

**TUTORIAL**  
**3.5**

# Answering Jewish Objections

Paul continues to explain that the Jews are under God's wrath, as are the Gentiles. He brings to light an inconsistency between the Jews' claims and their conduct. This module was developed from lessons presented by Bible Teacher Scot Keen.

## Introduction

We have seen so far that God's wrath is revealed towards the Gentiles and that God's testimony is clear and constant, which means that mankind is without excuse.

Paul acts like a prosecuting attorney in this section of Romans. He targets different groups of people. He begins with the Gentiles and then sneaks up on the Jews. He is talking to self-righteous people who think they are good enough to earn God's salvation. Paul lets them know that if they do good, then they will get good in return. However, he never holds this out as an actual option. He is saying, in essence, if people think they can go down that road, then they had better do it perfectly because if not, they are going to face God's wrath. It is not the possession of a standard that makes people right with God. The only way people can claim to be righteous is if they can actually live up to a perfect standard. And Paul knew that the Jews couldn't live up to their rules.

## Inconsistency of claim and conduct

Paul pointedly calls attention to the Jews and God's wrath (Romans 2:17-3:18). Paul is going to firstly show the inconsistency of their claim and conduct. The Jews claimed to be right with God because of their identity as Jews. But their conduct did not measure up to their claims so Paul says in Romans 2:17-19, "But if you bear the name 'Jew' and rely upon the law and boast in God, and know his will and approve the things that are essential, being 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." When Paul says 'but', they may have had a ray of hope. "Wait a minute. We are Jews and we do teach other people and we are instructed out of the Law and we do love the word of God and we are correctors of the immature." Maybe they thought, "Wow, there's hope for us. Maybe the fact that we're Jews will shelter us from God's wrath."

But Paul turns the tables very quickly. He says in Romans 3:21, "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." Paul is planning to highlight that although the Jews had possession of the Law and were trusting in it to make them right with God, it was the very thing that they were trusting in (the Law) that actually condemned them before a holy God.

It is stated elsewhere that the Jews were trusting in the Law to make them right with God. In John chapter five Jesus said, "Don't think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope." They were trusting in their Law observance to make them right with God. So Paul is going to show that possession of the Law does not make people right with the Lord.

Paul then goes through a list of things that the Jews were known to brag about. He says that they rely on the Law and boast in God. They approve God's will and the things that are essential, and not only that, they are also instructed by the Law. They are confident that they are a guide to the blind and a light to those in darkness, a teacher to the foolish and a teacher of the immature. Because of this possession of the Law, they were confident that they were a guide to the blind. Jesus actually reversed that and said, yes they are guides, but they are blind ones! Obviously if a blind guide leads the blind, then the guide is not leading properly because he or she can't see.

The Jews were confident that they were a light to those in darkness, meanwhile being in darkness themselves. They were confident that they could teach others. In fact Jesus said that the scribes and Pharisees would "travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte." They were teaching other people, but in their very efforts they were making someone twice the child of hell than they were to begin with. Not only was the individual still lost, but now they thought they were right with God because they followed the message that was given to them by the Jews.

So Paul is going to demonstrate that both Jews and Gentiles are under God's wrath. He says that the scribes and Pharisees placed themselves "in the chair of Moses." Jesus said, "They say things" but "do not do them." They were teaching others, but they were not teaching themselves. And Paul was not the first one to make that statement- Jesus made it first.

Paul is showing an inconsistency between the Jew's claim and conduct. Notice the terminology here, *you who say, you who teach, you who preach*. These are all things that came out of their mouths, not actions that they manifested with their bodies. In the book of Matthew Jesus said, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me."

The Jews brought shame on God by failing to live for him while at the same time claiming to be his people. Look at Romans 2:23. Paul says, "You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, just as it is written." In this verse Paul is quoting from Isaiah chapter fifty-two and Ezekiel chapter thirty-six. "Those who rule over them," continually "howl." They are laughing and mocking the Jews and God's name was being "blasphemed all day long." Look at Ezekiel chapter thirty-six, "When they came to the nations where they were scattered, they profaned God's holy name." So they were supposed to live for the honor of God and instead brought shame to him everywhere they went because, again, of the inconsistency of their claim and conduct.

This reminds me of the 1980s and the televangelist scandals that took place in the United States. Many people who were confronted with the gospel would point at the televangelists and say, "If this is what Christianity is all about, I don't want anything to do with it." That is what the Jews were causing by their failure.

I saw a news story recently about a young man who broke into a fitness center. As soon as he made it into the building he grabbed a security camera and turned it away from him, or so he thought, but actually what he did was turn it to face himself! He thought he was hiding from something that would condemn him, but in fact was condemning himself. That is what the Jews were doing. When they claim to be justified by the Law and they fail to live up to it, they were trusting in the very thing that condemned them.

## **Insufficiency of Jewish Externalism**

Paul goes on to talk about the insufficiency of Jewish Externalism. This refers to the rite of circumcision and things of that nature. Look at Romans 3:25. Paul says, "For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision." This goes all the way back to Genesis chapter seventeen when circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. It was a sign that the Jews were members of this covenant nation and therefore were God's people. That is what circumcision was supposed to signify. It was also intended to signify that they were separated from the rest of the world, separated for God.

