

1. **Introduction**: God established the Israelites as His “chosen people” by calling Abraham from the Sumerian city of Ur. Isaac, Abraham’s son, Issac, had 2 sons, Esau and Jacob. After an encounter with a heavenly being, Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, which means “let God prevail.” The 12 tribes of Israel descended from Jacob’s sons. What enables a person to be a member of God’s chosen people? But the life and sacrificial death of Jesus, the promised Messiah, changed the picture. God made a lasting Covenant with Abraham with circumcision as a sign of being “in the Covenant.”
2. **Romans 2:25-29**: *For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.* <sup>26</sup> *So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?* <sup>27</sup> *Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.* <sup>28</sup> *For no one (since Jesus’ salvation work) is a Jew (one of God’s chosen) who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.* <sup>29</sup> *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*
  - Abraham believed God (faith) and God accounted it to him as righteousness. From Abraham to Moses, “believing God” was the basis for righteousness. Then the Law was given through Moses. From Moses to Jesus, righteousness was based on Law-keeping.
  - Then came Jesus who lived a perfect, vicarious life under the Law, thus earning righteousness on behalf of “those who believed in Him” (faith).
  - After Jesus’ salvation work, Law-keeping was no longer the basis for righteousness. The “old” characteristics identifying who was one of God’s chosen were changed.
  - Jesus’ salvation work made it possible for Jews and Gentiles alike to be declared righteous apart from perfect obedience to the Law (which no one could do). By His substitutionary death, He enabled a pardon for the penalty due sins committed.
  - How then, after Jesus, are God’s chosen ones to be identified? In other words, what is the new requirement to be “like a Covenant Jew?” Circumcision was a sign of admission into the Covenant between God and His people given to Abraham and his descendants.
  - Being circumcised implied a commitment to obedience to God. Mosaic Law required that male babies be circumcised on the eighth day after birth (Leviticus 12:3). Jewish belief was that circumcision has saving power.
3. **Circumcision**: Paul argues circumcision itself does not assure exemption from God’s judgement. The effectiveness of circumcision depends on obedience to the Law. Paul says, *“For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.”*
  - Being circumcised was the sign of Covenant membership. Being included in the Covenant demands obedience. Circumcision and obedience to the Law belong together.

- Circumcision becomes uncircumcision if the Law is disobeyed. That means the person who disobeys loses their position as a participant in God's Covenant. Paul does not mean "obedience saves." Rather, obedience is a sign of salvation.
  - Paul says that "circumcision minus obedience is equal to uncircumcision." He then says, "uncircumcision plus obedience" equals circumcision. The uncircumcised by obedience to God's moral Law become as though circumcised.
  - Jews and Gentiles are both exposed to God's judgment. Obedience to God's moral law is the key to avoiding God's judgment and wrath.
  - Paul makes the startling statement, "*he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.*"
4. **Outward vs. Inward:** Gentiles judging God's chosen people! How can that be? Paul's answer is, "*no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.* <sup>29</sup> *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*"
- The concept is that being a Jew ethnically is important, because Jews are God's chosen people, but being a Jew inwardly is vital and overrides the ethnic criteria. An inward Jew is a person who is inwardly responsive and obedient to God. Their circumcision is of the spiritual heart, not of the flesh. They may be ethnic Gentiles.
  - Another view of this position is John 3. You must be "born again." You must be given a new spiritual heart, one alive to God, a spiritually circumcised heart.
  - Circumcision of the spiritual heart is not a new "after Christ" concept. In the OT God promises He will circumcise hearts of people so that they may love Him with all their being (Lev 26:41; Dt 10:16, 3:6).
  - Circumcision of the spiritual heart is not carried out by people. It is done by God and is not of the flesh. The approval (praise) for being a person with a circumcised heart comes not from men, but from God Himself. Such a person is God's workmanship.
  - Gentiles are described as uncircumcised in heart and flesh. There are both Jews and Gentiles who, though circumcised in the flesh, do not have circumcised hearts.
  - Circumcision of the spiritual heart is an inward work of the Holy Spirit, a result that can never be achieved by obedience to the written Law. God is concerned that we experience in our spiritual hearts that deep inward work of the Holy Spirit.
  - Stott points out that what Paul writes here about circumcision and being a Jew could also be said about baptism and being a Christian. True Christian baptism is of the spiritual heart and is done by the Holy Spirit. Water baptism is the outward sign given to signify the inward reality has occurred.
  - Paul's position on the Law and Circumcision will seem to many ethnic Jews to be an outrageous attack on the foundations of Judaism.
5. **Objections to Paul's Teaching:** In the next few verses (3:1-8), Paul responds to questions he believes might trouble some of his Jewish readers.

