



## Romans - Chapter Three

- II Romans 1:18-3:20 - God's righteousness in His wrath against sinners  
(continues/concludes)
- II.b Romans 2:1-3:8 - The unrighteousness of the Jews  
(continues/concludes)

### Summary of Chapter Three

The chapter begins by looking at the faithfulness of God. Paul confirms that the Jew's indeed are privileged people because it was with them that God has established his covenant promises and to them that he had entrusted the law. What the Jews for their part had done was to fail to understand God's intentions; they had clung onto these things as a mark of nationalistic identity and pride, failing to see it was their role to teach the rest the world what it was like to have a Creator God as a benefactor, and how they, the other nations, should live their lives in order to attain it. Instead, the Jews viewed themselves as superior to all other races purely based on a gift of God.

In vv.9-20, Paul draws to a conclusion this first major section of his letter. He asserts that all of mankind, created in God's image for the sole purpose of worshiping God and acting as faithful stewards over his creation, had failed. They were a fallen race, initially through the disobedience of their forefather Adam, but subsequently through their own chosen apostasy. Most had not even tried to seek the God that human logic should have told them existed; instead they sought after graven idols or even aspired to becoming the gods of their own lives. They were now in the dock, where they stood indicated of a capital crime: sin. And there was no defence to be offered on their behalf. Paul uses some very cleverly crafted scriptures to pull together the case against not just the Gentiles, but also the Jews, so that all people were under the same charge and equally guilty; perhaps the Jews more so, for their privileged possession of the law and the covenants. The things that their nationalistic pride thought would defend them, their works of the law, were the very things that were actually condemning them in the sight of God.

The final argument is given at the start of the second major section of his letter and comes by showing that it is only righteousness by faith that will save humankind and not works of the law. Because there had to be some kind of payment in order to appease God's wrath, caused by generations of apostasy, disobedience and sin directed against God, then, in his faithfulness, God offered his Son, Jesus Christ, to be a sin offering for all mankind. Although he had no sin in him, he took on the burden of sin for everyone else and was publically sacrificed by being nailed to the Cross for the propitiation of sin. God then raised him from the dead to take up his rightful position as Priest, Prophet and King, that he could judge the world at the end of time.

Paul's assertion is that the Gospel he preaches does not nullify the law, nor is it contradictory to that which has been foretold by the law and the prophets, but is a continuation and the actual fulfilment of the law that God had given through Moses.

### II.b.iii Romans 3:1-8 - God's faithfulness

Paul has already proved the guilt of both the Gentiles and the Jews. Here, he continues his discourse concerning justification.

<sup>1</sup> What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?

#### Romans 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*, which means 'to give value, benefit' in Romans 2:25. Paul's target is clearly the Jew in his self-assurance as a Jew, i.e. Jewish overconfidence in the privilege of being God's chosen people. It is the assumption that being a Jew is an advantage, that circumcision is of value even when one goes on to transgress the law, that Paul has attacked, and attacked so effectively that the slightly agonised cry of the Jewish self-identity responds in bewildered protest.

<sup>2</sup> Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.

#### Romans 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 very words 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. But it should not surprise us really that Paul is so positive about his Jewish heritage for the law and the sealing of the covenant with circumcision were clearly important, both to the Jew and to God, who would not have instituted it had it not been so.

On the Jews being entrusted with the oracles of God, and their task was to demonstrate God as God for all nations; we read: <<And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?>> (Deuteronomy 4:8), <<These are the commandments the Lord proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me. When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders came to me. And you said, "The Lord our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a man can live even if God speaks with him. But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer. For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? Go near and listen to all that the Lord our God says. Then tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you. We will listen and obey" >> (Deuteronomy 5:22-27), and: <<He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the Lord>> (Psalm 147:20). Note the use of the words oracles of God, which many translations prefer, as it invokes more of a mystery concerning the written and spoken words of God for the Gentile reader. As they had often searched for such mysteries, then the use of this word would provoke an interest in what Paul was saying. Indeed, being given stewardship over the words of God was a commissioning for the Jewish nation, and continues now with the Gospel: <<On the

contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles>> (Galatians 2:7-8).

The Jews had failed in their task by keeping the oracles for themselves, like some prized possession, and then looking down on the nations that had not received the same privileges they had. This continued, even after a long history of national disobedience; their pride and privilege reigned. This then had the opposite effect of what God had intended them to do. According to Isaiah, God has been blasphemed and not praised in the nations as a result of Israel's apostasy. The nations received the wrong message of God, thought he was a weak and insignificant God who couldn't even care for his own chosen nation. However, God would not leave himself without witness and Jesus would come to fulfil Israel's failed task of delivering the message they had not (and, of course, to achieve infinitely more, much more).

The answer is affirmative as God has opened a door for all to come to salvation, but the way to that door is made easier for the Jew through the privileges: <<For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen>> (Romans 9:3-5), that God has given to them as a people and through his covenant promises and the oracles of God: <<He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us>> (Acts 7:38). The Gospel is the oracles of God: <<In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!>> (Hebrews 5:12), and: <<If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen>> (1 Peter 4:11). The OT was written in the Hebrew language, Moses and the prophets were men of their nation, as of course was Jesus, the Christ, who had lived and taught among them, and they kept the scriptures secure from generation to generation, again we read: <<And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?>> (Deuteronomy 4:8), making them the librarians for the Christians, for salvation was meant to be for all mankind: <<Surely it is you who love the people; all the holy ones are in your hand. At your feet they all bow down, and from you receive instruction>> (Deuteronomy 33:3). The Jews were the sacred keepers of the rule book, were meant to live by it so that they could be a guiding beacon to teach the rest of the world, which they failed to do.

Overall, it may seem that Paul is too general and abrupt with handling this important issue, and it seems that Paul did not really want to deal with so early on in his letter in too much detail; he will return to it again later in Chapters 9-11.

<sup>3</sup> What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?

