic can spread his negativism to others.
10. **Gossips** - *psithuristes* in Greek are whisperers. They speak behind people's backs and spread bad news about them that is either true, partially true, or entirely untrue. What ever the case, they do this secretly behind the back of the accused who cannot defend himself due to the fact he knows not that he is spoken of.
11. **Scandal mongers** - *katalos* describes the person who does not whisper their defaming words but, rather, publishes them loud and clear for all, including the accused, to hear. At least in this case the accused can know of the accusation and defend himself. Still, it is tremendously destructive of the reputation of individuals.
12. **They hate God** - *theostugeis* describes a man who hates God and knows explicitly that he is defying Him. He does this because he perceives God to be an obstacle to his own inordinate pleasures. He would prefer a godless world and works to eliminate religion's influence to attain it.
13. **Insolent** - *hubristes* describes describe a man that is so proud that he defies the gods. Hubris to the Greek mind was the vice that courted destruction from the hand of the God's. Here it is applied by Paul in the Christian sense - a man who is so arrogant that he defies God.
14. **Haughty** - *huperephanos* are arrogant men and describe the man who is filled with contempt for all others. He has no time to be bothered by others and delights in making them feel small.
15. **Boastful** - *alazon* is a Greek word with an interesting history. It literally means "one who wanders about." It then became synonymous with wandering quacks who boasted of the cures they had worked which were really false or due to coincidence. Thus, the word captures a sense of the spirit by which one pretends to have what he does not have. The braggart is out to impress others of some quality he more than likely lacks.
16. **Ingenious in their wickedness** - *epheuretes kakon* means more literally "inventors of evil." They are not content with the ordinary ways of sinning but seek the thrill of finding new and more inventive twists on doing evil.
17. **Rebellious toward their parents** - *goneusin apeitheis* is well translated here. Once the bonds of the family and natural affections are attacked, society is seriously compromised. Wholesale degeneracy must soon follow.
18. **Senseless** - *asunetos* describes the man who cannot learn from experience. he is a fool and will not use the mind God has given him to discern and learn the lessons of experience. A loss of common sense results.
19. **Faithless** - *asunthetos* describes breakers of agreements. Again, if society cannot expect people to keep their vows and agreements an unraveling of

- relationships soon follows. There comes strife, lack of trust and cynicism.
20. **Heartless** - *astorgos*. Storge was the special Greek word for "family love" So those who are the astorgos are those lacking in natural family affections. At the time of Paul children were considered by many in the Gentile world to be a misfortune and bother. Likewise, natural families were breaking down through common divorce and loose sexual mores.
21. **Ruthless** - *aneleemon* meaning more literally "pitiless." Recall that this was a time of gladiatorial shows where slaves and prisoners were put to death as a form of entertainment. The quality of mercy was departing as people observed the deaths of others as a type of thrilling entertainment.
- M. ***Although they know the just decree...*** Again, because of the conscience, they know these things and the evil thereof but continue to practice and even try to draw others into them.
- N. Discussion- does this portrait seem familiar? What does it say about us today. What does it say about any society that suppresses the truth?

## I. Chapter II:1-11

### A. Introductory notes

1. Sometimes the chapter and verse schema which is given in scripture, although helpful, can also be a hinderance. This is because it often causes us to compartmentalize the text in the way that the original author may have never intended. Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) as a continuous text. Thus we must be aware that the chapter, verse format that we have may effect our understanding of the text. For this reason it is instructive to read the text across the chapter break. Begin with I:28 and read without a break to II:10. This helps us to understand the "therefore" of verse I and see that Paul does not exempt the Jew from the portrait he paints in chapter I.
2. The style of this section is called "diatribe." For Americans this word often carries a negative connotation but this should not be the case here. The word diatribe comes from a Greek word meaning "to pass the time" and specifically denotes a manner of setting forth an issue or debating a point. The style frequently makes use of an imaginary person called an "interlocutor." This interlocutor is the "you" of Chapter two. In effect there is an imaginary conversation that takes place. Paul imagines an opponent, anticipates his views, arguments and objections and then answers them. In this case the interlocutor is a Jew who considers himself exempt from Paul's remarks in Chapter I. Some commentators have considered the interlocutor a Roman (Pagan) Judge or official but the general consensus is that he is a self-righteous Jew.
3. Therefore the basic point that Paul sets forth in Chapter two is to make his fellow Jews see that, despite their privileged position, they too are unrighteous. If the pagans who could know God only through the use of natural reason are without excuse how much more inexcusable is the behavior of Jews who commit the same sins despite the reception of supernatural Revelation.
4. This is a startling development to Jewish ears. Jews always thought of themselves as a specially privileged people before God. They were His chosen people. They held that God loves Israel alone of all the nations on Earth.
5. It is important for us to recall here that Paul's purpose is not to rant and rave about how bad things are but to establish the universal need for salvation. All are under sin and in need of the mercy of God. No one is just by his own doing.
6. The progress of thought in 2:1-3:20 is not easy to follow. The difficulty arises mainly from the fact the various objections with which the Apostle repeatedly interrupts the course of his argument. In addition the actual objections are not stated in the text but must be inferred from his answers. Through our reflections we must see the nature of these objections but let them be seen in summary here.
  - a. First objection - Do not God's kindness and mercy give a guarantee that the threatened punishment will be adverted?