But Paul states that if they do not live accordingly, then this sign becomes uncircumcision. Think of it like a wedding ring. A wedding ring is a symbol that one spouse is committed to the other. It is a statement that the husband is committed to his wife and the wife is committed to her husband. If one spouse cheats on the other, even if they're wearing the ring, it is like their wedding band becomes an un-wedding band. It signifies an inconsistency. It is not living up to what it is supposed to communicate. The external sign does not match the reality and that is the point Paul is trying to make regarding circumcision.

Paul says, "If the uncircumcised man keeps the requirement of the law will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And he who is physically uncircumcised if he keeps the law, will he not judge you even though you have the law, but you don't keep it?" In essence Paul is saying, "What do you think really matters the most? The sign or the reality that goes with it? What if someone is not circumcised but is living to the standard of the Law? Is that better or worse than being circumcised and yet not living up to the standard?" Paul wants the Jews to realize that their Jewish externalism does not make them right with God.

The Jews were very quick to throw this back. Paul had travelled much of the known world by the time that he wrote the book of Romans. He knows Jewish excuses and so knows that the first thing out of their mouth would be, "Yeah, but we have the Law." Paul says, "Yeah, I know you have the Law, but you don't keep it". "Yeah, but we're circumcised," they would reply. And Paul would say, "Yeah, but it doesn't match any corresponding reality."

Douglas Moo in his commentary on Romans says, "Judaism claimed that no person who is circumcised will go down to Gehenna." In other words, the Jews were trusting that if they were circumcised then they would be spared God's wrath. Paul is removing the blinkers from the Jews so they can see things from God's perspective.

The Jews were claiming to be spared from God's wrath because of their Jewishness: "I call myself a Jew. I have the Law". They claimed that their circumcision would shelter them from God's wrath and Paul takes that argument off the table. Now that he has dealt with those arguments he deals with the loose ends, the wild statements that they will make in desperation.

Think of it this way. You may have noticed that when people on TV are being interrogated for a crime they often start throwing out wild excuses, especially when the truth comes out. That is what the Jews are doing here. In Romans 3:1, here are some questions that they ask, "What advantage has the Jew? What is the benefit of circumcision?" They are saying, "Paul, okay, if you're telling us that circumcision doesn't make us right with God, what's the point of being circumcised anyway? What's the point of being a Jew? What's the value in that?" Paul answers back, "Great in every respect."

There were advantages of being Jewish. Jews grew up with access to the Word of God. They could hear about the salvation that God had promised to provide, but that didn't automatically make them right with God. It just gave them access to the Truth. So, Paul agreed with them that there were advantages to being a Jew, just not in the way that they thought.

## Answers to Jewish Objections

Their next excuse in is Romans 3:3, "What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar." The next objection is, "Well, what if some Jews don't believe? God will not break his promises to the Jews if some don't believe." Paul replies, "Of course not. God will be true even when every man is found to be a liar." He quotes Psalm ninety-five which says, "God will be justified in his words."

Now this is a cryptic statement that Paul is going to unfold further in Romans chapters nine through eleven although he alludes to it here. If you think about this from the first century perspective, the Jews were asking, "Well, what advantage do Jews have if the Gospel is going to Gentiles and if being a Jew doesn't automatically shelter one from God's wrath?" Paul says, "There are advantages." What if some Jews don't believe? Is God is still going to keep His promises? Yes, he will keep His Word even if every man is proven to be a liar.

Paul goes on to the next argument that the Jews would give in Romans 3:5. He says, "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)." Paul is using an argument that he heard when interacting with the Jews. In essence they would say if their sinfulness makes God look more righteousness then why does He find fault with them, because after all they are making God look good? That is basically their argument. Paul says, "May it never be. Otherwise, how will God judge the world?"

Imagine a Jew were to say, "Okay, if God accuses me and if he holds me guilty, why would He do that? My sin makes Him look better." Paul would reply, "Well, would you want God to apply that logic to the Gentiles?" The Gentiles could use the same argument and insist that their sin makes God look better too. If God can't judge someone who is a sinner, then he can't judge the world. Of course, no Jew was going to agree with that. Paul is saying, "Yes, God is going to judge the world and He is going to judge the Jews as well."

Their final argument comes in Romans 3:7-8, "But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to his glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), 'Let us do evil that good may come'?" Notice how Paul doesn't even enter into that discussion. He says in Romans 3:8, "Their condemnation is just." In other words, he says they deserve God's wrath. Paul is not even going to take their bait. He refuses to go down that road.

So far Paul has shown an inconsistency in the Jews' claim and conduct. They claim to be right with God because of their possession of the Law and yet do not keep that standard. There is clearly an insufficiency in Jewish externalism. They had circumcision and trusted in that as their salvation, but Paul took that

away from them. Then he finally answered their objection that their sin made God look better. So why would God judge them? Paul explained that they deserve God's judgement. Paul has taken away every hope that the Jews would have, and in doing that, he silences them so that they can see that their only hope is in God's grace.



## **DISCUSSION POINTS**

### *Answering Jewish Objections*

1. Who is Paul focusing on in this section?
2. These people are placing their confidence in what three things?
3. What did the Jew's wrongly assume about being a descendant of Abraham?