

June 27, 2021

Jewish Objections

Romans 3:1-2

Part 1

Divine judgment of the Jews does not undermine God's character and covenants

LTS: Deut. 4:1-10

God has determined to set the glory of His righteousness on display through the condemnation of sinners on the one hand and the justification of sinners on the other. Between these opposing outcomes stands the Gospel of God's Son which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes – to the Jew first and also to the Greek. This is what the book of Romans is about. Allow me to take a minute to review the main themes Paul has revealed so far.

IN the first two chapters he taught us that before a sinner can benefit savingly from the good news about which Paul is unashamed, he/she must first apprehend and embrace the bad news of God's righteous and necessary judgment. If God is a righteous Judge (and He is) then he must judge sin. He must judge YOUR sin, and mine

Now, the way Paul presents this truth is striking. First, he speaks about God's righteous judgement against the nations (gentiles). He says (1:18) that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Why? Because they suppress the truth about God. They prefer useless gods made of wood and stone over the one true God who is their source of every good thing in this life and in the one to come. Therefore, their condemnation is just.

The Gentiles are without excuse for their rejection of God. By nature, they knew God, but they didn't want him. For this reason, Paul says, God gave them over to their perverted desires and allows them to suffer the physical and spiritual consequences of their sin.

In chapters 2-3, after prosecuting the Gentiles for their willful godlessness, he now turns to his fellow Jews with the same message. Chapter 2 begins with the same major theme of chapter 1; namely, with the same words, "Therefore, you have no excuse." This is NOT a welcome message to Jewish ears. It's difficult to imagine any statement that would be more controversial and objectionable to them. You see, the Jews misunderstood God's relationship with them.

They knew that God had chosen them from among all the peoples of the earth. He rescued them, blessed them and entered a special covenant relationship with them. They were his "Chosen People." All of that is true. But it led them to believe that their Jewishness guaranteed their salvation.

Paul's message to his fellow Jews is clear. When it comes to God's righteous judgment, everyone stands on level ground. All are sinners. Therefore, all are deserving of God's judgment regardless of whether one is a Jew or Gentile. Listen to how Paul says it (2:12).

For all who have sinned without the law [Gentiles] will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law (Jews) will be judged by the law.

In other words, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, Judgment day is coming. And for every soul born into the world there will be a Day of Reckoning. Preparing for that day should be of highest importance to all people. And preparation begins with embracing the fact that the only thing we have to offer God is our sin. The only truth that matters is that we are spiritually bankrupt and in need of the eternal treasure of his mercy.

On a personal note, I want you to know that for me these messages are NOT merely obligatory Sunday morning lectures in theology. I believe heaven and hell are at stake for some of you who have been listening. So, I have been praying that God will use these weeks of preaching about the certainty of God's judgment to open your eyes to your need; namely, your need to surrender everything to Christ. Lower your shield! Drop your defenses! Let go of your pride and your precious idols and fly to Christ for salvation. That is my great hope as I preach Paul's Gospel to you and to me week after week. O, we have so much to learn and so far to grow.

Let's begin this morning by reading our text for today. Please take your Bible and stand as we read...

Romans 3:1-8

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ By no means! Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged." ⁵ But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸ And why NOT do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

May the Lord add his blessing to
The Reading of His word

Now, I must confess this morning that interpreting this passage is rather difficult. In fact, several commentators have declared this passage to be the most difficult section in Paul's letter to the Romans. Nevertheless, as we look at our passage for this morning, I think a helpful matrix for understanding Paul's thoughts is to view him as a prosecuting attorney in the court of God's righteousness.

In the chapters leading up to this part of his letter, Paul has presented the facts of the case, exposing sin, and calling for a just verdict – which God, the Righteous Judge, will infallibly render. For there is no injustice with God.

Paul has made his case against the Gentiles and the Jews. Now it is time for the defense attorneys for the Jews to raise objections to Paul's case.

This is interesting because we know the Jews are NOT actually participating in the writing of this epistle. Rather, Paul, having argued the affirmative case against the Jews, he will now (in the absence of his opponents) argue their objections against Paul's Gospel and respond to each of their concerns.

How does Paul know what their rebuttal will be? He knows what the Jews would say because he has heard their arguments and rebuttals many times.

You may remember that Paul's strategy as a Jewish Rabi and Gospel preacher, was to go from town to town attending the local synagogues as a guest preacher on Sabbat (the Sabbath). He would open the O.T. Scriptures and from them preach Christ crucified, risen, and coming again from

In Acts 9, for example, immediately after meeting Jesus on the Damascus Road and having his site restored by Ananias, he went to the local synagogue "declaring that Jesus is the Christ of God. And all who heard him were amazed and said, is this not the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon [Jesus'] name? And has he not come here for the purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"¹

Years later, when he began traveling with Barnabas, he preached in the synagogue at Salamis on Sabbat. He did it again in Antioch – that great city where, by the preaching of the gospel, many were saved. Luke tells us that it seemed like the whole city came out to hear them. It is likely that thousands of people heard the gospel that day. However, the

¹ Acts 9:20-21

leading Jews in that city were outraged. And it was after this event (I suspect) that the Jews began formulating their rebuttal to Paul's gospel.

