

**3:1-2:** *What advantage then hath the Jew? or what is the profit of circumcision? 2 Much every way: first of all, that they were intrusted with the oracles of God.*

Paul knew his readers would sometimes have questions about his instructions and teachings, so in many instances he answered these questions in advance. He raised and then answered the questions his readers would have wanted to ask. Two questions Paul anticipated from those who read this epistle are found in 3:1.

In this letter, Paul made several points about Jews and Gentiles. He said that a Jew's circumcision could be viewed as *uncircumcision* (it wouldn't matter). He affirmed that a Gentile's uncircumcision could be counted as *circumcision* (Gentiles could be acceptable to God). He told the Jews that they did not keep God's law. He further told them that they were not the only ones who could be justified in the eyes of God.

Paul's arguments affirmed that Jews and Gentiles were in the same boat. Both had broken God's laws and both were guilty of sin. Thus, Jewish readers were probably going to be upset. They may have wondered if Paul believed the Jews had no special advantages. Was he saying that being a Jew was just like being a Gentile? Here Paul addressed these concerns and he assured his readers that there were some advantages to being Jewish. In the first verse "*advantage*" (*perissos*) and "*profit*" (*opheleo*) are synonyms to show that Jews did have significant advantages and blessings. The question over whether or not being Jewish had value would have resulted from Rom. 2:17-24. What Paul said in Rom. 2:25-29 would have caused the readers to ask a second question—"What about circumcision?" Paul was not the only one who acknowledged that having a Jewish background was significant. Jesus also recognized the value of being Jewish when He said *salvation was from the Jews* (Jn. 4:22).

Barclay (Romans, pp. 46-47) well illustrates how Paul carried on an imaginary argument. Here is his illustration of Paul's argumentation.

**"The objector:** The result of all that you have been saying is that there is no difference between Gentile and Jew, that they are in exactly the same position. Do you really mean that?

**Paul:** By no means.

**The objector:** What, then, is the difference?

**Paul:** For one thing, the Jew possesses what the Gentile never so directly possessed—the Commandments of God."

In trying to deal with the anticipated questions, Paul said the Jews had been "*intrusted*" (past tense) with the *oracles of God*. The word "*oracle*" (*logion*) was "a meaningful word to the Greek speaking world. It means a saying or revelation from deity. Logion is used in Herodotus 8.60.3 when Themistocles is speaking to Eurybiades. He said, 'they will advance no further than Attica, but will depart in disorderly fashion. And, we shall gain by the saving of Megara and Aegina Salamis, where it is told us by an oracle that we shall have the upper hand of our enemies'" (Owen, p. 19).

A second key term is *intrusted* (*pisteuo*). In many places this verb is translated "*believe*." Here, however, it has the sense of entrusting someone with something. The term has the same sense in places like 1 Thess. 2:4 and 1 Tim. 1:11 (Paul was "entrusted" with the gospel). Paul was faithful to what had been entrusted to him, but the Jews were not as careful.

Even though the Jews had been entrusted with a message from God, this would *not* help them with God's judgment. The Jews believed having the *oracles* would help them in their dealings with God, but Paul said they were mistaken, and the reason for this is not hard to understand. When people possess greater privileges (opportunities), their responsibility is greater (Lk. 12:47-48). The Jews wanted to enjoy what they had been given and still be free from all responsibility. Paul said that was impossible. Even now, many want opportunities and privileges, but there is little interest in being accountable for what is possessed or enjoyed.

The *oracles (logion)* possessed by the Jews have been interpreted in different ways. Some consider them the whole law while others say the term describes the Ten Commandments. Still others interpret the word to describe the list of blessings and cursings found in the law. McGuiggan argues that Paul used the word to describe a list of the Messianic promises (Romans, p. 118), a view also supported by the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:355). Only four places in the New Testament use this term; the other three are Acts 7:38; Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 4:11. Here it is plural.

**3:3-4:** *For what if some were without faith? shall their want of faith make of none effect the faithfulness of God? 4 God forbid: yea, let God be found true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy words, And mightest prevail when thou comest into judgment.*

Since the Jews were entrusted with information from God, and those reading this letter would have agreed, Paul responded by imagining another opponent. This objection is again well illustrated by Barclay.

**“The objector:** Granted! But what if some of the Jews disobeyed these commandments and were unfaithful to God, and came under the condemnation of God? You have just said that God gave the Jews a special position and a special promise. Now you go on to say that at least some of the Jews are under the condemnation of God. Does that mean that God has broken His promise, and has therefore shown Himself to be unjust and unreliable?

**Paul:** Far from it! What it does show is that there is no favouritism with God, that God punishes sin wherever He sees it. The very fact that God condemns the unfaithful Jews is the best possible proof of the absolute justice of God. He might have been expected to overlook the sins of this special people of His but He did not. Nothing could so demonstrate His impartial justice, and His right to be the Judge of all the earth.

**The objector:** Very well then! All you have done is to succeed in showing that my disobedience has given God an opportunity to demonstrate His righteousness. You are saying that my infidelity has given God a marvelous opportunity to demonstrate His fidelity. Why call me a sinner for that? My sin is an excellent thing! It has given God a chance to show how good He is! I may have done evil, but nothing but good has come of it! You can’t surely condemn a man for giving God a chance to show His justice.

**Paul:** An argument like that is beneath contempt! You have only to state it to see how intolerable it is!”

What Paul said is more fully developed in chapters 9-11. At this point Paul had said enough. He showed that, even though the Jews were faithless, God remained faithful. This thought is reinforced by other New Testament passages like Heb. 10:23, 1 Pet. 4:19; and 1 Tim. 2:13.

Another thought in the fourth verse is “*let God be found true and every man a liar.*” That is, if all the men on the earth held an opinion contrary to God’s, they would be wrong and God would be right. When a disagreement arises between man and God, man is always on the losing end. This thought is reinforced at the end of verse 4. God is the one who will always “*prevail in judgment.*” This quotation is from Ps. 50:6 in the LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) or (in our English Bibles) Ps. 51:4. Paul meant no man can accuse God of being wrong. God is always right.

At the end of the fourth verse there is an apparent reference to Ps. 51:4 (the psalm which describes David’s adultery with Bathsheba). After considering his sin David felt filthy; he knew that he had been faithless to God’s covenant. David, though a good man in many ways, illustrates the potential faithfulness in man while on the other hand God is always faithful. David’s experience shows the true nature of God. Heaven said adultery is wrong and evil. What David did proved that God is right. We may not understand everything that God has done, but His decisions are always absolutely right. Time and the occurrence of events will always vindicate the members of the Godhead. It is almost as if Paul

used the image of “a court in which God is put on trial...the great Judge of all lets the universe of angels and of men judge him together with all his words and his acts in order to see whether in any instance he can possibly be adjudged as not being faithful, not true, and thus not righteous; in fact, God demands to be tried in this manner. Those whom he judges, both those acquitted and those condemned by him, are to judge him, their Judge, and the very verdicts which he pronounces upon them” (Lenski, Romans, p. 216). Those who render a verdict (*judged* is in the present tense suggesting this is being done in this life) will eventually say God is both “*justified*” and must “*prevail*” (*nikao*). Kittle (4:945) says *prevail* (“*overcome*,” KJV) means *divine victory*. The other term, *justified*, shows that unlike people, God will never need to retract what He has said. His words will always prove to be true.

