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The Religious Jew's Lack of Understanding 3: 1-20

The religious Jew's lack of understanding DIG: Is the Torah the problem here? Why doesn't the religious Jew understand that he is just as sinful as the pagan Gentile or the "good person?" What does, "There is no one righteous, not even one," mean to you when you see someone who seems to be a "good person" doing good deeds? Why would Paul say that?

REFLECT: What "advantages" do you have as a believer? Have you put those "advantages" to work? Or are they on the "back burner?" If that's the case, what can you do to change that? How does the sinfulness of mankind affect you personally? Who does your heart ache for because of their lost state and their ultimate destiny in hell?

The religious Jew is in no better condition than the "good person," or the pagan Gentile, despite the advantages that they might have had.



In **3:1-8 Paul** dealt with the promise to **the Jews** because **he** already foresees a possible **first objection** that might be prompted because of what **he** had just said that all distinctions between **Jews** and **Gentiles** have been erased in **2:17-29**. And if a **sinful Jew** is on the same level as a **sinful Gentile** as far as the wrath of **God** is concerned, **then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being**

circumcised (3:1)? Why even bother! Looking at the rather tragic history of **the Jewish people**, one is not inclined to think there has been any **advantage** in being **a Jew**. In spite of the reality that **they** are such a noble strain of humanity chosen by **God**, **their** history has been a saga of slavery, hardship, warfare, persecution, slander, captivity, dispersion, and humiliation.[65] **Paul will give a very brief answer here in Chapter 3, and a very extensive answer in Chapters 9, 10, and 11.**

Paul answers **his** own question: **Much in every way!** Although it did not bring salvation, it bestowed many privileges that **Gentiles** did not have. Later in **his** letter, **Paul** tells **his** readers: **I could wish myself actually under God's curse and separated from the Messiah, if it would help my brothers, my own flesh and blood, the people of Isra'el! They were made God's children, the Sh'khinah has been with them, the covenants are theirs, likewise the giving of the Torah, the Temple service and the promises; the Patriarchs are theirs; and from them, as far as his physical descent is concerned, came the Messiah, who is over all. Praise be ADONAI forever! Amen (9:3-5).** But **they** did have **God's Word**. **In the first place, the Jews, including Luke, were entrusted with the very words of God (3:2). This includes Luke because He was a Hellenistic Jew, having traveled with Paul** (see **Acts, to see link click Bx – Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia**).[66] Every writer, in both the TaNaKh and the B'rit Chadashah, was **Jewish**.

Then, anticipating a **second objection** that is raised, even until today, **Paul** asks rhetorically: **If some of them were unfaithful, so what? Does their faithlessness cancel God's faithfulness?** In other words, doesn't **Jewish** unbelief cancel out the promises made to **Isra'el** in the TaNaKh? After all. Even though there are a minority of **Jews** who believe, the majority are unbelievers! Unfortunately, this is the thinking of Covenant, or Replacement Theology, and the Hebrew Roots movement today (see the commentary on **Galatians Ak – The Hebrew Roots Movement: A Different Gospel**). But **Paul** answers emphatically: **Heaven forbid** (Hebrew: *chalilah*, meaning *that's a contradiction, it makes no sense*)**!** In fact, if anything, the unfaithfulness of **Isra'el** is going to prove even greater **the faithfulness** of **YHVH**. **He** has every intention of fulfilling the promises that **He** has made to **her. He** is **the Promise Keeper** in spite of **Isra'el's** response! **God would be true even if everyone were a liar! – as the TaNaKh** says: **so that you, God, may be proved right in Your words and win the verdict when You are put on trial" (Romans 3:3-4; Psalm 51:4).**

*Dear **Faithful Father God**, How awesome **You** are – always thru all eternity a loving and **faithful God**! **Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, Your faithfulness to the skies (Psalms 36:5). Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before You (Psalms 89:14). He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart (Psalms 91:4). For the LORD is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations (Psalms 100:5).***

