

Romans 1.18—3.20

The Perfect Mess

Having introduced himself, his purpose for writing, and his passion for proclaiming the gospel, God's perfect message, Paul presents the need for the gospel. The need for the gospel, God's righteousness apart from our efforts, focuses upon the revelation of God's wrath against humanity's universal idolatry and moral lawlessness. It is because of, and amid this human rebellion against God, that God's glory (His character and works) through the gospel shines the brightest. The human condition and the plight of the universe is the "perfect" mess. Perfect in that it is the plan of God's by which His love and grace shine the brightest, and "mess" in that the chaos and plight of humanity is just that, a mess.

I. Failure to Honor God and Keep His Law Results in Humanity's Universal Guilt and God's Justifiable Wrath, 1:18—3:20

A. God reveals His wrath because of Humanity's Failure to Honor God, 1:18—2:1.

The Text with Grammatical Notes

18 For God's wrath is being revealed^{ppi} from heaven upon all humanity's¹ impiety and unrighteousness² who are suppressing^{3paptc} the truth in unrighteousness, **19** because⁴ that which is known about God is^{pai} manifest among them; for God, to them, has made [what is known about God] manifest^{aai}. **20** For His invisible [attributes] from creation of the world by the things made is being understood clearly^{ppi}, even His eternal power and divine nature, so that⁵ they are to be^{painf} without excuse, **21** because having known^{aaptc} God they did not glorify^{aai} [Him] as God or were thankful^{aai}, but they became futile^{api} in their reasonings and their senseless heart was darkened^{api}. **22** While claiming^{paptc} to be^{painf} wise they were made foolish^{api} **23** and they exchanged^{aai} the glory of the immortal God in the image of form of mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 Wherefore God gave them over^{aai} in the desires of their hearts unto uncleanness who dishonor^{pminf} their bodies among themselves and their senseless⁶ heart was darkened^{7api}, **25** who

¹ The plural genitive ἀνθρώπων has been taken to be descriptive/possessive genitive

² ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν καὶ ἀδικίαν upon all Impiety and unrighteousness—i.e., impiety/godlessness (lack of reverence for God) and wickedness (no righteousness).

³ κατεχόντων (fr. κατέχω) articular pres act ptc masc gen pl "hold down; suppress."

⁴ διότι – a marker indicating why something just stated can be reasonably considered valid.

⁵ εἰς το + infinitive = purpose – for the purpose that they are without excuse

⁶ ἀσύνετος lacking understanding

⁷ ἔσκοτίσθη emphatic position in the original...aorist passive indic.

exchanged^{aai} God's truth with the lie⁸ and worshipped^{api} and served^{aai} the creature rather than the One who created, who is^{pai} blessed forever, amen.

26 On account of this God gave them over^{aai} to dishonorable passions, for the females exchanged^{aai} the natural function for⁹ [the function] contrary to nature, **27** likewise the males releasing^{10aaptc} the natural function of the female were inflamed^{api} in their longing for one another, men with men committing^{pmptc} the shameless deed and which of necessity receiving^{paptc} the penalty of their error among themselves¹¹.

28 And just as they did not approve^{aai} to have^{painf} God in their knowledge [to acknowledge God], God gave them over^{aai} to a worthless¹² mind, to do^{painf} things which are not proper^{paptc}, **29** having been filled^{pfpptc} with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greediness, malice, full¹³ of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malevolent; gossiper; **30** slanderous; God hater; violent; arrogant; boaster; inventor of evil; disobedient to parents; **31** senseless; bound by no covenant¹⁴; unfeeling; unmerciful; **32** who, having known^{aaptc} God's ordinance, namely, that the ones acting out^{paptc} these things are worthy of death, not only are doing these things^{pai}, but agree together^{pai} with those doing^{paptc} them. **2:1** Therefore you are^{pai} without excuse, O fellow human, everyone who judges^{paptc}, for in which you judge^{pai} another you are condemning^{pai} yourself, for the one judging^{15paptc} is doing^{pai} the same things.

Observations From the Text

We have exchanged the true God for gods of our imagination, 1:18-23.

VV 18-23 introduce the natural condition of humanity and mankind's relationship with God (apart from divine intervention through Christ). This natural condition is that of idolator and the continual practice of idolatry, placing others and things as more important than or in the place of the true and living God. Humanity suppresses THE TRUTH about God IN/by UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, v18. Even though what can be KNOWN ABOUT GOD IS EVIDENT "plain"/visible /manifest, v19, we humans have, in our self-worship and ensuing arrogance, v22, EXCHANGED THE GLORY OF THE INCORRUPTIBLE character of God for the visible things of this world, namely, AN IMAGE IN THE FORM OF CORRUPTIBLE MAN AND OF BIRDS AND FOUR-FOOTED ANIMALS, v23. With Adam's disobedience all humanity is born guilty of idolatry.

⁸ en + dative "in" "with" "by"

⁹ eis + accusative "for" denoting purpose...motion toward; unto; to.

¹⁰ ἀφέντες aor act ptc from ἀφίημι — to release; let go; forgive; give up; abandon

¹¹ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς

¹² εἰς ἀδόκιμον – same root word as the verb approve (v28)

¹³ μεστοῦς—accusative adjective

¹⁴ ἀσυνθέτους – untrustworthy; unfaithful

¹⁵The ptc "the one who is judging" is last in the original language placing the emphasis upon "are doing the same things," literally "for the same things you are doing the one who is judging."

Further observations from these verses inform us that UNRIGHTEOUSNESS suppresses the truth, v18. Further, though God has made Himself known to mankind, v19, mankind has undermined this knowledge, v21. This subversion darkened man's heart.

V18 FOR – The explanation which follows reinforces why God's righteousness must be granted from faith (Christ's) and to faith, (our response to grace), 1:17. Those who have not honored God are under God's wrath.¹⁶ The remainder of this chapter, as well as chapters 2:1 through 3:20, provide details about the spiritual and moral condition of every human being as well as the inevitable judgment of each person in the day of God's wrath, 2:5.

V18 THE WRATH OF GOD – The gospel reveals God's righteousness. This revelation of God's righteousness includes God's justice against unrighteousness. God's righteous assessment of sin includes God's righteous judgment. Because of humanity's spiritual and moral failure God's wrath is revealed. Ultimately, the revelation of God's wrath is evident in the substitutionary death of Christ, 3:35-26, but this wrath is also evident in the chaos of human existence, 1:24,26,28, and will be evident at the final judgment, 2:8; 5:9.

V18 IS REVEALED – Using the same word found in 1:17, Paul connects the revelation of God's wrath to the previous mention of revealing God's righteousness. God's righteousness through the grace of the gospel is the same righteousness that executes judgment upon sin. Now Paul tells us that God's wrath is already at work (present passive) judging us for our rejection of God. Furthermore, the revelation of God's wrath is tied to the perfect message in that humanity's universal guilt, 1:18—3:20, through our idolatrous violation of God's law, requires a new manifestation of righteousness, namely, the person of Christ, who, as we will discover, reveals God's righteousness apart from law gifted by grace in and through Christ, 3:21—8:39.

V18 WHO SUPPRESS THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS – God's wrath has a justifiable object, namely those who suppress the truth about God by their unrighteousness. Here we also discover one of the effects that sin has upon us, the suppression of truth. Romans 7:11 states "sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived¹⁷ me..." The flesh's appetite for unrighteousness (self) suppresses the truth. This appetite historically took the form of other gods (envying other things; covetousness, Philippians 3:19; Colossians 3:5). These "gods" become the objects of our affections as we exchange God's glory for other things, 1:23.

¹⁶ John 3:36 states, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

¹⁷ The idea behind deceive is that of "beguile," or 'entice by using bait.' "The thought is to be so completely deceived as to accept falsehood for the truth, believing it to be the truth." Jacob W. Kapp "Beguile" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, from Logos Bible Software.

V19 FOR GOD MADE IT EVIDENT TO THEM – Anticipating that we might ask, “What truth about God?”, Paul informs us that mankind intuitively knows about God and His righteous requirements. Elsewhere Romans indicates that the nations, without the written Law, have a moral law written on their hearts, 1:32; 2:14-15. The Jews, having God’s written Law, knew, in their covenantal setting, God’s specific requirements, 2:17ff.

V20 HAVE BEEN CLEARLY SEEN—What God has revealed about Himself since creation is CLEARLY SEEN. God’s INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES, HIS ETERNAL POWER AND DIVINE NATURE have been UNDERSTOOD THROUGH WHAT HAS BEEN MADE. Humanity is WITHOUT EXCUSE. Of course, because of the dark lens from sin’s deception we can’t see as we ought (v21 THEIR FOOLISH HEART WAS DARKENED) unless God intervenes. And God’s intervention is constant. This intervention (revelation of truth) exists through creation, providence, the incarnation, and the normative role of Scripture.

V21-23 FOR EVEN THOUGH THEY KNEW GOD – The humanity’s consensus through the centuries is, ‘God exists.’ Yet in our knowledge of God we, through the darkness of our hearts, invented what this ‘god’ was like. Humanity imagined other gods. Our self-worship resulted in our failure to honor God as God. And we became FUTILE IN our SPECULATIONS. PROFESSING TO BE WISE (our self-authentication) we BECAME FOOLS. And so Humanity EXCHANGED THE GLORY OF THE INCORRUPTIBLE GOD FOR AN IMAGE IN THE FORM OF CORRUPTIBLE MAN... The heart of our rebellion against God is the exchange of the true and living God for other things. The heart of sin is our self-sufficiency and the constant expression of our self-sufficiency is idolatry. Conversely, at the heart of the Christian growth, the exchange of our lives for the life of the indwelling Christ, is God stripping away our idols (self) and directing our allegiance to Him. Consider the grand statement of the gospel’s objective, calling God, “Abba,” 8:15.