- b. Second objection - Will not the Torah, the Law, protect Israel from God's wrath?
  - c. Third Objection - Is not circumcision a sufficient guarantee for Israel's salvation?
  - d. Fourth objection - If none of these things will do, what then remains of Israel's rightfully praised privileges?
7. The Basic structure of Paul's argument looks like this:
- a. The General principle of God's impartial judgement 2:1-11
  - b. The mere possession of the Law is no guarantee 2:12-16
  - c. The law condemns Jew and Greek alike 2:17-24
  - d. in spite of circumcision 2:25-29

## II. Chapter Two

- A. Personalization - *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. <sup>2</sup>We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things. <sup>3</sup>Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?*
- B. Presumptiveness - *<sup>4</sup>Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup>But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.*
- C. Principle (of judgement) *<sup>6</sup>For he will render to every man according to his works: <sup>7</sup>to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup>but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury.*
- D. Prospects - *<sup>9</sup>There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, <sup>10</sup>but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.*
- E. Partiality? *<sup>11</sup>For God shows no partiality. <sup>12</sup>All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. <sup>13</sup>For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.*
- F. Place of the Conscience - *<sup>14</sup>When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup>They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them <sup>16</sup>on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.*
- G. Perfecting of the Law - *<sup>17</sup>But if you call yourself a Jew and rely upon the law and boast of your relation to God <sup>18</sup>and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed in the law, <sup>19</sup>and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup>a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—<sup>21</sup>you then who teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? <sup>22</sup>You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup>You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? <sup>24</sup>For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of*

you.”

- H. Physical? - <sup>25</sup>*Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.* <sup>26</sup>*So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?* <sup>27</sup>*Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.* <sup>28</sup>*For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical.* <sup>29</sup>*He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God.*
1. Let's discuss interiority
    - a. We have become content with a minimum of interiority and are content with superficial adherence to a set of norms
    - b. But our true dignity is to know the Lord
- I. Prerogatives - <sup>1</sup>*Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?* <sup>2</sup>*Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God.*
- J. Paradox - <sup>3</sup>*What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?* <sup>4</sup>*By no means! Let God be true though every man be false, as it is written, "That thou mayest be justified in thy words, and prevail when thou art judged."* <sup>5</sup>*But if our wickedness serves to show the justice of God, what shall we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)* <sup>6</sup>*By no means! For then how could God judge the world?* <sup>7</sup>*But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?* <sup>8</sup>*And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*
1. A complicated Passage but Paul teaches the following
  2. The Jews have acted unfaithfully, but God remains faithful and draws good from their disobedience (the mission to the Gentiles)
  3. Despite God's ability to draw good even from sinful situations this does not excuse the sinner who still deserves God's wrath.
  4. Further, it is false to say that it is OK to sin because God will draw good from it. This is a condemnable opinion.
- K. Pandemic (of sin) - <sup>9</sup>*What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin,* <sup>10</sup>*as it is written:*
1. *"None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup>no one understands, no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one."* (Ps 14:1-3)
  2. <sup>13</sup>*"Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive."* (Psalm 5:9)
  3. *"The venom of asps is under their lips."* (Psalm 140:3)
  4. <sup>14</sup>*"Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."* (Psalm 10:7)

5. <sup>15</sup>*“Their feet are swift to shed blood,<sup>16</sup>in their paths are ruin and misery,<sup>17</sup>and the way of peace they do not know.”* (Prv 1:16; Is 59:7-8)
6. <sup>18</sup>*“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* (Ps 36:1)

L. Point - <sup>19</sup>*Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup>For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

### III. Commentary on Verses 2:1-3:20

- A. **Therefore, you** Paul's transition from Chapter I is sudden and very abrupt: "they" becomes "you" in an instant. To make such an abrupt change intelligible it is helpful to see another example of a similar approach. See 2 Samuel 12:1-9 - Nathan's conviction of David. As David wholeheartedly condemned the man of Nathan's parable so every Israelite would join in Paul's condemnation of Paganism's sin. But there follows in each case the unexpected and sudden, "Thou art the Man!" (2 Sam 12:7 = Romans 2:1).
- B. **are without excuse** - see remarks above.
- C. **every one of you who passes judgement...** the phrase highlights the self-righteous person's illusion. This is not to say that we shouldn't notice sin and condemn it. The very context of Paul's own words belie that notion. The point here is to realize that we are all under mercy "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." [Rom 3:23] See also:
1. John 8:7
  2. I John 1:10
- D. Now Paul moves to the first objection listed above and will deal with it until and including Verse 10. That objection he addresses is: "Do not God's kindness and mercy give a guarantee that the threatened punishment will be averted?" Paul sternly refutes the claim by declaring that such a hope is foolish. On the day of Judgement God's justice alone will rule. He will repay every person according to that person's works. On that day, God's goodness will not declare sinners to be saints.
- E. **the judgement of God** - the Greek word *krima* can mean "lawsuit," "decision," or "judgement" but the connotation is of an adverse sentence.
- F. **is true** - God's condemnation which falls on evildoers is righteous and just.
- G. **do you hold his priceless kindness, forbearance, and patience in low esteem?** The problem is not just one of illusion but even contempt for they hold these things in low esteem. God's patience is directed to our salvation and it ought to lead to repentance but it is made light of by the guilty Jew who loses a vivid understanding that unrepented sin will be punished. This is a culpable forgetfulness. See also:
1. Wisdom 11:23
  2. 2 Esdras 7:74
- H. There are three Greek words that Paul uses in this verse that are worth examining so that we can better understand it:
1. **chrestotes** (kindness). There are two words in Greek meaning "good." There is *agathos* which describes the goodness of a person which may issue in rebuke, discipline and punishment. Christ showed this for example in driving out the moneychangers. The other word is *Chrestos* which describes a person who is always essentially kind and Jesus showed this with repentant sinners in the Gospels. What Paul essentially says then is that the Jews were trying to take advantage of the *chrestos* forgetting entirely *agathos*.
  2. **Anoche** (forbearance). *Anoche* is the word for "truce." Although truce refers to a cessation of hostilities, that cessation has limits. Thus Paul

declares that there are limitations to God's forbearance and that it must not be understood as a *carte blanche* to sin. We cannot sin forever with impunity.