***For great is Your love, higher than the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the skies (Psalms 108:4).** I bow in worship and adoration at how **loving** and **faithful You** are! **You** have promised an eternal joy for those who **love You (Revelation 21:4). I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).** I **trust Your faithful** promise that those who choose to trust you, become your children. **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12).** How wonderful the thought of living with **You** dear **Father God** in your holy home in heaven for all eternity. Earthly trials will be over soon, so I live for **You** now by pleasing you in all I do, say and think. I lovingly serve **You**. In **Your** holy **Son Yeshua's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Paul has just said that **Isra'el's** unfaithfulness will essentially prove **the faithfulness** of **God**. But if that is true, then a **third objection** could be raised. **Now if our unrighteousness highlights God's righteousness, what should we say?** Why should **God** ever want to **judge sin**? **That God is unrighteous to inflict His anger on us?** Again, lest his readers conclude that he was expressing his own thinking, **Paul** immediately adds the parenthetical explanation: **I am speaking here the way people commonly do,** that is according to human logic**.** To intensify the disclaimer, **Paul** again says: **Heaven forbid! Else, how could God judge the world? God** cannot allow **sin** to go unpunished under any circumstances. **Paul** counters this baseless argument to an absurd extreme. **"But," you say, "if, through my lie, God's truth is enhanced and brings him greater glory, why am I still judged merely for being a sinner?" Indeed!** If carried out to its logical conclusion, no one would ever be **judged** by **God**. **Why not say, as some** unbelievers **slander us by** gossiping and **claiming we say, "Let us do evil, so that good may come of it"? They** falsely accused **Paul** of teaching, in effect, "Let's prove **God's faithfulness** by our unfaithfulness!"

He concludes: **Against them the judgment is a just one (3:5-8)!**

Universal guilt: So, are we Jews better off? His conclusion is: **Not entirely; for I have already made the charge that all people, Jewish** "good person" (see **Ao – The "Good Person"**) **and** pagan **Gentiles alike** (see **Ak – The Pagan Gentile**)**, are controlled by sin (3:9). As** far as salvation is concerned, and as far as **God's** wrath is concerned, **the** religious **Jew** is in no better condition than **the** pagan **Gentile** despite the advantages that **they** might have had. **As a result, Paul sets out to prove that all of humanity, Jews and Gentiles alike, are sinful. To prove his case, he issues an indictment with eight passages from the TaNaKh**.

The character of the accused (3:10:12): Paul now reinforces the inclusiveness of the indictment by reiterating the fact that **all** of fallen humanity is under **sin**. Quoting from **Psalm 14:1, Paul** declares: **As the TaNaKh puts it, "There is no one righteous." Righteousness** is a major theme in **Romans**, appearing in one form or another more than thirty times. Other terms from the same Greek root are usually translated **justified**, **justification**, or the like. Together they are used more than sixty times in **Romans**. So, it's not surprising that the first charge **Paul** makes in **his** indictment is that of mankind's unrighteousness. And to prevent someone from thinking that there might be exceptions, **Paul** adds, **not even one (3:10a)!**

The quoting from **Psalm 14:2, Paul** states that not only is **mankind** universally **evil**, but also spiritually ignorant. **"No one understands" (3:10b).** Mankind has no innate ability to fully comprehend **God's** truth or **His** standard of **righteousness**. Apart from the ability to see general revelation of **His** power and majesty, **mankind** has no spiritual capacity to know or understand **YHVH** because **the natural man does not receive the things from the Spirit of God – to him they are nonsense! Moreover, he is unable to grasp them, because they are evaluated through the Spirit (First Corinthians 2:14).**

Alluding again from **Psalm 14:2, Paul** declares that in addition to being universally **evil** and spiritually ignorant, fallen **mankind** is rebellious. **"No one seeks God "(3:11). Man-made** religions are demon-inspired efforts to escape from **God**, not to find **Him**. Every person who comes to **Yeshua Messiah** for salvation has been sent to **Him** through the divine initiative of **God the Father**: **Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will certainly not turn away . . . no one can come to Me unless the Father – the One who sent Me – draws him (John 6:37** and **44a). ADONAI** always takes the first step

in the salvation process. The only person, therefore, who **seeks God** is the person who has responded positively to **God's seeking** him.

