

- The true Jew is the one whose heart is right in God's sight. One who is not inwardly committed to the Lord is not a true Jew, even though he fully conforms to the Jewish standards of dress, ceremony, and ancestry. Don't substitute religious ritualism for true relationship with the living God! A personal relationship with God means that He has changed your heart and the evidence of that change is a life of obedience to His Word.

## 2. The Jews' Objections Refuted (3:1-8)

- Romans 3:1-8 consist of a dialogue ("diatribe") that the apostle Paul holds with his Jewish detractors. Paul asks and answers 4 rhetorical questions.

### *(i) Objection 1, 3:1-2*

- 1<sup>st</sup> objection: "If Jews and Gentiles are both guilty before God, what advantage is there in being a Jew? Particularly, what advantage is there in being circumcised?" Paul anticipates and answers this objection. "*Much every way*" – there are many advantages to being a circumcised Jew (cf 9:4-5). Paul gives the most important one here – the Jews were entrusted with the oracles or revelation (and promises) of God. The word "oracles" stresses the fact that the OT, and the Mosaic Law in particular, was the very utterance of God preserved and handed down by earlier generations. Before everything else, God confers upon them the privilege of being the depositaries of the divine oracles (Acts 7:38).
- The main benefit of being a Jew is to possess the sacred Scriptures and their instructions. No higher favour can be conferred on a people than to be put in possession of the sacred Scriptures because no one can be saved unless they know the truth of God's saving grace (Deut 4:8; Ps 147:19-20). It is a great privilege & a great responsibility to possess the Word of God. To have the light of God's Word & yet to reject it makes one more accountable (Matt 11:21-24).

### *(ii) Objection 2, 3:3-4*

- 2<sup>nd</sup> objection: "If it be admitted that some of the Jews did not believe, does it not follow that the faithfulness of God in His promises will fail? Does the Jews' lack of faith or their faithlessness imply that God has failed to keep His promises to the nation; or that He has made promises which He is not able to fulfil?"
- Paul rejects the assumption: "*God forbid!*" For God to be unfaithful is unthinkable!
  - The promise made to Abraham, and the patriarchs, was not unconditional and absolute, that all the Jews should be saved. God has never promised that any individual Jew could claim security in God's promises apart from repentance and personal faith in God (Isa 55:6-7).
  - In Romans 9-11, Paul shows that the widespread Jewish unbelief did not thwart God's sovereign election of a remnant. There will be a future conversion of the Jews, when "*all Israel shall be saved*" (Rom 11:26).

## The Condemnation of the Jew (2:17-3:8)

- In 2:17-3:8, Paul deals with the religious people. The Jews considered themselves as special in God's sight, favoured and exempted from condemnation on 3 grounds:
  - The Jews trusted in their Jewishness – they are sons of Abraham.
  - Unlike the Gentiles, they have God's Law.
  - They are circumcised in contrast to the uncircumcised Gentiles.
- But Paul drives home the fact that the Jews stand in the same need of salvation by grace through faith as the non-Jews. He shows that lineage & external rituals are not what is important to God; the condition of the heart is what matters.

## 1. The Jews' False Confidence (2:17-29)

### *(i) The Law, 2:17-24*

- "*Behold, thou art called a JEW....*" This is the name by which the Hebrews were generally known from the time of the Babylonian captivity. 2 Kings 16:6 is the first instance of the word "Jew" in the Bible. It is a single word in the Hebrew, "Judahites," which means, "men of Judah." The Jews bore their name proudly for it marks them out as God's covenantal people (Deut 7:6-8). Just as God chose the Jews to be His people, so He chooses us in Christ. God did not do this because He foresaw anything of merit in us, including our faith. Rather, He did it to display His grace, that we would glorify Him (Eph 1:4-6).
- Paul begins with the 1<sup>st</sup> privilege that the Jews enjoy – they possess the "law." The word "law" can refer to:
  - The moral Law, or the 10X, given in Exodus 20.
  - The moral, ceremonial, and judicial Laws found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – The Law of Moses or the Mosaic Law.
  - The Old Testament.
  - The law as an operating principle (vs lawlessness).
- When Paul mentioned the "law" in 2:17, he was referring to the Law of Moses or the Mosaic Law. Possessing the Law, the Jews had these advantages:
  - Trusted in the Law. The Jews relied on the Law for acceptance or favour; on the fact that they had the Law and was thus distinguished above others. The Jews relied upon the Law, rather than upon the God who gave them the Law!
  - Boasted in God. On account of the Law, the Jews felt far superior to all other people and despised the pagan Gentiles, who did not know God.
  - Knew God's Will. Through the Law, the Jews knew what God commanded; what He forbade. But while they knew God's will, they did not do His will.
  - Discerned Moral Values. They refer to a sense of right and wrong (cf Phil 1:10) – particularly the ability to identify the right things that are essential.
- God has blessed the Jews because they possessed the Law. This was not a ground for boasting, but for gratitude & humility. The Law was never designed to give salvation but to awaken their consciences to a sense of sinfulness (cf Jas 1:23).