Regarding the word “*liar*” in 4a (*pseustes*), “The New Testament seems to indicate two categories of liars. The first includes those individuals who claim to have a relationship with God but, in reality, do not know Him. The Jews who opposed Jesus would be found in this category (John 8:55). John wrote that anyone who claims to know God, but while disregarding His commands, is a liar (1 John 2:4). This is also true of the person who says he loves God, yet hates his brother (1 John 4:20). The second category involves those who deny the revealed truths of God. In 1 John 2:22 the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ is both a liar and an antichrist” (CBL, GED, 6:551).

**3:5:** *But if our righteousness commendeth the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who visiteth with wrath? (I speak after the manner of men.)*

Paul continued to make his point by asking additional questions, and his argument is emphatic. The word “*say*” (*ereo*) shows Paul was “not only verbalizing a thought but emphasizing it as well” (CBL, GED, 2:593). Here, Paul continued to answer an imaginary opponent, supposing the objector (described in the previous paragraphs) said, *If man’s unrighteousness (sin) demonstrates God’s righteousness, what should man do? Shouldn’t he sin? If sin makes God appear to be as good as He can be, should not man be as wicked as possible?*

An illustration of what the objector said can be drawn from a diamond laid on black velvet. The cloth helps highlight a brilliant jewel. The people to whom Paul responded were arguing that sin was like black velvet—it helped show off God’s goodness. Thus, God should be happy with sin and not angry. Just as it would be bad to destroy the velvet, so it would be bad to do away with sin (McGuiggan, p. 119). This illustration should be compared to Rom. 6:1.

The two questions in verse 5 go together. The first question would have been answered **yes** *by the Jews* (sin [unrighteousness] makes God look good). This was the view that some of Paul’s readers had adopted. Because of this belief, a second question was only natural: If sin makes God look good, and God punishes man for sin, isn’t God unfair? How can God punish those who make Him look good?

The arguments Paul made are explained at the end of verse 5—“*I speak* (present tense) *after the manner of men*.” In other words, Paul re-stated an argument that had been made by others. This was not what he believed.

**3:6:** *God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?*

Here Paul began to answer the questions he raised in verse 5. His first two questions were: “Is God unrighteous?” and “Doesn’t sin glorify God?” The questions were answered with two words—**absolutely not**. If God were unrighteous, He would not be a fit judge for the world. God cannot do what is wrong, evil, or bad (Heb. 6:10). Also, if the Jews should not be punished for their sins because sin glorifies God, what about the Gentiles? If Jewish sin makes God look good, doesn’t Gentile sin do the same? Furthermore, if sin glorifies God, why should there be any punishment or final judgment? This was another of Paul’s arguments to deal with the erroneous ideas advocated by some in the first century. The following verses record even more of Paul’s arguments related to this subject.

**3:7-8:** *But if the truth of God through my lie abounded unto his glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? 8 and why not (as we are slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say), Let us do evil, that good may come? whose condemnation is just.*

The first part of verse 7 is difficult. It appears Paul was still involved with an argument that involved the Jews and their view of Christianity (i.e. Christianity is a *lie*). Because Paul supported Christianity, the Jews regarded Christianity as *his lie*. The word “*lie*” (*pseusma*) is a noun which occurs only here in the New Testament. It has the sense of “falsehood” or “untruthfulness.” Paul’s rejection of Judaism for Christianity would have been very troubling to his former colleagues, so this term was appropriate. Part of Paul’s argument should be understood as his describing a one sided conversation. That is, Paul said to Jews, “Why are you fussing at me? You believe I am sinning by promoting Christianity. Since you believe that sin is good, and you believe my faith makes me as a sinner, you should be happy. You must conclude that Christianity (*my lie*) **glorifies** God.” In the Greek text the thought is especially noteworthy. A single term translates “*I also*” (*kago*), and this word has the sense of “*I in particular*” (CBL, GED, 3:193).

In the latter part of the 8<sup>th</sup> verse Paul asked another question: “Why not do evil [sin a lot] so that good may come?” This was the logical conclusion for what some were saying. Since some believed that sin was good, it was best to sin as much as possible. In addition, some were saying that Paul believed sin was good. This charge was false and Paul argued against this philosophy throughout the book of Romans. Paul also affirmed that those who were slandering him would get the condemnation they deserved (“*condemnation is just*,” ASV and in the KJV, “*damnation is just*”). The word *just* (*endikos*) has the sense of *just, deserved, or legal*; it is found only here and Heb. 2:2.

Towards the beginning of verse 8 both the ASV and KJV use the word “*slanderously*” (*blasphemeo*), a present tense verb. This is a fairly common term in the New Testament as it is found 35 times, used in 14 New Testament books, and utilized by 8 different writers. Jesus faced this same accusation while He was upon the earth (Mt. 9:3; 26:65). Two other times in the book of Romans this term is found (2:24; 14:16). Here, the word, which is in the present tense, describes the kind of slander “that strikes at the gospel itself” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:220).

**3:9:** *What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we before laid to the charge both of Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin;*

Here is another question the Jews would have wanted answered. They would have asked, “Are we not better than the Gentiles?” The Jews thought they were better because they were God’s people. Although this is what they believed, Paul informed them they were not any better (i.e. there would be no advantage in their dealings with God, because as the following verses show, both Jews and Gentiles had the same problem: all were *under sin*).

While the Jews did have some advantages (Rom. 2:17-20a; 3:1-2; 9:3-4), they misused them and were thus no better off than the pagans. This was tragic and the problem continues until the present moment. Today God’s people have access to the truth, but instead of using it to live as they should and teach others, many live like the unsaved.

Since Paul has charged both the Jews and Gentiles with sin, he now proceeds to further prove his accusation. He has already offered some evidence for this accusation in chapters one and two, but he now draws from the Old Testament to show the Jews they were guilty of sin. *All are under sin* and proof for this would come from what the Jews treasured most—the *oracles* from heaven (verses 2, 10).

The expression “*laid to charge*” in the ASV and “*before proved*” (KJV) comes from a single term (*proaitiaomai*) which was apparently invented by Paul and the Holy Spirit. There are no known instances of this term ever being found in Classical Greek. Neither is it found in the Septuagint. Paul only used it once, and it means “make a prior accusation.” A charge had been made—all are under sin—and Paul intended to fully persuade his readers of its veracity. Both the ASV and KJV recognize the on-going nature of Paul’s accusation (“*are*” all under sin—present tense, 9b).

**3:10-12:** *as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none that understandeth, There is none that seeketh after God; 12 They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable; There is none that doeth good, no, not, so much as one:*

The first four words in verse 10 are very important—“*as it is written.*” Paul used what was recorded in God’s word; he went to the *oracles* received by the Jews several times in this book. In the following section (verses 10-18) there are several citations from the Old Testament (see the following chart). For other places in this book where Paul appealed to the Scriptures to prove his case (*it is written*), see Rom. 1:17; 2:24; 3:4; 4:17, 23; 8:36; 9:13, 33; 10:5, 15; 11:8, 26; 12:19; 14:11; 15:3, 9, 21. Today, those who are truly gospel preachers will cite from the Scriptures in this same manner.

<b>Rom. 3:10, 12</b>	➔	Ps. 14:1-3.
<b>Rom. 3:13</b>	➔	Ps. 5:9; Jer. 5:16; Ps. 140:3.
<b>Rom. 3:14</b>	➔	Ps. 10:7.
<b>Rom. 3:15,</b> Prov. 1:16;	➔	<b>17</b> Isa. 59:7-8.
<b>Rom. 3:18</b>	➔	Ps. 36:1.