Now **Paul** charges that mankind is naturally stiff-necked. Quoting from **Psalm 53:3**, **he** declares that **"all have turned away."** The person who is naturally **evil**, naturally ignorant of **God's** truth, and naturally rebellious against **Him**, will inevitably naturally live apart from **His** will. **Isaiah** put it this way: **We all like sheep, went astray; we turned, each one, to our own way (Isaiah 53:6). Paul** continues: **"And at the same time become useless; there is no one who shows kindness, not a single one" (Romans 3:12; Psalm 14:1-3** and **53:1-3)!** Apart from the saving relationship with **Messiah Yeshua**, a person is a spiritually dead **branch**, totally unable to produce any fruit. As such, it is lifeless and **useless**. **Unless a person remains united with Me, he is thrown away like a branch and dries up. Such branches are gathered and thrown into the fire, where they are burned up (John 15:6).**[67]

The conversation of the accused (3:13-14): A person's character will inevitably reveal itself in his conversation. **Yeshua** declared that **the mouth speaks what overflows from the heart. The good person brings forth good things from his store of good, and the evil person brings forth evil things from his store of evil (Matthew 12:34-35).** The writer of **Proverbs** said: **The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off. The lips of the righteous know what is wanted, but the mouth of the wicked [knows] deceit (Proverbs 10:31-32).**

Continuing to quote from **the Psalms**, **Paul** minces no words when **he** says, **"Their throats are open graves, they use their tongues to deceive" (Psalm 5:9).** A spiritually dead heart can produce only spiritually dead words. **Psalm 5:9** describes flatters, whose words of praise are really a means of serving themselves rather than the one they are praising. And because praise appeals to human nature, it also leads the flattered person into pride and false self-confidence. A flatterer, therefore, both uses and abuses others.

Quoting from part of **Psalm 140:3**, **Paul** says that the lost have **"vipers' venom is under their lips" (Romans 3:13; Psalm 140:3).** Because of the spiritually damning false doctrines and the **deceitful** character of most of the religious leaders of Pharisaic Judaism in **Yeshua's** day, both **He** and **John the Immerser** described them as **broods of vipers (Matthew 3:7, 12:34)**.

Their mouths are full of curses and bitterness (Romans 3:14; Psalm 10:7). David described **cursing**, **bitter** persons as those who **have sharpened their tongue like a sword . . . aimed bitter speech as their arrow, to shoot from concealment at the blameless; suddenly they shoot him, and do not fear (Psalm 64:3-4 NASB).** Every age of mankind, our own certainly included, has been characterized by people who use their **tongues** as vicious weapons. Their attacks not only are against those they know well enough to hate but sometimes, as **David** seems to suggest, even against strangers, simply for the **wicked** pleasure of venting their **anger** and hatred.[68]

The conduct of the accused (3:15-17): Whether in peace or in war, man kills man. Quoting **Isaiah 59:7, Paul** says, **"Their feet rush to shed blood" (3:15).** Obviously, most people are far from possessing such extreme brutality. Scripture, however, makes it clear that the seed of murder is one of the many **evil** seeds that are universally found in the human heart and that, to some degree, inevitably grow and bear fruit. **"In their ways are ruin and misery"** as is obvious from current world affairs **(3:16).**

