Romans 2:17-3:20

Verses 17-29:

7) *Paul will show that the Jews do not escape God's judgment through their religion.*

--Now, Paul knew this Jewish elitist mentality better than anyone because it was his life story!

--Here he is pointing out their sinful duplicity with accusations that are likely historical (as a people group) and personal (individual).

--The applications to the Jewish, God-ordained, yet empty religious profession and that of modern Christianity are similar enough that we should be challenged to make our calling and election sure. *Are we religious, just going through the motions?*

--In **17-24,** we see the Jewish religion as intellectual, and in **25-29,** we see the Jewish religion as ceremonial. Both are void without the spiritual!

Verses 17-24:

--There is a very interesting structure in this first section. Paul gives five Jewish privileges **(17-18)**, followed by five subsequent duties they felt necessary based on those privileges **(19-20)**, which he follows with five challenging questions **(21-23)**, and the final summation of it all **(24)**.

--**(17-24)** ***Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve of the things that are excellent, bring instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, and instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.***

--The typical Jew boasted of knowing the True God, His will, of being able to approve the *best* things over simply *good* things, and having that instruction was able to teach the blind, darkened, foolish, babes ignorant of God's truth.

--This prideful idea of guiding the blind was part of Jesus' indictment of the religious leaders of His day.

Matthew 23:16-17+19:** ***Woe to you, blind guides. . . Fools and blind!. . . Fools and blind!*

John 9:39-41:** ***And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."

Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?"

Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains."*

--The problem with their boasting was that their truth was not seen clearly, and it was only intellectual and not actual. Their knowledge of God's law did not mean they had personal possession of those truths the law revealed. *Because we have a verse memorized doesn't mean we *know* that truth.*
--Paul then points out their hypocrisy. They liked the "idea" of God's law but not the actuality of God's law. *As Americans like "work" + "humility" + "prayer" as ideals but not as much as realities.*
--Paul quotes from **Isaiah 52:5** and points out that the Gentiles would see their wickedness and suppose that they must be like that because that is what their God is like (the context in Isaiah is to defeat a people in battle is to defeat their god). In so doing, they were a bad testimony.
--Of course, this hypocritical reality was ultimately proven in their treatment of Jesus Christ. How their highest religious leaders hounded, hated, and eventually murdered He who was the fulfillment of the law!
--So, far from justifying them before God's judgment, their relation to the law only caused God's name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles because of their general pride, selfishness, covetousness, and hypocrisy. *There will always be this element in the church—yet you can still follow Jesus.*

Verses 25-29:
--**(25)** ***For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.***
--Here, Paul makes it clear that Jews couldn't rest in the ceremonial action of circumcision. To carry the sign of obedience in their flesh while living in the reality of disobedience was a grave sin! The mark of separation is only good if one was actually separated to God in heart and life.
--Circumcision without obedience was of no value then or now. *Similar to how some today rest in the ceremonial actions of church attendance, communion, giving, baptism, etc.*
--**(26-27)** ***Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?***
--Paul's point was, of course, most clearly seen in the life of Abraham, who was given the promises before he was given the sign of circumcision. But Jesus also brings up uncircumcised examples of the same principle:
Matthew 12:41-42:** ***The men of Ninevah will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.*
--Even in the OT the spiritual significance of circumcision was made clear:

Deuteronomy 10:16:** ***Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.*

Jeremiah 9:25-26: " ***Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will punish all who are circumcised with the uncircumcised—Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all who are in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart."****

--To have a form of obedience but an inner reality of disobedience took away all the glory, boasting, and privilege of the Jew. Sadly, we are told that this will also be the resounding rebuke from God in the last days for the church as well! ***2 Timothy 3:1-5***

--**(28-29)** ***For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.***

--The true Jew that God was always looking for was not the person who simply had a physical heritage and cultural appropriation of God's commands (Korah, Ahab, Judas, etc.) but the man or woman who actually pleased God.

Chapter 3:1-20

Verses 1-3:

--Paul now anticipates a few questions from the religious Jew.

--***What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?***

--First is someone saying: "If one is to please God by being a Jew inwardly (spiritually), and be circumcised of heart, is there any advantage to being a Jew outwardly (physically)?"

--You would think Paul would say *No,* but he says: *Yes!* (As do many Scriptures: **Ps. 147:20; Isa. 5:5-6; Amos 3:2-3; Mt. 22:1-8; Lk. 13:6; 14:16-17+24)**.

--First and foremost, they had God's truth and purpose in His ***oracles*** **(**See also **9:4-5)**. They had many blessings, but the apostle lists the Word of God as their true advantage.

Ephesians 2:11-12:** ***Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

--Unfortunately, Paul admits that ***some did not believe*** the oracles of God in history or in relation to the Messiah! They proved unfaithful and prideful. Therefore, they established God's judgments, as declared in His Word, as just.