These Old Testament citations are interesting because they were passages used by the Jews. When the Jews wanted to “whip up” on the Gentiles, they used these or similar verses. When Paul used these passages, *he applied them to Jewish people* (this must have been a real shock because he said not one single Jew was righteous!) Notice the present tense (“*is not*”). Another quick point of grammar is the perfect tense of *it is written*. By using the perfect tense Paul showed that the world had *never* contained a person without sin (excluding, of course, Jesus and small children such as infants who are not guilty of sin—Ezek. 18:20). The passages used by the Jews to condemn others were used against them, and applying these passages to the Jews was appropriate (Rom. 3:19) because the law *speaks to those who are under law*. Because each of these verses is found in the Jewish law, the information had to apply to the Jews.

The references cited by Paul cover three major areas: **character**, the **tongue** (speech), and **conduct**. Each of these subjects is handled in a way that affirms the Jews were *ignorant, indifferent, crooked, and unprofitable*. Paul portrays Jewish speech as *deceitful, destructive, and maligning* (slandering). The conduct of the Jews is pictured as *oppressive, injurious, and ruthless*.

The information in verses 10-12 may also be compared to Ps. 14:1-3. When Paul said “*there is none that understandeth,*” and “*there is none that seeketh after God,*” he described the Jews. Though the Hebrew people spent a lot of time studying God’s word, they didn’t understand the message. They failed to realize the significance of what God’s law required. They did not realize the Old Testament system was temporary and would be replaced (Rom. 7:1-4). They failed to realize that many of God’s promises are conditional. Neither did they truly seek after God or obey what His word says.

Regarding the word *understandeth* (*suniemī*), Paul used this same term in Eph. 5:17 to say that God’s will can be understood. Here it points to “*a good and upright man* (as having knowledge of those things which pertain to salvation,” Thayer, p. 605). These items are missing not because of “chance,” but “*man in his deepest being rejects God*” (Brown, 3:132). The lack of insight described by this term “*must be regarded as culpable behaviour*” (*ibid*). For information on the second key word (*seeketh—ekzeteo* in Greek), see how it is used in Acts 15:17; Heb. 11:6; 12:17; 1 Pet. 1:10.

The application of this information for our day is two-fold. First, Christians can be just like the Jews. We have access to all kinds of books, the best study tools, the best Bibles, computers, software programs, etc., but still fail. In spite of all the tools and knowledge currently available, many never

understand what they need to know or do to please God. A failure to study the Scriptures or a failure to apply them leads to destruction.

Although the information in Rom. 3:10-12 should be applied, many apply it incorrectly. For example, one author said, “Apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit people cannot exhibit this fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). They have no inner spiritual capacity whereby they can normally and automatically exercise genuine kindness toward others. Instead sin causes them to be selfish and self-centered” (Bible Knowledge, p. 449).

This type of application and interpretation is not only incorrect, it completely misses Paul’s point. The apostle showed that the Jews were sinners. Instead of lacking the ability to choose (the view affirmed in the Bible Knowledge Commentary), the Jews made a choice, but it was the wrong one. Paul said these people *turned aside* (a willful act, verse 12).

Although Paul used the word *none* again and again, not every Jew was immersed in sin and unrighteous (Mt. 1:19; Lk. 1:6). Some were good, but none was without sin and thus truly *righteous*. A further illustration of this point is found in 12a (*turned aside*). These two words come from a single term (*ekklino*) that occurs only here, Rom. 16:17, and 1 Pet. 3:11. In the Septuagint this term described turning from a road on which someone was traveling (Judg. 4:18) as well as turning away from God (1 Sam. 12:20 in English versions but 1 Kgs. 12:20 in the Septuagint) or His word (Josh. 23:6). Perhaps to impress the point even more, Paul further said the Jews were “*unprofitable*” (*achreioo*). The main part of this word is related to a noun that meant “use, need, necessity,” but Paul added a prefix to this term which negated its meaning. It would be like adding the prefix “non” to “sense” so a new and negative word is formed. It is not an overstatement to say that until a person has been forgiven of his or her sins, he or she has no value (part) in the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9).

A final key term is “*kindness*” (*chrestotes*). In the New Testament this term is only used by Paul and he used it ten times (five of which are in this book). When people are compared to God, it can only be said they “*do not do good*” (*doeth* is a present tense verb). For additional information on this term see the commentary on Gal. 5:22, another place where it occurs.

**3:13-18:** *Their throat is an open sepulchre; With their tongues they have used deceit: The poison of asps is under their lips: 14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways; 17 And the way of peace have they not known: 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

The character of the Jews (as a whole) has been described as *unrighteous, without understanding, none sought after God, all had turned aside, none did good, and all were unprofitable*. In the remaining five verses, Paul deals with the other two areas mentioned in verses 10-12 (the Hebrew’s speech and conduct).

In describing the Jewish speech (verse 13), a unique picture is painted. The Jews had throats like “*an open sepulcher*” (grave). Paul was so strong in his reproof that he didn’t use a simile. Saying that someone has a mouth *like* an open grave is a serious charge. Paul omitted the comparison word and affirmed the Jews *were* an open grave. “Can you imagine a worse odor than that of a decaying carcass? That reeking smell depicts the corruption of so much of human speech. As the contents of the grave cause the stench, so the contents of the human heart and mind cause the unclean, unkind utterances” (CBL, Romans, p. 57). The word translated “*throat*” (*larunx*) is found only here in the New Testament. It “depicts the uncleanness and filth which characterizes the speech of the wicked and leads to death” (CBL, GED, 4:35).

These people spoke with “*tongues*” (*glossa*), the same word that elsewhere describes miraculous tongues. This word typically refers to human language and here the language was bad. Paul referred to speech filled with “*deceit*” (13b). *Deceit* (*doloo*) is an imperfect tense verb (continuous action) that is found only here in the New Testament. It describes speech that is continually deceitful. If this were not bad enough, Paul added “*the poison of asps was under their lips.*” Stated in plainer terms, their speech was like the “*venom of a snake*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:191). Just as poison will damage a person or product, so speech is able to damage people. The Jews used their ability to talk for damage and to destroy others. Even now, speech may be poisonous and the

Bible offers several warnings against evil speech (Col. 4:6 and Eph. 4:29). Paul's comparison of their evil speech to an *asp* (*aspis*) is unusual as this term occurs only here in the New Testament. In Classical Greek it described the Egyptian Cobra. For other passages which make use of the word "lips" (*cheilos*), see Mt. 15:8; Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 3:10.

In addition to *deceit*, the Jewish people were also guilty of "cursing and bitterness" (verse 14). When these two terms are combined, they show "that both Jews and Gentiles are 'under the power of sin'" (Brown, 1:202). Adding the word "full" (a present tense verb) to these two terms left no doubt about the people's guilt. The Jews behaved like many churchgoers in our day and time. People go through their daily workweek cursing whatever they see and then attend worship on Sunday. This is how the Jews acted, and Paul concluded such actions result in condemnation (verse 23). Even James condemned this type of speech and life (Jas. 3:10). James also said the tongue *defiles* the whole body (Jas. 3:6). Paul affirmed that improper speech defiled the Jews.

In studying verses 13-18 we find several references to body parts. Verse 13 mentions the throat, the tongue, and lips. Verse 14 mentions the mouth. Feet are referred to verse 15. Eyes are mentioned in the 18<sup>th</sup> verse. Numerous body parts are listed to show that every part of the human body can be used to sin. A person does not need a complete, perfect, or even a physically healthy body to break God's laws.

One of the sins committed by Jews and Gentiles was "murder" (verse 15). Paul quoted from a passage that said God's people were not just willing, they were "swift" (*oxus*) to shed blood (fast and hasty would be other definitions for this term). The New Testament does not explain this verse, but the deaths of Jesus and Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) may be related to the thought. Perhaps to further show the awfulness of the Jews' actions, Paul used the word "shed" (*ekcheo*), a term meaning "to lament the murderous conduct of humanity" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:424).

