



Romans 3:1-20 (ESV)

¹ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”

⁵ But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸ And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good, not even one.”

¹³ “Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.”

¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:1-20 (HCSB)

¹ So what advantage does the Jew have? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ² Considerable in every way. First, they were entrusted with the spoken words of God. ³ What then? If some did not believe, will their unbelief cancel God's faithfulness? ⁴ Absolutely not! God must be true, even if everyone is a liar, as it is written:

That You may be justified in Your words
and triumph when You judge.

⁵ But if our unrighteousness highlights God's righteousness, what are we to say? I use a human argument: Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath? ⁶ Absolutely not! Otherwise, how will God judge the world? ⁷ But if by my lie God's truth is amplified to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? ⁸ And why not say, just as some people slanderously claim we say, "Let us do what is evil so that good may come"? Their condemnation is deserved!

⁹ What then? Are we any better? Not at all! For we have previously charged that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

There is no one righteous, not even one.

¹¹ There is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned away;
all alike have become useless.

There is no one who does what is good,
not even one.

¹³ Their throat is an open grave;
they deceive with their tongues.

Vipers' venom is under their lips.

¹⁴ Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.

¹⁵ Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ ruin and wretchedness are in their paths,

¹⁷ and the path of peace they have not known.

¹⁸ There is no fear of God before their eyes.

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

English Standard Version Bible - *Study Bible*¹

Romans 3:1-20

3:1 After arguing that the Spirit's work in Gentiles renders them true Jews and the true circumcision, Paul raises the logical question of whether there is any **advantage** or **value** in being an ethnic Jew and physically circumcised. He probably means "value for salvation" since he uses a Greek noun (*ōpheleia*) that corresponds to the verb *ōpheleō* ("to give value, benefit") in [2:25](#).

3:2 One might expect Paul to answer that no advantage or "value" results from being Jews. Instead, he claims that the Jews have great advantages, consisting chiefly in possessing **the oracles of God**, which refers to the OT Scriptures and may focus (given what Paul says in the verses following) on God's promises to save Israel. On the **Jews** being **entrusted** with the oracles of God, see [Deut. 4:8](#); [5:22-27](#); [Ps. 147:20](#).

3:3-4 Even though the Jews were **unfaithful** and refused to trust and obey God, he remains faithful to them and therefore will fulfill his covenant promises, particularly his promise to save them. (Paul is speaking generally and does not mean that every single Jew will be saved; he further develops God's faithfulness to the Jews in [chs. 9-11](#).) Since every person is a **liar** and a sinner, God is **justified**, i.e., vindicated in the justice of his judgment, especially (in this context) his judgment of unbelieving Jews.

3:5 Paul considers a false implication that could be drawn from his argument. If the Jews could repent only by God's grace, then it would be **unrighteous**, according to Paul's Jewish opponents, for God to pour out his wrath on those who did not repent, since as sinners they were unable to respond to him.

3:6 Paul does not provide a full answer to the objection here (for that, see [chs. 9-11](#)). He shows that the Jewish objector's position is untenable, for then God could not **judge the** (Gentile) **world** either, and no evil behavior would be punished.

3:7-8 Indeed, some of Paul's Jewish opponents insisted that he taught a doctrine of "cheap grace," i.e., that God receives more glory when Christians **do evil** and then are forgiven. Paul emphatically rejects such a view (as "slander") but waits until [ch. 6](#) to examine this charge in more detail.

3:9-20 *The Unrighteousness of All People.* The argument of the entire section, [1:18-3:20](#), is concluded here. Paul cites the OT to charge all with sin, both Jews and Gentiles, preparing the way for the claim that right standing with God is available only for those who trust in the atoning death of Christ.

1. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 3".