By the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, he had no less than 25 years of experience preaching the gospel to the Jews. He had heard it all! Having been a leading Jew himself when he was young, Paul would have formulated his own negative arguments against the gospel. So, as we read this section of Romans, it's as if we are listening to Paul the apostle arguing against Saul of Tarsus.

But what exactly were the Jewish arguments against Paul's Gospel?

In the text before us Paul identifies four objections against his gospel. More specifically, these are arguments against that part of the gospel that declares that Jews are sinners same as Gentiles and are subject to the same wrath of God. It is against this divine truth that the Jews take their stand. Each of these objections are presented as a question, and each of them are designed to make it appear that the gospel is an attack upon the very character of God. If they can convince people that Paul's gospel is contrary to God's character and promises, they win.

Here are the four Objections:

- I. Does Paul's Gospel nullify Jewish privilege? (1-2)
- II. Does Paul's gospel make God unfaithful? (3-4)
- III. Does Paul's Gospel make God unrighteousness? (5-6)
- IV. Does Paul's Gospel make God Unjust? (7-8).

Let's begin our study with the first objection:

I. Does Paul's Gospel nullify Jewish privilege? (1-2).

1. Now, that strikes us as a strange question. So, let's read verses 1-2 again to make sure we know what they are actually saying.

Read 3: 1

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ²

2. We need to remember here that at the end of chapter 2, Paul stated unequivocally that on Judgement day, circumcision will be meaningless with regard to their salvation.

3. Turn back one page and read Paul's words with me. (Rom. 2:27-29)

Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.

4. Paul is saying, no one is saved by any external ritual. Rather, salvation comes, if it comes at all, as the Holy Spirit performs a transformation in your heart. Your Jewishness will not help you on the day of God's judgment.

5. In rebuttal, the argument of the Jews here goes something like this. Paul, if what you say is true, then the Jews have no advantage over the Gentiles. "What advantage has the Jew and what benefit has circumcision?"

6. IN other words, doesn't your gospel nullify the value of circumcision? Doesn't your gospel nullify the very benefits that we have received from God as His special people?

7. Now when we dig into this it's easy to understand why this would be a major concern for the Jews. Consider with me for a moment how much of the O.T. emphasized the unique status and privilege the Jews had because they had Yahweh as their God.

8. Exodus 19:5. Here Israel is with Moses on the day God established his exclusive covenant with them and made them a nation, his unique people. Note what God says:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.

9. And this is not the only place where we find God declaring Israel's lavish privilege in their relationship with Him. Turn with me to Deut. 10

10. After the nation of Israel had survived 40 years wandering in the desert until everyone 20 yrs. old and older had died because of unbelief. They found themselves once again on the border of the Promised land. Here God reminds them once again how privileged they are to have Yahweh as their God. We read (Deut. 10:14)

Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in

love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.

11. Again, we see this in Deut. 14. Here God is teaching them how to live in this covenantal relationship with God. Specifically, he is telling them why they should NOT cut themselves as the pagan nations did as an occultic ritual. And the reason they shouldn't do things like that is because,

(Deut. 14:2)

you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

12. Moses is telling them that in the eyes of God they have an exalted status and amazing privileges. They are God's special, and uniquely chosen people.

13. Again in Psalm 135:4 the Psalmist declares " the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession."

14. This brings a little perspective on things, doesn't it? The Jew's weren't making this up. They had manifold biblical precedent for their belief that they had special advantage over the nations of the world because they were in Covenant with Yahweh, their God.

15. The Jew's implied argument with Paul is that either the O.T. is wrong or your Gospel is wrong. God has said we have an exalted position, but Paul is saying, none of that matters. Who is wrong? Paul or God?

16. You see, in the Jewish mind God's integrity was at stake. They were not the one's responsible for exalting themselves in the eyes of God. It's clear from Scripture that God did that! Their advantages were bestowed upon them by God's sovereign decree!

17. Now, let's return to the original question. "What advantage has the Jew?" Now, before we move on, let me ask you a question: If we were to turn back to what Paul just said in 2:27-29, that one's Jewishness cannot save them, nor can any external religious forms and; that true Jewishness is a matter of the heart by the work of the Spirit, how would you answer the question? "What advantage has the Jew?"

18. When you think about it like that, Paul's answer is more than a little surprising! Our natural inclination is to declare, "You have no advantage!" But that's NOT what Paul says. What advantage has the Jew? Paul answer, "Much in every way."