Thinking about those who were swift to shed blood should remind Americans of what is happening in the United States. This nation has been swift to shed blood—innocent blood—by legalizing abortion. Destruction and misery await any nation that unjustly sheds blood (verse 16). "Destruction" (*suntrimma*) occurs only here in the New Testament. In the Septuagint (Lev. 21:19), this term was used for a fractured bone. Here it denotes destruction and ruin. A second term is "misery" (*talaiporia*). It means "devastation, pillaging, ravaging, calamity" (Spicq, 3:366). Like its counterpart *destruction*, it is a "result of the actions of sinful people" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:332). Sin abounded because there was "no fear of God" (present tense, verse 18).

As America appears to continue on a downward moral trend, the description given by Paul becomes especially meaningful. Their lack of peace may be compared to Lk. 19:41-44. Sometimes, people fail to realize what they are losing or have lost until it is too late. Americans may one day find that they too have lost peace and reclaiming peace is impossible.

Paul wanted to prove from the Old Testament that the Jews were guilty of sin. Did he succeed?

**3:19-20:** *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God: 20 because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for through the law (cometh) the knowledge of sin.*

Based upon the previous observations two points need to be stressed. First, the Jews received a law. This is what the Old Testament says and history confirms this. Second, the Jews were sinners. These facts should have made the Jews realize who they were and what their relationship to God was like. They were God's people, but this fact did not insulate them from punishment or apostasy. This information was made clear in the law, but the Hebrews failed to either understand or believe it.

If any Hebrews wished to deny they were accountable to God, they had to face the arguments made by Paul in the preceding verses. Paul showed that the law applied to the Jews and that both they and the Gentiles were guilty of sin. At the end of verse 19 the thought is very plain: "and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God." In place of *judgment* (*hupodikos*), a term occurring only here in the New Testament, the KJV says "guilty." This term means "the world is

under the judgment of God because of the Law before which no one can stand blameless” (CBL, GED, 6:375). God is over all mankind, and all who violate His laws are accountable.

All this information was designed to “*stop*” (*phrasso*) “*every mouth*.” Hebrews 11:33 uses this same term to say the mouths of lions were stopped (completely closed). Jews had their mouths shut in that they were defenseless when it came to their sinfulness. They were burdened with sins against God; not one of them could deny their guilt. Cranfield (p. 67) said, “The reference to the stopped mouth evokes the image of the defendant in court, who, when given the opportunity to speak in his own defense, remains silent, overwhelmed by the weight of the evidence against him.” This information sets the stage for the 23<sup>rd</sup> verse where Paul affirmed that “*all*” are guilty of sin. Verses 20 and 21 reveal the law’s purpose. The Old Testament system was **not** given to justify mankind. God delivered it so man would recognize sin. The law identified sin.

Though the KJV and the ASV have the definite article in verse 20 (“*the law*”), this is an insertion by translators. Also, the word *works* may be a little easier to understand than the word *deeds* (the KJV translation).

The 20<sup>th</sup> verse shows that no one can be justified by doing good deeds. Works will not get us to heaven. This has been true for every system God has given to man, and Moses’ Law is an especially good illustration of this fact. The law given to the Jewish people was an instrument of condemnation, 20a. The only way that justification was attainable by this system was through perfect obedience. Since no one other than Christ flawlessly kept this law, Moses’ system of rules and regulations condemned person after person. A further expression of this thought is described as “*in His sight*.” This expression is based upon a preposition (*enopion*) that “depicts salvation or judgment in a legal, forensic manner (i.e., in terms of a court or judicial scene)” (CBL, GED, 2:456).

At the end of verse 20 the “*knowledge of sin*” brought by the law is explained by the CBL (Romans, p. 59): “The Law may be compared to a scale which tells us how much we weigh; it will not add to or subtract from our weight. The Law discovers the fact of sin, exposing its presence and revealing its nature in order that God might prescribe the remedy.”

The point in verse 20 is easily related to the book of Romans. The Jews had received a system that condemned everyone under it, so they were guilty of sin. The penalty of sin is death. This penalty cannot be avoided by doing good works. Thus, the Jews were forced to ask, “How can we be saved?” Paul is preparing to answer this question, and his response may be summed up by two words—the gospel.

In the next section of this book (3:21-8:39), Paul will show how justification has been provided for mankind. Since information about universal condemnation has been provided, the stage has been set to describe the terms for justification and salvation. Stated another way, the problem has been outlined and now Paul provides the solution. In this section, Paul reveals that justification comes through faith in a crucified Messiah. He reinforces the necessity of believing in Christ (Jn. 8:24; Rom. 10:9).

**3:21:** *But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;*

The Jews wanted to know about justification. They wanted to know how they could be right with God if Moses’ Law was not the way (verse 20). Here Paul begins to tell them. He said apart from the law (Moses’ law) there is a righteousness of God. This righteousness of God has been “*manifested*” (*phaneroo*), a term meaning *revealed* or *disclosed*. Compare this to 2 Tim. 1:10. The righteousness that Paul describes is *Jesus*. Because Jesus is the only way to God (Jn. 14:6), Paul was able to describe Him with the perfect tense—a tense meaning He became and continues to be the way to our being righteous. A full explanation of the point is found in verse 22.

Basically Paul affirmed that Jesus is separate from the Old Testament. In other words, Jesus cannot be tied in with the Old Testament system in any sense, except that the Old Testament prophesied He would come. The “*law and the prophets*” (definite articles occur before both words in the Greek text) were aware of His coming, and this information was given to the Jews. Aside from



this, the Lord was not connected to Moses' law because He brought a "new covenant" (Lk. 22:20). Some parallel references to what Paul wrote are Jer. 31:34; Zech. 13:1; and 1 Pet. 1:10-12.

**3:22:** *even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction;*

The "*righteousness of God*" is "*Jesus Christ*" (He became and continues to be the "*manifested righteousness*" who received "*witness*" from the "*law and the prophets*," verse 21). Faith through Christ is the way people become right with God. Although the KJV says "*by the faith of Jesus Christ*," Robertson (4:22) says the right idea is "*in Jesus Christ*" because this is an objective genitive. He offers Gal. 2:16 as a supporting reference. This faith, as demonstrated in the commentary on Rom. 1:5, must be obedient. Only those who have an obedient faith will receive salvation. Here, Paul taught the same truth by using the present tense (*believe* is in the present tense). Belief leads to obedience, and salvation comes to those who continually obey.

At the end of this verse Paul noted that there is no distinction regarding the people who want to follow Jesus. All are equally important in the eyes of God. Robertson (4:347) said, "The Jew was first in privilege as in penalty (2:9f.), but justification or getting right with God is offered to both on the same terms."

**3:23:** *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;*

The expression "*no distinction*" in verse 22 laid the foundation for the point in this verse—all have sinned and come short of God's glory (compare 2 Chron. 6:36). Paul realized that all need to come to Christ because of sin, and **all can come** because justification is available for all. All are stained by sin and all can be cleansed from sin.

Though many frequently say, "I am just as good as the other people at church," a better statement would be, "I am just as bad as all the other people at church" because all have sinned. The proof of this allegation "is clear and convincing. There is no appeal and no reversal of the verdict" (CBL, Romans, p. 61).

In looking at this verse, a distinction must be noticed. When Paul said that all have *sinned*, he used a past tense verb. This is even rendered in the past tense (*sinned*). In the next expression, Paul spoke of those who "*fall short*" (*hustereo*). This expression is from a present tense verb that has the sense of failure. The difference in tenses tells us that accountable people do not live perfect lives. Before conversion and even after conversion, the best people still transgress God's law. No Christian has or will fully overcome sin since Paul said Christians continually *fall short*.