<sup>4</sup> Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written:

“So that you may be proved right when you speak  
and prevail when you judge.”

## Romans 3:3-4

Even though the Jews lacked faith and refused to trust and obey God, he remained faithful to them and therefore will fulfil 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 Chapters 9-11. Part of the problem is that Israel had failed in its stewardship of God's word and in its covenant promises, firstly by not keeping their side of the deal, but thankfully God's faithfulness is not determined by Jewish unfaithfulness, and secondly by not understanding their role of being a beacon to the Gentiles and sharing God's words with them, except with those who came to faith as God-fearers and proselytes, whom the Jews seemed more interested in Judaising than turning them to be faithful servants of God. Either they had failed to understand the words of God and then missed the importance of Christ when he stood amongst them, or they had never understood them at all!

God's continuing faithfulness towards Israel is for Paul a primary confirmation of Paul's belief that God's righteousness is from faith to faith, see comments made on Romans 1:17, is neither dependent on nor destroyed by Israel's misunderstandings of the law and its role, and is neither dependent on nor destroyed by man's works of unfaithfulness. The point to being Jewish is that God made the promises to their forefathers, he fulfilled those promises in and through Jesus, and by the Holy Spirit he will keep his promises fully and always.

Job, in his presumed innocence and righteousness before God, had made the mistake of thinking he was in a lawsuit with God, and that he should come out of it triumphant, or at least absolved. His 'friends', who had so fiercely accused and chastised him, thought he was in a lawsuit and that God 'must' win. A key point to the book of Job is that God is not in a lawsuit with anyone, nor is he judge of his own case, he is simply the final and perfect judge of all things; he was, is and always will be GOD!

Since every person is a liar and a sinner, God is true, i.e. vindicated in the justice of his judgment, especially, in this context, in his judgment of unbelieving Jews. God's truth is not called into question by man's misconstrual or perversion of it. The allusion back to the earlier stages of the argument will be deliberate, and would probably have not been lost on the attentive listener, since God's truth has been such a consistent motif throughout the argument, not only in the indictment of man in general (Romans 1:18 and 1:25), but also in the indictment of Jewish religiosity in its falsely based pride (Romans 2:2, 2:8 and 2:20).

Every man is a liar will include the unfaithful Jew, thus the interlocutor is included in the psalm's indictment of humankind in general: the Jew in his unfaithfulness has suppressed the truth: <<First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world>> (Romans 1:8), has perverted the truth into a lie: <<They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen>> (Romans 1:25), and has disobeyed the truth: <<But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger>> (Romans 2:8), as much as anyone else. Nevertheless, God will be true to his original purpose, both in his creation and in choosing Israel as a nation, Israel's falseness notwithstanding.

What benefit is there in being a Jew that does not believe in Jesus? Are the promises nullified? Paul says 'God forbid!' God's promises are for all who keep his statutes and he will not turn away from those in their unbelief but will continue to accept them if they turn to him as they were always meant to do. God is not a liar, it is man who is a liar: <<And in my dismay I said, "All men are liars" >> (Psalm 116:11), for the Jews worshipped the law not the law-maker and law-giver. Christ will be glorious, although Israel be not gathered: <<And now the Lord says – he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honoured in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength>> (Isaiah 49:5). Man and his vanity: <<Lowborn men are but a breath,

the highborn are but a lie; if weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath>> (Psalm 62:9), and: <<You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath>> (Psalm 39:5).

The second quotation (v.4b) is from Psalm 51:4 and it seems to contain a complex thought of God's final judgement. In the psalm, David confesses his lawlessness and sin repeatedly. The implication then is that here is a Jew, King David himself, who recognised his transgression of the law and his sin against God, and who made no attempt to argue a special relationship or prerogative of averting God's wrath from himself for any past faithfulness, and accepted God's condemnation as wholly justified. It may be this way of reading the verse which prompted the reference to wrath and God's final judgement in vv.5-6. Alternatively, it could be in view that God has been unreasonably faithful to his unfaithful covenant partner.

<sup>5</sup> But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument).

#### Romans 3:5

By stating our unrighteousness, Paul has switched to the first person plural to indicate that he has always included himself with the unbelieving and unrighteous Jews, at least in the time of his former life as a zealous, Pharisaic Jew, who had the law but had not fully grasped its full meaning or implications either for him as an individual, for his nation, and especially not for the whole world.

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. It seems that Paul's well constructed argument to date about God's righteous wrath against mankind has now gone off the rails by stating that God, in his righteousness and truth, remains faithful to Israel despite all their unfaithfulness. Paul realised the problem and thus goes on to address it, and he hides any embarrassment of raising the issue with the phrase I am using a human argument.

<sup>6</sup> Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?

#### Romans 3:6

Certainly not! The idea that God can be criticised as unjust in any of his thinking or action is absolutely abhorrent to Paul. But the two sides of his argument seem to counter each other that God will judge the world in justice and righteousness on a final day, but in the meantime he will remain faithful to Israel and the purpose he has for them, no matter how unfaithful they are and continue to be. The irony is that the problem is caused to the human mind more by God's faithfulness than by man's unrighteousness. God will judge in righteousness and does so in all things, whether we understand them or not. That we can never understand God fully is no reason not to try to for we are called to love God with our minds as well, just as Jesus has taught us to: <<Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength>> (Mark 12:30).

Paul does not provide a full answer to the objection here - for that, see Chapters 9-11. He shows that the Jewish objector's position is untenable, otherwise God could not judge the Gentile world either, and no evil behaviour would be punished.

If unbelieving Jews led to the calling of the Gentiles, is it right for God to punish the sins of the Jews? Unbelieving hearts will always take the opportunity to argue over the equity of God and condemn him as being unjust: <<Can he who hates justice govern? Will you

condemn the just and mighty One?>> (Job 34:17). But God is just and judges according to the sin: <<From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked>> (Luke 12:48b). Such thoughts must not be entertained. If God were not righteous then he could not judge the world. The argument is much the same as with Abraham: <<Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?>> (Genesis 18:25b).