6. **Romans 3:1-8:** *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup> What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup> By no means! Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.” <sup>5</sup> But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) <sup>6</sup> By no means! For then how could God judge the world? <sup>7</sup> But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? <sup>8</sup> And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*

- These verses likely represent the view of Paul, as a Pharisee (before he was converted), arguing with Paul’s new insight after he was converted.
- Paul, personally, knew both sides of the question, “what advantage has the Jew?” When a active Pharisee, Paul considered being a Jew advantageous before God in every way.
- Then he met the risen Christ.
- Paul explains that the Covenant remains in force, but, because of the coming of Jesus and His salvation work, the definition of who is a Covenant “Jew” is changed.
- Romans 2:25-29 summarizes the part of Paul’s teaching that led to Jewish objections.
- Paul says, (1.) There is no fundamental difference between Gentiles and Jews. (2.) The law, and circumcision provide neither Jewish identity as the people of God or Jewish immunity from judgment by God.
- Do Paul’s “new definitions” eliminate the advantage of being a Jew by the old definition, and what value is there in the old intent and meaning of circumcision?
- Ethnic Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God, the very words of God. This highly privileged responsibility was given to Israel’s ethnic Jews and no other.
- In 3:1-8, Paul deals with 4 anticipated objections to the new situation.
- **Objection 1:** (3:1-2) *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.*
- Does Paul’s teaching undermine God’s Covenant? No, but Jesus gave the Covenant new meaning. Paul agrees that God chose Israel out of the nations, made a covenant with them, and gave circumcision as the sign and seal of that covenant.
- Because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, the meaning of “Jew’s as God’s chosen people” must be redefined. Further, circumcision also has a new/old meaning.
- Abraham was chosen to be the earthly father of God’s chosen people. From Abraham to Moses, there was no written Law. God gave the Law through Moses. From Moses to Jesus, obedience to Moses Law was required.
- Then came Jesus paying the penalties due sins and vicariously living the perfect life under the Law required to earn righteousness.

- The Jews retained their “chosen by God” position but it was amended.
- **Objection 2:** (3:3-4) *What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?* <sup>4</sup> *By no means! Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”*
- Does Paul’s teaching about Jesus nullify God’s faithfulness? The issue is God’s faithfulness to His promise. Does God remain faithful to His Promise?
- This question may be specifically aimed at the promise of Messiah.
- If some of the Jews to whom the promise was entrusted were unfaithful, will their lack of faith nullify the promise? In other words, if God’s people are unfaithful, does that mean that God will be unfaithful?
- Paul responds with “**By no means!**” There is no way God will ever be unfaithful He will never break His Covenant. Even if every human was a liar, God would still be true.
- **Objection 3:** (3:5-6). *But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)* <sup>6</sup> *By no means! For then how could God judge the world?*
- Does Paul’s teaching create doubt about God’s justice?
- If a major sin reveals God’s righteousness more clearly than a minor sin, should God inflict wrath on a sinner whose great sin magnifies God’s righteousness? Or, as Paul says in 6:1, should I sin more so that grace abounds?
- To say it another way, the more sinful we are before our salvation, the more glorious is God’s saving grace to us.
- The argument is so obviously false, Paul says in an aside that he speaks in a human way.
- If this reasoning is applied to Jews, will God really bring His wrath on His chosen people? Paul’s answer is “**By no means!**” Then Paul asks a counter question.
- If God were unjust, how could He judge the world? To doubt God’s justice means doubting His competence as judge which demonstrates the absurdity of the question.
- **Objection 4:** (3:7-8) *But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?* <sup>8</sup> *And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*
- Does this teaching by Paul promote God’s glory in a false way?
- This an elaboration on the 3<sup>rd</sup> objection. The issue is, if wicked behavior causes good consequences (among the bad) that promote God’s glory, should we not promote it?
- Such arguments deserve condemnation. Evil in all forms never promotes God’s glory.
- Paul has affirmed that God’s covenant has abiding value. God is faithful to His promises. God is a “just” judge. God’s glory is promoted only by good, never by evil.
- In 3:1-8 Paul argues the truth and reasonableness of the gospel. The gospel must be expounded but also defended against, misunderstanding and misrepresentation.
- **Next Lesson:** Begin with 3:9.