Taking a Closer Look

GOD’S WRATH

God’s wrath presents a constant and important theme in Romans. Of the twenty-one times Paul uses “wrath” in his letters, twelve of these appear in Romans. The primary word behind wrath focuses upon the retribution directed at wrongdoing including the idea of strong indignation.¹⁸ Wrath provides the underlying necessity for the gospel of grace.

In Romans God’s wrath is presented as a progression. First, in Romans 1:18-32, God’s wrath is revealed as that which allows sinners to experience the effects of their own sin and unbelief. Dealing with sin and death daily is a part of God’s judgment. In Romans 2 God’s wrath is represented as the final judgment against sinners for failure to keep law, 2:5,8. In 3:4-8 we learn that God’s wrath is just/fair/justified. In Romans 4:15 we discover that God’s wrath is connected to the Law. Romans 5:9 possibly blends the two timeframes of already/not yet since the justified are saved from the outcome of sin, namely, from the judgment still to come, while presently living with the temporal results of Adam’s death. In Romans 9:22 we learn that wrath is a

¹⁸ BDAG, 720. *Orge* appears in Romans 1:18; 2:5a; 2:8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22(2); 12:19; 13:4; 13:5.

necessary and useful part of God's plan to rescue humanity. Here we discover that God uses the reality of wrath as a motivation to turn to Christ, consider also 7:24. In Romans 12:19 we are exhorted to leave "wrath" to God. In wrath's place we are to love our enemies. Finally, in Romans 13:4-5 we learn that civil government is an arm of God to execute wrath.

In sum, the concept of wrath is embedded with the use of the terms for judgment and condemnation especially as it relates to humanity's idolatry and failure to honor God. We experience God's wrath/judgment through the impact of sin and, further, those who reject Christ will experience a future judgment/condemnation while the justified are saved from wrath, 5:9. There is no condemnation in Christ, Romans 8:1, 34.

VV 24, 26, 28 – GOD GAVE THEM OVER – In the following passages we discover the first expression of God's wrath/judgment. God allows sin to have its way with us. God's judgment begins by handing mankind over to IMPURITY, their own DEGRADING PASSIONS, and a "worthless" DEPRAVED MIND. This "delivering over" led humanity to dishonor God through false worship (vv24-25), indecent sexual perversions (vv26-27), and to a lifestyle worthy of death, vv28-32.

We have exchanged God's Truth for a lie, 1:24-25

V 24 GOD GAVE THEM OVER – We often wonder why everything is so corrupt. The corruption is the human heart. God's wrath/indignation toward this corruption is allowing us to have our own way.¹⁹ God did not "make" us corrupt. God simply gave humanity over IN THE LUSTS OF our HEARTS TO IMPURITY.

V25 EXCHANGED THE TRUTH OF GOD – The reason God gave humanity over to their own desires is that humanity gave God over. Humanity has EXCHANGED THE TRUTH OF GOD FOR A LIE. Considering Paul's emphasis regarding humanity's self-sufficient idolatry and Adam's disobedience, 5:12-21, the thought behind LIE may allude to the serpent's deceit in the garden, "you shall be like God." Regardless, the exchange of truth for a lie took humanities rebellion further. Humanity WORSHIPED AND SERVED THE CREATURE. Our exchange of truth for a lie led to worshipping and serving 'ourselves.' RATHER than worshipping and serving the CREATOR, WHO IS BLESSED FOREVER, we WORSHIPED AND SERVED THE CREATURE.

We have exchanged God's natural order for destructive passions, 1:26-27

V26 GOD GAVE THEM OVER TO DEGRADING PASSIONS – Since humanity exchanged God's truth for falsehood God delivered humanity over to their own dishonorable passions. The passions referred to here are those of homosexuality. It must be stated that here is nothing in the language that suggests this sexual sin is a unique or hideous form of homosexuality.

¹⁹ Isaiah 29:10 and Deuteronomy 29:4 (cited in Romans 11:8) indicates that God closes the minds of people by withdrawing His word (through the prophets). Secondly, Jesus, after being rejected by the religious leaders as being empowered by the Devil, Matthew 12:24, Jesus begins teaching the crowds with parables, Matthew 13:10-16.

Rather, all homosexuality is sin.²⁰ Paul singles out this sexual behavior because homosexuality attacks God's natural order. Consider that same-sex activity cannot reproduce itself. God's natural order is that each "kind" multiples/reproduces itself. Same sex passion cannot reproduce which places this activity outside God's natural order, cp. Genesis 1:28. In Paul's words, homosexuality exchanges THE NATURAL FUNCTION FOR THAT WHICH IS UNNATURAL. From exchanging our understanding about God through the worship of self to activities which work against God's natural order, the chaos/ mess created by the self-authenticating human condition worsens.

We have exchanged God's good character for our unrighteous flesh patterns, 1:28-32

V28 AND JUST AS THEY DID NOT SEE FIT TO ACKNOWLEDGE GOD – Taking the reader back to the opening paragraph, vv18-23, Paul now gives us a description of humanity as it relates to everyday behavior. God has given us over to A DEPRAVED MIND. There is a subtle play on words at the beginning of verse 28. Paul tells us that as humanity choose "not to approve to have God in their knowledge," that "God gave them over to an unapproved (depraved) mind." God gave us over to our own self-sufficient aptitude and efforts. Now, through this final exchange, we discover the results of our self-worship. The sin list 'sampler' is amazingly personal. We discover behavior, i.e., flesh patterns,²¹ that include everyone. Nobody escapes indictment. Our everyday human patterns of self-authentication and self-sufficiency (flesh patterns) include ENVY, STRIFE, DECEIT, characterizing us as GOSSIPS, SLANDERERS, HATERS OF GOD, INSOLENT, ARROGANT, BOASTFUL, INVENTORS OF EVIL, DISOBEDIENT TO PARENTS, WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING, UNTRUSTWORTHY, UNFEELING, and UNMERCIFUL. Certainly, all of us might not be characterized by all these qualities all the time. We are, however, guilty of these responses to life and others. "There is none righteous, not even one," 3:10.

V32 ALTHOUGH THEY KNOW THE ORDINANCE OF GOD— The conscience has a sense of moral correctness. Few would excuse the behavior listed above if it were directed at them. This sense of knowledge and guilt is because we KNOW THE ORDINANCE OF GOD, that is, we know God's law in conscience or in writing. Further, as mentioned, the list of human sins in verses 29-31 includes everyone. Every person may not murder, but by the time we read through Paul's short list, we intuitively know our guilt. We know these behaviors are wrong and deserve some form of correction and punishment. To this Paul concludes that our knowledge includes THAT THOSE WHO PRACTICE SUCH THINGS ARE WORTHY OF DEATH

²⁰Remember, all heterosexual immorality is also sin, consider 1 Corinthians 6:18; Ephesians 5:5.

²¹ The phrase "flesh patterns" refers to the behavioral patterns we have developed from the messages we have received about ourselves and the world throughout our lifetime. These messages shape behavior in such a manner so that we respond to life in attempts to manage circumstances, protect interests or self, and meet basic needs apart from the sufficiency of a personal relationship with God in Christ.

(God's ultimate judgment). But instead of remorse the general response to the everyday flesh patterns of humanity is that we, in some fashion or another GIVE HEARTY APPROVAL TO THOSE WHO PRACTICE THEM. Rather than seek God's mercy, humanity is characterized by the continued practice and approval of sin(s). While we know these behaviors to be worthy of judgment, but we do nothing. In fact, many things listed in vv. 29-31 not only become flesh patterns (i.e., normal responses in everyday living) but are justified and even applauded (given our consent). Various cultures approve of our 'right' to get even, to boast, to break our promises, to lie, in order to preserve and promote ourselves or the values we embrace.

Our own assessment of another's behavior passes sentence upon ourselves, 2:1

2:1 THEREFORE – This word introduces a conclusion about what has just been said. The conclusion, based upon our own assessment of another's behavior is that we HAVE NO EXCUSE about ourselves. Reiterating sentiments in 1:20 "without excuse," Paul demonstrates that our own assessment of others' behavior indicts ourselves. There isn't anyone who has an excuse for the unrighteousness in their lives. The fact that we complain/judge others for the very things we do, renders us guilty. We intuitively know what we do to be wrong. For example, in the very act of speaking judgmentally about someone who gossips (v29), we gossip and condemn ourselves. Our very passing judgment about another judges us. Paul includes everyone. EVERYONE OF YOU reads "O man," in the original language indicating that Paul is addressing humanity, not just the church (see also 9:20). Though Paul's understanding of the righteous (those who believe in Christ) includes complete acquittal/justification of all wrong, for the sake of argument, everyone, past present and future, is included. The inclusion is because everyone PASSES JUDGMENT. Everyone judges others. If you think me wrong on this matter, you have just proved me right. You have just fulfilled God's word, proving Paul's point. And the reason for Paul's guilty verdict, is simple, FOR YOU WHO JUDGE PRACTICE THE SAME THINGS. Every human being knows, that is has a sense of right and wrong. Yet every human being does what every human being does. We are all, through our flesh patterns, guilty of transgressing God's Law. Our flesh patterns may be different (have different preferences) but we are universally guilty.