It is only accidental that sin commends God's righteousness. It is no thanks to the sinner for that, who intended no such thing in or through their sin. Should anyone continue to sin that God's grace will abound all the more? Psalm 52:1 states: <<Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?>>. God will justly condemn those who unjustly condemn his truth. If they embolden themselves in their sin in the pretence of God getting the glory to himself out of it, then they will be condemned quite justly. They justify their own damnation.

<sup>7</sup> Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" <sup>8</sup> Why not say – as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say – "Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved.

### Romans 3:7-8

If my falsehood, why am I. Although Paul poses that someone might argue, he clearly is accepting his part in this as both an unrighteous Jew and as a recipient of God's saving righteousness. Paul also seems to be turning the argument away from final judgement to more immediate matters.

Paul was accused of many things by the Jews, e.g. <<When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs>> (Acts 21:20-21). Another issue was his association with Gentiles that brought him into dispute with Peter and other Jewish Christians: <<When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified>> (Galatians 2:11-16). The point here, apart from the hypocrisy of the Jewish Christians, would then be that Jew should not condemn Gentile, including and perhaps especially Gentile Christians, as a sinner because he is in the same boat; his unfaithfulness is as liable to God's wrath as humankind's falseness in general.

But what clearly annoyed Paul was that he was under attack by those who claimed that the Gospel he preached seemed to be an encouragement to sin, and Paul was clearly sensitive to this outrageous jibe. He says it is slanderously reported, a deliberate turning from white into black. The very suggestion that Paul would consent to elide so completely the difference between good and evil he believes is so manifestly unjust as to be self-condemned. Paul is not proclaiming that we should sin so that grace may abound and God can put things right for his own glory. Paul asserts that those who slandered him in that way will receive their just rewards.

Because of Paul's stance that God's grace abounds so widely and freely to accept all those who have transgressed but then turn repentantly to God, 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 Chapter 6 to examine this charge in more detail.

Paul probably felt that he was getting too far ahead in his argument, so rather than debate further, he simply states: their condemnation is deserved. But one good thing that his sidetracked dialogue provides us with is to show the solidarity between Jew and Gentile in their unrighteousness, and God in his glorious truth and steadfast righteousness, despite the best efforts of mankind to the contrary.

## II.c Romans 3:9-20 - No one is righteous

The argument of the entire section, Romans 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 Jesus Christ.

In vv.9-20 Paul revives his assertion of the guilt of all mankind and the corruption of mankind in general. Are Christians any better than Jews? Not at all because, before free grace, we were all alike in our sin and corruption; and that sin is a burden to us: <<My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear>> (Psalm 38:4).

The purpose of this section is to round off the case against all mankind in order to show that all are guilty before God. Paul can use legalistic language as 1st Century people in the Roman Empire were familiar with legal proceedings; court hearings were usually held in public and were generally well attended by interested spectators. When a defendant had finished speaking in their own defence and had nothing more to say, they would customarily put their hands over their mouths to indicate this. If the court official believed a defendant should say no more he would slap him in the mouth to indicate this, as had happened to Jesus: <<When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded>> (John 18:22), and Paul: <<At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth>> (Acts 23:2).

<sup>9</sup> What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.

### Romans 3:9

After his brief digression in vv.1-8, Paul now concludes his assertion of the guilt of both the Jews and the Gentiles. Even though God has promised to fulfil 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. Whereas before he used the singular Jew and Gentile and spent time showing how each group were under condemnation, now he uses the plural and places both ethnic groups as one in the same situation. Also, the use of the singular and the prepositional phrase 'under sin' would strike a solemn note for the readership. Sin is clearly presented as an external power, which can and does dominate all humankind, giving rise to the unrighteousness, all the pride, selfish ambition and disregard for the truth documented in Chapters One and Two. To highlight the plight of humankind, the singular 'sin', as a noun, is deliberately set over against the plural Jews and Gentiles. For all the differences of race, culture and religion, which distinguish and divide human beings, they are all alike under the same domination, the power of a force which binds them to their creatureliness in forgetfulness of their creatureliness.

Not only are they guilty of sin but worse still they are under its power. Paul speaks in the way others may speak of Satan or the enemy, in that it seems that sin has a life force of its own in the way it controls people's lives.

<sup>10</sup> As it is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;

<sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

<sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless;

there is no one who does good, not even one.”

### Romans 3:10-12

In the past: <<The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time>> (Genesis 6:5), and God was set on the total destruction of mankind, yet in that wickedness God found one righteous man, Noah: <<But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord>> (Genesis 6:8). Here, Paul states there is not even one righteous man, otherwise God would have found him, yet in his mercy and through grace, God did not wipe us out! Instead, he would provide that one man!

Paul focuses on the sinfulness of every human being, citing Psalm 14:1-3, which is repeated in Psalm 53:1-3, and perhaps echoing Ecclesiastes 7:20 <<There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins>>. When Paul says no one is righteous, no one seeks 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, and whatever the intent or motivation, are still stained by evil since they are not done for God’s glory: <<For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened>> (Romans 1:21), and do not come from faith: <<But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin>> (Romans 14:23).

The only righteous one is the one we should all turn to. For even those who are justified and sanctified in faith are unrighteous by nature. The fault lies in the corruption of understanding. Now we have Christ there is so much more reason to be better and to do better; but we lack understanding. Sinners are all fools. Sinners who have the Gospel are to be pitied above all others.

<sup>13</sup> “Their throats are open graves;

their tongues practice deceit.”

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”

<sup>14</sup> “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

### Romans 3:13-14

Paul zeros in on sins of the tongue, quoting from Psalms 5:9 and 10:7. The reference to the open grave highlights both the decay and corruption of the heart or the deadly effects of sin.

