

**Romans 3:19–20** Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are subject to the law, so that every mouth may be shut and the whole world may become subject to God’s judgment.<sup>20</sup> For no one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law.

**Introduction:** Why was the law given to the Jews? And what constitutes being a genuine Jew?

**The political state of Israel has always struggled with that very question. In 2018,** Israel passed the “nation-state law” which attempted to define exactly what it means to be Jewish in a Jewish state. Nearly all Israeli Jews identify as either ultra-orthodox, traditional, or secular.

**Is it ethnicity?** Those who are born into the line of Abraham and a member of the twelve tribes of Jacob? Harry Ostrer of the New York University School of Medicine found that genetic studies, such as that conducted by the *American Journal of Human Genetics* found that all three predominant Jewish groups—***Middle Eastern, Sephardic,*** and ***Ashkenazi***—share genomewide genetic markers that distinguish them from other worldwide populations. Those ethnic markers go back at least 2000 years to Jesus, Peter and Paul’s day. So maybe being Jewish really is an ethnic designation. But 40% of ethnic Jews are secular and atheist.

**Maybe its culture?** There are many practicing Jews who are black, Asian, white, or of European descent. They observe kosher dietary laws, circumcise their children and observe Passover and sabbath. Those people very much consider themselves “Jewish.”

Paul’s answer in Chapter 2 is shocking. Of course Paul thinks there is such thing as an ethnic Jew—he is one. And of course he thinks there is such a thing as a cultural Jew—he used to be one. But Paul adds a further dimension—what does it mean to be genuinely “Jewish” in a spiritual sense?

He says a man is not a Jew who is one outwardly. That person may claim an Abrahamic lineage, to possess Torah law and to hear it read to them on Sabbath each week. They may even preach moral law to others. That person may even bear the marks of physical circumcision—the symbol of covenantal relationship with Yahweh—and they may even attempt to live righteously according to the Mosaic code. But Paul said that to be truly Jewish is to possess the Spirit of God—the new badge of covenant membership. Paul said that a person is now set apart, consecrated to the Lord by an internal “circumcision of the heart.”

Therefore, possessing the law, hearing it, and attempting to obey it confers upon the individual no immunity on the day when God judge’s men’s secrets according to the gospel. It gains us no exemption from condemnation on that day.

Now, Paul anticipates protests to his reasoning.

**1. Paul anticipates 4 objections from his countrymen (Rom 3:1–8).** He answers 4 objections he’s no doubt heard repeatedly from his kinsmen in his debates in local synagogues across the Mediterranean.

**First Objection: Why bother being a Jew?** Romans 3:1–2 “So what advantage does the Jew have? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Considerable in every way. First, they were entrusted with the very words of God.”

**Paul’s answer: There is a considerable advantage of opportunity and access.** Jews have the very “words” of God revealed in Moses’ law.

- The Hebrew Bible reveals God’s character and salvation plan—he reveals his plan to save Israel and the world through Israel. The gospel is in the book and the Jews already have a strong education in it. ***So, they have a considerable advantage of opportunity and access. Something the Gentiles (until Jesus came) never had.***

**Second Objection: Isn’t God unjust to judge us because of the failings of a past generation?** Rom 3:3–4 “What then? If some were unfaithful, will their unfaithfulness nullify (make void) God’s faithfulness? <sup>4</sup> Absolutely not! Let God be true, even though everyone is a liar, as it is written: **That you may be justified in your words and triumph when you judge.**” Aren’t you saying that God is being unfaithful to his eternal covenant with us? God’s faithfulness can be seen in two ways:

- **God’s promise to make them his own people and to bless them for obedience.**

Gen 17:7 “I will confirm my covenant that is between me and you and your future offspring throughout their generations. It is a permanent covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you.” This covenant was made to Abraham and his offspring. So Paul’s dialogue partner will say, “Aren’t we the children of Abraham? Don’t we have the rights and privileges promised in an unalterable covenant with him?”

A Promise for Covenant Obedience: Deut 28:1–2 “Now if you faithfully obey the Lord your God and are ***careful to follow all his commands*** I am giving you today, the Lord your God will put you far above all the nations of the earth. <sup>2</sup> All these blessings will come and overtake you, because you obey the Lord your God.” Deuteronomy 28:1–14 seems to make it pretty clear that God is going to bless them in every way—to prosper them, to keep them in their land as a permanent inheritance, to bless the nations through them.

- **God’s promise to bring upon them all the curses for disobedience to the covenant.**

Deut 28:20 “The Lord will send against you curses, confusion, and rebuke in everything you do until you are destroyed and quickly perish, because of the wickedness of your actions in abandoning me.” Deuteronomy 28:15–68 (and Ch. 27) detail all the curses.