OT Testimony that All Are under Sin (3:9)

Romans 3	OT Reference
Sinful Condition	
v. 10, none is righteous	Ps. 14:3/53:3 ; Eccles. 7:20
v. 11a, no one understands	Ps. 14:2/53:2
v. 11b, no one seeks for God	Ps. 14:2/53:2
v. 12, all have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one	Ps. 14:3/53:3
Sinful Speech (note progression from throat to tongue to lips)	
v. 13a, b, their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive	Ps. 5:10 LXX (English, 5:9)
v. 13c, the venom of asps is under their lips	Ps. 140:3
v. 14, their mouth is full of curses and bitterness	Ps. 10:7
Sinful Action	
v. 15, their feet are swift to shed blood	Prov. 1:16/Isa. 59:7
v. 16, in their paths are ruin and misery	Isa. 59:7
v. 17, and the way of peace they have not known	Isa. 59:8
Summary Statement	
v. 18, there is no fear of God before their eyes	Ps. 36:1

3:9 Even though God has promised to fulfill his saving promises to the Jewish people ([vv. 1-4](#)), they do not possess any inherent advantages, for they too are **under** the power of **sin**. **Greeks** here refers to the entire Gentile world in contrast to the Jews.

3:10-12 Paul focuses on the sinfulness of every human being, citing [Ps. 14:1-3](#) and perhaps echoing [Eccles. 7:20](#). When Paul says **none is righteous**, **no one seeks for God**, and **no one does good**, he means that no human being on his own seeks for God or does any good that merits salvation. Paul does not deny that human beings perform some actions that conform externally to goodness, but these actions, prior to salvation, are still stained by evil, since they are not done for God's glory ([Rom. 1:21](#)) and do not come from faith ([14:23](#)).

3:13-14 Paul zeros in on sins of the tongue, quoting from [Ps. 5:9](#) and [10:7](#). The reference to the **grave** highlights either the corruption of the heart or the deadly effects of sin. Human beings deceive through flattery or lying, and **the venom of asps** points to the poisonous effect of one's speech. Nor is evil speech merely occasional, for people's mouths are **full** of evil, so that cursing and malice characterize their lives before salvation.

3:15-17 Next Paul considers the impact of evil in terms of actions and in society, modifying and abridging [Isa. 59:7-8](#). Human history is littered with murder and warfare. Sinners leave in their wake devastation, **ruin**, and **misery**. Instead of knowing peace (see note on [Rom. 1:7](#)) they have sown disorder and confusion into the world.

3:18 This citation from [Ps. 36:1](#) identifies the root cause of sin as the failure to fear and honor God. Any society that commonly assumes that God will not discipline sin in this life or judge it in the next will have **no fear of God** and will therefore give itself increasingly to evil.

3:19-20 These verses represent the culmination and conclusion of [vv. 9-18](#) and all of [1:18-3:20](#), showing that all, without exception, are sinners.

3:19 The **law** here, as is typically the case in Romans, refers to the Mosaic law. Those **under the law** are the Jews. But why is **every mouth** left without excuse and condemned before God if the law is addressed only to the Jews? Paul's logic is that if the Jews, who are God's special covenant people, cannot keep the law, then it follows that Gentiles, who are taught much of the law by their consciences, will not avoid God's condemnation either.

3:20 **Works of the law** is understood by some to refer only to the ceremonial law, i.e., those laws that separate Jews from Gentiles (such as circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath). But the context gives no indication of such a restriction, and therefore the phrase should be taken to refer to all the works or deeds required by the law. The law required perfect obedience to God's will. All people sin and fall short of this standard, therefore no one is justified by the law. **Justified** is a legal term and indicates that no one will be declared to be righteous by God, who is the divine judge by virtue of his own goodness, since all violate and none fulfill God's requirements (see note on [Gal. 2:16](#)).

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*²

Romans 3:1-20

3:1 It might seem from chapter 2 that being a Jew and being circumcised conferred no **advantage**, but Paul listed many Jewish advantages in [9:4-5](#). In our day it is advantageous to have Christian parents, to attend a church, to be baptized, to attend a Christian school, and to read the Bible—but none of these advantages can save us.

3:2 It is a great privilege to be Jewish—**considerable in every way**. They heard God speak the "ten words" or Ten Commandments ([Ex 20:1-20](#)) directly to them. Then through a long series of prophets, God's words came to them. No other people on earth had this privilege.