Human beings deceive through flattery or by lying, and the poison of vipers points to the venomous effects of one’s speech. Nor is evil speech merely occasional, for people’s mouths are full of evil, so that cursing and bitterness characterise their lives before salvation. Paul uses the corruption of particular people, e.g. Doeg the Edomite: <<They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent’s; the poison of vipers is on their lips>> (Psalm 140:3), and of the Jews (vv.15-17) <<Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they

do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace>> (Isaiah 59:7-8), to show that the same corruption is in all of us; our sinful nature. And the times that Paul is referring to were some of the better times in the history of Israel!

Solomon writes: <<All this I tested by wisdom and I said, “I am determined to be wise” – but this was beyond me>> (Ecclesiastes 7:23).

What good can be expected from such a degenerate race? Paul gives three examples:

1. Cruelty - their throat is an open grave, ready to swallow up the poor and innocent; they speak poison: <<but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison>> (James 3:8). As noted earlier, Paul uses Psalms 5:9 and 140:3 for his examples.
2. Cheating - with their tongues they have used deceit. They are children of the devil: <<You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies>> (John 8:42).
3. Cursing - their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness reflecting on God and blaspheming his holy name, and wishing harm on their brothers: <<With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness>> (James 3:9), and: <<He loved to pronounce a curse – may it come on him; he found no pleasure in blessing – may it be far from him. He wore cursing as his garment; it entered into his body like water, into his bones like oil. May it be like a cloak wrapped about him, like a belt tied forever around him>> (Psalm 109:17-19). How often do Christians use this to show they are still under the dominion of sin, still in the condition they were born in?

15            “Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
16            ruin and misery mark their ways,  
17            and the way of peace they do not know.”

#### Romans 3:15-17

Next Paul considers the impact of evil in terms of actions and in society, modifying and abridging Proverbs 1:16 and Isaiah 59:7-8, see vv.13-14. Human history is littered with murder, human conflict, and warfare. Sinners leave in their wake devastation, ruin, and misery. Instead of knowing peace and social harmony, see comments on Romans 1:7; they have sown disorder, discord and confusion into the world. This passage indicates people seem bent on causing problems for others and themselves. They talk peace but are strangers to it, and are miserable, as they are captive to the overwhelming power of sin.

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

#### Romans 3:18

This citation from Psalm 36:1 identifies the root cause of all sin as the failure of mankind to fear and honour God, the purpose for which they were created. 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 over to evil. Those who do not fear God are headed for destruction.

Fear of God teaches us to do what is right: <<But the earlier governors – those preceding me – placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in

addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that>> (Nehemiah 5:15), for once fear is cast off, prayer is restrained: <<But you even undermine piety and hinder devotion to God>> (Job 15:4).

Verses 10-18 are cleverly crafted together. Paul combines scripture, several of which the Jews would normally use to defend their stance that the Jews are indeed superior to the Gentiles, to show those who read it without the blinkers of Jewish presumption of privilege, that it is actually a devastating indictment of all peoples, Jews as well as Gentiles. Whatever distinction between Jews and Gentiles remains, whatever is the continuing advantage of being a Jew, it does not apply here. When such scriptures assert that no one is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks God, no one does good, no one fears God, they mean no one.

Whenever Paul quotes an OT passage it nearly always appears that he has the context of the wider passage in view, and that he chooses them carefully in that, by referring to those passages that condemn, they are nearly always part of a wider scripture that goes on to show how God rescues us from our sin or that general situation. No matter what we do or where we are at, salvation is always close at hand.

### Romans 3:19-20

These verses represent the culmination and conclusion of vv.9-18 and all of Romans 1:18-3:20, showing that all, without exception, are sinners.

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

### Romans 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 fail to do what is right and therefore cannot avoid God's condemnation either.

We cannot be justified by the works of the law or by any other skill of man but only by faith in God through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. The Pharisees looked for justification by being obedient to the moral code: <<The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector>> (Luke 18:11), but Paul argues these two things:

1. The Jew's guilt. He who has broken the law cannot be saved by the law, as it is the same law that will convict him. This applies to all those created in God's own image who have an in-built sense of right and wrong, yet choose to do wrong. Those who boast in the law will be made speechless: <<to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him>> (Jude 15), <<'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless>> (Matthew 22:12), and: <<The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths>> (Psalm 107:42).
2. Paul extends the argument to the whole world: <<We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one>> (1 John 5:19), especially those who, by nature, are children of wrath: <<All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its

desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath>> (Ephesians 2:3).

The law which convicts and condemns us cannot justify us, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (v.20). That which opens the wound cannot be the cure: <<Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!>> (Job 14:4).

<sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

#### Romans 3:20

The assertion of this final verse, which is the final nail in the coffin for all mankind, comes from Psalm 143:2 <<Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you>>. The psalmist confesses his own liability to judgement because he, like the rest of humankind, can make no assumption that he will be acquitted or vindicated by God. But Paul makes the point doubly applicable by using a modified text.

Observing 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 observance. 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. Many translations have this as deeds or works of the law, which is not the same as the work of the law written on the heart, but something more superficial and limiting, just as circumcision had become just an outward sign of being in the covenant, so too were such works or observance of the law the minimum requirement to stay within the covenant, or so some thought. These translations also tend to state no flesh for no one, which has a connotation of mankind in his fallen state. By putting them together, those familiar with Jewish law and ways of life, would know that the Jews put such great hope in both the law and the flesh, in terms of their circumcision, but here Paul shows again they have placed their false faith and hope in their ethnicity rather than in God. If they had properly understood the law, they would have realised it was not intended to provide a ground of confidence or boasting, but rather to eliminate such confidence or boasting. It is worth repeating Paul's words to the church in Corinth: <<He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord">> (1 Corinthians 1:28-31).

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 legalistic 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 fulfil God's requirements. Elsewhere, Paul writes: <<We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified>> (Galatians 2:15-16). The main point of Paul's argument here, against those under the law, is that they have transgressed it and therefore it condemns them. Anyone who thinks they can appeal to God in final judgement to works of the law as their saving factor is sadly mistaken.