**Paul’s answer: Hardly! God also promised that if we sinned and walked away from his covenant that we would incur the curses and judgment in the law.** God was faithful to the terms of his covenant with you. And we have failed him miserably in this regard. God was faithful in his promise to Abraham, faithful to reward us with prosperity and permanency in the land—and faithful to judge us and uphold all the terms of that covenant.

**Third Objection: Isn’t God unjust to condemn me if my sinful life ultimately brings him glory?** Rom 3:5–7 “But if our unrighteousness highlights God’s **righteousness**, what are we to say? I am using a human argument: Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath? Absolutely not! Otherwise, ***how will God judge the world?*** <sup>7</sup> But if by my lie God’s truth abounds to his **glory**, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

Why would God judge us if our sin ultimately brings him glory? Isn’t that unjust? If Israel’s failure to uphold the covenant and incurring its curses magnifies God’s righteousness, truth, and goodness—then God is unjust to punish Israel, because ultimately their sin led to His exaltation.

- Paul’s answer: God alone is in the position to determine what is just and unjust. Claiming that God is unfair or unjust for bringing wrath against my sin—which ultimately brings him glory, is boloney because God alone reserves the right to judge what is right and wrong. Now, the technical term for this is “Divine Command Theory.” God alone has the right to determine what is just and unjust, what is right and what is wrong. And the earthbound creature just isn’t in a position to gainsay God’s just decisions—to second guess or pass judgment on God’s rulings.
- Paul’s secondary answer is that ultimately my sin accentuates and magnifies God’s righteousness and his glory. Sin is judged as sin in stark relief against the implacable cliffs of his unchanging holiness and glory—and even serves to ultimately magnify his holiness. If one cannot see what ought to be clearly seen in nature about the character and justice of God—then one is still left with the witness of sin itself. The world is permeated with sin and wrongdoing—and to judge it as such requires that we have some notion of what is right and just and perfect.

**Fourth Objection: Isn’t the Christian Faith just an “anti-law” religion?** Rom 5:8 “And why not say, just as some people slanderously claim we say, ‘Let us do what is evil so that good may come?’ Their condemnation is deserved!”

- Paul condemns this accusation as pure nonsense. To prescribe a life of license in order to magnify grace is a crazy way of thinking. He’s going to more thoroughly address that way of thinking in Romans 6, so we’ll save his thunder for that subject for that chapter—but for now he’s touching on this slanderous claim that Christians advocate lawbreaking in favor of grace. He’s saying, that’s absurd and that is not at all the Christian message of righteousness. The Christian faith is not *anti-nomian* meaning “anti law.”

The Christian does not deny the law, or fail to keep God’s moral law—***the Christian just recognizes the limitations of the law.***

Paul has addressed 4 possible objections from his countrymen relative to his statement in 2:17–29.

## 2. Paul addresses 4 problems with the human race (Rom 3:9–18).

Rom 3:9 “What then? Are we any better off? Not at all! For we have *already charged* that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin <sup>10</sup> As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one” (see 1:18–2:29).

**He first asked do the Jews have an advantage of opportunity and access? Yes. Here, he asks “Do we Jews have an advantage in terms of judgment for sin?”**

**There’s a second interpretive issue in verse 9 that is a sticky wicket, however.** There is a raging debate between the Calvinist and Arminian camps between the scope of Paul’s comments here in the Psalms that he cites. The Arminian camp tends to downplay the “not even one” or “no one” or “all” language here—to limit the focus of his statements to Israel (the immediate context). “The immediate context” they claim, “is Paul addressing his countrymen. So the passage doesn’t describe all men, everywhere in all places and at all times—it’s particular to the Jews. It thus drives home Paul’s insistence that his kinsmen according to the flesh are ‘all sinners’ too.” The problem with that view is that verse 9 reiterates Paul’s larger context (Chs. 1–3)—which is *all people, Jew and Gentile alike stand liable to judgment—thus NONE of them are righteous before God.*”

**The NT consistently teaches that we are all under bondage to sin.**

- Rom 5:12 “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned.” His context here is everyone born into Adam—including sons of Abraham and Gentiles.
- Rom 7:14 “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave under sin.” Here, he is describing about the human race and our universal predicament—we are slaves under the dominion of sin.
- John 8:34 “Jesus responded, ‘Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a **slave** of sin.’” Who commits sin? Everyone!
- Gal 3:22–23 “But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin’s power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. <sup>23</sup> Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed.” All a human being ever had before faith was revealed in Christ was the confines of the law, imprisoned in sin because we constantly broke it.

So, under the rubric of “There is no one—Jew or Gentile alike—righteous—not even one person can escape or be exempt from God’s righteous judgment because under the reign of sin and death, we have broken God’s moral decrees.