There are several different words for "*sin*" in the New Testament, and a brief study of key words for them will be given here. The first word is the term used in this verse (*hamartano*), a verb usually translated "*sin/sinned*" in the New Testament. In other places this word is used as a noun (*hamartia* and *hamarema*), and this usage is also typically rendered *sin* in the ASV and KJV. Whether employed as a noun or a verb, Greeks employed this term to describe warriors who cast spears but missed the targets. It was used of people who forgot to turn on a road or "missed their turn." Poets who chose a subject that could not be treated poetically were described with this word as were artists who tried to go beyond their artistic limits. In the most basic terms, this word meant *to miss the mark*, and it was the ideal word for New Testament writers to use when speaking about breaking God's laws.

Because this word was so broad, it has been called the "umbrella" word for sin in the New Testament. Wuest (Studies in the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, pp. 95-96) says it means "failing to attain an end, gives it the idea of missing the divinely appointed goal, a deviation from what is pleasing to God, doing what is opposed to God's will, perversion of what is upright, a misdeed. Thus the word *hamartia* means a missing of the conformable to and fixed by God. It is interesting to note that in Romans the word *dikaioisune* which means 'conformity to the standard' appears as the opposite of *hamartia*, a missing of the standard set by God (6:16-18)." Because each person misses at least one of God's goals (it does not need to be "something big"), all are guilty of *sin*

(Rom. 3:23). The price for this sin is “death” (Rom. 6:23, a verse which uses the word *hamartia*). Additional passages related to this point include Rom. 5:21 (sin *reigns/rules* over mankind). Sin is so overwhelming people *serve* it (Rom. 6:17, 20); and it is *deceitful* (Heb. 3:13). Someone once said if we want to see what a New Testament word is trying to describe, see what kind of company it keeps. *Sin* rubs shoulders with words like *death*, *master*, and our *serv*ing it. This term views sin from the standpoint of “controlling power” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:33), whereas other terms such as *paraptoma* (see the commentary below for this word) view wrongdoing from the viewpoint of “a specific sinful act” (ibid) in the writings of Paul.

A second word for wrongdoing (*parakoe*) is used only three times in the New Testament (Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 10:6; Heb. 2:2), and it denotes a “false step” or a “misstep.” It might be compared to someone *stumbling* over an object as they begin to walk or are already on their way. In life, stumbling may be accidental. This term, however, “expresses above all a refusal to listen, turning a deaf ear” (Spicq, 3:29). Wuest (Studies in the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, p. 96) says it “means ‘a failing to hear, a hearing amiss,’ the idea of active disobedience which follows on this inattentive or careless hearing, being superinduced upon the word.” “The lack of an earnest and honest attempt to know God’s will in any instance, is sin. This carelessness or inattentiveness with respect to the will of God, has its roots in the desire to have one’s own way, and to cover up that desire and the consequent wrongdoing by the excuse that one did not know His will in the particular instance” (ibid).

Definitions such as these can be easily related to modern life. As this word was being studied, I phoned the manager of a large property management company. She said her company managed 550 different pieces of rental properties, and five percent of the tenants were “problem people.” Rules were given to the tenants (just as God has given in His word), but five percent of the renters *refused to hear* the rules. They were told “no pets,” but they didn’t follow this rule. Rent was scheduled to be collected on a certain day of each month, but some of the tenants *do not hear* that part of the lease. Such behavior is exactly consistent with what this term describes.

Even in the time of Noah there were people who had this mindset. In one of the places where this term is found (2 Cor. 10:6), God promises to punish “*all*” *disobedience* (*parakoe*). In this reference the word applies to people who are religious. Whether saved or unsaved, a failure to listen to and follow all of God’s word will result in punishment. It is not, therefore, enough to be somewhat obedient, or mostly obedient, to God’s will. Heaven is not interested in people who will obey 70% of God’s instructions, 90% of what the Bible says, or even 99% of God’s directives. God wants and requires 100% compliance with His word. For an additional comment on this term, especially how it compliments another term for sin, see the commentary below on *parabasis*.

Those who read the New Testament will encounter another common word for sin—“*ungodliness*.” This term occurs as a noun (*asebeia*), as a verb (*asebeo*) in only two places (2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 15), and (a few times) as an adjective (*asebes*). It can be compared to many English words that are changed into something negative when “*un*” is added to their prefix. For instance, *certified* can be quickly changed to *uncertified*, *caring* into *uncaring*, and *crushed* into *uncrushed* by adding the prefix *un*. Greeks did a similar thing but their addition to words was the letter “*a*.” In this instance they took a word (*sebeia*) that meant religious awe, fear, honor, worship, etc., added a negative prefix, and changed the word into an opposite term denoting impiety, godlessness, wickedness (*asebeia*). Outside the New Testament this term was used of people who failed to show proper respect to Roman emperors. When applied to the spiritual realm, those who are guilty of *asebeia* do the *opposite* of what God wants. A study of this term shows that this type of lifestyle will result in punishment (Rom. 1:18). Such behavior is in the same category as worldly lusts (Tit. 2:12). All who live in this manner will be punished (Jude 15). Those who choose this way of life should learn from past examples of ungodliness (2 Pet. 2:6). We can be thankful that God can save us from all *ungodliness* (Rom. 4:5). Our salvation is possible because Jesus *died for the ungodly* (Rom. 5:6). Jesus died for all, but if the *ungodly* do not respond, they will be punished (see how this word is also used in 2 Pet. 2:5 and 2 Pet. 3:7).

Just like the term in the preceding paragraph, the Greeks negated another word, *anomia*, that was also used by New Testament writers. Greeks took their word for *law* (*nomos*), added the negative

prefix (“*a*”), and the result was a word that meant “lawless.” New Testament writers typically used this word as a noun (*anomia*) and an adjective (*anomos*). In the New Testament it has great significance. According to the CBL (GED, 1:287), this term “is probably the strongest word for sin that exists.” One of the places where this word is found is Mt. 7:23. Many people who were very religious in life will appear before the Lord on the Day of Judgment and hear they were *lawless* (people who acted as if there were no laws). These people may have been good citizens and lived exemplary lives, but their spiritual existence, though filled with works done in the name of the Lord, will be declared *lawless*. The reason? These people acted in a way other than what God described in His word (Mt. 7:21b). If we make up our own religious rules—whether a few of them or many—we are not following the laws of God and are thus a law unto ourselves (*lawless*). Translators of the NKJV and NASB actually use the word *lawlessness* in Mt. 7:23. By using this term in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus forever demonstrated that man cannot decide how he will worship God. We cannot “find a church that we like,” locate “a worship service that makes us feel good,” or something similar. We must do things exactly as God has said or we will, at the end of time, be declared *lawless*.

Other places *anomia* can be found include Mt. 13:41; 23:28; Rom. 4:7; Heb. 1:9. In its adjective form (*anomos*) this term is applied to the “*transgressors*” who died beside Jesus (Mk. 15:28; Lk. 22:37). Peter applied it to those who put Jesus to death (Acts 2:23). In the KJV this term is usually rendered *iniquity/iniquities*. Wuest (Studies in the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, 3:97) notes how this term can be found in Classical Writings. There it is “joined with *anarchia*, which is defined as ‘the state of a people without government, without lawful government, lawlessness, anarchy.’” When people are without a government, there is lawlessness. When religious people fail to abide by the Scriptures and only the Scriptures, they too will be *lawless*, and the punishment for this choice is eternal death. A further thought on this point can be found in 2 Cor. 6:14 (here the word is used as a noun). When writing to the Corinthians Paul said “*righteousness*” can have no fellowship with “*unrighteousness*” (same word). Today it is not uncommon for congregations of God’s people to join themselves with other religious groups—groups that do not strictly follow the New Testament. This is done to supposedly promote “unity and love,” but God says His church has no right fellowshiping these kinds of groups. There can be no unity between the lawful and the unlawful. God is love, but not even He allows Himself to be joined with the lawless. We must not become united with those who are not in complete harmony with the Scriptures.

