

In Romans 3:4, Paul responds to the unbelieving Jews' question of Romans 3:3:

*May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, "THAT THOU MIGHTEST BE JUSTIFIED IN THY WORDS, AND MIGHTEST PREVAIL WHEN THOU ART JUDGED." (Romans 3:4)*

The apostle uses the strongest language possible, saying, "May it never be." "May it never be" that the overall unbelief within the Jewish nation should nullify God's faithfulness to the Jews who believe. Paul understood well that God will "be found true, though every man be found a liar." He does not stop here. He goes on to say, "That Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, and mightest prevail when Thou art judged." The words, "art judged," can be interpreted, "dost enter into judgment." Therefore, the last phrase of the passage can be rendered: "and mightest prevail when Thou dost enter into judgment." Yes, when God passes judgment, no one, not even an unbelieving Jew, can accuse Him of responding unjustly. Keep this fact in mind as we continue.

Worthy of our time is King David's quote in Romans 3:4:

*"THAT THOU MIGHTEST BE JUSTIFIED IN THY WORDS, AND MIGHTEST PREVAIL WHEN THOU ART JUDGED." (Romans 3:4)*

David made these statements in Psalm 51:4, a Psalm of repentance written subsequent to his sin with Bathsheba. In mentioning these words, Paul reminded his Hebrew opponents of David's view of sin in the life of a Jew. David also penned in Psalm 51:16:

*For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou are not pleased with burnt offering. (Psalm 51:16)*

David realized that "sacrifice" and "burnt offering" were not what ultimately restored fellowship with Jehovah once sin was committed. What restored fellowship was "a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart":

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 51:17)*

In quoting David in Romans 3:4, Paul demonstrated his desire that his Jewish opponents realize that even a Jew is in need of repentance, and that personal repentance and faith, exercised in Christ while depraved, is required by Jehovah before ushering anyone, Jew or Gentile, into His kingdom.

In verse 5, Paul records even more questions offered by his Jewish opponents.

*But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) (Romans 3:5)*

The Jews who disagreed with Paul's teaching presented the following argument. They realized that Paul considered them lost so long as they rejected Jesus' Messiahship:

“If what you are teaching is true, then our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God. However, if our acts of disobedience present opportunity for God’s righteousness to be manifested to an ever-increasing degree, which in turn enhances His reputation, how can He condemn our sin and remain just? In fact, if you are correct Paul, we need to sin to an even greater degree so His righteousness can be manifested all the more. If His judgment against the non-elect, whom He gave no opportunity to believe, enhances the elect’s appreciation of His grace, He is grossly unjust and unworthy of anyone’s praise.”

Intriguingly, these Jews, who were lost and without Christ, properly understood that God would be unjust by judging those who do not believe should He withhold from them the freedom to believe. However, their argument did not stop there. They correctly understood that should God’s righteousness be magnified through judging the sin of those who had no opportunity to exercise faith, the non-elect Jews (if there were such a thing) would be free to sin excessively—all to God’s glory. This argument presented by Paul’s Jewish opponents adds much flavor to what follows.

The Jews in opposition to Paul’s message viewed God as having chosen/elected them to be part of His family prior to physical birth. Should Paul be correct, the Jews questioning his theology had no alternative, in their minds at least, but to view God as having chosen/elected some Jews as His covenant people, and by default, rejecting the remainder. They concluded, therefore, that should God judge the sins of the Jews He failed to choose/elect, He would be totally “*unrighteousness*” (v.5)—for those judged would have had no opportunity to repent and believe.

This input makes Romans 3:6 extremely intriguing:

*May it never be! For otherwise how will God judge the world? (Romans 3:6)*

To understand Paul’s words in Romans 3:6, one must realize that the unsaved Jew perceived God’s judgment as directed toward Gentiles only. Thus, they would have interpreted the word “*world*” as Gentiles. This conclusion is totally out of context, for Paul is emphasizing the impossibility of God judging the “*world*” (Jews and Gentiles alike) should He fail to judge the unsaved Jews. The judgment addressed here is the “*great white throne*” judgment of Revelation 20:11-15, a judgment directed toward all persons who reject the Father’s provision through Christ.