Here, Paul shows that justified means counted righteous or declared righteous by God. If people were sinless and perfectly obeyed all of God's perfect moral standards, they could be justified or declared righteous on the basis of their own merits. But Paul says that this is impossible for any Gentile or even for any Jew to do.

### III. Romans 3:21-4:25 - The saving righteousness of God

Since no one can be righteous before God by keeping the law, Paul now explains that right standing with God comes through faith in the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. This is a decisive shift in the argument to a new stage: the eschatological state of affairs brought about by Christ.

#### III.a Romans 3:21-31 - Righteousness through faith

Paul is careful to pick up the terms of the preceding conclusion, particularly the double negative-positive reference to the law:

- no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law (v.20);
- a righteousness from God, apart from law (v.21).

Thus he underscores the point that his argument is not against the law as such, but against an assumption that God's righteousness is his commitment to the people of the law so that righteousness apart from the law, outside the bounds of the covenant people, would be scarcely conceivable. Paul's objective is to argue the contrary: Jesus' sacrificial death provides a different criterion for the understanding of God's righteousness; the one true God must, by definition, be concerned for Gentile as well as Jew.

#### III.a.i Romans 3:21-26 - God's righteousness in the death of Jesus

By now the Roman readers are probably quite depressed and wondering where hope may come from, so Paul switches from his indictment of Jew and Gentile to outline his Gospel, which after all is good news. But the transition does not carry with it a complete discontinuity of thought, and it is necessary to keep in mind the arguments of the previous section. The good news of God's action on behalf of man, to and in the believer, to establish him in the relationship with God, broken by man's unrighteousness, initially through Adam, and further distorted by Israel's misunderstanding of the law. God's saving righteousness has been manifested now in the death of Jesus Christ, so that God's justice and love are reconciled through the Cross; good news indeed!

God, it may have appeared, had a problem. He had created a world that had turned against him and the righteousness he stood for; he had chosen a nation and given them a solution, i.e. the law, but they had failed in their mission, not only that but they too had turned away from God! The other dilemma facing God was that there are people in the world who are being oppressed and are calling out for him to do something about it. God has made his promises and will keep them, but he will not do so by showing favour or partiality to any particular group, i.e. to the Jewish nation. He will keep his promises to Israel despite their apostasy, but he must punish their sin also; he will protect the weak in the world, but must punish their sin too. How does he punish the sin of so many? He offers up his own son to die for the sin of all others as propitiation, the absolution of the crime and the appeasement of his righteous wrath.

This solution has to be done apart from the law otherwise only those under the law, i.e. the Jews, could benefit, and the Jews alone would not have benefitted in the main as they were part of the problem. The tables were now turned and the Gentiles would become a beacon of God to many of the Jews.

But the solution still had to come from within Israel and God had not found one faithful Israelite to choose and so he sent his son, born of woman and raised a Jew, was circumcised on the eighth day, and who lived under the law, but did so in full obedience to God's word and will; not man's out-workings and traditions that had become associated with it. In his obedience and sinless character, Jesus took on the sin of the world, bore God's wrath on himself as he died a shameful and painful death, in public view. God's righteousness was fully declared and so he

raised Jesus back to life, and now has him seated at his own right hand in order to judge the world in the full righteousness of God that he himself has portrayed.

<sup>21</sup> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

#### Romans 3:21

The righteousness from God has been manifested now, i.e. in the period of salvation history inaugurated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The use of now and the perfect tense has been made known indicates to those who know Paul's thinking would see that he had in view eschatological salvation, the time when God is putting into action his final purpose for Israel and mankind: <<For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation>> (2 Corinthians 6:2).

On the righteousness from God, see comments made on Romans 1:17. Here, in Chapter 3, it refers to the morally right character of God that is clearly shown in his saving action by which human beings may stand in the right before God as the divine judge. This righteousness has been revealed apart from law, which means that it is not based on human obedience to the works of the law, nor to the Jews misconception of their own salvation being available simply by having the law. Paul is not dismissing the law as it is that which identifies sin and through which our understanding of salvation comes.

Paul may also intend to say it is not based on the Sinai covenant. Even though God's saving righteousness is apart from law, the Law and the Prophets testify to it. In other words, the OT scriptures prophesied this very way of salvation: <<the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures>> (Romans 1:2).

In fact, Paul wants it to be known that this act is not just a continuity of the law, to which the Prophets testify, but is in fact a fulfilment of the Law when rightly understood.

<sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

#### Romans 3:22

On the righteousness from God, Romans 1:17 <<For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith (ASV)>> continues to state it is through faith to faith. The attentive reader, who had seen how the first phase of the argument had raised the question of God's faithfulness, would also recognise that Paul was now beginning to expound and explain the role of man's faith, man's proper response to the faithfulness of God. In addition, see the comments made on Romans 1:17.

The faith in Jesus Christ is seen by some to really mean the faith exercised by Jesus Christ, but although we should not finally exclude the possibility of a deliberate secondary ambiguity in the phrase, it is much more likely that the primary meaning intended by Paul is faith directed toward Jesus as the object of that faith. We may presume they would think in terms of trust in, commitment and obedience to Jesus. It is clearly intended to denote the basis of a relationship which is not dependent on specific ritual acts, but is direct and immediate, a reliance on the Risen Christ rather than a resting on the law: <<You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?>> (Galatians 3:1-3). Verse 22 is really the faithfulness of Jesus. That is, the fulfilment of the faithfulness God had required of Israel when he called them but which they were unable to achieve as their part of the covenant agreement.

This right standing with God is available to all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile.