3. ***Makrothumia*** (patience). An important premise of the word is that patient person has it in his power to move against an offender but restrains this for a time out of patience. Thus, in using this word Paul seems to underscore that just because God is patient and does not move against us after every sin that he is powerless to do so. His patience does not prove his powerlessness or approval, it proves only his patience. We must not read into this quality of God and rashly conclude things.

- I. ***You are storing up wrath...*** Again remember our earlier discussion on the "wrath of God. Here see once again how Paul projects this eschatologically (i.e. he projects it to the Last Judgement. In Old Testament terms it is a development of the "Day of Yahweh." See also

1. Zech 1:14-18
2. Amos 5:18
3. Ez. 7:7

- J. ***Who will repay everyone according to his works...*** Here he alludes to Ps 62:12 and Prv 24:12. (It is worth noting the phrase here and introducing a notion that will be developed later). Note Paul's reference to works. Our works are important and we will be repaid for them (for better or worse). The phrase does not contradict the teaching that we are justified by faith. Note this critical distinction that is often overlooked. We are justified by faith but we will be judged and repaid by our deeds. Paul does not teach that we are saved by faith, he says we are justified by faith. There is an important distinction and it will be developed later. Remember the whole topic of justification and salvation is highly nuanced and we must proceed carefully and thoughtfully. Here let us just plant the distinction for later cultivation.

- K. ***Eternal life to those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance in good works*** - The reward is eternal life with glory and honor in the Lord's presence to be enjoyed forever. Note however the perseverance that is the cornerstone of the prerequisite. It is not enough to merely have done a few good things once upon a time, there must be a perseverance in good works. This teaching reflects our Lord's teaching in the gospels "*he who endures to the end will be saved.*" (Matt 10:22) In regard to the need for good works and the fact that we shall be judged based on them, it is good to turn to the Protestant scholar, William Barclay who deals forthrightly with this passage as one essential to Paul's theology. It is valuable to read Barclay to see that not all Protestant Bible scholars accept that Paul's teaching is that we are saved by faith alone. It should also be noted that Barclay was widely read and his scholarly ability was accepted by most all. : *It is often argued that his [Paul's] position was that all that matters is faith. A religion which stresses the importance of works is often contemptuously waved aside as being quite out of touch with the New Testament. Nothing could be further from the truth "God," said Paul "will settle with each man according to his deeds." To Paul a faith which did not issue in deeds was a travesty of faith; in fact it was not faith at all...One of the most dangerous of all religious tendencies*

*is to talk as if faith and works were entirely separate things...Our faith must issue in deeds, for it is by our deeds that we are accepted or condemned.*<sup>2</sup>

- L. **Wrath and fury to those who**... we have discussed these concepts above but here note that it is at least implicitly an eternal state.
- M. **selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness.** The Greek word *eritheia* is a bit difficult here. It is related to *erithos* which means "mercenary's pay." Hence the concept of selfishness or self seeking. Here note then that the wicked described do not reject the truth out of ignorance or laziness but out of a self-seeking attitude: *non-serviam!* (I will not serve). To serve the truth might cost them too much. We have seen what a lie this really is. In seeking to be "free" they really become slaves.
- N. **anguish and distress** - which is exactly the point we just made.
- O. **the Jew first then Greek.** - the phrase echoes 1:17. Having received the unique privileges of salvation history, the Jew, when he sins is therefore more responsible. But when he does well he is the first to receive reward. And yet the Gentile is not neglected.
- P. **There is no partiality with God** the Greek word *prosopolempsia* (partiality) is unique to Christian vocabulary. But was coined from the Greek translation of the New Testament where there is a phrase (*prosopon lambenein*) meaning "to lift up the face." This describes lifts a person's face by showing him favor. Paul says that at the judgement this will not be found in God.
- Q. Thus, the following teachings can be drawn from Paul's reply to this first objection:
  - 1. God is a just and impartial judge.
  - 2. God does not regard a person's privilege of birth but rather that person's manner of life (deeds). He is no respecter of persons. Despite all their privileges, the Jews will be no better off than the Gentiles unless they do what is expected of them.
  - 3. The glorious state of the blessed in heaven is described Vv. 7 & 10
  - 4. And the fact that it will last forever v. 7
  - 5. The necessity of perseverance in good works. v. 7
  - 6. That God will punish unrepentant sinners v. 8
  - 7. The miserable condition of those of condemned to hell. v. 9

#### IV. Chapter II:11-24 The Second Objection.

- A. Paul next proceeds to a second objection of his "interlocutor." The Objection is stated as thus, "Will not the Torah, the Law of Sinai, protect Israel from God's wrath?" Paul's reply is substantially the same. On the day of judgement it is not the Law that will be weighed in the balance but men's works. On that day sin will be punished as sin without any respect of persons no matter whether it was a sin against God's will as expressed in the Torah or as voiced in Man's conscience. By extension Paul also answers a Gentile who might declare that he was not responsible since he didn't have the Law to know any better. Additionally, the Torah, glorious though it was, was in itself only a guide for the Jews and not a