Yet another term used by New Testament writers, *parabasis*, meant “to break the law.” This definition is especially visible in Rom. 4:15 (if there is no law, there can be no *transgression*). We cannot break what does not exist. Laws do exist—in both the spiritual and secular realms—and these can be broken (*parabasis*). Jesus encountered Pharisees and Scribes who accused him of *breaking* (same word but used as a verb—*parabaino*) religious traditions (Mt. 15:2). Jesus responded to their criticism by asking why they *broke* (same word) God’s commands (Mt. 15:3).

Today there are many who are worried about the breaking of religious traditions and customs but far less concerned about breaking God’s laws. When Paul used this term in Rom. 2:23, he showed that *breaking* God’s law actually brings dishonor to God. Many believe that breaking God’s laws, if done in ignorance, can be excused (overlooked). God said this is untrue (see 1 Tim. 2:14 where this term is rendered *transgression*). Eve was *beguiled* (tricked), but it was not an excuse. She broke one of God’s laws and paid the price for her disobedience. This is also the term found in 2 Jn. 9. This sin can be thought of as a “sin of commission” (Spicq, 3:29) and another—*parakoe*, discussed above, is a “sin of omission” (ibid).

A word very similar to *parabasis* is *paraptoma*; this word is used in two different ways in the New Testament. Thayer (p. 485) says this describes “a lapse or deviation from truth and uprightness.” It is thus very close to the meaning of *parabasis*, and “may therefore be regarded as synonymous with *parabasis*, which designates sin as a transgression of a known rule of life, and as involving guilt... Still the word is not quite as strong as *parabasis*” (Wuest, Studies in the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, p. 98).

While this term has a definite sense of sin, it can also have a lesser sense of wrong, something like a slip, blunder, stepping incorrectly. Trench (p. 246) said Biblical writers **sometimes** (emphasis mine,

BP) used this term “to designate sins not of the deepest dye and the worst enormity.” This sense seems to come through in places like the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:14—forgive men their *trespasses*). Jesus also used this same term in Mk. 11:26. In these two passages did Jesus have in mind something as serious as federal crimes or the “smaller” things of life (gossip, lies, hateful remarks, a lack of courtesy, etc.)? All sin is sin, but not all sin is equal. To illustrate this we can confidently affirm that all money is money, but not all money is equal. For an Old Testament illustration of how not all sin is “equal,” see Deut. 21:22 (all sin deserved punishment, but not all punishments were equal). Other verses which use this term but the intensity of the wrong seems somewhat “less” include Jas. 5:16 and Gal. 6:1. Perhaps this word and this secondary sense was used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount to mean we must pay attention to the “smaller sins”—the kinds of sins which are very common and are thus ones that trouble us the most often.

An infrequent term for sin (found only twice in the New Testament) is *hettema*, a noun that implies a *defect*. Of the two places this term is found (Rom. 11:12—*loss/dimishing* and 1 Cor. 6:7—*defect*), the most important passage is 1 Cor. 6:7. Here translators tried to capture the thought with various renderings: *utterly a fault* (KJV); *utter failure* (NKJV); *completely defeated* (NIV); *defeat* (NASB, RSV); *real defeat* (Living Bible and New Living Translation).

In life, many believe that sin, in one form another, will be beneficial or helpful (compare Mk. 12:1-9). At some point all eventually learn and admit that sin leads to *defeat* (*hettema*). Sin results in such complete defeat the Bible tells us to abstain from it (1 Thess. 5:22), flee from it (1 Cor. 6:18), give no occasion for stumbling (1 Cor. 10:32), put the old life away (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:5), crucify the flesh (Gal. 5:24), let not sin be named among us (Eph. 5:3), purge out the old leaven (1 Cor. 5:7), do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16), depart from unrighteousness (2 Tim. 2:19), deny ungodliness (Tit. 2:12), lay sin aside (Heb. 12:1) and put away wickedness (Jas. 1:21).

A final term to be considered describes sin from the perspective of *ignorance*. This term is used as a verb (*agnoeo*) and a noun (*agnoema*, *agnoia*, and *agnosia*). As a verb it is applied to Jesus’ disciples (Mk. 9:32—this is the first time this term occurs in the New Testament). Paul applied it to people involved in incorrect worship (Acts 17:23) as well as the Jew’s *ignorance* of the gospel (Rom. 10:3) and the Corinthian’s *ignorance* of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1). It is even applied to our understanding Satan (2 Cor. 2:11) and Jesus’ second coming (1 Thess. 4:13). Paul applied it to his life before conversion (1 Tim. 1:13), and this reference shows that ignorance of God’s will is not an excuse. As a noun the term occurs only a few times in the New Testament. The word *agnoema* (one of the noun forms of this word) is found only in Heb. 9:7 where the writer applied it to the “errors” of those who lived under the Old Testament. A second noun form of this word is found only in Acts 3:17; 17:30; Eph. 4:18; and 1 Pet. 1:14. The third (*agnosia*) occurs only in 1 Cor. 15:34 and 1 Pet. 2:15.

**3:24:** *being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:*

Verse 24 should be tied in with verse 23. All have sinned (past tense, verse 23), and all continue to sin (present tense, verse 23). In spite of our past and present sins, God allows His people to be “justified” (*dikaioo*).

The word justified, as noted earlier, was a legal word. It meant to declare someone righteous. This term describes what God does for people. Instead of declaring His people guilty, God declares His people to be free from all wrongdoing. In this book it first occurs in Rom. 2:13. This chapter uses it several times (verses 4, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30). In the remainder of the book it is found in 4:2, 5; 5:1, 9; 6:7; 8:30, 33. In this verse it is a present tense verb. Even though God’s people continue to sin (verse 23), God continues to justify (declare them righteous). A parallel text is 1 Jn. 1:7, 9.

Another point about God’s justification is that it is “free” (*dorean*). It is given without charge, and it is a gift “apart from merit” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:364). These facts have caused many to conclude that salvation is a gift that has no conditions. Many illustrations have been given to prove this conclusion, though illustrations only illustrate. They do not prove that something is right or wrong. In this instance, the illustrations that affirm salvation is a gift without conditions are wrong.

One of the erroneous illustrations goes like this. A young girl comes into the living room on Christmas morning. She has some gifts under the Christmas tree. Must she wash the car and the kitchen dishes to earn her gifts? The obvious answer is no. This illustration is used to “prove” that salvation comes without conditions. As the Christmas gifts are free (no strings or conditions are attached), so is salvation.

While it is true that God’s gifts of justification and salvation are free (6:23), *who receives these gifts?* Paul has already described the recipients in Rom. 1:5. To access God’s gift, *one must be a child of God*. Because the daughter in the illustration was in the family, she was entitled to the gifts. When we become a child of God then we, too, are entitled to the free gift of salvation as well as all other spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3).

In order to become a Christian certain conditions must be met. Only after meeting these conditions are we “in Christ” (2 Tim. 2:10) and entitled to all the gifts. We do not earn the gifts, but we receive them freely because we are in Christ. The idea that salvation is a free gift and there are no conditions to receiving it is also inconsistent with what Jesus taught in Jn. 6:27-29.