Summarizing the Text

As the gospel reveals God's righteousness, the gospel also reveals God's righteous wrath, that is, God's righteous judgment against the sin(s) of humanity. This wrath is directly related to our rejection of God and our exchange of God for the lie fostering our self-worship. We have exchanged the truth of God for the lie of self-authentication. Because of this exchange, God has delivered us over to the passions of the mind and flesh. Left to ourselves our lives become characterized by a multitude of flesh patterns worthy of judgment/ death. Our judgment another's behavior renders us, by our own assessment, guilty. In part or in whole,

we all do the same things. The moral and social mess which is humanity runs deep. The mess is complete.

B. All humanity will face God’s future judgment based upon our works, 2:2—11

The text with grammatical notes

2 And we know^{pfai} that²² God’s judgment is^{pai} according to truth upon those who are doing^{paptc} such things. **3** And do you think^{pmi} this, O fellow human who is judging^{paptc} those practicing^{paptc} these things and doing^{paptc} the same, that you will escape^{fmi} God’s judgment? **4** Or the riches of His kindness and of the forbearance and of the patience are you despising^{pai} while not knowing^{paptc} that God’s kindness is leading^{pai} you to repentance? **5** But according to your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are treasuring up^{pai} wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of God’s righteous judgment **6** who will repay^{fai} to each one according to his works; **7** on one hand, to those seeking^{23paptc} according to good works glory and honor and immortality, eternal life, **8** but on the other hand, to the ones from selfish ambition and disobeying^{paptc} the truth but obeying^{pmptc} the unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.²⁴ **9** Tribulation and trouble upon every human life²⁵ committing^{pmptc} evil, to Jew first and to Greek; **10** but glory and honor and peace to everyone who is working^{pmptc} the good, to Jew first and to Greek; **11** for there is^{pai} no partiality²⁶ with God.

Observations from the text

Without any elaboration regarding sequence and attending circumstances Paul announces that God will judge every human being, punishing or rewarding each person according to their works.

V2 THE JUDGMENT OF GOD RIGHTLY FALLS – Paul immediately focuses upon the primary point of this section, God’s justifiable wrath. The ESV renders the original language “according to truth” as RIGHTLY. Hence, God’s judgment of sinful behavior is true/ right (fair and deserved).

V3 Rhetorical questions in Romans often indicates a shift in the discussion. Paul now turns his attention toward God’s present patience and the inevitability of God’s future judgment.

V3 O MAN – Here Paul addresses all and every human being with a generic phrase. Paul singles out anyone (which, of course, is everyone) who judges the behavior of others (and who, by doing so, inadvertently agrees to an inner moral standard). Paul argues, through our admitting to an inherent moral standard, that we are, likewise, guilty. Thus, the question is

²² ὅτι -epexegetical giving the content of what we know

²³ τοῖς ... ζητοῦσιν – the ptc encloses καθ’ ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν thus the translation “those seeking according to perseverance of good works glory and honor and immortality”

²⁴ The ESV renders this passage, “but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.”

²⁵ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου literally “every soul of man”

²⁶ Gk “respect of persons”, also in Col.3:25, and James.2:1.

simple, WILL YOU ESCAPE THE JUDGMENT OF GOD? The answer, is simple, “no, we will not escape God’s judgment.”

V4 THE KINDNESS OF GOD LEADS YOU TO REPENTANCE – A second question addresses our misunderstanding regarding THE RICHES OF [God’s] HIS KINDNESS AND TOLERANCE AND PATIENCE toward humanity. God’s present kindness (or forbearance) is the God-given opportunity to change our minds about our relationship with God. God is not presently visiting humanity with His final judgment. This is the time for people to change their minds, 2 Corinthians 6:2.

In brief, repentance is the first response of faith. As we change our mind (the core meaning of repent) about God and our relationship with God, we are replacing our former opinions and understanding with something different. By God’s patience, as we understand God’s grace and kindness, we understand more about ourselves; and upon hearing the perfect message we then “believe” the gospel. Repent and believe represents the two essential elements of biblical faith, consider Mark 1:15. GOD’S KINDNESS IS MEANT TO LEAD YOU TO REPENTANCE. God’s kindness is expressed in His daily provision for creation, for life, and for giving us life. God’s kindness is expressed through His delay of inevitable judgment. God’s kindness is displayed in providing the escape of condemnation apart from the law through Jesus Christ.

VV 5-11 Because God’s judgment is right (i.e., according to truth, v 2), God will impartially assess and reward every human being according to their deeds. Those who persevere in doing good will receive eternal life; those who live in selfish disobedience to the truth will receive wrath and indignation. While at first reading these verses seem to indicate the salvation is achieved by works, Paul’s conclusion to the proposition, ‘if you could keep the law, then God would reward you with life,’ will be that keeping the law is impossible. Eternal life as a reward for our good works is unattainable, 3:19-20.

V5 Rather than taking God’s gift of time as an opportunity to trust the gospel, many, BECAUSE OF their²⁷ STUBBORNNESS AND UNREPENTANT HEART, ARE STORING UP WRATH FOR themselves IN THE DAY OF WRATH. Paul does not indicate a specific time for God’s judgment. What we know is that THE DAY OF WRATH is certain and yet future. Today, according to Paul, is the “day of salvation, 2 Corinthians 6:2. The DAY OF WRATH is the day of the REVELATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD. While we experience a sense of God’s judgments today (e.g., living with the consequences of sin and death), the full revelation of God’s righteous judgment is yet to come. This is the time to change our minds.

V6 ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS— The gospel stresses salvation as a free-gift, apart from works, Romans 3:24. That said, the Bible clearly reports that everyone must face a judgment, Hebrews 9:27. Those who reject Christ and those who have accepted Christ will stand before God and give an account of their works. Revelation 20:11-14 indicates that humanity’s final

²⁷The text reads “you” and “yourselves” rather than ‘their’ and ‘themselves.’ Paul is addressing humanity in general (O man), not the Roman Christians in particular. I have changed the pronouns to fit the sense of my sentence. To indicate this I have not capitalized these changes.

judgment is according to works. Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 also inform believers that their works will be assessed. As mentioned elsewhere, however, the judgment of a believer's works is for reward, 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, not salvation. The judgment revealed in Revelation 20:11-14 will be an assessment of the unbeliever's works. This judgment, according to Revelation, results in the second death, or final condemnation. The gift of salvation, interestingly, will also be according to works, but not our works. Our deliverance from condemnation will be because of another's faith and faithfulness. This other person, of course, is Jesus, 3:21-22; 5:19.

V7 ETERNAL LIFE – Paul's letters use the phrase eternal life to refer to more than our final destiny (consider Galatians 6:8). Here, while there is a degree of ambiguity, the context seems to indicate that ETERNAL LIFE is a reward for a life well-lived, that is, **TO THOSE WHO BY PERSEVERANCE IN DOING GOOD SEEK FOR GLORY AND HONOR AND IMMORTALITY, ETERNAL LIFE**. This concept of eternal life, namely, the final state of the righteous, is further reinforced in v. 10 where eternal life is described as **GLORY, HONOR, AND PEACE**. If it were possible, this eternal life would be granted to anyone who lived up to God's moral standards, consider 2:13. This possibility, however, is unattainable. From this point onward in Paul's discussion, the Apostle makes the impossibility of salvation by our works of the law very clear.

Taking a closer look

FUTURE JUDGMENT

An entire section could be written about God's judgment(s). Our 'closer look' regarding God's future judgment will be brief bullet points. Further, we will restrict the overview to the book of Romans).

- Romans indicates that every human being will stand before God and give an account. Those who persevere in doing right will be rewarded, 2:5-6. Those who do evil will suffer wrath, 2:7.
- The judgment everyone faces will be impartial, 2:11, according to the standard of the gospel that Paul preaches, 2:16, unveiling and on the basis of the secrets of men's hearts, 2:16.
- Regarding condemnation, the justified will no longer face the possibility of God's wrath, 5:9; 8:1, 31-34, but will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, 14:10, where the Christian will give an account of himself to God, see also 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. The reward of eternal life, in this sense, will be the quality of one's 'status' in the kingdom of God (for the implied idea of great/least in the kingdom consider Jesus' words in Matthew 5:19).
- While different theological systems present plausible scenarios for how God's future judgment will unfold, in Romans Paul does not provide any definitive timeline or sequence. The judgments mentioned seem to be simply at the end of this age preceding the possibility of "eternal life," in the full eschatological sense.

V8 THOSE WHO ARE SELFISHLY AMBITIOUS AND DO NOT OBEY THE TRUTH—Here we have the condition of humanity as a whole and the life-long condition of those who with face God's wrath. We often hear that the essence of sin is pride. Pride, however, could be further clarified as self-sufficiency, or independence from God, placing the creature ahead of the Creator is simply disobedience to **THE TRUTH**. This **TRUTH** is the truth about God revealed, 1:18-23 rendering everyone inexcusable. Rather than obeying the truth about God, these receiving God's wrath **OBEY UNRIGHTEOUSNESS**. The self-sufficiency of sin seems to be expressed here in the negative as self-seeking, or selfish ambition (BDAG).

VV8-9 WRATH AND INDIGNATION. TRIBULATION AND DISTRESS – Paul uses four words to communicate the inevitable experience of those who live life independently of God. Pursuing a life of unrighteous self-sufficiency/misplaced worship, leads to God’s WRATH. Wrath properly understood is accompanied by anger expressed in “rage,” and TRIBULATION emphasizing the affliction experienced. Finally, there is also DISTRESS which focuses upon the “difficulty” produced by this tribulation. In a word, God’s future judgment is certain and will not be pleasant.