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<sup>2</sup>Barclay, William: The Letter to the Romans, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1955; p. 44.

principle of salvation. Lastly, by way of introduction it is worth noting that verses 14 + 15 are a long parenthesis and another way of discovering the logic of the passage is to read it as follows: 12,13, 16, (14 & 15)

- B. ***outside the law*** - not simply outside a law but specifically outside the Mosaic Law. The context here deals with Gentiles who lived without benefit of Mosaic legislation. If they sin without knowledge of its regulations then they will perish. This is because their sin brings their own condemnation. Even though the Law is not applied to them.
- C. ***all who sin under the law*** - here again it is the Mosaic Law and Paul insists that they will be judged by the Law. What men do is the only criterion by which they will be judged. This point is clarified and underscored in the two verses that follow.
- D. ***it is not those who hear the law*** - the Jew is not upright before God simply because he knows the regulations of the Torah. Knowledge is one thing and by itself it is inadequate. What is needed is action.
- E. ***those who observe the law*** - here Paul echoes Lev 18:5
- F. ***will be justified*** - the verb is in the future tense and shows forth an eschatological (end times, last Judgement) quality to the vision as well.
- G. ***For when the Gentiles who do not have the Law*** - verses 14 and 15 show why the Gentiles will be punished for failing to observe the demands of the Law. God made it possible for Gentiles to know instinctively the difference between right and wrong. But as Paul noted in Rom I:18-32 they misread the evidence of God's existence, power and divinity and "claiming to be wise, they became fools."
- H. ***by nature*** - (*physei*) that is to say, by the regular natural order of things apart from any positive revelation. Following the guidance of the physical order (*physis* means nature) the Gentiles frame rules of conduct for themselves and know at least some of the things the Torah prescribes for the Jews. The phrase, "the prescriptions of the Law" is not understood too technically as if each of the smallest and most technical prescriptions of the Torah were meant.
- I. ***They are a Law to themselves*** - because they have a conscience and an intellect with which to observe the natural law. Even without the Law the Gentiles know instinctively what is to be done. Paul does not necessarily imply here a perfect observance of all the precepts.
- J. ***They show that the demands of the Law are written in their hearts*** - the central reason that the Gentiles will be held to the standard of truth even apart from supernatural revelation.
- K. There is a Greek phrase here that is extremely important - *ergon tou nomou* which is translated here "demands of the Law" but means more literally "deeds of the Law" The phrase is not found in the Old Testament or Rabbinical literature. We will discuss the phrase later when we examine Rom 3:20 but here just note the way in which Paul uses the phrase in reference to judgement. He will use it again but with different implications (in 3:20) in reference to justification. More will be said of this phrase then.
- L. ***their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them*** - this is a difficult phrase to render in English. The Greek is *metaxy allelon* (lit. between one another) and seems to describe the debate of inward thoughts in the conscience of the Gentile but there is some debate among translators. For example some take the phrase

"between one another" to refer to a debate among the Gentile peoples. Nevertheless the general consensus is that the phrase suggests a debate in the conscience of each Gentile.

M. ***on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge people's hidden works through Christ Jesus -***

1. ***on the day when*** - once again Paul projects the whole argument into the future to the Last Judgement (eschaton). But again, this does not mean that the process is not at work now, only that it will be fully evident on that day of the Last Judgement. On that day all will have to confess that they had God's law written in their hearts.
2. ***according to my gospel*** - note that this phrase should not be understood to mean, "according to my way of thinking," or "in my opinion." Recall Paul's description in Chapter One of the authority he had received as one Called to be an Apostle by the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus he speak from his authority as an Apostle. "My gospel" is an authoritative claim
3. ***people's hidden works*** - the conscience is a hidden factor although deeds are visible. Thus God will judge not the deeds only but the disposition behind those deeds. It is possible to a good deed with an evil disposition and it is possible that a bad deed might have been done innocently (e.g. by ignorance or under duress) both these factors will be judged on that day.

N. The teachings contained in this passage

1. A person will be judged by what he had the opportunity to know. If he had the Law then he will be judged according to that. If not, he will be judged according to what he could know by what was written in his heart. God is fair and so a person will be judged by his fidelity to the highest that it was possible for him to know.
2. Every human person has the unwritten law in their hearts and it is both possible and necessary for them to live according to it. The pagan philosophers for example urged all to live *kata physin* (according to nature). Thus, it is not just Paul's opinion that there is this law written in the heart of Man, the Greeks would have agreed.

O. Important clarifications -

1. It might seem with all this, that the Law from Sinai, the Supernatural revelation of God was nice but why did God bother since we already have a law written on or heart?
2. The Church teaches that although human reason in theory is capable of grasping the natural law written on our hearts by our Creator, many factors inhibit us from obeying that law: our senses, our imagination, and our evil desires deriving from Original Sin. All these give rise to difficulties. As a result, people can easily convince themselves that sin is good, or good is evil, or that it is all up for grabs.
3. In order for us to overcome these difficulties and delusions and attain a sound grasp of what is to be done in a moral way God chose to reveal himself to us in another, supernatural way. The conclusion here is that divine revelation of the content of natural law is morally necessary. This is not to say that it is absolutely necessary but God knows we need a lot of

- help!
4. The argument is more sophisticated than might be immediately apparent to us. This is because our notion of law is a list of things you do or refrain from doing. But for the Jew the Law is a divine revelation of the order and reality of things. It articulates the very structure of the Universe (cf Sirach 24). Thus Paul's debate with the Jews over the Law and their possession of it is deeper than we might imagine.
  5. Lastly, Paul is not saying that if the Gentiles keep the dictates of the law impressed on their heart by God that they can be saved without the help of supernatural grace. Salvation is everywhere and always a pure gift of God and the gift totally transcends our natural ability. Paul is here speaking of the criteria of the Judgement God will render. Even if a person keeps all the commandments they are not saved by that observance. They are saved only by the pure Grace of God. Salvation is created,<sup>3</sup> salvation is gift.