3:3 Even if some of the Jewish people **did not believe**, God will be faithful to His covenant and will bring His promises to fulfillment. Paul referred particularly to the promises centered in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

3:4 After he was confronted by the prophet Nathan for his sins surrounding the Bathsheba incident, David confessed in [Psalm 51:4](#) that God is **justified** in His judgments. God **must be true**, for it would be against His infinitely perfect nature to be otherwise.

3:5-8 Paul addressed several implications to which critics mistakenly thought his teachings would lead. For example, if God is shown to be in the right by man's sin and error, then God is honored by our shortcomings. How then can God punish us when we have helped display His righteousness? But Paul answered that as a matter of principle God's judgment of sin is always righteous. People who think otherwise deserve **condemnation**, for their true focus is not on glorifying God but on giving free reign to their sinful desires.

2. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., HCSB Study Bible, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 3".

3:9 All the world is **under sin**, and yet sin is considered an archaic topic in our secular society. It is not hard to guess why. Vice is something done against oneself; crime is something done against society or an individual; but sin is against God. Since modern culture is essentially atheistic, "sin" has become a meaningless term.

3:10-18 In these verses Paul linked seven OT passages to demonstrate that all of mankind is under sin's dominion. No one is righteous; no one **understands** ([Jn 8:43-44](#); [1Co 2:14](#)), and **no one... seeks God**. Since Adam and Eve's fall, people have hidden from God, but God sent His Son "to seek and to save the lost" ([Lk 19:10](#)). All have gone astray ([Isa 1:2-4](#); [53:6](#)), and in God's sight none are right. Paul cited Bible passages that show the extent of corruption. As Jesus taught, "from within, out of people's hearts" ([Mk 7:21](#)) come all sorts of evil. Man is quick to **shed blood**. During the last century over 39 million people lost their lives in wars. And by conservative estimates, human governments killed an additional 125 million people—led by Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Hitler, and others. The root problem is that humans are often practical atheists even when they profess belief in God. They choose against God's will and show no fear for it.

3:19 Someone may argue that the seven passages cited above are addressed not to Jews but to pagan nations. But everything in the Hebrew Bible is first addressed to the Jews for their instruction so they can learn about sin's power. All people from every nation and ethnicity are sinners, and God will judge **the whole world**. In God's court, everyone is speechless.

3:20 No one can earn justification by obedience to the law's requirements. The law was never intended to be a means of salvation. A primary purpose of the law was to reveal sin in its full scope, thus pointing to man's need for the gift of righteousness.

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Romans 3:1-20

3:1ff In this chapter Paul contends that everyone stands guilty before God. Paul has dismantled the common excuses of people who refuse to admit they are sinners: (1) "There is no God" or "I follow my conscience" ([1:18-32](#)); (2) "I'm not as bad as other people" ([2:1-16](#)); (3) "I'm a church member" or "I'm a religious person" ([2:17-29](#)). No one will be exempt from God's judgment of sin. Every person must accept the fact that he or she is sinful and condemned before God and receive God's wonderful gift of salvation.

3:1ff What a depressing picture Paul is painting! All of us—pagan Gentiles, humanitarians, and religious people—are condemned by our own actions. The law, which God gave to show the way to live, holds up our evil deeds to public view. Is there any hope for us? Yes, says Paul. The law condemns us, it is true, but the law is not the basis of our hope. God himself is. He, in his righteousness and wonderful love, offers us eternal life. We receive our salvation not through law but through faith in Jesus Christ. We do not—cannot—earn it; we accept it as a gift from our loving heavenly Father.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1898-99.

3:2 The Jewish nation had great benefits. (1) They were entrusted with God's laws ("the whole revelation of God," [Exodus 19-20](#); [Deuteronomy 4:8](#)). (2) They were the race through whom the Messiah came to earth ([Isaiah 11:1-10](#); [Matthew 1:1-17](#)). (3) They were the beneficiaries of covenants with God himself ([Genesis 17:1-16](#); [Exodus 19:3-6](#)). But these privileges did not make them better than anyone else (see [3:9](#)). In fact, because of them the Jews were even more responsible to live up to God's requirements.