V9 FOR EVERY SOUL OF MAN WHO DOES EVIL—The negative wrath and distress mentioned above is literally for EVERY SOUL OF MAN emphasizing the very core of one’s life that enlivens every other aspect of our being (e.g., mind, feelings, will, and body). Everyone who does evil will experience wrath, fury, tribulation, and distress to their deepest sense of being.

V9 THE JEW FIRST AND ALSO THE GREEK – Repeated twice in these verses, Paul once again emphasizes the prioritized relationship the Jews have with God as first recipients of the promises and the Law. As with the blessedness of the gospel, 1:16, the Jewish privileged position, 3:1-2; 9:4-5, in God’s plan, also warrants the priority of God’s retribution, consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:20-24.

V10 GLORY AND HONOR AND PEACE...WHO DOES GOOD –Similarly, those who “accomplish” the good, God will grant glory, honor, and peace. While these last words may be a Hebraism for “messianic salvation (Is 52:7), Ac 10:36; Ro 10:15; Eph 2:17.”²⁸, nevertheless, Paul describes what God intends for those who achieve God’s righteous requirements. Quit a future. Only problem, no one can attain God’s righteous requirements apart from outside intervention, which we will see in Romans 3:21-24.

V11 NO PARTIALITY – While the Jew is ‘first in line’ (to the Jew first), God will be impartial as it pertains to a righteous or truthful assessment of one’s works. God’s judgment will be just/fair/ righteous, whether a person is Jewish or Gentile.

Summary of the Text

Paul tells us that everyone’s tendency to judge others agrees with God’s moral compass and indicts us as guilty. Despite our self-pronounced guilt, however, God, in His forbearance, allows our unrighteousness to continue in order that some might repent/change their minds of their evil and turn to God. Not changing our minds, however, stores up wrath in God’s future judgment. In this final “day of wrath” God’s system of justice, is simple. Everyone is judged. Those who do evil receive wrath. Those who achieve God’s righteousness and do good get rewarded with eternal life.

C. Failing God’s moral requirements without the Law does not excuse anyone, 2:12-16

In this brief section Paul informs us that those without God’s written Law will be judged by the law written on their hearts. The criteria for this judgment will be the gospel. The depth of this judgment will be the secrets of one’s heart. In this paragraph Paul singles out the

²⁸BDAG, 288.

Gentiles/ the nations (i.e., those without the law). The idea that the Gentiles, who did not have the Mosaic Law given to them, were excused from God's judgment, is simply not the case. The moral aptitude of mankind renders everyone guilty and liable to God.

The Text with Grammatical Notes

12 For whoever apart from law sinned^{aai} will also perish^{fmi} apart from law, but whoever in law sinned^{aai}, through law will be judged.^{fpi} **13** For the hearers of Law [are] not righteous with²⁹ God, but the doers of Law will be declared righteous^{fpi}. **14** For when the Gentiles [nations] not having^{paptc} Law by nature are doing^{pasubj} the things of the Law, these not having^{paptc} Law are^{pai} a Law to themselves, **15** who are demonstrating^{pmi} the written works of the Law in their hearts, while bearing witness with^{paptc} their conscience between one another while the thoughts either accusing^{paptc} or even being defended,^{30ppptc} **16** in the day when God will judge^{fai} humanity's secrets according to my gospel through Jesus Christ.

Observations from the Text

V 12 FOR—FOR introduces a further explanation/reason of the previous discussion about God's future judgment. In this paragraph Paul discusses God's judgment and the person who lives without having God's written Law.

V12 ALL WHO HAVE SINNED (2x) – Paul introduces an important reality in verse twelve. What would seem a possibility of eternal life by works, 2:7, is now qualified. Anyone who has sinned, regardless of their relationship to the Law, will face judgment. Those who have sinned WITHOUT THE LAW WILL PERISH WITHOUT THE LAW (further explanation in vv. 14-16), while ALL WHO HAVE SINNED UNDER THE LAW WILL BE JUDGED BY THE LAW. The judgment of God is universal regardless of one's knowledge of and relationship to God through the Law.

V13 FOR...THE DOERS OF THE LAW WILL BE JUSTIFIED – The obvious reason for judgment is now given, THE DOERS OF THE LAW WILL BE JUSTIFIED. What seems here to be the possibility of justification by works has already been qualified, 2:12. Justification before God will be according to God's Law. Obey, fulfill God's Law and you will be saved/ spared God's wrath. In the verses following, 2:14—3:8,³¹ Paul's meaning in this passage will be clarified. Having clearly presented the basis for justification before God, Paul begins to demonstrate the impossibility of justification by our own works of the Law. His readers, confronted with the notion that we can justify ourselves before God through our good works, are shown the

²⁹παρὰ τῷ θεῷ -- para + dative has the idea of "alongside of" "with"

³⁰συμμαρτυρούσης αὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως καὶ μεταξύ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων Is a genitive absolute expressing contemporaneous action to the time of the main verb. The two ptcs at the end of this construction are a present active genitive plural and a present passive genitive plural, respectively.

³¹While one could make the argument that receiving the gift of righteousness through the Gospel "upholds the Law", 3:31, the immediate context likely refers to those who are trying to establish a righteousness by their own efforts to keep the law whether written on stone or upon the conscience, consider Romans 9:31-32. That said, righteousness before God is through One who flawlessly obeyed the Law. Jesus is God's righteousness.

universal failure of anyone who attempts to achieve God's righteousness by works. Later in this letter, as Paul explains the gospel, Paul confirms that justification has been made possible by virtue of One's faithfulness to God. But this faithful obedience is that of another, 3:21-5:21. The 'perfect man,' Jesus has demonstrated the righteousness of God apart from Law, 3:21.

V14 FOR WHEN GENTILES – In 2:14-16 Paul specifically demonstrates how Gentiles, without God's written Law, become a law to themselves. Gentiles, men and women around the world, DO INSTINCTIVELY THE THINGS OF THE LAW. Every human being has a sense of right/wrong within. This sense is tempered by the era and culture in which we live, yet a moral conscience remains in everyone except for those extremely impaired. The result, however, even though we ARE A LAW TO ourselves, is that humanity fails to measure up to any justifiable righteousness. We do not even measure up to our own version/standard of morality. On any given day every human being fails their own sense of moral correctness.

V15 WRITTEN IN THEIR HEARTS – Here we discover a great truth, every person has an inner moral conscience/compass. This conscience is WRITTEN IN THEIR HEARTS. Theologians have often referred this universal moral conscience as the 'moral argument for God's existence.'³² Every human being has a sense of morality, as skewed or buried under our world view as this conscience might be. Furthermore, this moral compass, and our ability to keep this law, will be judged.

V16 ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL, GOD WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN THROUGH JESUS CHRIST- Those without God's written law will be judged. The criterion of judgment is the gospel, namely, God's righteousness revealed and offered apart from the law made known and available through the faithfulness of Christ, 3:21-22. This gospel will expose the conscience of every human being. The Standard and the Judge will be Jesus Christ, consider John 5:22. God's judgment will be according to the standard of the gospel and based on the motives of the human heart. Condemnation will be one's rejection of God's gracious gift because of one's preference for darkness (one's own way), consider John 3:18-19, 36b.

Summary of the Text

While those who keep God's righteousness will be rewarded with eternal life, 2:7, anyone who sins will experience God's judgment according to the gospel. This includes those who do not have God's written Law but attempt to live according to the moral standards written on their hearts. Of course, we need to keep in mind that the 'gospel' is God's power unto salvation. So, while Christ's obedience and exaltation present the guarantee of judgment to those who do not believe, Christ's obedience and exaltation provide the way of life to those who believe, consider 2 Corinthians 2:15-16.

³²Though different theologians use various arguments simply stated are: 1) The cosmological argument: since the universe exists there must be a sufficient first cause; 2)The teleological argument: since the world has a functional order there must be an intelligent designer; 3) Moral argument: since humanity has a moral compass there must be a moral Creator; 4) Ontological argument: since mankind has the idea of a greater and perfect being it must be true; 5) Religious argument: since the notion of religion is universal there must be a God.

D. Failing God’s moral requirements under Law does not excuse anyone, 2:12,17—3:8.

Those who have been given God’s Law are guilty of breaking God’s Law, 2:17-24.

The text with grammatical notes

17 But if you are being named^{ppai} a Jew and are finding rest^{pai} in Law and are boasting^{pai} in God **18** and you know^{pai} the will and approve^{pai} of the superior things while being taught^{ppptc} from the Law, **19** being convinced^{pfai} yourself to be a guide of the blind, a light in darkness, **20** a child tutor of the ignorant, a teacher of the immature, having^{paptc} the formulation of the knowledge and of the truth in the Law; **21** therefore, the one teaching^{paptc} another is he not teaching^{pai} himself? The one preaching^{paptc} not to steal^{painf} is he stealing^{pai}? **22** The one saying^{paptc} do not commit adultery^{pai}, is he committing adultery^{pai}? The one who detests^{pmpctc} idols, does he rob temples^{pai}? **23** Those who boast^{pai} in the Law through transgression of Law are dishonoring^{pai} God. **24** **“For the name of the Lord through you is being spoken evil^{ppai} of among the nations (Gentiles),”³³** just as it has been written.^{pfpi}

Observations from the text:

Paul now turns his attention to those who have God’s written law and its religious tradition.