- The Jews were confident that they were superior in knowledge to others. Having the Law enabled them to give spiritual light to those who were in darkness.
  - A Guide to the Blind - The Jews esteemed themselves qualified to guide the Gentiles who did not know the way.
  - A Light in the Darkness - Another figurative expression to denote a teacher to the ignorance of the Gentiles (Isa 49:6).
  - An Instructor of the Foolish - The Jews esteemed themselves qualified to instruct those without understanding.
  - A Teacher of the Immature - The expression “babes” denotes those who are as ignorant as children.
- In the Law, the Jews possessed the “form,” the correct embodiment, of knowledge and truth. While this was true, for the most part the Jews failed to lead the Gentiles to the truth, because ultimately, they did not know the Truth. They were in effect blind guides (Jn 14:6; Matt 15:14).
- Paul proceeds to compare the profession of the Jews with their practice. In teaching others, they failed to teach themselves, and are accused of:
  - Theft - apparently, they extorted money from helpless women (Matt 23:14).
  - Adultery - undoubtedly many were guilty of this immoral act (2 Pet 2:14).
  - Sacrilege (or to “rob temples”) - refers to the common practice of looting pagan temples and selling the idols and vessels for personal profit under the pretext of religion (Deut 7:25; Acts 19:37).
- The Jews observed the Law outwardly, according to the letter and not according to the spirit. They were hearers of the Law, but not doers of it. They didn’t seek to please God from the heart (Mark 7:6). The Jews’ failure to do what they knew to be right was far more inexcusable than the ignorance of the Gentiles whom they despised. Two consequences of the hypocrisy of the Jews:
  - Dishonouring God - By their transgression of the Law, they dishonoured God Who gave them the Law (Rom 3:23).
  - Blaspheming God - Their conduct led the pagans to blaspheme and reproach both their religion and its Author (Isa 52:5; 2 Sam 12:14). God is honoured by our holy living & His name is blasphemed when we act wickedly.
 Mere knowledge cannot commend us to God; rather, it should humble our hearts before God and lead us to worship and obey Him.

(ii) *Circumcision, 2:25-27*

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> privilege that the Jews prided themselves as God’s chosen people is their covenantal sign – circumcision – which they felt guaranteed their spiritual standing before God (cf Acts 15:1). The Jews became a distinctive nation because of the rite of circumcision.
  - God instituted the practice of circumcision as a sign of His covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:1-14). This practice was intended to be a picture of what must happen to the heart – to be set apart for God.

- This command was reinforced in the Mosaic Law (Lev 12:3). Under the Law of Moses, it became a sign of membership in the covenant community.
- The danger of religious rituals, even of those that God commands, is that they become externals only – or, a mere formality. The physical ritual of circumcision must be accompanied by its spiritual meaning, namely, holiness and obedience to God on the heart level (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4). Bearing the outward sign of the covenant has no value without inward devotion to God. Paul says that circumcision is profitable only if one is making a practice of the Law, that is, live in obedience to God’s will (Gal 5:3).
- If the Jews transgressed the Law, it would not distinguish them from those who are not circumcised. God requires the obedience of the heart and life. Where that is missing, no rite or profession can save. What is said here of circumcision applies with equal force to baptism or the partaking of the Lord’s Supper. There is no spiritual benefit conveyed just by going through these religious ordinances, apart from a personal relationship with God. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are of no value unless it is accompanied by an inward & spiritual grace. Spiritual privileges do not give you any advantage with God if we do not respond in faith and obedience; rather, they increase our accountability to God (2 Cor 2:16).
- A Jew who breaks the Law is no better than a Gentile. And conversely, a Gentile who keeps the Law’s requirement is as good in the sight of God as a law-abiding Jew. In fact, the Gentiles’ humble obedience to the Law would condemn the Jews who, in spite of their great advantages, live in disobedience (Luke 11:32). Cornelius, an uncircumcised Gentile (Acts 10:1-2), was more pleasing to God than Caiaphas, a circumcised Jew, and a High Priest.

(iii) *Ancestry, 2:28-29*

- Faced with the undeniable reality of Paul’s charges, the Jews have 1 last hope left – their ancestry. They are the descendants of Abraham. The Jews take great pride in their Jewish lineage. But the main thing in God’s sight is not the outward, but the inward (Matt 23:25). A true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Holy Spirit.
- Paul uses four somewhat overlapping contrasts to drive home his point:
  - Not outward, but inward: God is more interested in the inward (1 Sam 16:7). If you’re right inwardly with God, it will express itself in outward deeds.
  - Not the flesh, but the heart: True circumcision is a matter of the heart. Circumcision which is acceptable to God is attended with holiness of heart.
  - Not the letter, but the spirit: True circumcision is that of the heart which is renewed by the Holy Spirit (Jer 4:4; Col 2:11) - it is internal & spiritual.
  - Praise not from men, but from God: The word “Jew” is derived from the Hebrew name “Judah” which means “praise” - “his Judaism/praise is not from men, but from God.” He lives before God; his praise will be from God.