#### V. Chapter II:17-24

- A. The next verses are almost taunting as Paul parades in front of his fellow Jews the very things of which they most boasted. Verses 17-18 list the first five boasts:
  1. I am a Jew
  2. I rely on the Law
  3. My boast is Yahweh
  4. I understand his will
  5. Instructed in the Law, I know what is right and wrong
- B. In verses 19-20 four more taunts reveal the Jew's attitude toward others
  1. I am a guide for the blind
  2. I am light for those in darkness
  3. I am a trainer of the foolish
  4. I am a teacher of the simple
- C. Paul does not deny Israel's special privileges but sees all too clearly the lie that is shown by normal Jewish complacency
- D. The Long sentence (17-20) is never really finished Paul breaks off and addresses the Jew directly and addresses him with five pointed questions that reveal to the Jew the rift between teaching and deeds:
  1. are you failing to teach yourself?
  2. do you steal?
  3. do you commit adultery?
  4. do you rob temples? - This is a strange charge that is difficult to understand. Is Paul's charge literal-were contemporary Jews open to the charge of temple robbing? There were ancient charges by the pagans that Jews did rob temples (not to have the idols as much as to have the gold etc). In fact many held that the Greek word for Jerusalem (Hierosolyma) was derived from the Greek verb hierosylein meaning "to rob a temple." If Paul has something like this in mind then his taunt is all the harsher! There is another theory that Paul was saying that they were defrauding the

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<sup>3</sup>The verb "create" is for the Christian mind always an act of God. Creation is the creation of something out of nothing. God alone can do this. God alone is creator and creative.

Jewish temple of its due by failing to pay their tithes.

5. do you dishonor God by breaking the Law?

E. ***Because of you the name of God is reviled among the Gentiles*** - here Paul quote Is. 52:5 but accommodates it a bit. He also echoes Ez. 36:20. He therefore powerfully concludes that the duplicity and present immorality of the Jews is the cause of the defamation and ridiculing of God's Name. The Gentiles irritation with Jews should not be underestimated. Beyond the specific issue that Paul raises (i.e. duplicity) there were other cultural and legal matters that caused no small consternation among gentiles. Jews were allowed to some extent to have their own courts and live according to their own laws. The Roman government also respected the Jewish observance of the Sabbath and this caused many things to be delayed a day (when Jews were involved) that might otherwise have gone ahead. Jews were also exempt from conscription to the Roman army and it flowed directly from their strict observance of the Sabbath which made it impossible for them to fulfill military duties on that day. They were also allowed to export their temple tax to Jerusalem which at times caused a serious depletion in local currencies. All of these things made the Gentiles often despise the Jews as a race of people living apart as a specially privileged group. Thus Paul articulates a certain danger; Jews must not test already strained relationships.

F. It would be an exaggeration to say that Paul regarded every Jew as a thief, adulterer and temple-robber etc. His point is that these sins were committed by Israelites even though they were forbidden by the Torah. The law therefore had not saved Israel from sin nor would it protect on the day of judgement. A personal reflection for us today. Let the same argument be addressed to each of us as a Christian, "You say you know the will of God and what he requires, what does your life look like?" Are our lives transformed? If I say God is my Father and Jesus my Lord died to set me free, shouldn't I look and act differently? The great tragedy is that so called Christians look largely the same as the average pagan in our culture. We must remember that the main evangelism and primary appeal to the conscience of others is a transformed life. Is it not sadly true today that the Name of God is held in contempt by many today due to the poor example of so called Christians. This is not a call to be nice and agreeable (i.e. indifferent or unopinionated) about everything, it is a call to holiness.

## VI. Chapter II:25-29 - The Third objection

A. Paul now proceeds to address a third objection of his interlocutor which is stated as, "Is not circumcision a sufficient guarantee for Israel's salvation?" Put in another way "Perhaps we Jews do not observe the Law as we should, but at least we are circumcised." Paul answers simply that circumcision will not make a man holy before God if he does not keep the Law and Israel has not kept the Law. What gives an act value in the sight of God is the motivating principle (the disposition of the heart). Paul reacts against the external formalism of the Jewish morality and redirects the matter of concern to disposition of the heart. In rejecting circumcision alone (without keeping the wider Law) Paul is not unique. The theme is widely contained in the Old Testament; for example:

1. Dt. 10:10-16

2. Dt. 30:6
3. Jer 4:4
4. Jer 9:24-26
5. Ez. 44:7-9

**B. *Circumcision, to be sure has value if you observe the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.***

1. circumcision is the sign of the covenant. See Gen 17:10-11. It incorporated a person into God's chosen people, and heir to the promises, and assured of life in the age to come. Circumcision obliged the Israelite to keep the Mosaic Law, especially its moral precepts. Thus, Paul although he does not deny the value of circumcision and Israel's heritage denoted by it, nevertheless he underscores the duty to keep the commandments. Circumcision is no substitute for the observance of the Law.
  - a. The practice of circumcision
    - (1) common in the ancient mid-east
    - (2) but the Jews did so on the 8th day (a significant action of trust given the medical complications of the day). Other cultures did the circumcision at 12 or 13 years.
  - b. what about women?
    - (1) the Jewish attitude toward women is more complex than many who call it "patriarchal" consider it.
2. ***your circumcision has become uncircumcision.*** Paul equates a good pagan with a circumcised Jew. This would have been an abomination to Pharisaic ears.

