

II. Condemnation: All men condemned by revelation of God's righteousness (1:17--3:20).

The first thing Paul will do is to show how all men come short of God's revelation and are condemned.

- A. The Gentile condemned by general revelation (1:17-32).
 - 1. Righteousness and Wrath: God's righteousness and wrath is revealed by God from heaven¹⁷ (1:17-18).
 - a. The righteousness of God is revealed¹⁸ (not earned, but received by faith¹⁹) from Israel (or Paul) to the Gentiles (or Rome) as seen in the Old Testament (1:17).
 - b. The wrath of God by contrast is also revealed against men, since they are ungodly and unrighteous, and not only that but they actually go against the obvious revelation and suppress²⁰ (by their reasoning) the revelation of God (1:18).

¹⁷ "From heaven" is pointing out that God is His own revealer. He is not revealed through man's thoughts or reason.

¹⁸ This word "revealed" is in contrast to the earning of righteousness on earth. It is not mustered up on earth, but revealed regarding God from heaven. It is an attribute of God, not man.

¹⁹ There are two possible contextual interpretations here of "from (*ek*) faith to (*eis*) faith.

By "from faith to faith" Paul means what he has just said, that the revelation is passed through Israel (by believing, i.e., faith) to the Gentiles (by believing, i.e., faith). This is picked up by Paul (a Jewish apostle, by faith) and given to them as Gentiles (by faith). A similar reference to Jews and Gentiles is in 3:30. The quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 defines the walk of a righteous man (a positional believer); he walks on the basis of his belief in God's righteousness on him.

Based on what follows and precedes Paul is talking about positional faith (from faith) and then sanctificational faith. This is based on the definition of the gospel as deliverance (sanctificational) to every one who believes (positional). Then based on his quotation in Habakkuk it shows that the righteous man (positional belief) lives (or walks) on the basis of belief (faith). On the basis of the context of the book, this would seem to be the better option.

²⁰ This is the two fisted argument of Paul, not only do men not measure up to the revelation of God's righteousness, but they actually suppress that revelation and advocate the very evil that they do.

2. The Revelation: God revealed Himself in His creation, which was clearly seen by man's mind.²¹ Man's mind was capable of understanding²² God's desires for man, thus he is convicted by his own understanding (1:19-20).
3. The mind: Man's understanding²³ of God was immediately flawed²⁴ by selfish²⁵ reasoning²⁶ (1:21-22).
4. Their understanding of God: Their flawed reasoning led them to make representations of God that were obviously lower than he was (flawed man, and creatures which were lower than man) and thus they were left to their own hopeless reasoning which would result in the lowering of their own status in dishonoring activities (1:23-25)
5. This lowering of their own status in flawed reasoning led them to rebel against God's obvious creational purpose for man and woman (1:26-27).²⁷
6. Understanding of good and evil: Their flawed reasoning allowed them to do deeds that were totally unlike God (1:28-31).

²¹ "Evident in" (*phanerao 'en*) basically is to be taken to mean that man had the capability of understanding God based on the evidence that was made obvious to him. This really goes back to the previous phrase of the previous verse, that is that they suppress the truth that they know.

²² Note here that the two-pronged argument shows up again, that the evidence is clear, yet man manipulates what is understood in his mind.

²³ Again, their reasoning is the foundational failure. 'Speculations' indicates that they were just guessing, and it became futile. Their heart became darkened indicates that their very being, their attributes were apart from the knowledge of the revelation of God.

²⁴ The word translated "honor" is actually "glory", thus indicating that their actions did not glorify God.

²⁵ This is shown in the fact that they did not give thanks. They did not understand that God was gracious toward them in their very creation.

²⁶ The definition of the "wise man" and "the fool" in Proverbs is the difference between one who listens to the word of God and accepts it and one who hears and rejects for selfish human reasoning.

²⁷ The "receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error" is indicating that since they would not respond to the obvious revelation given to them, that they were left with flawed human reasoning and thus hopeless to find any solution. This is the due penalty of their error, reprobation to their own mind.

7. Summary: Although man *knew* obviously that God's wrath was on these things (since they were clearly against His creation desires), yet they acted²⁸ incorrectly and justified these actions as godly²⁹ (1:32).