VV17-21—The Jews in Paul’s day boasted about having the benefits of God’s Law and through the law having a special relationship with God. Paul, from the perspective of a Pharisee, who by his own testimony regarding “righteousness under the law,” was “blameless,” Philippians 3:6, now tells his readers that a life under the Law must be accompanied by complete obedience to that Law, consider Galatians 5:3. Consequently, failing to obey the law in any respect results in God’s dishonor.

V17 BEAR THE NAME JEW— Having addressed those who have a law written on their hearts, 2:14-16, Paul now addresses those who consider obedience to the written law as their claim for righteousness. Paul uses the term JEW in a general, ethnic sense. There seems to be no consideration here for the variety of factions characteristic of Second Temple Judaism, e.g., John 9:28-34.

VV18-20 – Knowing the Law brought great advantage and potential for the Jewish people. They were given the knowledge of God’s will, an awareness of the divine worldview, and the opportunity to be guides to the nations. Israel could have been instructors of the foolish, teachers of children, **HAVING IN THE LAW THE EMBODIMENT (formulation) OF KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH**, consider Deuteronomy 4:4-8.

VV 21-24 – With these advantages in mind and having extolled the God-given privileges of the Jewish people, Paul now asks a series of rhetorical questions. The same nations who might have glorified God because of Israel’s relationship with God, now blaspheme God because of Israel’s disobedience. When the Jews disobey the very Law in which they boast,

³³Isaiah 52:5c

God is dishonored. Instead of being guides to God through godliness, the Jews fostered ridicule toward God because of their hypocrisy. Through a rhetorical question, verse 23 aptly summarizes what happens when the religious Jew fails to keep the law. Paul asks, YOU WHO BOAST IN THE LAW, THROUGH YOUR BREAKING THE LAW, DO YOU DISHONOR GOD?

Summary of the text

The Jews have God's written law. Having the Law, however, is not enough. God's judgment will be based on "doing" what the Law requires, 2:13. Those who fail to keep the law dishonor God and sully God's reputation.

Taking a Closer Look

THE CONCEPT OF LAW IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Law (*nomos*)

While 'law' may refer to stipulations and ordinances (written legal legislation) the underlying concept behind these uses involves the broader sense, that of "principle" or "norm." In English we use law to describe the "law" (principle) of gravity/ the "laws" (principles) of nature, etc. In Romans we find the same general use, 3:27; 7:23.

Specifically applied, however, Paul uses the word "law" as a reference to God's moral law in the conscience of man, 2:13-15, the Law of Moses, 2:17, the OT, 3:21, the law/principle of faith, 3:27, the law/principle of sin, 7:23, the law/principle of sin and death, 8:2, and, the law/principle of the Spirit of life in Christ, 8:2. Below is a listing of "law" as found in the letter to the Romans.

A survey of some texts using the term 'law.'

- Law represents a standard/norm by which all mankind will be judged, 2:12.
- Mankind is liable to live according to a divine moral standard, the law, 2:13.
- According to "law" everyone is accountable before God, 3:19
- While adherence to the Law is considered the basis for justification, no one can be declared righteous by works of the law, 3:20.
- Through the law there is the knowledge of sin, 3:20.
- The righteousness revealed through Christ is 'apart from' law, 3:21.
- There is a "law" of faith, 3:27.
- The gift of righteousness meets the requirements of the Law because of God's judgment of sin on the basis of law, 3:31.
- The law provides a justifiable basis for divine wrath, 4:15.
- With "law" there is a concrete basis for the reckoning of transgression, 4:15.
- Law is the basis for guilt, 5:13.
- Those united with Christ are not under the Law, 6:14
- Through Christ, the believer has died to the Law, 7:4-6.
- The believer no longer faces the condemnation of sin because of law, 4:15; 5:13; 8:1.
- Law serves as a catalyst for sin, 7:5, 10-11.
- Law is the basis by which sin can bring about spiritual death, 7:10.
- Law is how sin deceives and kills, 7:11.
- Though not under law, the regenerate man/mind delights in the law of God, 7:22.
- The Law of sin and death has been replaced by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ, 8:2.
- The law could not deliver because of the weakness of the flesh, 8:3
- Those who walk by the Spirit fulfill the righteousness of the Law, 8:4
- Israel failed to attain to the righteousness of the Law trying to keep the law 9:31.
- Christ Jesus is the end of Law for righteousness, 10:4.
- Love fulfills the Law, 13:8-10.

Paul's understanding of Law in the argument of Romans

• **The law and justification:** Romans explicitly states that "the doer of the law will be justified," 2:13. The difficulty with this condition is that, because of the weakness of the flesh, 8:3, attempting to keep God's law for righteousness only results in the knowledge of sin. Paul writes, "wherefore, from works of law no flesh shall be justified in His presence," 3:20. With this pronouncement Paul discusses the all-important subject of justification/righteous standing with God (the heart of the gospel), 1:18—4:25. First Paul establishes the fact that keeping the law, whether the law of conscience or of the Mosaic covenant, results in guilt and condemnation, 3:10-20. Romans, and elsewhere, consider 1 Timothy 1:8ff. uses 'law' to establish humanity's universal guilt before God. Having established universal guilt based upon God's law, Paul then directs the reader to recognize the need for a divine solution, namely, justification/righteousness apart from law, 3:21—

5:21. While God's law remains at the center of justification, it is through the righteousness of God in one Man that a sinful person may be justified. This justification is through the fulfillment of the Law but is granted apart from the Law.

- **The law and sanctification:** Paul goes to great length to depict that any attempt to live up to the laws standards results in desperation, 7:7-24. Moving from justification apart from the law, Paul explains that Christ's life/death not only satisfies God's righteous demands, 3:24—5:21, but that Christ's death ends a believer's legal relationship to law, 6:1—7:6, thus ending the possibility of sin's domination and resulting condemnation, 7:7—8:39. It is within this section, 7:7—8:4 that Paul describes the futility of anyone attempting to keep the law, 7:14-24, for holiness/sanctifying purposes. Because of the futility of our efforts to keep God's law, 7:24, Paul directs the reader to a new reality, namely that through Christ God did what we could not do, He condemned sin in the flesh apart from the Law, 8:3-4. Sanctification, the godly life of the believer, is achieved by the life-giving Holy Spirit uniting us to the resurrected Christ, 8:4,10-14.

- **The law and God's plan for Israel and the nations:** In God's plan attempting to keep the law results in alienation with God, 9:30-33. Keeping God's law through our own efforts is impossible. The questions now arise concerning the fate of Israel. Has God rejected Israel, thus indicating that His word of promise might fail? To answer this question Paul points out that it is Israel's insistence of righteousness by law-works, 9:32 that has alienated this nation from God. In Romans 9—11 Paul informs us that Israel has stumbled over God's plan for righteousness apart from law by attempting to keep the law, 9:30—10:5. God's Word has not failed Israel; Israel has failed God's Word. Now, the Gentiles (the nations) are being joined to the Abrahamic promise by faith apart from works of the Law, 9:30.

- **The law and Christian living:** Keeping Messiah's Law fulfills all God's expectations, Romans 13:8-10. Regarding charges against Paul that he taught a lawless faith (see 3:8), Paul ends his letter to Rome by demonstrating that the Messiah's Law (see also John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:23) fulfills the righteous requirement of any commandment given in the Mosaic covenant, 13:8-10.

Conclusion

Rather than being lawless/antinomian, Paul demonstrates throughout the book of Romans that attempting to keep the law (of conscience or of Moses) only leads to condemnation while faith in the faithfulness of Christ, who alone satisfies God's righteous requirements, becomes the divine means of justification/salvation. Truly, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes, 3:21; 10:4. Below is a simple chart attempting to show how Paul uses "law" to magnify the life-changing message of the gospel.

GOD'S RIGHEOUSNESS REVEALED

Romans 1:16-17

UNDER THE LAW...	Through the righteousness revealed in the Law comes the knowledge of indwelling sin. The knowledge of sin's pervasive dominance leads the listening heart to seek God apart from personal merit through the righteousness only available in the Person of Christ	UNDER GRACE/ THE GOSPEL...
GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS EXPOSES SIN LEADING TO JUDGMENT AND WRATH , 3:19-20		GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS REVEALED APART FROM THE LAW THROUGH FAITH/FAITHFULNESS OF JESUS CHRIST
SIN DECIEVES AND KILLS BECAUSE OF THE WEAKNESS OF THE FLESH, 7:11; 8:3 RULING OVER EVERY HUMAN RESULTING IN DEATH , 7:8-11		GRACE REIGNS THROUGH CHRIST'S FAITHFULNESS RESULTING IN JUSTIFICATION LEADING TO ETERNAL LIFE 3:21-24; 5:18-21
SIN BLINDS ISRAEL TO THE MESSAGE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS GIFTED THROUGH FAITH IN THE SON OF PROMISE, 9:31-33;		GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS PRODUCED BY THE INDWELLING PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT 7:4-6; 8:2-4,13
RIGHTEOUSNESS IS PRODUCED THROUGH THE STRENGTH OF THE FLESH LEADING TO SPIRITUAL FAILURE, 7:14-25		GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOW REVEALED TO THE NATIONS WHICH LEADS BACK TO ISRAEL'S SALVATION 9:24—11:32
		GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND RIGHTEOUS REQUIREMENTS ARE REVEALED AND EXPRESSED THROUGH MESSIAH'S LAW OF REDEMPTIVE LOVE 13:8—15:13

2. Those under God's Law must experience a changed heart by God's Spirit, 2:25-29.

Text with grammatical notes

25 For on one hand circumcision is of value^{pai} if³⁴ you practice^{pasub} Law; but if you are^{pasubj} a transgressor of Law, your circumcision has become^{pfai} uncircumcision. **26** If,³⁵ therefore, the uncircumcision [uncircumcised one] follows^{pasub} the requirements of Law, will not his uncircumcision be reckoned^{fpi} unto circumcision? **27** And the one, who by nature [is] uncircumcised, will judge^{fai} you, by carrying out^{paptc} the Law, the one who through letter and circumcision [is] a transgressor of Law. **28** For he is^{pai} not a Jew who [is] in public, nor in the outward [of] in flesh circumcision **29** but the Jew [is the one] in the inward, even the heart circumcision, by the Spirit not by the letter, of which the praise is not from people but rather from God.