3:5-8 Some may think they don't have to worry about sin because (1) it's God's job to forgive; (2) God is so loving that he won't judge; (3) sin isn't so bad—it teaches valuable lessons; or (4) we need to stay in touch with the culture around us. It is far too easy to take God's grace for granted. But God cannot overlook sin. No matter how many excuses they make, sinners will have to answer to God for their sin.

3:10-12 Paul is referring to [Psalm 14:1-3](#). "No one is righteous" means "no one is innocent." Every person is valuable in God's eyes because God created us in his image, and he loves us. But no one is good enough (that is, no one can earn right standing with God). Though we are valuable, we have fallen into sin. But God, through Jesus his Son, has redeemed us and offers to forgive us if we turn to him in faith.

Crucial Concepts In Romans		
ELECTION	Romans 9:10-13	God's choice of an individual or group for a specific purpose or destiny.
JUSTIFICATION	Romans 4:25 ; 5:18	God's act of declaring us "not guilty" for our sins, making us "right" with him.
PROPITIATION	Romans 3:25	The removal of God's punishment for sin through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
REDEMPTION	Romans 3:24 ; 8:23	Jesus Christ has paid the price so we can go free. The price of sin is death; Jesus paid the price.
SANCTIFICATION	Romans 5:2 ; 15:16	Becoming more and more like Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.
GLORIFICATION	Romans 8:18 , 19 , 30	The ultimate state of the believer after death when he or she becomes like Christ (1 John 3:2).

3:10-18 Paul uses these Old Testament references to show that humanity in general, in its present sinful condition, is unacceptable before God. Have you ever thought to yourself, "Well, I'm not too bad. I'm a pretty good person"? Look at these verses and see if any of them apply to you. Have you ever lied? Have you ever hurt someone's feelings by your words or tone of voice? Are you bitter toward anyone? Do you become angry with those who strongly disagree with you? In thought, word, and deed, you, like everyone else in the world, stand guilty before God. We must remember who we are in his sight—alienated sinners. Don't deny that you are a sinner. Instead, allow your desperate need to point you toward Christ.

3:19 The last time someone accused you of wrongdoing, what was your reaction? Denial, argument, and defensiveness? The entire world will be silent before God. No excuses or arguments will remain. Have you reached the point with God where you are ready to hang up your defenses and await his decision? If you haven't, stop now and admit your sin to him. If you have, the following verses are truly good news for you!

[3:20](#), [31](#) In these verses we see two functions of God's law. First, it shows us where we go wrong. Because of the law, we know that we are helpless sinners and that we must come to Jesus Christ for mercy. Second, the moral code revealed in the law can serve to guide our actions by holding up God's moral standards. We do not earn salvation by keeping the law (no one except Christ ever kept or could keep God's law perfectly), but we do please God when our life conforms to his revealed will for us.

Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary⁴

Romans 3:1-20

God Remains Faithful / [3:1-8](#)

Having firmly described the shared sinful condition of humankind, Paul turns to several thoughts about the unique benefits of being Jewish. He wants to remind his Jewish brothers that their lack of faith has not hindered God's plan. Paul does not want his people to miss the significance of God's faithfulness. In spite of their failures, God still allows them to be the people of the Messiah. In fact, the Jews' lack of faith is a clear witness to the absolute need for a Savior. Neither they nor we can save ourselves. God's faithfulness is our only hope.

[3:1](#) Paul's conversation with his Jewish critic continues into this chapter. At the end of [chapter 2](#), Paul had clearly stated that true "Jewishness" is not a matter of heritage, but a matter of one's relationship with God, and that true circumcision is not on the body, but on the heart. The Jewish response might have well been, "**Then what's the advantage of being a Jew? Is there any value in the Jewish ceremony of circumcision?**" Paul gives his response.

[3:2](#) Paul answers **yes**, there are advantages for those members of God's chosen nation. **The Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God** ([Exodus 19–20](#); [Deuteronomy 4:8](#)). That great privilege alone made the Jews even more responsible to live up to God's requirements. Paul himself was a Jew, and even though he became a dynamic Christian, he did not turn his back on his heritage. In fact, he realized that the prophets, the law, and God's plan all pointed to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Therefore, he could confidently state that being a Jew and being circumcised did have meaning, but only as part of God's total plan. The Jews were entrusted with God's words, preserving them until the coming of Christ, who was the fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures.

