

## Studies in Romans 1 - 8 (3)

**Reading: Study 3 – Romans 2 v 17 – 24, 3 v 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 - 20**

In the latter part of chapter 1 Paul shows that the Gentiles are guilty, without excuse and deserving of judgement. In the first part of chapter 2 the spotlight turns on the Jews and Paul proves that the Jews also are guilty, without excuse and deserving of judgement.

**2 v 17 – 24 The Privileged Jew Condemned:** v23 *“through breaking the law dishonourest thou God”*

**2 v 25 – 29 The True Jew Identified:** v29 *“But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly”*

**3 v 1 – 9a Questions and Answers:** Five questions or objections anticipated are answered

**3 v 9b – 20 The Conclusion:** v9b *“both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin”*

### **2 v 17 – 24 The Privileged Jew Condemned**

In these verses Paul outlines the case against the privileged Jew. The Jew had miserably failed to live up to his privileged position. The Jew was privileged, proud and considered himself better than the Gentiles – see the Pharisees prayer in Luke 18 v 11 & 12. Paul begins this section by addressing those that *“art called a Jew”*. In v17 – 20 Paul lists some of the things the Jews boasted in and had confidence in (see Precious Seed November 2006 article).

1. Rested in the law – the Jew regarded the Law as a sign of God’s favour upon them, rather than guide for conduct (v14) and conscience (v15).
2. Made his boast in God and claimed he knew God’s will
3. Approved (distinguished between one thing and another) the more excellent things having been instructed in the Law. The Jew knew the Law and practiced a vain compliance with it, but missed the true meaning and purpose Matt 23 v 23 *“Woe unto you ... ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted ... judgement, mercy, and faith”*.
4. Had confidence that he could lead the blind, and be a light to them in their darkness. However, the Lord Jesus taught Matt 15 v 14 *“they be blind leaders of the blind.”*
5. Had instructed the foolish and taught babes. They considered themselves as trainers of others. The Lord Jesus said Matt 23 v 3 *“do not ye after their works: for they say and do not.”*
6. Had a form of knowledge and of the truth in the Law

In v 21 – 24 Paul states the problem with the Jew v23 *“Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God.”* They taught “Thou shalt not”, but practiced these very things. Such hypocrisy was denounced by the Lord Jesus e.g. Matt 7 v 5. Paul mentions three particular commandments which he charges the Jews of breaking (v21 & 22). Stealing and adultery are two and we can presume that Paul was confident that this was so, before making the charge. The third sin Paul refers to as “sacrilege”, a word that means robbing temples. It is not clear what Paul had in mind here, but it may be a reference to stealing from heathen temples, justifying this on the grounds of the evil of idolatry.

The result of all this was v24 *“For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you”*. This was as had been spoken of by the prophets e.g. Isa 52 v 5 and Ezek 36 v 23 and seen in the experience of David (see 11 Sam 12 v 14). A challenge and a warning to us.

### **2 v 25 – 29 The True Jew Identified**

The privileged Jew is condemned, guilty and without excuse and will not escape the judgement (v3). Paul is not finished his evidence against the Jew and in the closing verses of chapter 2 he states that by breaking the law the Jew is no better than the Gentile. Indeed, he says that if the Gentiles keep the law, God will reckon this as circumcision; the mark of the privileged Jew.

Circumcision was the seal of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 17 v 10) and another 'privilege' that the Jews boasted in and trusted in. However, Paul explains, circumcision was only of profit if there was a life lived according to the law and v25 "*if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.*" In v26 the opposite truth is stated i.e. if the uncircumcised Gentile keeps the law God will reckon, will count this as circumcision. The statement in v27 would have been a hammer blow to the proud Jew. The Jew, who had the privilege of "*the letter and circumcision*", if they break the law will be judged by the uncircumcised Gentile who fulfils the law (compare words of the Lord Jesus Matt 12 v 41 & 42).

In v28 & 29 Paul comes to the conclusion in his exposure of the Jew and the true Jew is identified. Outward signs of circumcision meant nothing if it was not accompanied by a life lived in conformity to the law and v29 "*But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly*". God looks on the heart (see 1 Sam 16 v 7). The fact that God was not looking for outward conformity, but inward reality should not have been a surprise to the Jew for this was taught by Moses Deut 30 v 6 "*the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart ... to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart*".

### **3 v 1 – 9a Questions and Answers**

Paul continues his argument in chapter 3 in the format of question and answer. He raises the questions or the objections that he anticipates will be raised by those opposed to his teaching. There are five questions asked (v1, 3, 5, 7 and 9) and answered.

Question 1 v1 - If, as Paul has stated, God is looking for circumcision that is inward, what advantage is there in being a Jew?

Answer 1 v2 - "*Much every way*" says Paul. He gives one example, but clearly has others in mind. The first, or principle, advantage is that to the Jews "*were committed the oracles of God.*"

Question 2 v3 – Did the unbelief of some render the plans and purposes of God, as revealed to the Jews, ineffective?

Answer 2 v4 – "*God forbid*", may it not be says Paul. God is true, God can not lie and the faithfulness of God is not dependent on man.

Question 3 v5 – The objection raised here moves on from unbelief to unrighteousness. If man's unrighteousness brings into greater prominence the righteousness of God, how can God punish man for that which "*commends the righteousness of God*"?

Answer 3 v6 – As in v4 Paul expresses his indignation at such a thought, "*God forbid*". God will judge the world, a truth recognised by the Jews. If He did not judge the unrighteousness of men He could not "*judge the world*", or be judge at all.

Question 4 v7 – This is an extension of the previous objection. If the truth of God is enhanced by man's lie, why is that man judged a sinner? The follow on from this logic is found in v8 "*Let us do evil, that good may come?*" i.e. encouraging sin enhances God's grace (cf Rom 6 v 1)

Answer 4 v8 – Paul does not take time to answer such a preposterous objection, but dismisses it with a reminder of future judgement, "*whose damnation is just.*"

Question 5 v9 – "*What then? (what conclusion do we come to?) are we better (or in a worse case) than they?*" If what Paul has said is true, does the privileges of the Jew put them at a disadvantage and bring them into greater condemnation?

Answer 5 v9 – There is no advantage or disadvantage, "*Jews and Gentiles ... all under sin*".

### **3 v 9b – 20 The Conclusion**

Paul concludes this section of his argument, demonstrating that the need of man, the problem of sin, is testified in the scriptures. He lists a chain of Old Testament quotations to prove the point. The conclusion is clear v19 "*every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*" and v20 "*by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight*".

And so man is hopeless, helpless and without excuse Job 9 v 2 "*how should man be just with God?*" In the next two chapters of Romans Paul declares God's provision, salvation.