Observations from the text:

V25 – IF YOU PRACTICE THE LAW – Paul's reference to circumcision, namely, CIRCUMCISION IS OF VALUE, seems to contradict earlier statements in Galatians 5:6. In Paul's thinking being Jewish had its advantages, 3:1-2. These advantages were not spiritual, rather, they were circumstantial, 3:2. The Jewish people had direct access and knowledge of the promises. The problem, however, was not circumstance/ birthright. The problem was spiritual. To demonstrate this Paul now expands what he means about practicing the law. The Apostle tells us that being a member of the covenant family is of value only if you keep the Law. Additionally, we know that if Paul was referring to faithfulness to the traditions of Second Temple Judaism he would not have to have been converted. In his own words he was blameless, Philippians 3:6. The Law, however, taught more than rules and regulations. The Law, which includes Genesis, taught righteousness by faith, Genesis 15:6. Thus, transgressing the Law, that is, its insistence upon faith as the basis for justification, negates one's covenant relationship. Transgressing the law meant you would be by-passing righteousness by faith as exemplified through the life of Abraham. While circumcision was emblematic of one's allegiance to the Abrahamic promises, circumcision did not result in Abraham's righteousness. Abraham was declared righteous (Genesis 15) before circumcision (Genesis 17), see 4:10-11. Apart from faith, a Jew was no different than the nations who did not have the Law, hence, YOUR CIRCUMCISION HAS BECOME UNCIRCUMCISION. A Jew's relationship with God, which can exist only through faith in the promises, Genesis 17, in all practicality, is no different than a Gentile's. By-passing the teachings of law regarding faith, the Jews failed to have any personal relationship with God. In chapter nine, Paul indicts the Jewish nation declaring that "Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law... Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as it were by works," 9:31-32. We enter into true spirituality through the door of faith in God's word, consider Hebrews 11:6.

³⁴ ἔάν third class condition introduces a sense of subjective possibility. The "if" clauses in verse 25 and 26 are third class conditions. The third-class condition (*ean+* subjunctive) functions to provide a present logical condition if A then B regarding a potential/possible, but not an actual situation.

³⁵ Third class condition

VV 26-27 – In contrast to the Jew who does not obey the Law (as taught in Genesis, namely the law of faith, 3:27), Paul now says that if the Gentile obeys the Law (the law of faith) his uncircumcision, estrangement from the promises, becomes circumcision (consider Paul's language in Philippians 3:3 in which Paul includes the Philippian believers as the true circumcision). Jews and Gentiles aligned with God's promises by faith with Abraham, Galatians 3:29 are the true circumcision. Thus, the believing Jew or Gentile, will stand in judgment against the transgressing Jew, namely, the one who attempts to create his own righteousness by works, Romans 9:31-33.

VV28-29 – Now we come to a debated passage. Do the verses before us teach that the redeemed, whether Jew or Gentile, constitute the true Israel? Are regenerate people spiritual Israel? While plausible, the context points toward a different conclusion. First, the context has been referring to those under the law, namely those physically born Jews, consider 2:17-24. Further, as Paul will point out later, circumcision was not originally instituted as aligning with Moses. Rather, circumcision was instituted before the Law and signified an alignment with believing the promises. Here Paul is telling his readers that those Jews who were trusting their alignment with God through circumcision were aligning themselves with their obedience to the Law. Their faith was in an outward sign or work. Paul's point here stresses that failure to conform to Law (which prescribes faith) negates one's advantage with God. Having the Law and attempting to keep the commands cannot make anyone righteous, 3:20. An inward change by the Spirit, 2:29, is necessary. The true Jew (natural branch) is not a member of the covenant faith family by physical birth or ritual. A Jew is considered truly Jewish only if there has been a change inwardly through regeneration. Regarding Gentiles, a Gentile who is circumcised in the heart (regeneration), Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians 2:11-12; Philippians 3:3, has been brought near to the promises is grafted onto the promises made with Abraham, the Patriarch through whom God instituted circumcision as a seal regarding faith in the promises, 4:10-11.

Second, Paul stresses (2:29) that HE IS A JEW WHO IS ONE INWARDLY. This refers to a CIRCUMCISION IS THAT WHICH IS OF THE HEART, BY THE SPIRIT, NOT BY THE LETTER. NOT BY THE LETTER refers to attempts to keep the regulations and traditions associated with the law, cp Romans 7:4-6. As stated in an earlier letter, the Law was not able to produce spiritual life/regeneration, Galatians 3:21. So here, Paul is identifying those Jews who are alive by the Spirit, a circumcision of heart, as true Israelites. The Apostle never says that Gentiles are the true Jews,³⁶ Paul is simply stressing that true Jews are Jews who are "circumcised" BY THE SPIRIT through faith (as was Abraham). These spiritually circumcised (regeneration) Jews are the "Israel of God," mentioned in Galatians 6:16. The spiritual reality mentioned here is simple. Attempting to keep the law did not make anyone truly Jewish ("not all those descended from Israel are truly Israel," 9:6). Rather, being born again, John 3:3-8, made one truly circumcised (of the heart) and qualified such a Jew to enter the kingdom of

³⁶Paul does indicate that a Gentile who believes has had his heart circumcised, thus being called the true circumcision. Circumcision should not, however, be considered equivalent to being an Israelite. This is obvious from Paul's argument in Romans 2:28-29. Only a person who has been born of the Spirit (heart circumcision) is circumcised before God and joins Abraham's family of faith, Galatians 3:29. As we will see later, Abraham was not a Israelite. To be related to Abraham does not make a Gentile an Israelite.

God. For a physically born Jew to become a son of Abraham, there needs to be a rebirth. Those of faith are the sons of the promise.

V29 HIS PRAISE IS NOT FROM MEN, BUT FROM GOD—The entire point of the gospel of grace is that salvation is not a product of our abilities. We cannot save ourselves by keeping the law of our conscience or the Law of Moses. Salvation is a gift from God. Thus, a regenerate (saved) Jew has nothing about himself to boast. His boast is in God, 1 Corinthians 1:31. Additionally, as this verse asserts, God’s praise follows those who have trusted the righteousness gifted by faith. Consider Jesus’ words in John 5:44, “How can you believe, if you accept praise from one another and don’t seek the praise that comes from the only God?” [NET]. God is praised by the glory of His grace. God also praises those who believe in His word about His Son Jesus.

Summary of the text:

Those who boast in the Law must keep the Law, namely, do what the Law teaches. Failure to keep the Law renders the Jew estranged from God (as though that person was an uncircumcised pagan). As the law taught faith, so a Jew needed to trust God’s according to the Promise, not rely upon his own ability to do right. What is needed in a Jewish person’s life is a heart operation by the Holy Spirit. Those Jews, under the Law, who have had this ‘operation’ are Jews who comprise “the Israel of God” or, true Israel, consider Galatians 6:16. Gentiles who follow the faith of Abraham, while not being Jewish (Israel), are considered heirs of the promise.

4. The Jews, having broken God’s Law, will be judged when God judges the world, 3:1-8.

The text with grammatical notes

1 What [is] extraordinary about the Jew or what [is] the advantage of circumcision? **2** Much because of every way. Because first, on one hand, they were entrusted^{api} God’s sayings. **3** For what purpose³⁷? If³⁸ some refused to believe^{aai}, will their unbelief invalidate^{fai} God’s faithfulness? **4** May it never be!^{lamopt} Let God become true and every human [become] a liar, just as it has been written^{pfp}, **so that you might be justified^{apsub} in Your words, and You will conquer^{fai} in Your judgment.**³⁹ **5** Now if our unrighteousness demonstrates^{pai} God’s righteousness, what will we say^{fai}? God who is inflicting^{paptc} the wrath is not unrighteous [is He]? I am speaking according to human [standards]. **6** May it never be!^{lamopt} Otherwise how will God judge^{fai} the world? **7** But if God’s truth abounded^{daai} in my lie to His glory, why am I still being judged^{ppi} as a sinner? **8** Just as also we are being slandered^{ppi} just as some affirm^{pai} us to say^{painf} “Let us do^{aasub} evil in order that good might come^{aasub}”? Their judgment is^{pai} righteous.

³⁷ Literally, Because what?

³⁸ “if” the construction is first-class condition. First-class condition assumes the reality of what is being discussed. The reality is, some refused to believe. This was not a hypothetical situation. The first-class condition is also found in v5 and v7.

³⁹ Psalm 51:4

Observations from the text:

3:1-8 Paul frequently used questions in Romans to emphasize his points or shift the conversation. Paul now begins to close his discussion about humanity's perfect mess begun in 1:18. To do this Paul demonstrates God's judgment upon humanity is just and justifiable.

VV 1-2 – Though inward regeneration is required to be truly Jewish, 2:28-29, the Jewish people as a people group have had the advantage of access to God's Word.