[3:3](#) While it was true that many Jews **were unfaithful** to God or to what they had been entrusted, that didn't change the fact of God's faithfulness. Many Jews rejected the gospel and thus failed to understand their own Scriptures. But Israel's unfaithfulness did not determine God's faithfulness. God had always been faithful to Israel, despite the nation's failings, and God would continue to be faithful to his covenant with them.

[3:4](#) In the strongest terms he could use, Paul wanted to drive home the point that the combined self-justification of the whole world could not stand up to God's truth. If God and every person were to disagree, there still would not be any doubt about who was right. The fact that many people are unfaithful (see [Psalm 116:11](#)) by suppressing the truth ([1:18](#)), exchanging the truth for a lie ([1:25](#)), and rejecting the truth ([2:8](#)), doesn't change the deeper fact that **God is true**. God's purpose for Israel and his plan for all people remained unshaken.

4. Barton B. Bruce et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 589-592.

Paul quoted from one of the profoundly confessional passages in the Old Testament ([Psalm 51:4](#)). It records the repentance of David following his confrontation with the prophet Nathan over his sin with Bathsheba. In the revelation of his sin David realized, as all of us must, that there is no denial before God. He sees even those things that we hide so well in ourselves and perhaps even come to believe never happened. Kings were used to getting their way. We tend toward the same arrogance. Before God it carries no weight at all.

[3:5-6](#) The apologist in Paul can foresee further objections arising. He poses them in the question of this verse. He understands that people are usually more willing to rationalize than repent, and that their minds will be pondering ways to elude God's righteous judgment. Paul knows they are thinking, "If my sinfulness makes God look so good, then why should he punish me? I'm actually helping him out!" This was an attempt to make it seem **unfair for God to punish** sinners.

Many believe that God's wrath contradicts his loving nature. But God judges based on his own character, not on society's norm for fairness. God is not accountable to some external, vague notion of fair play. His personal moral uprightness is the standard by which he judges.

Eventually the final day of reckoning will come when God "will judge all people according to what they have done" ([2:6](#)). God must and will judge sin—he has the right to judge the world because he is God, and he is holy and just. Paul answers by reaffirming God's character. **If God is not just, how is he qualified to judge the world?** No person can be an exception to God's laws; that would violate God's character and disqualify him as the Judge.

[3:7](#) This is the same question from [verse 5](#), posed with different words. The root problem is in people's misunderstanding of God's righteousness when he is patient to both unfaithful Jews and sinful Gentiles. Jews cannot condemn Gentiles; both are in the same predicament. Both need to rely on God's righteousness in his dealings with them and then choose to trust him or face his inevitable wrath for their sins.

[3:8](#) The gospel Paul preached was being misconstrued because he argued that obeying the law would not bring salvation. Paul, and possibly the Roman Christians, had heard this objection from Jews who were accusing him of teaching lawlessness. If Jews or Gentile Christians interpreted Paul's words that God is faithful despite people's faithlessness to mean that God's laws need not be followed, then they could reach the incorrect conclusion that **the more we sin the better it is**. Paul dismisses this perverse reasoning with the terse words, **"Those who say such things deserve to be condemned."**

All People Are Sinners / [3:9-20](#)

Paul applies the concept of depravity he taught in [1:18-32](#) to the Jews in these verses. Paul now brings to a close the lengthy introduction of the charges against humanity that he began back in [1:18](#). He continually maintains that everyone stands guilty before God. Every person must accept that he or she is sinful and liable for God's condemnation. Only then can they understand and receive God's wonderful gift of salvation.

[3:9](#) To the question of whether there was any value in being a Jew, Paul had said yes ([3:2](#)). But to the question as to whether **Jews** are **better** than Gentiles, Paul answers **no**. The reason? Jews and Gentiles alike are **under the power of sin**. Both need God's grace. Gentiles have no excuse ([1:20](#)), and neither do Jews ([2:1](#)).