**C. *Again, if an uncircumcised man keeps the precepts of the law, will he not be considered circumcised?*** Paul directly attacks the notion that the only thing that matters is the externally visible mark of circumcision. Without observance of the law, the physical mark means nothing.

**D. *Indeed, those who are physically uncircumcised but carry out the law will pass judgement on you, with your written law and circumcision, who break the law.*** Again, that a non-Jew could be circumcised of heart is an Old Testament notion but Paul states it very forcefully and provocatively here.

**E. *One is not a Jew outwardly. True circumcision is not outward in the flesh.*** He reiterates the point in Verse 25.

**F. *Rather, one is a Jew inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit, not the letter; his praise is not from human beings but from God.***

1. Here is the climax of Paul's answer to this objection. He pits outward Jewish formalism against the principle of interior motivation of a heart dedicated to God (a circumcised heart). God deals not with men according to outward appearances but judges the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.
2. ***circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit, not the letter;*** This thought is expressed also in II Corin 3:6. It is a succinct Pauline way summing up the realities of the two covenants. The Old Covenant was governed by the written code, an extrinsic norm to be observed and made much of; the New Covenant is vitalized by God's gift of the Spirit, an interior principle

that reshapes the person inwardly and remolds his conduct. This is not just a natural spirit already in man; it is the Spirit of Christ to which Paul refers. The Holy Spirit moves the person beyond a natural human mode to a supernatural godlike mode of being. Such an ability to keep the Law as never before was prophesied by Ezekiel (see Ezek 36:27). This means it is possible for the person to keep the Law perfectly, as never before by fulfilling it (see Matt 5-7). This is an important understanding to have of this text. When we use the phrase "the spirit of the law not the Letter" we often use it to mean that we can be excused from doing something. This is not at all what Paul means by using the phrase. Far from being excused, more is actually required of us since more has been given us (cf Luke 12:48).

3. Paul speaks in this section of a profound topic - interiority. Interiority is the opposite of superficiality. Interiority is at the heart of the glory of man whose nature is to move from the inside out. We are to be reflective and thoughtful before we act; not just reactive. This is part of the authority we are to take over our lives. Sadly many do not act in such a way but are reactive and superficial. Our culture conspires to keep us this way by downplaying reflection and meditation and over-emphasizing action and conformity. Externals such as income, good looks, fashion and so forth are of exaggerated importance. This is true even among many devout Christians: most of us are content with a minimum of interiority so long as there is an external conformity. It is here that we see the difference between being religious and being holy. Paul is not saying that externals are of no importance and all that matters is how you feel about something on the inside (this is a 20th century notion that would have been strange to Paul). What Paul is saying is that the glory of the human person is to move from the inside out.
4. ***his praise is not from human beings but from God.*** Here Paul echoes what Jesus taught (cf Matt 6:2). The person should not do good merely to win the esteem and praise of men but, rather, the praise of God. The sin of human respect is very common to us and very deadly. Because we are commonly more interested and concerned about what human beings think of us, we are willing to do many sinful things to win their esteem. We suppress the Gospel, we lie, we go with the flow even if that the general flow of things is unjust and sinful. The true road to virtue will often be to exempt oneself from the common views of human beings and cling to God's wisdom. *For the wisdom of the world is folly to God.* (I Cor 1:20) A second meaning of this phrase is that Jewishness comes not from men but from God. To be a Jew is not so much a matter of pedigree as of character.

#### VII. Romans III:1-20 - The Fourth Objection.

- A. Now to the fourth objection which is stated as, "If none of these things will do, what then remains of Israel's rightfully praised privileges?"
- B. ***What advantage is there then in being a Jew*** - Paul states the objection clearly.
- C. ***in the first place*** - Paul's reply begins as if he intended to answer with a series of