VV 3-4 – Paul's second question deals with Israel's unfaithfulness, a subject he will resume in detail in chapters nine through eleven. His line of thought is straightforward, if the Jews do not believe is God's faithfulness to the promise null and void? Does God's faithfulness depend upon our response?

V3 IF SOME DID NOT BELIEVE, THEIR UNBELIEF WILL NOT NULLIFY THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD, WILL IT? The words for unfaithfulness and faithfulness are derived from the same root word often translated "unbelief" and "belief"/ "faith". Building upon the principle of faith taught in the Law, Genesis 15:6, Paul asks "If the Jewish people do not believe, will God still be faithful to His plan/promise? Paul answer is clear, "Absolutely." God's faithfulness focuses upon His plan for humanity through Israel. The promises made to Abraham concern everyone, the natural and wild branches, 4:11, 16-17. Considering Romans 9—11, Paul understands that Jewish unbelief has been incorporated into God's plan leading to the demonstration of God's redemptive mercies for all, 11:30-32. Unbelief, however, is still unbelief. Israel's failure to believe does not call God's integrity into question. Regarding God's faithfulness, in Paul's day Israelites were coming to Christ, 11:1-5. In the future God will graft the natural branches back on to the root/tree of Promise, 11:24-27. But God's judgment of the Jewish self-righteousness and unbelief is just and justifiable.

V4 To validate his line of reasoning Paul cites Psalm 51:4 in which David, confessing his sin against God, tells us that because of his sin God "may be justified in [His] words and victorious/PREVAIL ["BLAMELESS" in ESV] in [His] judgment." The point here is our failure to measure up to God's standards and comply with God's requirements does not indict God as unkind or as having failed. Humanity, in this case the Jewish people, has failed. God will remain true to His promise.

VV 5-8 – Now Paul asks several questions leading the reader to a single conclusion. If our failure (UNRIGHTEOUSNESS) DEMONSTRATES THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD, is God unrighteous to find fault and INFLICT WRATH on mankind? Stated another way, in 3:7 Paul asks, IF THROUGH MY LIE THE TRUTH OF GOD ABOUNDED TO HIS GLORY, WHY AM I STILL BEING JUDGED AS A SINNER? This line of reasoning leads to a final question, LET US DO EVIL THAT GOOD MAY COME? The answer to these questions is the same. Though man's sin unfolds and reveals God's righteousness (e.g., our sin leads to the gospel), man's condemnation is justified. While man's choice to sin is a part of God's plan and, as such, demonstrates God's righteousness both in judgment and in offering salvation, man's sin is still wrong and God's judgment is just.

V8 THEIR CONDEMNATION IS JUST – This final statement summarizes Paul’s discussion. God’s wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, 1:18. While God is compassionate in granting humanity the opportunity to repent, 2:4, every human being will be judged according to law, whether written upon the heart, 2:14-16, or written in their holy book, 2:17-24. Furthermore, this judgment by Law will be in accord with the gospel, 2:16. Finally, while our unrighteousness reveals the righteousness of God, our unrighteousness is evil and God’s judgment is just/righteous, 3:8.

Summary of the text

While our sin ultimately glorifies God (puts God’s righteousness on display through the gospel), God’s faithfulness to His promise is secure and His judgment against the unbelief and unrighteousness of humanity is justified.

E. Under law all mankind stands guilty before God, 3:9-20.

The text with grammatical notes

9 What then? Do we have an advantage^{pmi}? For we have accused beforehand^{ami} [both] Jews and also Gentiles to be^{painf} all under sin. **10** Just as it stands written^{pfpi}, **There is none righteous, not even one.** **11 There is not one who is understanding^{paptc}; there is not one who is seeking^{paptc} God.** **12 All have turned^{aai} aside. Together they have become worthless^{api} [depraved]. There is no one doing^{paptc} kindness. There is not even one.** **13** their throat has become an open^{pfpi} grave. They were deceiving^{impai} with their tongues; **14** asp’s venom under their lips; whose mouth [are] a curse and are filled^{pai} of bitterness **15** Their feet swift to shed^{aainf} blood **16** destruction and misery in their ways **17** and the way of peace they have not known^{aai} **18** there is no fear regarding God before/opposite their eyes.⁴⁰ **19** And we know whatever the Law says^{pai} to those under the Law it is speaking^{pai} in order that every mouth might be shut^{apsub} and that the whole world might become^{amsub} accountable to God; **20** wherefore, from works of Law no flesh will be justified^{fpi} in His presence, because through Law [comes] knowledge of sin.

Observations from the text

V9 ARE WE BETTER THAN THEY? The law has leveled the playing field. Regarding man’s unrighteousness and justified condemnation there is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile. While the Jewish contingent in Rome might protest Paul’s verdict, the Law and the Prophets (OT Scripture) substantiate Paul’s message, vv10-18. Because of sin and death, the history of humankind is a mess. BOTH JEWS AND GREEKS ARE ALL UNDER SIN. This universal mess of sin and death, however, is perfect because through this mess God’s righteousness is revealed. His righteousness is not only revealed in a justifiable judgment, but, as Paul will tell us, in Christ apart from Law. For a humanity without any hope of saving righteousness through good works, God’s righteousness will be offered apart from our works, through the gospel; through the life of the perfect man, Jesus, 3:21—5:21.

⁴⁰Verses 10 through 18 are from OT passages in this order (10-12) Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3 (13) Psalm 5:9; Psalm 140:3 (14) Psalm 10:7 (15-17) Isaiah 59:7f.; (18) Psalm 36:1

VV 10-18 contains an appropriate collection of OT citations. Paul's verdict regarding mankind is nothing new. The Bible presents a unified portrayal of man's depravity. These verses are carefully arranged in three strophes (10-12 consisting of two sets of three lines, while 13-14 and 15-18 consist of two sets of two lines). These collections may have already been in use among the churches during worship.

3:10-12 is an abridgment and adaptation of portions of Psalm 14:1-3 from the LXX. While Psalm 14 mentions God seeking man, Paul adapts this passage to indicate how man relates to God (i.e., not understanding, not seeking).

V10 NO ONE IS RIGHTEOUS, NO NOT ONE—The summary of Paul's argument is captured with this first descriptive phrase. In relationship to God and God's righteous requirement there are none who measure up to God's standard. Though Paul has previously stated that the doers of the Law are justified, 2:13, the reality is, there are none who keep God's standards; there are none who can commend themselves to God based upon one's merit. Sin, as we will discover, is more than sinful activities. Sin is systemic, embedded in every human. While the law could address certain activities and the flesh could find the ability to conform itself to outward regulations, Adam's sin corrupted the entirety of every human being.

V11 NO ONE UNDERSTANDS – As the character and behavior of man fails to measure up to God's standards so the mental faculties of man have been so affected by sin that mankind (apart from divine revelation, cp. 1 Cor 2:11-16) cannot understand true spiritual reality. This lack of understanding impacts humanity even further. **NO ONE SEEKS FOR GOD**. At first glance this may not seem to be entirely true. People are religious and many are "seeking" for God. Men and women still hunger for God. Consider Acts 17:26-27. Men do seek God, but this is because God has taken the initiative to draw them to Himself, John 6:44. The witness of the created order, divine providence, the Scriptures, and the living presence of God witnessed through His people are all factors of providential grace. This grace gets our attention and draws some to Christ. Had God left humanity to itself, however, apart from God's self-revelation through providential grace, no one would seek the true and living God. Rather, humanity would continue to pursue and worship the gods of their imaginations, 1:18-23.

3:13-14 begin with a citation of the latter portion of the LXX version of Psalm 5:10 [9]. The last line of v13 is an exact quote of the latter half of the LXX version of Psalm 140:3 [139:4 in the LXX]. Verse 14 is an adapted citation of the first part of LXX Psalm 9:28 [EV 10:7]. These verses depict the consequences that sin has upon the very words that come from man's mouth (which, of course, reflects the inner realities of the heart, cp. Mk 7:20-23). The human heart, responsible for that which proceeds from our mouths, is corrupt, consider Jeremiah 17:9.

3:15-17 is an abridgment of Isaiah 59:7-8a. **Verse 18** is nearly an exact quotation of LXX Psalm 35:2b [EV 36:1b] and forms the climax of this section. In sum, these verses describe humanity's inner disposition (heart and mind), **10-12**; the fruit of his mouth, that is, the words

that the heart produces, **13-14**; and mankind's actions with their consequences, **15-17**. Verse **18** summarizes mankind's relationship toward God. Humanity lacks any fear of God. In contrast, the Bible repeatedly tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of a wise and proper life, cp. Prov 1:7; 9:10.⁴¹

VV 19-20. Now Paul unfolds the overarching purpose of the Law in God's program. While the Law had several vital roles, especially in Israel's history,⁴² the primary redemptive purpose of the Law was to provide the divine voice regarding man's inability to justify himself before God resulting in salvation. Now, through the Law, we hear God's voice. BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW NO FLESH WILL BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT; FOR THROUGH THE LAW COMES THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN. With this verdict, we who rightly hear God's verdict/ judgment, reply to the Judge, "Have mercy, Lord God!" There must be another way to attain right standing." The remainder of Paul's letter to the Romans provides us with God's response.

Taking a closer look

COMPLETE DEPRAVITY⁴³

The cornerstone to any view of personal salvation is our understanding of human depravity, or, in other words, the impact sin has upon the entire human being and human race. While it would be beneficial to engage in a full presentation of the various views of sin's impact upon humanity associated with salvation (e.g., open theism, covenantal nomism, Arminianism, Calvinism, free grace, etc.), time and space do not allow for such a discussion. Instead, we will present a plausible understanding about the effect of sin and spiritual life.