[3:10](#) There can be no more argument about special privileges for the Jews, for from their own Scriptures Paul strings together a series of verses outlining universal indictment. The advantage of being a Jew does not apply to salvation. All have sinned; no one is righteous. **No one** can earn right standing with God.

As is the pattern throughout the New Testament, writers do not always quote word for word from the Old Testament. Their notions about making exact citations were less stringent than ours. And because writers were probably working from memory as often as they were working with a text before them, their quotations tend to be allusions more than they are direct references. At other times their quotes may have been exact to the translation they did have before them, such as the Greek version of the Old Testament.

[3:11-12](#) The phrase **no one is seeking God** is from [Psalm 14:2](#). Seeking is a way of expressing what is most important to us. This kind of seeking means training ourselves to turn to God first for help, to fill our thoughts with his desires, to take his character for our pattern, and to serve and obey him in everything. The phrase **all have turned away from God; all have gone wrong** is from [Psalm 14:3](#). The failure to seek God does not leave a person immobilized; rather, it sets him or her on a course of destruction. Whatever does not include the seeking of God ends up leading people in the wrong direction.

[3:13-14](#) From [Psalm 5:9](#) comes the statement that **their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave**. Jesus made it clear that the indications of sinfulness come from inside of us ([Matthew 15:11](#)). Up until this verse, the evidence of rebellion has been mainly evident between a person and God. Here Paul begins to point out that sinfulness corrupts human relationships too. The gift of communication becomes twisted into a weapon to deceive others.

From [Psalm 10:7](#) comes the picture of sinful people's **mouths full of cursing and bitterness**. Eventually, rebellion against God shows itself by tainting the way a person speaks. Cursing and bitterness may strike us first as offensive expressions, but they are also clues about a person's inward condition.

[3:15-17](#) [Isaiah 59:7-8](#) states that rebellion against God leads to violence against others. The shameful milestones of history are marked with bloodstains from the atrocities committed by those who freed themselves from God. There is always talk of peace, but apart from God, there can be no real peace.

[3:18](#) Quoting from [Psalm 36:1](#), Paul states the bottom line condition of these people: **they have no fear of God to restrain them**. To fear the Lord is to recognize God for who he is: holy, almighty, righteous, pure, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-wise. When we regard God correctly, we gain a clearer picture of ourselves: sinful, weak, frail, and needy. When we recognize who God is and who we are, we will fall at his feet in humble respect. Only then will he show us how to choose his way.

Paul's brief tour of truth ends almost full circle. He began with the fact that no one is like God (who is righteous), and he ends with the parallel truth that we lack fear of God. Some people lack this fear out of ignorance, while others, through familiarity with God, lose the sense of humble awe that ought to characterize a person's attitude before God.

[3:19](#) The verses above quoted from the Scriptures condemn all people, but especially those under **the law**, the Jews. Those who read the verses above are silenced. There are no more excuses to be made, no more self-defenses uttered. No one has any **excuses**; everyone is liable for **judgment**. And if the Jews—God's special chosen people—can say nothing in their own behalf, then no one can.

In the silence filling the court, one thought is clear: guilty as charged. That accountability of guilt must be answered, even though every explanation and excuse had failed. We are held accountable to God because he is our Creator, the personal source behind the standard (law), and the faithful Judge. We owe our existence and obedience to this One.

[3:20](#) With this all-inclusive statement, Paul closes his opening arguments that describe the state of human lostness. The purpose of the law is not to bring salvation, but to make us aware of sin.

The only way people can be **made right in God's sight** is for God to declare them so. No one can do it by trying to do **what God's law commands**, meaning keeping certain traditions, such as circumcision, in order to be identified as a Jew and so remain under God's covenant promises. These traditions have to do with identifying with God's people and maintaining one's relationship within that people. Again Paul drives the point home: being a knowledgeable, faithful, and law-keeping Jew doesn't make a person righteous. The law was not meant to become something the Jews boasted about; rather, it was given to eliminate anyone's boasting and to make all people aware of sin and their constant need for God's grace. The law only makes it painfully clear that people **aren't obeying it**.