19. What advantage do Jewish people have over the rest of the world? Paul says, “Much in every way.” Look with me at verse 2: “To begin with, (or of first importance) the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

20. The word “oracle” here is not the best translation. It comes from the King James, and I expect the translators were trying to exalt the value and preeminence of Scripture by using this word. In GK, however, the word is Logia, which simply means “Word, declaration, saying, or utterance.” The important thing to understand here is that Paul is saying that the first and arguably greatest privilege the Jews received from the hand of Yahweh is the gift of Scripture.

21. We read in Deut. 4:8

And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

22. Paul’s argument, against which the Jews railed, was NOT that they [the Jews] Jews had no special privileges, but that their Jewishness would not save them from the just and holy judgment of God for their sin. Nevertheless, that didn’t suggest that they were NOT privileged in other magnificent and exclusive ways.

23. In fact, there were many ways in which the Jews were tremendously privileged. When we come to chapters 9-11 of Romans, we will see Paul offer a whole list of privileges. Specifically he will say (Rom. 9:4-5),

They are Israelites, and to them belong

- the adoption ; that is, adoption as a nation.
- To them belong the glory, {the pillar of Fire & smoke)
- To them belong the covenants (first to Abraham, then Moses, then David Moses),
- To them belong the giving of the law,
- To them belong the worship [i.e.the priesthood and sacrifices, the festivals and Sabbath Days, and the promises [especially
- To them belong the promise [of Messiah].
- ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs,
- and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

23. BTW: It’s important to note that in Rom. 9, Paul was specifically speaking of unbelieving Jews. As a nation – even a nation made up of mostly unbelievers – they were blessed by God with these incredible privileges. The inference here is that you don’t have

to be a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ to be beneficiaries of His goodness. Remember, he sends the gift of rain upon the evil and the good.”

24. Just because you are evidently a beneficiary of God’s good gifts in this life is NO argument that you will enter eternal life because salvation is not like that. It’s not grounded in God’s blessing, but in His sovereign grace.

25. The point of this text, however, is that the Jews are a uniquely privileged people. And the one privilege Paul elevates is the one that serves as the very foundation of everything else; namely, the Logia of God, or Lit, “the words of God.”

26. This phrase points to the entirety of the O.T. No other nation was the recipient of the enscripturated words of God.

27. And this is really huge when you think about it, because throughout all of Paul’s ministry – whenever he step into a synagogue to preach salvation in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Savior – he would always make his case by appealing to the O.T. scriptures.

28. If we had the time this morning, we could go back to Acts chapter 7 and listen to how Stephen sought to prove that Jesus was the Christ. His whole sermon was bursting with O.T. proofs and promises.

29. Paul heard Stephen’s sermon as it was preached that day because he was part of the mob that killed that faithful evangelist. And Paul never forgot what he heard Stephen say.

30. And then, throughout the book of Acts, we find occasions when Paul himself preached the Gospel, and the single most important feature of his preaching was that every assertion he made was grounded in O.T. Scripture. In fact, you will remember that after the resurrection when the two disciples were leaving Jerusalem on the Road to Emmaus, Jesus approached them, but they didn’t know it was Him. They were confused about Jesus’ crucifixion because they thought for sure that He was the promised Christ. So Jesus interrupts by abruptly saying to them (Luke 24:25)

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”

²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

31. Paul, if your gospel is correct, what advantage has the Jew? Much in every way, because to you has been given the Logos of God.

Application:

1. You may be thinking, what does this have to do with me? O, much in every way. You too are an exceptionally privileged people – even more so than the Jews.

- Many of you have grown up in Christian homes
- Some of your earliest memories are of coming to church on Sunday evenings where you were in cubbies, and where you probably memorized your first scriptures.
- You have come to Sunday school your whole life where you were taught from Scripture that Jesus is the Christ, your Savior – if you will have him!
- You have been in your group where you probably learned to pray and share the gospel with others.
- It is likely that you were baptized as a sign of your New Covenant relationship with God in Christ.
- Nevertheless: Hear me! None of these things will matter when you stand before the judgment of God. All he will want to know is, How have you responded to My Son?

In the mid 1600's a puritan pastor by the name of Thomas Wilcox wrote the following words,

When we come to God, we must bring nothing but Christ with us. Any ingredients or any previous qualifications of our own, will poison and corrupt faith. He that builds upon duties, graces, etc., knows not the merit of Christ... [You] must every day denounce as dung and dross your privileges, your obedience, your graces, your tears, your meltings, your humblings... your workings, your self-sufficiency must be destroyed. You must take all from God's hand. Christ is the gift of God... Ah, how nature storms and frets, rages at this, that all is a gift, and it can purchase nothing with its actings and tears and duties, that all workings are excluded, and of no value in heaven. (Thomas Wilcox, 1621-1687).
Berean Call (News Letter, June 1997).