- points but he makes only one point
- D. ***the utterances of God.*** Paul's point is that Israel has been entrusted with the Scriptures. The Greek is *ta logia tou Theou* properly translated here as "the utterances of God" but it is taken to mean the Holy Scriptures in general by most. The basic point Paul makes is that the Jews have remained the vehicle of God's revelation, despite their sins. This point however should not be a boast since this undeniable fact rests solely on the favor of God. And Paul immediately hints at the need for humility especially since immediately (in the next verse) points to the fact that some have been unfaithful to this word. Still, he says God has remained faithful to Israel and that this is a special glory. As already noted, Paul will develop the theme of Israel's privileges more fully in Chapters 9-11. In the context here however the interlocutor will raise some objections based on Paul's logic. The first question which the interlocutor raises and which Paul must address is: "If our unfaithfulness helps to show how faithful God is then why are we still under his wrath and urged to seek his justification. Paul's reply in verses 6-8 is difficult to follow but he basically tries to lead the objector ad absurdum (i.e. to see the absurdity of such an objection).
- E. ***What if some were unfaithful?*** The Greek word in this phrase *apisteo* can mean either "refusal to believe" or "be unfaithful." As often when there is an ambiguity it can serve Paul a dual purpose and mean both things. Note that he says here a lack of truth serves to bring out even more fully and clearly the opposite attributes of God. That God is so faithful and true is most evident when his people stray and he still stays faithful and true. Paul makes the same point in Rom 9:6 and II Tim 2:13. Jeremiah also makes the point at Jer 31:32.
- F. ***Will their infidelity nullify the fidelity of God?*** Paul here begins the argument that though the Jews have been unfaithful to the covenant God's truthfulness and faithfulness are above any changes man might introduce. Nothing can nullify God's faithfulness. No human can force God's hand or thwart his ultimate plans. Despite Israel's sinfulness God still used them as his chosen vehicle and thus their particular dignity remains despite their sins and infidelity.
- G. ***Of course not!*** The very suggestion that God could be unfaithful leads to a strong response from Paul in the Greek, *me genoito!* which is an indignant negative "far be it from me!" A kind of "get that argument out of my sight!"
- H. ***God must be true.*** In using *alethes* of God Paul plays on its two meanings: true, honest & faithful, loyal. Though the second meaning is obviously intended in this context the first cannot be excluded.
- I. ***though every human being is a liar*** - here Paul quotes Ps 116:11 he then jumps to Ps 51:6. The importance of the psalm here is that David, through his infidelity learns profoundly of the fidelity of God. In the wrong of his sin David realizes just how right and True God is. In effect he acknowledges, "O God you are just and I am not." But God is just and will not utterly destroy David though he will chastise him. Had not God declared: "I will never forsake David" Ps 89:35 If we don't understand what Paul is doing here then the quote from the psalm might not make sense. Read the verse again. But it must be understood that Paul does not proof text like many do today. Rather, he states a verse from the psalm that is meant to elicit the full psalm in the memory of his readers. This is a very

important principle and we will see it again. The critical rule is this: when Paul cites a text from the O.T. **look it up**. The full context is often what he means not necessarily the single verse or two that he quotes.

- J. ***But if our wickedness provides proof of God's righteousness...is God unjust...to inflict his wrath?*** Here is the objection of the interlocutor that Paul anticipates. After all if David's infidelity does not nullify God's fidelity but rather, makes it manifest then is not right to conclude that our sins are really Ok since they manifest the opposite sinlessness of God? And if so, why does God punish us? Again, Paul emphatically rejects this claim and drives the point to the absurd in the following verses.
- K. ***Of course not!*** Again Paul strongly rejects such a notion.
- L. ***For how else is God to judge the world?*** This response of Paul's carries a lot of weight with the Jew who knows from the scripture that God will judge all nations and peoples.
1. Amos 5:18
  2. Joel 4:12ff
- M. ***But if God's truth redounds to his glory through my falsehood, why am I being condemn as a sinner?*** The interlocutor sticks to his guns and restates the objection to Paul's claim.
- N. ***then (and) why not say...that we should do evil that good may come of it.*** Paul again responds and this time goes directly to the absurdity of the interlocutor's statement. This form of argumentation is called *reductio ad absurdum*. One needs to hear the tone of voice Paul uses. He is saying that the conclusion is absurd and so his tone is one of exasperation. He insists (implicitly) that there is no contradiction between the manifestation of divine uprightness and wrath. Paul has already dealt with the way they are consonant. Wrath is in fact our experience of the total incompatibility of our sin with the holiness, justice and uprightness of God. He reiterates this in the very next phrase. There is an additional absurdity implicit in Paul's remarks. In effect he says, "Don't you see?!? When the love of God touches your heart, you don't want to sin any more." By the way, in fielding this argument, Paul answers an objection commonly hurled against Christians of the day. The modern version of this accusation against Catholics is not unsimilar, "Oh those Catholics, they think they can just go ahead and sin and then go to confession. They make light of sin..." We must answer in a way similar to Paul by clearly rejecting such a bankrupt philosophy and declare most clearly, "No! We don't teach that about confession. Every penitent must have a firm purpose of amendment before forgiveness can be celebrated."
- O. ***Their penalty is what they deserve*** - "Their" in this case means "any one who would hold such a stupid position. In other words just see how experience deals the death blow to such a claim. Just try an live in unrepentant sin and see the misery and wrath that issues forth. Sin leads to wrath - this is seen by experience and that wrath flows from the very uprightness of God since sin is so incompatible with it. This if course is the very point that Paul has been making about sin. He made it most emphatically in Chapter I:17ff
- P. ***Well then, are we [Jews] better off? Not entirely*** Paul now returns to his original

question about the advantage of the Jews. (This phrase is very difficult to translate and different bible handle it differently. Our translation is most commonly used but there are others. For the sake of brevity we will pass over any other translations since there is not a doctrinal point at stake here). Paul explains why Jews are not any better off (although he stated above that the Jews were in a privileged position). in the next verse.

Q. ***all are under the domination of sin.***

1. The "all" here includes Jews and Greeks alike. This is evident from the verse. The Greek phrase here is *hupo hamrtian* The Greek word *hupo* is strong and elicits the thought of one being under the authority of someone or something, or "in the power of." In the Christless state one is under the control of sin and helpless to escape from it.
2. When Paul speaks of sin here he is not speaking particularly about our personal sins (though that is a secondary sense of sin in this passage). Sin (*hamartia*) for Paul is a force that holds people in bondage and keeps them estranged from God. Thus he speaks primarily of what we have come to call "Original Sin." Adam and Eve sinned against God and the whole human race has been affected by that sin ever since. By it we are alienated from God, strongly adverse to the truth, and (even after baptism) strongly inclined to sin. This sorry state has affect every human being and no one is exempt. Baptism washes away original sin but the healing of our strong inclination to sin (concupiscence) needs the continuing work of grace to bring it toward healing. Thus Paul shows how we all need mercy - no one is exempt - no one. In a secondary sense Paul also means our personal sins since we ratify the sin of Adam and Eve by or own rebellion and sin. This varies with each person, and this is why it is only secondary to Paul's meaning. He cannot make a sweeping indictment of every being under sin in reference to personal sin since he doesn't know. But in terms of Original Sin it is known by faith that this has touched literally everyone. Paul will take up the theme again in Chapter 5.

