

## Intro:

We are coming to the conclusion of Paul's argument with the Jews concerning their state before God. Let's quickly review the progress of the argument through these chapters.

1. The Gentiles (Pagan Man) are under the wrath of God for rebellion against *natural* revelation.

Before we move on, remember this point: God's wrath against the Pagan man is manifested *now* in the display of overt wickedness in lives. This culminates in a *reprobate mind* (1.28). **Keep note of that thought!**

2. The Moral man (Jew or Gentile) is under the condemnation of God for rebellion against the voice of conscience.
3. The Religious man (in the first century, the Jew) is subject to the judgement of God for rebellion against *special* revelation, the Bible.

As we begin chapter 3, we are involved in an argument between Paul and a typical Jew, one who is rebelling against the gospel of judgement that Paul is teaching him.

Why do you suppose there is no similar argument from the Gentile?

- If a Gentile is listening to this argument and taking it in, he has no recourse to the special privileges of 'religious people'.
- He is guilty, it is plain in his life, and he knows it.

The religious person (but unsaved) has a particular problem. He doesn't deny God, but he thinks he is on good terms with God.

When the apostle confronts him with the notion that he is subject to judgement, he recoils? How could that be?

So he argues.

I want to show you that the very fact of the argument is evidence in favor of Paul's gospel *and* I want to show you that the Religious man who argues against the revelation of judgement is in fact putting himself in the same place as the Gentile with the reprobate mind. Here is our title:

### *The Source of a Reprobate Religious Mind*

Let's read our passage again, our text is a whole four verses today!

Rm 3.1-8, text 5-8

**Proposition:** The reprobate mind of the pagan argues that God is not great. The reprobate mind of the religious man argues that God is not good.

## I. The final (and most corrupt) objection to judgement (5)

### A. The logic of the passage

1. Paul expresses the last objection of the Jew (the Religious man) in his own words – it is a paraphrase (5a)
  - a. Reason 1: the presence of his ‘transitional phrase’ “what shall we say”
 

Moo notes that this is a phrase “which Paul always uses to introduce his own conclusion or question.”<sup>1</sup>
  - b. Reason 2: the nature of the statement itself
  - c. Reason 3: Paul apologizes for speaking in human terms
2. Paul expresses the objection more starkly in the second main phrase (5b)
3. Paul’s answers follow in vv. 6-8
  - a. First, an answer explaining how horrible the objection is (6)
  - b. Second, a restatement of the objection from a more personal and human perspective (see words ‘my’, ‘I’) (7)
  - c. Third, the logical extension of the objection, one which is completely unacceptable and not worth considering for a moment (8)

### B. The basis of the objection

1. The last objection was answered by Paul proving that God is just to both keep his promises of blessing and to keep his promises of judging sin (4)
2. The objection twists the meaning of Paul’s answer entirely around.
  - a. Paul said in v. 4 that God is just to judge sin (proving it by David)
  - b. The objection suggests that sin *commends* the righteousness of God
    - 1) The meaning of the word:
      - a) Root meanings – basically ‘to stand with’ ‘to stand in the presence of’

<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 189.

- b) Basic meaning – ‘to place with or before’ anyone
  - c) Derived meaning – ‘to commend’, ‘to render conspicuous’, ‘to demonstrate’
- 2) An example (2 Cor 7.6-13)
- a) Paul wrote the Corinthians a letter of rebuke
  - b) They took it to heart and were demonstrative and profuse in their repentance
  - c) By this, they intended to ‘demonstrate’ or ‘make conspicuous’ their desire to follow the Lord

So here: ‘sin demonstrates the righteousness of God’ or ‘sin makes the righteousness of God conspicuous’

3. The objection Paul is paraphrasing in v. 5 could be stated this way:
- a. “Well, then, if unrighteousness makes God look more righteous, then God would be unjust (unrighteous) to judge sin, since sin enhances his righteousness.”
  - b. Or, put another way, “Sin makes God look good.”

#### C. The character of the objection

1. This is a smart-alecky objection: Paul makes it clear that it is not his position, he is simply using human reasoning (smart-alecky reasoning)
2. But note this: such thinking attacks the very justice of God. “*Is God unrighteous*”

Remember our proposition:

- **Proposition:** The reprobate mind of the pagan argues that God is not great. The reprobate mind of the religious man argues that God is not god.

I label this point as the “most corrupt” of the Religious man’s objections to the gospel of judgement.

I have not yet shown why this is so, but as Paul begins to answer, I hope that you will see that this objection is indeed the most corrupt of human objections to God’s condemnation of sin.

## II. The shock of the godly to such an objection (6)

### A. The meaning of ‘God forbid!’

1. We mentioned this last time, and I gave you this literal rendering of the meaning:

“May it never ever even in the remotest way ever possibly come to pass!”

2. The Biblical context is going to ‘ramp it up a notch’ for us

- a. Used three times in LXX to translate a Heb term sometimes translated, “far be it from me”

- 1) Hebrew term has this connotation: ‘It is something profane, I don’t want to even come close to it”

- 2) Or, we could say, ‘It is something unclean, I don’t want to have my mind polluted by the presence of this thought.’