**First Problem: We ignore God’s truth failing to conform our thinking to it** (Ps 14:1–3; 53:1–3; Ecc 7:20).<sup>11</sup> There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.<sup>12</sup> All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one. Jesus said in John 6:44 **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”** A.W. Tozer once said, “before a man can seek God, God must first have sought the man.” Show me a person who seeks God and I will show you a person whom God has already sought—is drawing by the power of His Spirit. Instead of seeking God’s truth, we’ve turned away and our thinking has become worthless, shallow—consumed with pleasure-seeking, self-indulgence and superficiality. Failing to seek God we then become conformed to the pattern of this world.

**Second Problem: Our speech becomes toxic, and our actions become godless** (Ps 5:9; Ps 140:3; Ps 10:7). Failing to seek the knowledge and understanding of God—it results in vile, godless and haughty speech. These things issue from a depraved and immoral heart that is darkened in sin.<sup>13</sup> “Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Vipers’ venom is under their lips.<sup>14</sup> Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.<sup>15</sup> Their feet are swift to shed blood;<sup>16</sup> ruin and wretchedness are in their paths,<sup>17</sup> and the path of peace they have not known.” This corrupt soul then gushes forth in toxic speech—full of death, deception, and bitterness.

**Illus. The unseen cow’s tongue locked in a drawer. My friend and coworker Madeline played a prank on someone in her department.** She was going on vacation and bought a huge cow’s tongue and locked in the drawer of her coworker. Unbenownst to her, the guy also went on vacation. After two days in that hot, locked drawer it began to wreak and no one could find it. Then we all had to clear out as the hazmat crew came in to fumigate. She checked in by email and discovered that the cow’s tongue had never been found. By that time we had lost days of productivity.

***An out-of-control tongue can wreak untold havoc in relationships and in your life.***

James 3:5–12 “So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how a small fire sets ablaze a large forest.<sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among our members. It stains the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell... Who can tame it? It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.<sup>9</sup> With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in God’s likeness.<sup>10</sup> Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way.<sup>11</sup> Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening?

The world’s path is constant strife and dissention—*Constant and unceasing acrimony and dissention, relentless character assaults, memes, filthy jokes, tribal wars between all these factions—and now these tribes turning on themselves and tearing each other apart.* Listen, the world doesn’t have any answers. Its system is morally bankrupt. It’s merciless and unkind, it’s a system that rejects seeking the knowledge and understanding of God’s revelation and turning to futility, worthless thinking, self-indulgence, and social media mafia wars—through toxic, poisonous speech, and the affirmation of godless path.

**Third Problem: We live without a glorious sense of fear.**

<sup>18</sup> There is no fear of God before their eyes. There are two sides to godly fear—a glorious alarm that you are in the presence of a holy, powerful God. A sanctified panic that shoots right through the worshiper at the grandeur, the majesty, the power of God. We usually express this with words like “awe and wonder.” But there’s another side to godly fear—it isn’t just a sense of awe and wonder, the way you feel when you look at a beautiful mountain range from afar; or admire the power of raging river from the safety of its banks. Do not merely mistake “fear” of God as mere “admiration of God’s

awesome glory”—nope—it is the panic-inducing moment when you realized you have engaged the mountain and are attempting to summit its heights and the mountain that you admire can kill you. It's that rapturous anxiety we have knowing that we are in the class 5 rapids, paddling for our lives and enjoying every second of it—but knowing that the river we love can drown us and wash us away.

#### **Fourth Problem: The Law takes the witness stand against us.**

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are subject to the law, so that every mouth may be shut and the whole world may become subject to God's judgment. <sup>20</sup> For no one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law.

The very law that was designed to produce in me a favorable response actually triggers something deep in my flesh—a desire to break it. It's like little boys and buttons or doorbells. You tell them “don't push that button.” Walk away and see what happens. You tell them “don't touch that” and they touch it.

**Hayden's “button” on his finger—he was told repeatedly not to touch my exacto and carpet knives.** But he could not resist. As a consequence, he spent the entire summer in a cast with a little “button” sowed on the end of his finger to keep the tendon in place as it healed.

The law may slow or put the brakes on my descent into debauchery and moral insanity—but ultimately it just gives me lots of buttons to push. Lots of lines I long to cross. Lots of barriers I can't wait to scale and rules to break.

No one stands righteous before God—for we are all under the power and imprisonment of sin apart from Christ Jesus.

We have all failed to seek him, to understand his truth and follow his way.

**The depraved and corrupted heart spews forth vile, toxic speech—rather than the praises of God, ultimately setting aflame our entire lives.**

**Sin robs us of the opportunity to live with an awestruck wonder at the glory of God all around us—it causes us to live oblivious to certain judgment.**

**The Law isn't our ally—instead it takes the witness stand against us.**