B. The Jew condemned by the Law (2:1-29).

1. The Jew condemns the pagan Gentile yet is self-condemned since he practices the same things (he does not keep the revelation of God and is unable to judge himself as doing that.) (2:1-29).
- a. The Jew who passes judgment on the Gentile is self-condemned for he judges partially, not recognizing that he too is condemned by his actions. (2:1-5).

The Law required an impartial judgment. Yet when one does not judge himself by the same criteria he judges others, then he is self-condemned, not obeying the law against partial judgment.

- 1) The Jew practices evil and judges others for that (2:1)
- 2) The judgment of God is just on those who practice evil (2:2).
- 3) Question: How does the Jew feel he will escape the judgment when he not only practices evil but is incapable of judging it (2:3)
- 4) Answer: Does he take the delay of God's wrath as justifying when in fact it is for the purpose of giving an opportunity for repentance? Man's delay in repenting is actually storing up wrath for himself. (2:4-5).

²⁸ The word here for "practice" may be translated "do, practice". However, in most contexts it is talking about a characteristic action, a lifestyle, an action of attribute. While it may mean a temporal action, or even a repeated action, it should be taken usually in Romans to mean an action of attribute (character). In other words, here in 1:31 they do these things because they are these things. They cannot even help themselves to alternative actions. Refer to 2:25 where the practice of the Law infers a constant, total keeping of the Law (cf. parallel "keeps" in 2:26), since one is born with it and thus it is part of one's nature.

²⁹ The "give hearty approval" here is the second of the two premises. This indicates that they believed that these things were godly and thus taught what they believed to others.

- b. God judges good (obedience, righteousness) and evil (disobedience, unrighteousness) impartially as reflected in the Law (2:6-29).
- 1) God is not like man since He (Who is good) judges impartially as reflected in the Law (Psalm 62:12, Deut. 1:17,10:17, 16:9) (2:6-11).
 - 2) Both Jew and Gentile will be judged with and without the Law as their judge (compare with 1:17ff, and 2:1ff).
 - 3) Possessors of the Law (Israelites) are not justified but doers of the Law.
 - 4) Thus Gentiles who keep³⁰ the Law³¹ (doers) will be justified above a Jew who does not keep the Law (2:14-16).

³⁰ Paul has not identified how this works as yet. He has simply proposed that it is not Gentile heritage or Jewish heritage that determines one's righteousness (possession or hearer of the Law) but is indeed the keeping (or obedience) of the Law. Thus he proposes that Gentiles who keep the Law, would be righteous even apart from their heritage. Paul alludes to how this is possible by the reference in 2:15 "the Law written in their hearts" from Jeremiah 31, which speaks of the New Covenant. Paul's point is that while they did not have the Law ("by nature"), they would have it in their hearts (they rejected the external manifestation in Romans 1). Thus it would indicate that somehow or other they were obedient from the heart, having the revelation inside of them. This is not indicating that a Gentile can keep the Law apart from regeneration, since that issue was already dealt with in chapter 1. Further the quote from Jeremiah 31 indicates a reference to regeneration (the revelation of the apostles through the Holy Spirit to the heart of man). Paul is not dealing with the issue of an innate good in man. This would be difficult to declare a Gentile (who does some good deed) to be righteous over a Jew (who does some bad deed). Paul's point in these chapters is that they are all unrighteous. To declare any possibility that a Gentile (or anyone) could have any wisp of hope to do a righteous deed would be foreign to his argument (cf. 4:4).

³¹ The phrase "when the Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law" has two possibilities, each of which works in context.

The "instinctively" here is actually indicating a belief (heart in 2:15) that has been placed there by God in regeneration. The "heart" would be contrasted to the external revelation of 1:17-18. This would be speaking of 2:26-27.

The "instinctively" (lit.: "by nature") should be taken as follows: "For when the Gentiles who do not have the Law by nature, do the things of the Law . . ." Thus, he is saying the Gentile does not have the Law from his birth. Thus, also the Gentile is justified when he keeps the Law from his heart (regenerate heart) according to Jeremiah 31:33. Paul says a similar thing in Galatians 2:15, "We *are* Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles". In Galatians he is indicating that the Jews have the

- 5) But Jews who do not keep the Law (hear it, but do not judge themselves impartially as God does, cf. 2:6-11) are not justified before God (2:17-25).
- 6) Summary: A Gentile who keeps the Law will be judged as good, while a Jew who does not keep the Law will be judged as evil (2:26-29).
- 7) A true Jew thus must be one who has the Law written in his heart by the Spirit³², not by one which was external and could not change man's heart. Jewishness is not determined only by external genealogy.³³ A heart change gives God glory ("praise from God") while the fleshly deeds bring praise from men (2:28-29).