--**(4)** ***Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged."***

--Did the unbelief of some Jews ever prove the unfaithfulness of God? Paul says ***Certainly not!*** Or your Bible may say, *God forbid!*

--The idea of the language is: *Let it never be thought so!* or *Banish the thought!*
--This was not a simple truth for those it seemed to strip of divine privilege. God made certain promises to Israel as a people group, and continued the nation as such, but not to every individual who made up the nation. Each had to enter through faith.
--Even though the Jews as a whole had rejected the truths given to them, their rejection was not universal. Individual Jews did believe and receive the blessings promised, and when Jews did not believe, the truth of the Word of God was not shaken—His purpose was not altered. Even their unbelief was foretold, just as our falling away is predicted in our day and age!
--Paul then quotes from **Psalm 51:4,** where David is admitting that God's character does not change. He judges sin and also forgives the repentant sinner.
--**(5-6)** ***But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?***
--If God turns human sin to His own purposes, is it wrong for Him to judge that sin? When Paul says, ***I speak as a man,*** he is just saying what people say in their hearts.
--His answer: *Banish the thought!* How could He then be the Judge of the world if He didn't fairly judge His own people according to His own Word?
--God simply promises to counteract the purposed sin of man in His ultimate plan.
*Lewis (The Problem of Pain): *"For you will certainly carry out God's purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John."**
--People cannot rest their unbelief or unrighteousness on the Word of God. Only on their own wickedness.
--**(7-8)** ***For if the truth of God has increased through my life to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.***
--This is something Paul no doubt heard often. We typically assume all his 'reasonings' with people were intellectual and rational, but that is never the case. In reality, people are often irrational, emotional, defensive, and unreasonable. That is why Paul doesn't even give a response to this ridiculous objection, but instead condemns it!
--Doing evil that good may possibly come does not change the character of the evil. If that were true, the worst sinner would be the same as the best saint.

Verses 9-18:
--Having now brought all Jews and Gentiles under sin, Paul finishes up with a fourteen-point indictment of all men. Newell, in his commentary on Romans, has this heading on the section: *Fourteen horrible things about all men*.
--Paul lays out this grouping of OT Scriptures to sum up the case already established: Jews and Gentiles are all under sin and inexcusable before God.

--***As it is written*** tells us that what the prophets declared of human nature then was—and is—still true of human nature now. We have not 'progressed' morally.
*Scroogie (Salvation and Behavior): *"The pride of man rebels against the truth about himself, but in so doing he is despising the grace of God, and is incurring the wrath of God."**
--I see this little section as broken down into three small segments: Sinful motives **(9-12)**; Sinful speech **(13-14)**; Sinful actions **(15-18)**. All of these prove Paul's point that we are ***all under sin***.
--**(9-12)** ***What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."***
--Man is broken at the very core. He isn't born good and then corrupted. He is born corrupted and separated from God. This is evidenced in his deepest motives.
Psalm 51:5:** ***I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*
Isaiah 53:6:** ***All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way.*
--The word ***unprofitable*** was used for rotting fruit.
--**(13-14)** ***"Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."***
--Notice that men often think very little of sins of speech, but God apparently thinks very seriously about our ***throat, tongue, lips, mouth,*** etc., and Paul goes right to the tongue in his case to prove the sinful nature of man.
--The opening of the mouth is like opening the place of a rotting corpse.
--The tongue has a heart source and a hell source. *Just look at Social media, politics, or the sideline antics of coaches and parents at youth sporting events!*
Psalm 10:7** (Said of the wicked)**:** ***His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.*
--**(15-18)** ***"Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."***
--Here we have a description of bad outward fruit. Actions prove the life of the tree.
--Shedding blood; Destruction of purpose and joy; Lack of God ordained experience; No supernatural reverence.
Isaiah 59:8:** ***The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.*
--Doesn't the world promise this path of peace? Don't be deceived.

Verses 19-20:
--**(19)** ***Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.***

--The law (God's oracles) was given to the Jews for ***all the world*** and has placed all before God as guilty. The law demands that a person love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and body. Therefore, all stand condemned before the law and before God.
--People like to talk about the sins of others and point out that others are guilty before them, but their mouths stop once faced with personal sins. The law proves that no one is guiltless before God.
--All judgment will take place ***before God***. Sinners are very "Smart" and "Prideful" and "Confident" now, but they won't be one day as they kneel before God. We ought to find our proper standing before God now.
1 Peter 3:18:** ***For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.*
--**(20)** ***Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.***
--The law proves sin but does not give life. It reveals sin but does not cure it. Even then, the recognition of our sin is not salvation. Think of how hard it is to convince men of idolatry and paganism to repent, let alone men tied to a divinely established system.
Galatians 2:16 & 5:18:** ***Knowing that a man is not justified by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified…But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*
--Paul has now brought his argument to completion. He has all men under sin. God's plan never changed. It was always the path of faith. The law was meant to augment that path of faith.
Galatians 3:22:** ***But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*
--God gives these truths to awaken men out of false hopes in themselves. At the judgment day **(Revelation 20),** there will be no such preaching or pleading or reasoning!