Study and Discussion Questions



God's Faithfulness - [Romans 3:1-8](#)

Topics: [Confession](#), [Judgment](#), [Justice](#), [Law](#), [Self-righteousness](#), [Sin](#), [Unfairness](#)

Open It

1. *What could you learn about the character of a person by watching the behavior of his or her children?
2. How do you determine if a person is telling the truth?

Explore It

3. What is the advantage of being a Jew? ([3:1-2](#))
4. How did God show favor toward the Jews? ([3:1-2](#))
5. With what have Jews been entrusted? ([3:2](#))
6. *How does failure to be true to God reflect on the character of God? ([3:3-4](#))
7. When we realize our own sinfulness, what do we learn about the character of God? ([3:5](#))
8. What brings out God's righteousness more clearly? ([3:5](#))
9. *What was Paul's response to the charge that God is unjust in judging us? ([3:5](#))
10. What was Paul's human argument about the fairness of God's judgment of us? ([3:5-8](#))
11. *How is God's character affected by the level of our sinfulness? ([3:7](#))
12. What false statement or teaching was being attributed to Paul? ([3:8](#))
13. Who did Paul say deserves condemnation? ([3:8](#))

Get It

14. How can good come out of evil?
15. What danger results from defining our goodness in relative terms—such as comparing ourselves to notorious villains like Adolf Hitler or Charles Manson?
16. *What religious activities are we tempted to rely on as the basis of our justification before God?

17. How do you react when you see a well-known Christian leader exposed for sinful activities?
18. How is your faith in God affected by the public sins of Christian leaders?
19. In what practical ways can our lives be changed by the belief that God's promises will never change?
20. In what ways do we minimize the effects of sin or of disobeying God's law?
21. *What excuses do we use to explain away continuing sinful behavior in our lives?
22. What would Paul's reaction be to the statement, "You can't appreciate the good until you have experienced the bad"?

Apply It

23. What sins in your life do you need to confess to God and repent of this week?
24. *What step or action can you take this week to keep you from taking God's grace for granted?
25. Which of God's promises do you want to keep in your thoughts this week?

Study and Discussion Questions



No One Is Righteous - [Romans 3:9-20](#)

Topics: [Accountability](#), [Basics of the Faith](#), [Deceit](#), [Disobedience](#), [Excuses](#),
[Favoritism](#), [God](#), [Judgment](#), [Law](#), [Rebellion](#), [Righteousness](#), [Salvation](#), [Sin](#)

Open It

1. *In what ways are all people the same?
2. How would baby-sitting a two-year-old for a week influence your opinion about the goodness or badness of humans in general?

Explore It

3. How did Paul compare himself to others? ([3:9](#))
4. *How are Jews and Gentiles alike? ([3:9](#))
5. Who is righteous? ([3:10](#))
6. What is our natural tendency toward God? ([3:11](#))
7. What is the result of turning away from God? ([3:12](#))
8. *What is human nature? ([3:12](#))
9. How do our conversations and speech reflect our sinful nature? ([3:13-14](#))
10. *What are the characteristics of people who stand condemned before God? ([3:13-18](#))
11. What does God's law show us about ourselves? ([3:19](#))
12. What is the purpose of having God's law? ([3:19-20](#))
13. What reward does a person receive for observing the Law? ([3:20](#))

Get It

14. How do you feel when the Bible describes you as standing guilty before God?
15. How can Christianity be described as "good news" when it teaches that all people are guilty before God?
16. *What reasons would you give for describing people as either basically good or basically evil?

17. *How would you explain this passage to a person who believes that he or she is good and not guilty of any serious sins?
18. How will God judge His chosen people, the Jews?
19. How can we sin with our mouth?
20. For what are we accountable to God?
21. What misinformation about God's judgment have you believed at one point in your life?

Apply It

22. *What "laws" do you need to put aside in your life in favor of the true righteousness God offers?
23. With what believer could you meet and spend time in prayer and confession? When?