

Condemned by their own Scripture

Romans 3:9—21

Like a masterful prosecutor, Paul sums up his arguments in God's courtroom, showing man as being condemned and deserving of His judgment and wrath. He has declared all men to be sinners and are without hope. This even applies to the Jew, who have put their hope in being righteous in the Law, without realizing that their own Scriptures condemn them.

Scripture condemns the Jew (verses 9—18)

The Jews had an interesting view of sin. They understood sin differently than how most of us do today. Biblically, to sin means to miss the mark, to err or do wrong. Israel's leaders had set their own mark, which was often made up of their man-made traditions that they formulated and applied as God's commands (Matthew 15:2). They had the mistaken notion that their righteousness came through having the Law, not necessarily through doing the Law.

This is why they viewed Gentiles as sinners. The Jews thought they were favored in the eyes of God and others were therefore outcasts. Galatians 3:15 shows that there was a separation that had been built between the Jews and Gentiles. This separation was the Law, which the Jews had possession of and the Gentiles lacked (Ephesians 2:14). The Jews used the Law to show that they were righteous while others were inferior "sinners."

We can see how then how the Jews could use their interpretation of the Law to determine that Christ was a sinner after He healed a blind man in John 9. Anyone who acted outside of their understanding of the Law as called a sinner. They determined if someone missed the mark, which had set, while they themselves were missing the mark that God had set for them.

John 9:16—17, 24 15 Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. 16 Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. 24 Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.

Paul then uses the Scripture, that they claim is theirs, to show them that what they think gives righteousness actually condemned them. From the Old Testament we find out that there are none who are righteous and none who seek after God (Psalm 14:1—3; 53:1—3), that man's throat is an open grave speaking with deceiving tongues (Psalm 5:9), that their lips spew forth poison (Psalm 140:3), their mouth is filled with cursing and bitterness (Psalm 10:7), their feet are swift to shed blood (Isiah 59:7) and that they have no fear of God (Psalm 36:1). Paul could have pointed to many other verses from the Old Testament that told these Jews that they were not immune from God's judgment and wrath because they were not as righteous as they claimed. Instead of being declared righteous for having the Law, they were actually condemned by it.

The Law condemns (verses 19—20)

Those under the Law were held accountable to God, and they are incapable to make a defense for themselves. They sinned by disobeying God and missing His mark, not in failing to follow the man-made requirements imposed on Israel by her leaders. The one thing the Jew hangs onto to gain righteousness actually increasing their condemnation because it shows how guilty they are in disobeying God. Romans 4:15 states that the Law carries with it wrath. In fact, the Law was given to man to increase our transgression (Romans 5:20), while at the same time showing that we were in desperate need of a savior (Galatians 3:24). Knowing what God requires should make it clear that we are unable to fulfill His requirements, and that we need to look for someone to save us from this impossible situation.

This is why Paul calls the Law death and condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7—9). This connection between the Law and condemnation was clearly made at the regiving of the Law in Deuteronomy 27:26 (see also Galatians 3:10).

But now (Verse 21)

Paul's use of the term "but now" is often used to indicate a dispensational change. In this case, he is comparing times past (Israel under Prophecy and under the Law) with the new Dispensation of Grace (the Church, the Body of Christ under the Mystery). This dispensational distinction marks the temporary end of God dealing with the Jews as a nation, and the beginning of Him to deal with the individual Jews and Gentiles under Grace. When God set Israel aside as a nation, He also put any covenants He had made with the nation of Israel on hold. This means that the promise given to believing Israel of going into the Millennial Kingdom was also put on hold. They were not longer allowed to accept the offer of the Kingdom because they had rejected their Messiah. Just as Israel was no longer allowed to enter the Promised Land at Kadesh Barnea after they rejected God's offer in Numbers 14, they are no longer able to accept the offer of the Kingdom after rejecting their Messiah in Acts 7 with the stoning of Stephen, a spokesman for the Holy Spirit.

However, individual Jews were welcomed to come into the Church, the Body of Christ. In fact, Paul is told to make sure to include individual Jews along with the Gentiles when he preaches the Gospel of the Grace of God (Romans 1:16). This Gospel of Grace was being preached before the end of the book of Acts and was the Gospel spoken of in Romans 1:16. It includes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1—4). This is unlike the Gospel of the Kingdom that was preached by Jesus and the Disciples and could not include believing in Jesus Christ's work on the cross (Matthew 10:5—7; Matthew 16:21—23). This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached during the seven-year Tribulation when God once again begins to deal with Israel under the Prophetic program (Matthew 24:14). Those who believe that the Church began after the end of Acts often confuse God's dealing with a nation with Him dealing with individuals. This is why Paul says in Romans 11:14 that he hoped to move his fellow countrymen to jealousy, and hopefully see some of them become saved. He is not looking at having the nation believe, but desires to see individual Jews become saved.

It must be understood that even salvation has to be interpreted dispensationally. When Paul speaks of salvation, it is something that is given at the point a person believes. In God's eyes, we are already saved from His judgment and wrath, and we are already seated in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6) because we have believed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is in the present beginning at the point of believing (Romans 8:24; 10:9; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15; Ephesians 2:8; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5). Israel is looking at a future salvation, with the coming of their Redeemer, which will happen at the Second Coming (Romans 11:26; Isaiah 59:20; Jeremiah 31:34; 33:8; 50:20; Psalm 51; Ezekiel 36:25, 33; Micah 7:7—9; 18—20). (Note that Psalm 51 is a Psalm of David as a repentant sinner pleading with God to forgive him of his sins after Nathan the prophet came to him concerning his sin with Bathsheba. This Psalm has been taken by many churches to be an appropriate prayer for a sinner to pray today. David prayed this prayer because the forgiveness of his sins were future. Since a believer has already been forgiven, it makes as much sense for us to pray this prayer as it does to pray the so-called Lord's Prayer asking for Him to supply us with food when we have a well-stocked pantry. This chapter in Psalms is often matched with 1 John 1:9, another verse misapplied to the church in this dispensation. If our sins are truly forgiven, there is no reason to continue to beg God for forgiveness.)

Having finished with his pronouncement of condemnation upon all men, Paul now turns to the concept of justification through Jesus Christ.

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