Another key point is found in the word “*redemption*” (*apolutrosis*). This term, which is in the present tense, means “God’s gracious turning to humanity in its need for redemption, and this grace is experienced as remission of sins.” Sins are forgiven, but they are only forgiven to those who are *in Christ*. Since baptism puts one “into Christ” (Gal. 3:27), forgiveness of sins and baptism are joined together in the New Testament (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Two points have been made from the 24<sup>th</sup> verse. We have seen that people are justified and this justification is free. The third point is related to God’s grace. Our free justification is based upon and rooted in God’s grace. The word grace, in the Greek text, is used 24 times in this book. It was a common word and the basic definition for it was *unmerited favor*. As sinners we do not deserve justification. We do not deserve to be acquitted from sin. There is no human basis for it. We are only forgiven because God has been kind enough to offer forgiveness.

The forgiveness God offers cannot be given on an arbitrary basis. There needs to be a sound and logical basis for it. Thus, Paul explains this basis in verse 24. Grace is based upon the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The word redemption meant ransom payment. The sacrifice Jesus made on the cross is the reason for our justification. Jesus’ death was the payment for every sin committed by men. If we access the forgiveness through His blood, any and every sin can be forgiven.

The death of Christ is one of the predominant thoughts in the New Testament. Christians are reminded of Jesus’ death when they observe the Lord’s Supper (communion). Because Christ’s death is so important, the early Christians had the Lord’s Supper every Sunday. When the first day of the week came (Sunday, Acts 20:7), the disciples partook of the communion. The Corinthians also came together on Sunday (1 Cor. 16:1-2), and at these assemblies they were supposed to eat the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:20). The Corinthians had perverted this part of the worship, but they knew that eating the Lord’s Supper every Sunday was right. The church in Jerusalem participated in worship steadfastly. One of the things that they did was break bread (see the commentary on Acts 2:42) on a regular basis. Partaking of the Lord’s Supper each Sunday was and is one of the characteristics of Christ’s church.

When we partake of the communion, we should remember that we have been justified (declared innocent). This was done freely (without charge to us). This was also by God’s grace (we do not deserve redemption), and the basis for our salvation is Christ’s death.

Though many should have a deep appreciation for what Jesus did, some feel little gratitude. It is often hard to convince others that salvation is not deserved and God is not obligated to save us. Perhaps the following illustration will further emphasize the thought.

In the 1800’s, a young Englishman traveled to California in search of gold. He struck it rich after several months of prospecting. On his way home, he stopped in New Orleans. While there, he came upon a crowd of people that was looking in the same direction. It didn’t take long to see why the crowd had gathered. The people had gathered for a slave auction. He heard, “Sold!” just as he joined the crowd. A middle-aged black man was taken away.

A beautiful young black girl was then pushed onto the platform and made to walk around so

everyone could see her. The miner heard vile jokes and comments that spoke of evil intentions from those around him. Men were laughing as their eyes remained fixed on this new item for sale.

The bidding began.

Within a minute, the bids surpassed what most slave owners would pay for a black girl. As the bidding continued higher and higher, it was apparent that two men wanted her. In between their bids, they laughed about what they were going to do with her, and how the other one would miss out. The miner stood silent as anger welled up inside of him. One man finally bid a price that was beyond the reach of the other. The girl looked down. The auctioneer called out, "Going once! Going twice!"

Just before the final call, the miner yelled out a price that was exactly twice the previous bid. This amount exceeded the worth of any man. The crowd laughed, thinking that the miner was only joking. The auctioneer motioned for the miner to come and show his money. The miner opened his bag of gold. The auctioneer shook his head in disbelief as he waved the girl over to him.

The girl walked down the steps of the platform until she was eye-to-eye with the miner. She spat straight in his face and said through clenched teeth, "I hate you!" The miner, without a word, wiped his face, paid the auctioneer, took the girl by the hand, and walked away from the still laughing crowd.

He seemed to be looking for something in particular as they walked up one street and down another. He finally stopped in front of a store, though the slave girl did not know what type of store it was. She waited outside as the dirty-faced miner went inside and started talking to an elderly man. She couldn't make out what they were talking about. At one point, the voices got louder and she overheard the store clerk say, "But it's the law! It's the law!" Peering in she saw the miner pull out his bag of gold and pour what was left on the table.

With what seemed like a look of disgust, the clerk picked up the gold and went into a back room. He came out with a piece of paper that both he and the miner signed.

The young girl looked away as the miner came out the door. Stretching out his hand he said to the girl, "Here are your manumission papers. You are free." The girl did not look up.

He tried again. "Here. These are papers that say you are free. Take them."

"I hate you!" the girl said, refusing to look up. "Why do you make fun of me?!"

"No, listen," he pleaded. "These are your freedom papers. You are a free person."

The girl looked at the papers, then looked at him, and looked at the papers once again. "You just bought me...and now, you're setting me free?"

"That's why I bought you. I bought you to set you free."

The beautiful young girl fell to her knees in front of the miner, tears streaming down her face. "You bought me to set me free! You bought me to set me free!" she said over and over. The miner said nothing.

Clutching his muddy boots, the girl looked up at the miner and said, "All I want to do is to serve you—because you bought me to set me free!"

Paul said that a previous time we too were slaves to sin and death. Jesus came to set us free. Our freedom was purchased by Jesus' blood. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

**3:25a:** *whom God set forth (to be) a propitiation, through faith, in his blood,*

The end of verse 24 ties in with the first part of verse 25. Christ Jesus (24b) was "*set forth*" (*protithemi*) as a "*propitiation*" (*hilasterion*). Saying Jesus was *set forth* conveys the sense of a public display. Jesus was put forth as a sacrifice to demonstrate God's justice. *Propitiation* is a noun found only here and Heb. 9:5 where it is translated *mercy seat*. On the Day of Atonement, blood from a bull was sprinkled on this seat to cover (atone) for Israel's sins (Lev. 16:14). This offering satisfied God's demand for justice for another year. Paul had other words to choose from to describe Jesus' death, but under inspiration of the Holy Spirit used this term. It would thus seem God wanted us to know that (1) God has once and for all settled the sin question, and (2) the limitations imposed by the system

given through Moses have been removed. Jesus' death was the ultimate sacrifice for sin, and His sacrifice is final. It completely satisfied the debt created by sin and all who obey Him will be saved from destruction (Rom. 5:9). The cross is also contrasted with the mercy seat in that the mercy seat was hidden from public view, but Jesus was *set forth* like a public display.

The benefits that come from Christ's blood are all accessed by "*faith in His blood*" (this takes readers back to Rom. 1:17. Christianity is a system of faith from beginning to end). Our *faith* includes believing in the power of Christ's blood, believing in the benefits of it, and believing His blood will cover our sins at the judgment. Belief in the Lord's blood causes sincere souls to share in a form of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (baptism by immersion, Rom. 6:1-4).

**3:25b-26:** *to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; 26 for the showing, (I say), of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.*

One of the reasons Jesus died is found at the end of verse 25. His death was designed "*to show*" (*endeixis*—used twice in verse 25 and literally means *declare*) God's righteousness (justice). Before Jesus came, God did not punish all who sinned (see Acts 17:30) because He had been *forbearing*. Earlier in this book (2:4), we learned that God was *forbearing* (*anochē*, same word as in Rom. 2:4) so people had the opportunity to repent. For additional information about God's forbearance, see the information below. Since Christ has come, all men now have a very clear choice. They may sin and give their eternal soul as payment for their sins, or they can allow Christ to be their *justifier*. Jesus came to the earth to release people from sin (Lk. 19:10).