Paul continues quoting from **Isaiah 59:8**, by declaring, **"And the way of shalom they do not know (Romans 3:17; Isaiah 59:7-8).** The apostle is not talking about the lack of inner peace – although that is certainly a characteristic of the ungodly person – but of mankind's essential inclination *away* from **shalom**. **Shalom** has never been more sought after than in our day. But few would argue that **shalom** actually characterizes our times. Nevertheless, as in **Jeremiah's** day, many modern leaders are trying to heal the brokenness of their people by superficially crying out, **"Shalom, shalom,"** when obviously, there is no **shalom (Jeremiah 6:14). God's** Word gives us much advice on what makes for **peace**, and those people and societies who have chosen **His** blueprint for living have experienced relative times of **shalom**. But Scripture makes it clear that **peace** will never come until **the Prince of Peace** returns to establish **His** Kingdom (see the commentary on **Isaiah Cn – He Will Be Called Wonderful Counselor**).

The motive of man's **sinfulness** is his built-in godlessness. The basic **sinful** condition of mankind and of their spiritual deadness is seen in the fact that, for the lost, **"There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18; Psalm 36:1).** Because the ears of mankind are attuned to the lies of the Adversary rather than the truth of **God**, they have an inadequate concern about, and **no fear of, God**.

Fearing God has both positive and negative elements. In a positive way, every true believer has a reverential fear of **God** – an awesome awareness of **His** power, **His** holiness, and **His** glory. Proper worship always includes that kind of **fear of the Lord**. Reverential **fear** of **YHVH is the beginning** of spiritual **wisdom (Proverbs 9:10)**. That kind of **fear** is a necessary element in one's being led to salvation, as with **Cornelius (Acts 10:2)**, and motivates new believers in their spiritual growth.

The negative aspect of **the fear of God** had to do with dread and terror. Even believers should have a measure of that kind of **fear**, which acts as a protection against **sinning**. The writer of **Proverbs** observed that **people turn from evil through fear of ADONAI (Proverbs 16:6).** For this very reason they are **God's children**, who are subject to **His discipline** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Cz – God Disciplines His Children**). Unbelievers, however, should have a fear of **God** in its most intense and terrifying sense. The TaNaKh is full of stories about **Ha'Shem** wreaking destruction and death as punishment of **sins** of all kinds. **He** destroyed **Sodom and Gomorrah** because of **their** indescribable immorality; **YHVH** destroyed the whole human race through **the Flood**, saving only eight people; and **the LORD** ordered **Moshe** to have **the Levites slay** some **three thousand Israelite men** who had erected and worshiped a golden calf while he was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Words (see the commentary on **Exodus Gv – And All the Levites Rallied to Moses**).[69]

The verdict: The final verdict, then, is that unredeemed mankind has no defense whatsoever and is guilty of all charges. **Moreover, we know that whatever the** whole **Torah says, it says to those living within the framework of the Torah,** that is, to **Jew**s, **in order that every** self-justifying **mouth may be stopped and the whole world be shown,** proven by **God's** own words **to deserve God's adverse judgment.** If **the Jews**, who have **the Torah** to guide them, turn out to be guilty before **YHVH**, how much more will **the Gentiles**, who do not have this guidance, also prove worthy of punishment. **Jewish** privileges do not, and cannot, save from **sin**. There will be no exceptions. **For in His sight no one alive will be considered righteous (Psalm 143:2) on the ground of legalistic observance of Torah commands, because what Torah really does is show people how sinful they are (3:19-20). The Torah** isn't the problem; **the Torah** shows us *our* problem – **sin** (the Greek word *amartia* corresponds to the Hebrew word *chet*, meaning *missing the mark, like an archer who shoots off-target*)! This is, of course, not **the Torah's** only task – it also offers positive guidance toward right behavior (see the commentary on **Exodus Dh – Moses and the Torah**). In theory,

a Jew with **the Torah** to direct **him**, might possibly be able to aim nearer the target than a **Gentile** without it. Nevertheless, his achievement will always fall short of the goal; and unless he realizes this, he will surely not be saved. This subject is analyzed at length in **Chapter 7**.[70]