2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

C. Summary: All men condemned (3:1-20).

Law as part of their heritage while the Gentiles do not and thus they automatically become law-breakers.

This is the most likely possibility here since of the two possibilities it is the only one that is theologically feasible. Paul declared in Romans 1 that all men reject the internal (and external) revelation given at creation, and thus would not contradict that here.

The second possibility is that the Gentiles who do not have the Law *do instinctively the things of the Law*, indicates that a Gentile (without Law) keeps the Law through regeneration, not by deeds.

³² Note the Spirit here is the supernatural inputting of God's revelation into the heart of man, as opposed to his faulty reasoning coming up with it, since it was just shown that an external law is helpless to change man's self-glorifying depraved mind. God must not only reveal it but must convince man it is true in spite of his faulty reasoning. The Spirit thus convinces man of imputed righteousness through the revelation of the apostles.

³³ Paul is not advocating that Gentiles who are circumcised of heart are Jews. This is similar to his argument in 9:6-7. It is a contrast between a Jew who is only a Jew outwardly (no circumcision of heart).

1. **Question:** What benefit was it to be an Israelite if he is condemned by the privilege of having the Law? **Answer:** God entrusted them with His revelation (3:1-2).

The Jew now feels that if there is no credit toward God for being a Jew then what good is it, especially if a Gentile could excel past him by the keeping of the Law, i.e., a Jew could be under wrath while a Gentile was at peace with God.

Paul's answer is that Jews had the great privilege of being the representatives of God, that is, they were entrusted with the revelation.

3:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? **3:2** Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

2. Question: If some of Israel reject God does that make God unfaithful to keep His promise under the Abrahamic Covenant? Answer: God is faithful in all cases against man (3:3-4).

3:3 What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, "That Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, And mightest prevail when Thou art judged."

3. Question: Is it fair that Israel must do evil (God's plan) so that God may be glorified? Answer: In order to be faithful God must judge Israel the same as He judges the world (3:5-6).

3:5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) ⁶ May it never be! For otherwise how will God judge the world?

4. Question: If through the condemnation of man, God is glorified, then why is man condemned (since he glorifies God through his sin)?

3:7 But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

1. Illustration: Men say that the natural conclusion to Paul's message is that man should do evil³⁴ because it glorifies God (3:8).³⁵

⁸ And why not *say* (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.

5. Answer: Purpose is to condemn all men so that God may be glorified through the gift of righteousness (3:9-31).

- a. The Old Testament declared that man is totally depraved (3:9-20).

- 1) Psalm 14:3 (also 53:3) indicates that God is holy and man is totally unresponsive to His revelation (3:10-12).
- 2) Psalm 5:9 reveals that the rebellious cannot speak truth (3:13a).
- 3) Psalm 140:3 reveals that the source of evil is behind their speech (3:13b).
- 4) Psalm 10:7 indicates the wicked regard their prosperity as blessing and thus their arrogant mouths curse (3:14).
- 5) Proverbs 1:16 indicates that their actions are violent against the innocent welcoming the naïve to join with them (3:15).
- 6) Isaiah 59:7-8 indicates the path of the wicked is strewn with violence against God and their mind cannot conceive of how to relate to God (3:16).
- 7) Psalm 36:1 indicates that man is rebellious against God in his heart (3:17).
- 8) Summary: The Old Testament declares that every man is under sin and comes short of the glory of God (3:18-20).³⁶

³⁴ Remember that Paul's point is to remove the effect of the Law through Christ. Thus their accusation is that if the Law caused evil, and through Christ God was glorified, then evil is good. This conclusion of theirs about Paul is that men should thus do evil that good may come. This is not the same as the statement of 6:1, which is indicating a continuing under the Law for self-righteousness sake. It is also possible that they would be referring to the requirement that they leave the Law for Christ (thus leaving the Law would be the 'evil').

³⁵ The statement of these men is evil (opposed to the revelation), but in fact their very evil will glorify God, but not through their salvation, but through God's wrath.