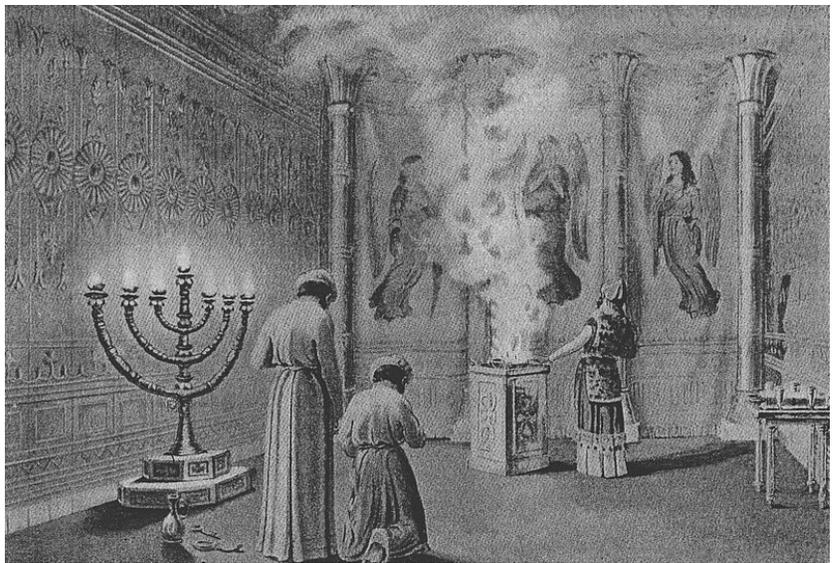
There is no difference. Jesus overcomes any nationalistic or ethnic claims and prejudices: <<For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink>> (1 Corinthians 12:13), <<There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus>> (Galatians 3:28), and: <<Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all>> (Colossians 3:11).

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 3:23

No one can stake a claim to this righteousness based on his or her own obedience, for all people have sinned and fall short of what God demands: <<For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened>> (Romans 1:21).

The glory of God or Shechinah. In Biblical Hebrew the word means literally to settle, inhabit, or dwell, and is used frequently in the Hebrew Bible. The Shechinah is referred to as manifest in the Tabernacle and the Temple in Jerusalem throughout Rabbinic literature. It was reported to have filled the temple at the time Solomon was first dedicating it: <<The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their



An image of the Shechinah of the Lord in the Temple.

voices in praise to the Lord and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God>> (2 Chronicles 5:13-14).

We are made in God's image and therefore should reflect his glory but due to sin and the nature of sin we have failed consistently to do this. But the redemption price is paid and those captive to sin have been set free, providing they are willing to let go of the chains that formerly bound them and held them captive.

We are all sinners by nature and by execution of our actions, thoughts and deeds. We have therefore fallen short of God's glory - by a mile! We not only fail to win the race, we become great losers of it. We have fallen short of bringing glory to God, and we are also short of being glorified by God, which is God's gift to man who comes to him in absolute faith and trust. We cannot walk in God's presence, which was the original intention for us all for, like Adam in Genesis 3:23, we have been banished from the garden, and we cannot come to heaven in our innocence for that route is barred by a cherub and a flaming sword (Genesis 3:24).

<sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

#### Romans 3:24

Therefore, all are justified, i.e. declared not guilty but righteous by the divine Judge, but only by God's free grace, i.e. his unmerited favour. If we cannot be justified under the law, and if our deeds are insufficient for our salvation, does this mean we are condemned under God's wrath? Paul argues there is another way, the only way, and that is through the righteousness of God without the law which is manifested now through the Gospel that will bring us back into a right relationship with God on the day of final judgement: <<In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus>> (Philippians 1:4-6).

The word redemption reaches back to the OT Exodus and the blood of the Passover lamb. See Exodus Chapters 12-15 for the full account, by which the Lord liberated Israel from bondage in Egypt; the Exodus likewise points forward to the greater redemption Jesus won for his people with his blood by forgiving them their sins through his death on the Cross: <<In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace>> (Ephesians 1:7), and: <<in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins>> (Colossians 1:14). On justification, see comments made on being declared righteous (v.20).

The people were in the dock, they expected a guilty verdict as they were indeed guilty as charged. But not only were they declared to be in the right by this redemption, it is as if they never sinned in the first place! How can God make such a declaration now ahead of the last day when the secrets of all men's hearts will be revealed? Although Paul takes some time to answer this in full, the next two verses make a start.

Taking v.24 as a whole, it becomes clear that God's act of acquittal is not an act of arbitrary caprice. There was a cost to pay, a ransom to be secured. The acquittal depends on the ransom having been given: God's sentence is based on it, comes to effect through it, and can be pronounced already in favour of all who believe by virtue of it. But at the same time the point most emphasised by Paul remains unobscured: that the payment was not made by man, and, by implication, no payment is yet outstanding to be required from man. Even if it were, it would be too great a price for man to ever be able to pay. The price was paid in full by God's free generosity; the ransom was provided by God alone through his Son.

<sup>25</sup> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished –

#### Romans 3:25

Jesus' blood propitiated or satisfied God's wrath: <<The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness>> (Romans 1:18), so that his holiness was not compromised in forgiving sinners.

Some scholars have argued that the word propitiation should be translated expiation, the wiping away of sin, but the word cannot be restricted to the wiping away of sins as it also refers to the satisfaction or appeasement of God's wrath, turning it to favour. At the time of his arrest: <<Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" >> (John 18:11), where 'drink the cup' serves as a metaphor for death and symbolises God's wrath. Note that the cup given to Jesus is from the Father, and hence Jesus is prepared to drink it. In addition to the physical suffering of the Cross, Jesus suffered the agony

of bearing God's wrath, which was poured out on him as a substitutionary sacrifice and in payment for our sins. God's righteous anger needed to be appeased before sin could be forgiven, and God in his love, sent his Son, who offered himself willingly, to satisfy God's holy anger against sin. In this way God demonstrated his justice, which here refers particularly to his holiness and justice. God's justice was called into question because, in his patience, he had overlooked sins committed beforehand. In other words, how could God, as the utterly Holy One, tolerate human sin without inflicting full punishment on human beings immediately? Paul's answer is that God looked forward to the Cross of Christ, where the full payments for the guilt of sin would be made, where Christ would die in the place of sinners. In the OT, propitiation, or the complete satisfaction of the wrath of God, is symbolically foreshadowed in several incidents: <<But Moses sought the favour of the Lord his God. "O Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened>> (Exodus 32:11-14), <<When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear through both of them – through the Israelite and into the woman's body. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000. The Lord said to Moses, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honour among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them">> (Numbers 25:7-11), and: <<Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The Lord will bring trouble on you today." Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since>> (Joshua 7:25-26).

As Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets then to come to Christ means that people meet all the requirements of the Mosaic Law and the prophets, for it is to attain the righteousness of God through the blood of Christ, who has become Priest, Prophet and the King, which we come to through faith and obedience to the call.

Yet the Jews that come to Christ want to impose the yoke of the ceremonial law, which Christ abolished through his suffering, on the Gentiles that wanted to come to Jesus for their salvation. Yet it is given so freely: <<All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name>> (Acts 10:43).

In Genesis 39:4 (KJV) we see that Joseph found grace in Potiphar's eyes, for Potiphar could see the benefits that Joseph would bring him, for Joseph earned it through his deeds. But with God, grace is given freely with no reward or benefit to God, and certainly there is nothing we can do to earn it! It was purchased for us by Jesus, with his blood and through his love for each and every one of us. He was propitiation for our sins: <<And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world>> (1 John 2:2). The innocent one punished for our transgression and he was the beloved son of the Father: <<And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased">> (Matthew 3:17), and: <<While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!">> (Matthew 17:5).

The sacrifice of the Christ looks backwards to cover the OT saints, as well as forwards to Paul's generation and beyond, although they expected Jesus to return very soon; as we all should. It should also be seen as a sacrifice and not as martyrdom.



The image is of the Ark of the Covenant. The Mercy Seat, or Atonement cover, was a solid golden slab that fitted perfectly on the top of the Ark. The golden cherubim, which were crafted out of the same piece of gold, had their wings outstretched covering the mercy seat and their eyes looking downward in reverent awe.

The following passage gives relevance to the inclusion of this image.

On the sacrifice itself, we need to look back to the annual sacrifice of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when God instructed

Moses quite precisely what the High Priest was to do: <<He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. He is to put the incense on the fire before the Lord, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover. "He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel. "Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the Lord and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on all the horns of the altar. He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites>> (Leviticus 16:12-19). In the Septuagint, the word expiation is used for the act of ransom of Christ's death and to describe the golden Atonement cover of the Ark of the Covenant. There are three key differences to note here:

1. the offering was God's only Son and not an animal;
2. the offering of Christ was not an annual event, but once and for all;
3. the 'sprinkling of blood' was not hidden behind a curtain but was made public so that everyone could bear witness and come to believe in Jesus as the Christ of God, the final atonement for all mankind's sin, not just for a small nation.

The purpose of Christ's expiatory sacrifice, in the first place, was to demonstrate or provide proof that God's saving action on Israel's behalf was in accord with the covenant obligations he had taken upon himself and laid upon Israel: <<God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God>> (2 Corinthians 5:21). His failure to punish Israel's sins, that is, by completely rejecting Israel as his people, did not mean that he was unfairly generous, one of the questions raised in vv.1-8. Former sins were passed over, either because Jesus' death demonstrated the sacrificial system to be effective, at least as far as inadvertent sins were concerned, or because Jesus' death, as the death of sinful man, is effective for the persons of faith who came before him as well as those who came after. For those who profess Christ die with him and their sins are covered by his death: <<For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died>> (2 Corinthians 5:14).

<sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

#### Romans 3:26

Paul repeats again, because of its supreme importance, that God has demonstrated his justice, i.e. his holiness and righteousness, at the present time in salvation history. In the Cross of Christ, God has shown himself to be perfectly just, utterly holy, so that the penalty demanded by the law is not removed but paid for by Christ, but also the one who justifies, i.e. the one who provides the means of justification, and who declares people to be in right standing with himself, and the Saviour of all those who have faith in Jesus. Here is the heart of the Christian faith, for at the Cross, God's justice and love meet in the fullness of perfection.

Demonstrate his justice is repeated in v.25 and v.26, which is unusual in Paul's writing. The first occurrence is where God deals with sin; the second shows that God is in the right. But how can this be? Granted universal sin, and granted God's promises to Israel, how can God be just, be in the right, be faithful to the covenant, and at the same time do what a just judge ought to do, deal with evil on the one hand and, on the other, rescue 'innocent' people who cry out to him in their distress?

Although very dense and tightly packed, what Paul basically shows is God:

1. To be in the right when dealing properly and impartially with sin;
2. To be faithful to the covenant promises he has made;
3. To have dealt properly with sin;
4. To be committed to saving those who call out in helpless faith.

One of the amazing revelations of this whole passage is that, in the middle of history, God is prepared to declare those who will be saved on the last day, who are now part of God's chosen people in his new covenant. It is as if the not guilty verdict has been declared before the trial has even begun.

We should just get down on our knees and give thanks to an awesome God.

The great demonstration of love and holiness was to give his only Son, and that he had made himself sin for us, so again we read that: <<God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God>> (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was loved by the Father and yet it pleased him to bruise his son: <<Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand>> (Isaiah 53:10).

His sacrifice was more than an act of grace and mercy, it was an act of righteousness as it proved his faithfulness in keeping his promises even though the Jews, and now all who profess Christ as Lord, did and do not keep their side of the promises and covenant: <<If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness>> (1 John 1:9).

This section, vv.21-26, is clearly of crucial significance in the development of Paul's argument and exposition of his Gospel, as is confirmed by the repeated emphasis on the key words of his earlier thematic statement: <<For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith">> (Romans 1:17). In the six verses of this section, righteousness and its cognates occur no less than seven times, while faith occurs four times.