R. ***as it is written*** - Paul now goes on to cite a series of quotes from the Old Testament to illustrate the point. The Jew should realize then that the theme is not new. Paul is in fact doing here what Jews customarily did. He has strung together a collection of Old Testament texts. He does not quote literally and sometimes departs from the exact text because he quotes from memory. This, as said, was a common Rabbinic technique. It was called *charaz* which literally means, "stringing pearls." There is not time to look up all the texts in class but it is good to do so privately. (We may well look at Ps 14). The texts are drawn from

1. Ps 14:1-3<sup>4</sup>
2. Ps 53:2-4
3. Eccl 7:20

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<sup>4</sup>When the Psalm says that "no one is righteous - no not even one" the term "no one" does not mean literally that absolutely no one in all of human history ever acted uprightly. It is used in a collective not a distributive sense. From the standpoint of needed grace however it is clear that absolutely no one could ever, by any human achievement, hope to earn salvation. It must be grace.

4. Ps 5:10
  5. Ps 140:4
  6. Ps 10:7, 15-17
  7. Prov 1:16
  8. Ps 36:2
  9. Is 59:7-8
- S. ***The Law*** - Paul here means the Old Testament in general since his quotes above are not specifically from the Torah.
- T. ***That the whole world may be accountable to God*** - Literally the Greek says that the whole world may be liable to the judgement of God." Thus there is a universal moral failure in humanity. This is Paul essential argument, that all are under mercy, all are in need of God's salvation and no one can save themselves. No amount of human achievement can earn this gift and the law underscores this very point.
- U. ***since no human being will be justified in his sight by observing the Law*** - Paul alludes to Ps 143:2. It is good to read the psalm to see the thoughts Paul invokes by calling this psalm to mind.
1. ***by observing the Law*** - Literally "by deeds of the Law." It is not simply "good deeds" in general, but specifically works performed in obedience to the Law. These works, though required by God have not been the principle of justification for them.
- V. ***Through the Law comes consciousness of sin*** - Paul will develop the theme of the Law in Chapter 7:7ff and that discussion is foreshadowed here. Its essential function is that of a moral informer giving man a knowledge of moral disorder as a rebellion against God. It supplies Man's conscience, which otherwise vaguely apprehends moral order, with an awareness of sin as a personal transgression against God. Thus, it adds a dimension to sin which, on the one hand is a precious and valuable insight but also makes a man even more accountable for his sin. The Old Law pointed at sin, forbade it but did not bestow the power to overcome it; a frustrating situation. But the New Dispensation by the Grace of Christ does supply that power. This theme will be developed in Chapters 7 & 8 of Romans.
1. There is a quote from St. Augustine that sums up well what Paul has said as well as what he will develop next, *The law was given that grace might be sought; and grace was given that the law might be fulfilled.*<sup>5</sup>
- W. Additional lessons and teachings from this passage
1. Paul believed the Jews to be in a special position. But, whereas some considered it to be of special privilege Paul states that it is one of special responsibility. Since you are a special people you must live a special life.
  2. This means God was justified all the more in condemning the Jews who had been so blessed. Though promised the Messiah, they recognized not the day of His coming.
  3. But not all Jews were unfaithful. Paul never forgot the faithful remnant. These in fact were the real Jews, they were circumcised in heart.
  4. Paul was also sure that God's rejection of Israel was not final. This point will be more developed in chapters 9-11: Because of Israel's disobedience,

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<sup>5</sup>De Spiritu et Littera, 19, 34: CSEL 60, 187.

a door was opened to the Gentiles. Eventually God would bring the Jews back and Jew and Gentile would be one fold.

5. The root of sin is disobedience. The root of the Jews sin was disobedience to the known law of God. In effect, disobedience sets up the will of man against God's.
6. Once a person has sinned, he shows an amazing ingenuity in justifying his sin. We see how strongly Paul rebukes such a tendency. Ingenuity is not needed in the face of sin, humility is needed which makes a person seek forgiveness.

#### VIII. Conclusion

- A. Paul has argued for the universal need for salvation. Laws alone are insufficient to make saints. The Gentiles had the Natural Law but it did not sanctify. The Jews had the Torah, but they too, by consistently failing to live that law showed that it too would not save them. Both these systems showed the ideal but did not produced the longed-for justice because in practice no one lives in complete accordance with all these laws. Because of Sin people need the salvation of the Lord given in the Gospel.
- B. Having diagnosed the disease Paul now proceeds to the cure, GRACE. The New Law will, by God's grace, not only say what is to be done, but give the power to do it. *"...the new law is not content to say what must be done, but also gives the power to 'do what is true' (cf Jn 3:21)"*<sup>6</sup>
- C. In effect, we need a heart transplant. *"I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities...I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees."* Ez 36:25-27
- D. Thus, now that Paul has shown the impotence of man in the preceding chapter, he now proceeds to show the Power of the Cross.
- E. On to part two!