- b. Illustrated by the only non-Pauline use in the NT, Lk 20.16

- 1) Parable of wicked husbandmen – master of vineyard rents it out to sharecroppers

- 2) Sends his servants for his share, the sharecroppers abuse the servants

- 3) Sends his son, the sharecroppers kill him

- 4) What will the master do? Answer: Lk 20.16

- a) The people respond: God Forbid!

- b) Jesus talks about the cornerstone being rejected

- c) The priests know that he spoke this against them (19)

The point is, everyone got it: God was saying, I will take away your place for your unrighteousness.

They said “God forbid! — that’s an unclean thought, may it never be!”

- c. Here, the Jewish objection has been, well, our sin enhances God’s righteousness, so it’s a good thing

- 1) Paul answers: God forbid! God forbid on the Jews!

- 2) That’s an unclean thought! May it never be!

Why is the thought unclean?

B. The reason this objection carries the characteristic of an unclean thought

1. The reason that such a thought is abominable is that it would entirely invalidate God's justice in judging anyone at all.
2. The objection is saying that if God judges me, He is not good
3. Paul says that if God doesn't judge all sinners, God would not be good
4. The truth is: God *is* good. He *must* judge you.

Can you imagine a Universe where God played favorites? A Universe where if you placated God by:

1. Making some kind of deal with him (covenant)
2. Or by being born to the right family
3. Or by performing the right rituals

What kind of Universe would that be?

- An animistic universe where bizarre practices: temple prostitution, drunken orgies, or sacrificing children pleased the god
- A Muslim universe, where murdering infidels pleases the god; where treating women like property pleases the god
- A universe where you can never be sure you are in good standing with god

You see, the essential tenets of religion are wrapped up in two concepts: God is Great; God is Good

**Proposition:** The reprobate mind of the pagan argues that God is not great. The reprobate mind of the religious man argues that God is not good.

### III. The wickedness of the ungodly to pose such an objection (7-8)

- A. The objection personalized – not just a thought about God, but a personal self-justification (7)

1. Notice the personal pronouns “my”; “I”
2. The objection was first stated with respect to who God is
3. Now it is stated with respect to its effect on man
  - a. From the side of God, God would be unjust to judge, the objection goes.
  - b. From the side of man, why am I judged if I am enhancing God’s truth?

Now, it is true that God can take man’s sin and use it for his own glory.

We don’t deny that. But that doesn’t excuse anyone’s sin, and especially not the religious man’s sin, since he knows better.

- B. The objection in its full meaning: logically demands antinomianism (8)
1. Paul takes the objection and goes one better.
  2. Not only could we say my sins glorify God, but we might as well go to this extreme: let me deliberately sin so God could be most glorified.

(Some slanderously say this is what Paul is teaching.)

This is called “antinomianism” – against law, *i.e.*, God’s gospel is lawless, it encourages more sin (so the objection goes)

- C. The objection dismissed: it is beneath contempt and manifests God’s attitude towards sin and sinners
1. Those who think this way are condemned
  2. Their condemnation is just, right, righteous

Paul’s answer is to dismiss the objection and its extension as utterly beyond worthiness as a thought.

“Paul indicates that the objection to his teaching that he puts here in the mouth of the Jewish objector is one that he has heard before and one, more than likely, that the Roman Christians have also heard. ... We must suppose ... that Paul intends very absurdity of the objection to imply its dismissal.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 195.

“What he condemns is teaching a doctrine subversive to all morality.”<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion:

**Proposition:** The reprobate mind of the pagan argues that God is not great. The reprobate mind of the religious man argues that God is not good.

What is the source of the Reprobate Religious Mind: the rebellious heart, turning against God’s special revelation, and saying “God is not Good if he Judges ME!?”

“Whole multitudes today in Christendom, sheltered in their imagination by the fact that they have ‘joined’ some church, resent the very doctrines that Paul here insists on.”<sup>4</sup>

“Now if God paid no attention whatever to the claim of the Jew to be exempt from judgment because he was a Jew, neither will He pay any attention to the claim of the ‘Baptist’ or ‘Presbyterian,’ ‘Episcopalian’ or ‘Methodist,’ — *as such*. For all men are like guilty, common sinners! What avails before a holy God the special religious names sinners may call themselves? This book of Romans will do you and me no good if we apply it to Jews or Mormons only!”<sup>5</sup>

You know, I keep pounding on this theme of God’s judgement and man’s just condemnation. It is vital for you that I do so.

We have now come to the end of the argument against the Religious Man. We have seen this:

1. The Gentiles (Pagan Man) are under the wrath of God for rebellion against *natural* revelation.
2. The Moral man (Jew or Gentile) is under the condemnation of God for rebellion against the voice of conscience.
3. The Religious man (in the first century, the Jew) is subject to the judgement of God for rebellion against *special* revelation, the Bible.

You and I really need the Power of God in order to be saved. You really don’t have a leg to stand on in our own strength. You can’t out argue God.

If you know that your life is full of sin and is not pleasing God, I would urge you to repent today and make things right with Him.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, p. 78.