The life of Jesus and the benefits of His death demonstrate God's righteousness. If God had done nothing about sin and let mankind be lost, His grace, love, and mercy would not have been adequately demonstrated. If God extended salvation to mankind without a proper basis, He would have been lacking in justice. Somehow, God's love had to be balanced with His perfect sense of justice. The Bible says God's love and justice were blended together in the life and death of Jesus. Jesus' death satisfied the payment for all sin and God was able to justly extend forgiveness to all sinners. Justification is received in an on-going manner because *justifier* in 26b is in the present tense.

Some have compared the sacrifice of Christ to a story. A king decreed that anyone in his kingdom would receive double punishment if he hurt a fellow citizen. One day the king's son poked out the eye of a fellow citizen. For the king to remain just and righteous, he had to enforce the law. However, he also saw the need to extend compassion and love to his son. The king ruled that his son would have one eye removed and the king would have one of his own taken out too. In this way, the king was just, he showed mercy, and the rule of law was upheld. When God gave His Son, He was just, He showed mercy, and the dignity of the law was upheld (adopted from Lanier, p. 19).

The meaning of "*passing over sins*" in verse 25 (*paresis*) is controversial. According to Gingrich and Danker (p. 626) the meaning is, "Letting go unpunished." This lexicon also says that in the classics the idea of "*remitting*" debts and obligations was expressed by this term. McGuiggan said that "Whatever 'paresis' (passing over, BP) means here, 1) God is said to have done it; 2) God didn't neglect or disregard sin; 3) in the next Chapter Paul speaks of full forgiveness of sins done aforetime" (page 137). Earle (p. 155) said "This does not mean that there was no punishment for sin during the OT period. It simply means that God did not deal fully and adequately with sin until Calvary." One source that tries to tie all these definitions together (the CBL, GED, 5:89) says this term means God *withheld His judgment*. Judgment was suspended on sins done "*aforetime*" (*proginomai*), a word occurring only here in the New Testament. This term means *happened earlier* (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:153). Another key word is "*forbearance*" (*anochē*) in verse 26. In the New Testament this term occurs only twice (here and Rom. 2:4). Writers of Classical Greek employed this word to describe a "pause" or a "delay." When used in the plural it described a "truce" or "armistice." Josephus connected this word with military actions. A good definition for this word is "*tolerance*," but it is a tolerance based upon time. God's forbearance is a "truce, a temporary arrangement until a peace agreement can take place" (CBL, GED, 1:291). Stated another way, "God retains His wrath and

His judgment on sin. This does not at all mean that the judgment is canceled; it is only suspended. The execution of judgment is postponed to allow time for the possibility of a settlement” (ibid). In Rom. 2:4 the emphasis is on individuals receiving enough time to obey the Lord and receive remission of sins. Romans 3:25 uses the term to describe the plan of salvation. God allowed enough time to complete a plan that both justifies sinners and allows Him to be righteous.

**3:27-28:** *Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law? of works? Nay: but by a law of faith. 28 We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.*

Paul has said that Jesus made a sacrifice for sin (verse 25). Now he anticipates his readers would have some questions. Thus, we now come to five questions that Paul asked and answered to help people believe and understand what he was teaching. The first questions are in verse 27.

Paul’s readers were asked about “*glorying*” (boasting). If God is the one who provides justification for people, how could the Jews boast? The answer is that they could not boast. Paul’s response was abrupt but the point was clear. If justification is by grace and faith (3:24-26), people cannot boast about their accomplishments. Paul’s conclusion may be applied to all people. “Instead of being the proud possessor of a spotless character, we have to rely on another to cleanse us from our own defilement” (adopted from Whiteside, p. 82). Paul’s point becomes even more vivid upon realizing the word “*excluded*” (*ekkleio*) only appears twice in the New Testament. Paul also used it to say Judaizers wanted to exclude Galatian Christians (Gal. 4:17). Synonyms for this word would be “eliminate,” “exclude,” and “shut out.”

This fact is useful in dealing with people who believe that a decent and moral life will get them to heaven. If a *good life* will get someone to heaven, some could boast they were in heaven because of their good works and or morality. Paul affirmed that justification is in no way related to boasting. Thus, this proves, beyond any doubt, that morality and or good works cannot save. This point is made especially clear with the verb translated *is excluded*. This is an aorist verb, and as Cranfield (p. 78) said, “the exclusion referred to has been accomplished once for all.”

The second question may be best understood by supplying some words. The thought is, *by what kind of law is justification?* These words are supplied because of the context (3:20, 24; 3:13). Paul is like a teacher who has already covered material in a class. He has asked if a law of works justifies people, though this was already covered in 3:20. To insure that people knew the proper response, Paul again gave the answer. Also, when Paul said *a law of faith* he was not saying we have simply changed laws. That is, men could not flawlessly keep the Law of Moses so we are now bound to flawlessly keep the law of Christ (the New Testament). THIS IS NOT PAUL’S POINT! Justification has never been and never will be based upon perfect obedience to a law.

Even though many of the New Testament commandments may be easier to keep, we do not attain justification by keeping commandments. If we want to be justified by law (and I mean **any law**), we must never make a single mistake (Jas. 2:10).

Paul presented a contrast between faith and works. “The ‘law of faith’ is that law which says that man is made righteous by trusting in the blood of Jesus, and not by perfectly keeping a set of commandments. This does not depreciate the importance of obedience on the part of a Christian. It simply says that justification is an act of grace on the part of God to the believer, and that it can never be earned by commandment keeping” (Owen, p. 25). To be justified by a law of works means we have earned salvation. Many passages show we cannot and do not *earn* eternal life.

Whiteside (p. 83) makes some excellent observations regarding verse 28. “Here we may draw hurtful conclusions, if we do not keep in mind Paul’s line of argument. Paul is not contrasting faith and the obedience of faith, but he is contrasting justification by works of law and justification by faith. When Paul talks about faith, he means an obedient faith. Many have stumbled through Romans without ever recognizing the fact that Paul makes that plain in the very beginning of his letter.”

The 28<sup>th</sup> verse is where Martin Luther added the word *sola* (*alone*) to the word *faith*. This was his addition to the text; Paul did not use the word *alone*. Paul did not believe this and would have not tolerated it because of the word “*reckon*” (*logizomai*), a present tense verb meaning “he held that a



man is justified” in the way he and the Holy Spirit described (Gingrich and Danker, p. 476).

**3:29-30:** *Or is God (the God) of Jews only? is he not (the God) of Gentiles also? Yea, of Gentiles also: 30 if so be that God is one, and he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.*

Here, Paul continued to tell the Jews about their distinctiveness. He covered the same things previously seen, though the information is now presented in a different way. Here the questions are: (1) “Was God only God to the Jews?” (2) “Is God not God to the Gentiles?” The answers to these questions are obvious. Whether nations recognize Him or not, God has been and always will be God over the entire world (Mt. 13:24-30; 36-38). Since all are sinners (3:23), and all need salvation, the death of Christ provides a way of salvation for all. Salvation is not just for the Jews and it is certainly not just for the Gentiles. Verse 30 says that both the “*circumcision*” and “*uncircumcision*” are to be justified by “*faith*.” Salvation is for all people.

**3:31:** *Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law.*

Here is the final question. Does the fact that we are justified by faith mean the Law of Moses is useless (meaningless)? The answer to this question is *no*. The law is not useless to Christians. Though Moses’ Law was not designed to justify man, it did have a purpose. It was useful in that it made people aware of sin. It helped mankind see that humanity was lost and that man could not save himself. It helped men and women understand that a savior was needed. Paul’s conclusion in this section is that he *established law*. In other words, he put the law in its proper place. He showed what the Old Testament law was designed to do.