1. Sin/sins corrupt every aspect of the human constitution

Corrupt at conception. Psalm 51:5 indicates that every human being is sinful at conception (original sin). Adam's disobedience has corrupted every person organically connected to Adam, 5:12. Consider John 8:44 which may imply that natural born human beings have the devil as his spiritual father and is like the devil in his

⁴¹The concept of "fear of the Lord" has been described by many as the "reverential awe and respect one ought to have toward God." While this is true, the words used for fear in either Testament convey the idea of "trembling." A proper understanding about God and the certainty of judgment should initially result in this "scared fear" and trembling, much the way anyone should feel at edge of a high cliff. While no one would merely leap off the ledge of a cliff, the "fear" and "respect" one gains at the edge of such a cliff leads to "wisdom" (skill in living). This gained wisdom allows those so trained to enjoy the beauty, majesty, and sheer greatness of the cliff without fear of harm. So too with God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom which allows those so trained to relate to God in such a way that we might enjoy His beauty, majesty, and sheer greatness without fear being consumed by His wrath. Sin's affect upon mankind has left humanity without a natural fear of God necessary for the wisdom needed to enjoy an eternal relationship with God.

⁴²The Law provided Israel with a constitution (a theocratic form of government); a legal protection against the destructive force of anarchy (sin left unchecked); a means of fellowship and blessing with God; a means of caring for one another; and a viable witness to the nations. In Romans we learn that the Law also serves as a divine tutor leading the listening person to salvation outside his own resources, i.e., to faith in Christ, see Galatians 3:24; 1 Timothy 1:8-11.

⁴³Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 342. "Throughout history, different theologians and different churches have placed different emphases on ... elements of sin leading to different doctrines of sin. One such view—Pelagianism—denies that people bear any relationship whatsoever to Adam and his sin; therefore, original sin, total depravity, and total inability are all denied. Another view—semi-Pelagianism—denies liability for guilt from Adam but agrees that people are corrupted by sin. The Augustinian or Calvinist is the full-orbed doctrine of original sin...which includes both guilt and corruption—characterized by both total depravity and total inability—because of Adam's sin." Ibid.

natural character. Certainly Ephesians 2:1-2 indicate that Christless humanity lives on a path that is “according to the ruler of the kingdom of the air...”

Corrupt in every intent and thought. Several passages in the Bible indicate the pervasiveness of evil (self-sufficiency) within the core (heart) of our beings. Genesis 6:5 tells us the wickedness of man was great; every intent and thought was only and continually evil. Jeremiah 17:9 states, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick...” ESV. Consider again Romans 3:10-18.

Corruption extending to every human being. Romans 3:10-20, 23 tells us in no uncertain terms that every human being (Christ being the one exception) 1) fails to meet God’s standards 2) does not comprehend spiritual reality, 3) does not want a relationship with the true God, 4) cannot commend himself to God 5) and, behaves contrary to God in word, deed, and intent. First Corinthians 2:14 informs us that human beings are, by nature, spiritual inept, that is, the natural (soulish) man (man without the Spirit) thinks the biblical presentation about Spiritual things is “moronic.” On one’s own, the natural human being cannot know or receive Spiritual truth (perceive spiritual reality apart from the revelatory work of the Spirit). Finally, because of sin in the flesh, Romans 8:7 tells us that the flesh is hostile toward God and cannot obey God.

Separated from the God’s life. Ephesians 2:1-3 indicates that the non-Christian is spiritually dead because of sins (i.e., is separated relationally from life with God); that the non-Christian lives according to the course of his surrounding culture; and, that the non-Christian lives according to the standards of Satan’s supervising ideologies and impulses.

Thus, throughout the biblical record, we have God’s testimony that every human being begins physical life spiritually “dead.” The question remains; “Can we respond to God?” As previously mentioned, when left to self, the answer to this question seems to be “no.” Apart from divine intervention we live our lives based upon messages we have received about ourselves that have shaped us so that we respond to life in ways attempting to manage life, protect ourselves, and meet our basic human needs apart from the sufficiency of a personal relationship with God in Christ. No one seeks after God, unless acted upon by an outside force.

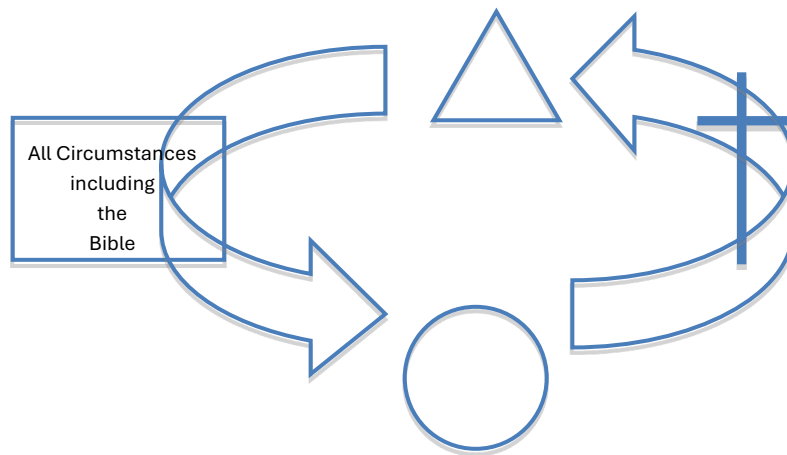
2. The inability for humankind to rescue themselves from sin

Sin’s impact from conception is aptly described as separation from life with God, Ephesians 2:1. This separation results in a self (sin-empowered) orientation affecting every faculty of one’s humanity. Because of sins’ presence and satanic activities/strategies, mankind’s intellectual abilities are supernaturally blinded (2 Cor 4:4) and darkened (Eph 4:18). This blindness toward God leaves mankind with natural inner appetites are directed away from God and onto the physical/earthly, Philippians 3:19, resulting in the creation of his own gods, Romans 1:20-23, whether one trusts a god upon resting upon a mantle or embedded in the latest cultural understanding about life. Sin’s deceitfulness directs one’s intellect away from a trust in God’s testimony (word) and toward reliance upon man’s ingenuity, Romans 1:21; 8:6-7. So misdirected, the will of each human is naturally given toward choices that are self-centered, self-reliant, and independent from God, John 3:19; Romans 3:11b-12a. Human emotions, in conjunction with our self-centered appetites, mind-set, and daily self-choice orientation, John 3:20, are disoriented and deficient. Sin’s impact over the faculties of each human directs their moral compasses so that mankind does wickedness (i.e., living a life that is self-sufficient rather than God-dependent), Romans 1:26, 28; 7:14, 23. Sin’s impact over our faculties estranges us from both ourselves, others, and God. In such a complete state of depravity, mankind, apart from divine intervention, is unable to save himself.

Thus, human depravity refers to the complete corrupting effect that sin has made upon the heart, mind, soul, spirit and will of man, rendering every human being, from birth, completely unwilling to desire and apprehend God’s revelation and unable to commend himself to God for salvation apart from God initiating this salvation graciously to the sinner through various prescribed means.

The good news is that God has not left mankind alone. God has revealed Himself through creation, Psalm 19:1-2; through history/ providence, Psalm 148:8; Romans 9:17; Acts 17:25-27; through Scripture, Psalm 119:105; through the incarnation of Christ, John 1:18; and through God’s people, Acts 1:8. Everything about life

speaks of God. This “intervention” might be called providential grace. God, by grace, providentially draws mankind to make a reasoned choice about God and salvation, consider 2:25-26. The following diagram illustrates what we mean. The triangle represents God. The circle represents any human being. Providentially God initiates grace which moves some to respond to God to and through Christ (the cross). Finally, as mentioned in Romans 3:19-20, the voice of God through the Law invites the listening soul to seek mercy.



Hence, God, in grace, providentially, through pre-creation omniscience, accounts for all the factors (all ‘free’ choices and their repercussions) which influence individuals so that the deadening, darkening influences of sin can be overcome to the extent that a person, of his own will, may respond in faith (or unbelief) to the gospel and spiritual life. God’s grace is greater than all our sin. As God’s witness about Himself through creation, history, Christ, the Scripture, and God’s people continue to move those foreknown to trust Christ. The perfect mess of complete depravity leads many to the perfect man, Jesus, 3:21—5:21.

Summary of the text

Humanity, whether Jewish or Gentile, stands guilty before God. There are none righteous; there are none who seek God; everyone is internally and externally corrupt; and there is not fear of God in the way we live our lives. Accordingly, the Law, upon which so many religious people depend, only renders a guilty verdict. Through the Law comes the knowledge of our failure, our sin. Through the Law, however, some hear God’s voice inviting us to trust Christ as Savior.

The Perfect Mess

Through the perfect message, God’s power to raise the dead unto eternal life has been demonstrated. Through the perfect message righteousness of God is revealed, from the faithfulness/fait of Christ unto the faith of those trusting this message. But this perfect message will only be sought and embraced on the backdrop of the perfect mess of sin and death (God’s final judgment).

God’s perfect plan included the entrance of sin and death into His creation. Only by virtue of the complete corruption of God’s ‘very good’ creation, could the depths of God’s love be manifested. Through His grace and mercy provided for and offered to humanity through the Perfect Man, Jesus, God provides the solution to ‘clean-up’ the perfect mess. Man’s self-worship expressed through sin’s relentless activity becomes the perfect stage and setting for God’s glory.