So it is well worth pausing to summarise the central points made:

1. The answer to the plight of all humankind under sin has been given by God in his provision of Jesus Christ as a ransom and expiatory sacrifice.
2. This saving act of God is in complete continuity with and fulfilment of his covenanted promises to Israel.
3. Participation in or benefit from this righteousness of God comes through faith, trust that Christ's ransom and expiatory sacrifice has been effective, and trust in Jesus himself; since all alike have the same need of God's righteousness, so it comes to all alike in the same way, through faith.

Of these three, Paul simply states the first two, as it appears he is confident they will be understood and accepted. It is the third that he strongly argues as it may be contentious and need further discussions and understanding.

The focus of his arguments therefore is on the third proposition, 'to all who believe'. The contention, which has to be argued, is that this understanding of the righteousness of God is in full continuity with and the fulfilment of 'the law and the prophets'.

### III.a.ii Romans 3:27-31 - Righteousness by faith for Jews and Gentiles

Both Jews and Gentiles obtain a right standing with God by faith alone. It is owing to the forbearance of God that we are not taken away in the very act of sin. It is due to the grace of the Christ that there is even one sinner this side of Hell.

The Jews thought that it was the keeping of the law that had been given to them by God, i.e. works of the law that would bring salvation. Therefore, as the only nation with the law, they were the only ones who could be saved, along with any proselytes who converted fully to Judaism and who subsequently kept the law. This would include any of the additional laws that the Pharisees, in particular, introduced as part of their tradition to clarify and interpret God's law to fit particular circumstances that people encountered in their lives. Now Paul comes along with a new idea:

1. Salvation is not by works but by faith in God. Not to dismiss the out-workings of that faith or to say that God is not interested in holiness, or is tolerant of any type of behaviour, providing we show trust in him.
2. This faith is now the only 'badge' that would mark someone out as being a member of God's new covenant people, not circumcision, keeping the law or being a Jew by heritage and birthright. Boasting is ruled out because it is not something that can be earned by people, but is freely given by God to all who believe, both Jew and Gentile.

3. Since God is One, a theme that is at the very heart of Jewish monotheism, and he is the Creator of everything, then anyone who tries to restrict God to one who only has dominion over a small nation is sadly mistaken. He is the God of all and for all. The law is his and it will be kept - by faith alone!

<sup>27</sup> Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.

#### Romans 3:27

Since salvation is accomplished through Christ's atoning death, all human boasting; is excluded. Some commentators believe the word law in this verse probably means principle, although it is more likely that a reference to the OT law is intended. If righteousness came about through works, then human beings could brag about what they have done. But since salvation is through faith, no one can boast before God. Thus no man can boast in his faith or his keeping of the law, for it is for God's glory alone: <<so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" >> (1 Corinthians 1:29-31).

Boasting would only be permitted if justification was by works of the law or human achievement. In some translations, Paul speaks of the law of faith: <<Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law? of works? Nay: but by a law of faith>> (v.27 ASV), so that we are not left lawless.

We may notice that Paul's antithesis is not between faith and the law, but between faith and works of the law, and that faith can be described in terms of the law: 'the law of faith' (v.27 ASV). This one phrase confirms beyond dispute that Paul sees his Gospel as standing in complete continuity with the law. It is the contention that most of Israel has misunderstood the law, by taking it as a badge of national and covenant identity. And it is this false understanding of the law, the law of works, which he seeks to eliminate. The law properly understood is fulfilled and 'done' by faith.

<sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

#### Romans 3:28

Apart from. Justification is by faith alone and does not depend at all on doing any works of the law. Given that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law, what is the significance of God's choice of Israel, and of his giving Israel the law in the first place? Paul's answer in Galatians is pushed to a sharper antithesis between the law and faith than he does here. And one of the reasons for writing to the Romans may well have been to provide a more carefully stated exposition of the continuity, as well as of the discontinuity, in God's purpose for Israel, and between the law and the Gospel.

<sup>29</sup> Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, <sup>30</sup> since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

#### Romans 3:29-30

He justifies the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith. Since there is little difference between by and through then there is imperceptible difference between Jew and Gentile in God's eyes, the only view that matters.

Since God is the Lord of all, whether Jews or Gentiles, there can only be one way of justification, and that is by faith.

Deuteronomy 6:4 provides the Jews with the answer they could have picked up on many generations earlier: <<Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one>>. If God is one, the Creator God, and all Jews inherently believed this, and he is the one and only God, i.e. their basis for monotheistic practice, then he is the God of the Gentiles also. Since he requires obedience, i.e. faith, from all his creatures, then Israel should have realised their privileged status was meant for something far more than simply keeping God to themselves.

Can it be imagined that a God of infinite love and mercy should limit himself to such a small and disobedient people as the Jews, leaving all the rest of his creation in a condition of eternal desperation?

<sup>31</sup> **Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.**

#### Romans 3:31

Nullify, uphold. Justification by faith does not nullify the law but establishes it. That is, the law itself points to the fact that human obedience to the law cannot save and that righteousness can be achieved only through faith in Christ; Christ has achieved this righteousness on behalf of all who believe in him, through his perfect fulfilment of the law and his atoning death on the Cross for the salvation of all who believe. When Paul says, we uphold the law, he also affirms the abiding moral norms of the law and thus anticipates the charge of antinomianism, to which he responds more fully in Chapters 6 and 7.

The law remains useful to convince us of what is past and to direct us for the future. Far from nullifying the law, the Gospel establishes the law but through and in a new way.

Paul's argument is that the law is only nullified if it is held to represent Jewish nationalistic identity and pride. When it is taken as the law of faith, when it is seen as speaking to Gentiles as well, it is established and its validity confirmed. The fact that God is one does not nullify the giving of the law to the Jews; rather it shows that his giving of the law had the Gentiles in view all along, with the Jews intended to be the nation that would take the law to the Gentiles and thus reveal the one true God to them, just as he had revealed himself to the Jews.