In Romans 3:7-8, Paul’s enemies make their final assault:

*But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just. (Romans 3:7-8)*

By accusing Paul of teaching, “*Let us do evil that good may come*” (v.8), Paul’s Jewish opponents verified that their only alternative was to distort the theology of the man who had proven them incorrect. Paul had never taught such an outlandish notion—

that of granting man a license to sin so man's disobedience could enhance God's "glory." This falsehood explains Paul's response:

*And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just. (Romans 3:8)*

God would be unjust in judging the lost should they be incapable of believing, especially if their sin magnified His righteousness, which is why Paul records, "as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say." Bondage to the Law many times produces such erroneous thinking, yet a similar mindset is being promoted within Christendom today.

The interpretation of these verses allows us to draw some interesting conclusions regarding the theological shift of our day that promotes the falsehood that God determines man's destiny from eternity past by means of an eternal decree. According to this view, He chooses and predestines the elect to salvation and, either condemns the non-elect to damnation (one branch of this system of thought) or leaves them to the consequences of their sin (another branch of this same system). This view portrays God, in His sovereignty, as electing only some to salvation so He will have persons on which to display His wrath. Those receiving His wrath serve as a catalyst for the elect to appreciate His grace. Yet, according to this view, the non-elect lack the ability to believe. If this scenario were true, the non-elect would be judged for failing to believe when it was God who created them with an inability to believe—making Him totally unjust.

Paul's Jewish opponents detected the flaw in this arrangement, for God would be entirely unjust should the sin of those incapable of believing enhance His glory. This flaw, as obvious as it seems to be, has not been reconciled by those who presently accept the flaw as proper theology. Their response to why God would create people who have no ability to believe and then punish them for their unbelief, is "mystery," which is no answer at all. Yet, according to this popular contradictory view, God is capable of saving all (due to His sovereignty), yet chooses to save only some, so His wrath against the non-elect will enhance the elect's appreciation of His grace. Is this your perception of the God of the Scriptures? The unbelieving Jews of Paul's day could see through this inconsistency. They could not bear to believe that God chose/elected only a portion of the Jews so His wrath displayed toward the non-elect of the nation could enhance His glory. Neither did Paul believe this irrational notion, for Paul taught something totally different regarding the believer's chosenness/election!

*...Their condemnation is just. (Romans 3:8)*

"*Their condemnation is just*" because their reasoning confirmed that they were lost and without Christ. After all, they considered themselves as belonging to Jehovah due to a choice that Jehovah had made, having chosen/elected them as His covenant people (as part of His family) prior to birth. Therefore, Paul's gospel, which required personal repentance and faith in Christ (while depraved) prior to God bestowing salvation, was viewed as ludicrous. Thus, they resisted Paul's teaching and labeled him a blasphemer of

the truth. Although these arguments presented by the unredeemed Jews could not refute Paul's theology, they gave rise to a popular, although contradictory teaching of our day. This teaching is addressed below in a numbered format.

### ***A Popular, yet Contradictory Teaching of our Day***

1. God is capable of saving all, but chooses to save only some.
2. God, in His sovereignty, and by means of an eternal decree, chose/elected from eternity past each person who will be saved.
3. Those who were not chosen/elected were either damned (according to one branch of this system) or given over to the consequence of their sin (according to another branch of this same system).
4. Only the chosen/elect can believe, and all of the chosen/elect will believe. God will ensure that all of the chosen/elect will be saved.
5. The non-elect can never believe.
6. The depraved (those who are spiritually unregenerated) cannot exercise personal repentance and personal faith due to their spiritual deadness. They are spiritual corpses.
7. Even those who have been chosen/elected to salvation from eternity past cannot believe in their depraved state.
8. When the time arrives for the chosen/elect to believe, God draws them to Himself, spiritually regenerates them, gives them repentance and faith, and they repent, believe, and are saved.
9. God did not choose/elect everyone to salvation because He desired to have someone on which to display His wrath.
10. God's wrath will be displayed on those who have had no opportunity to believe, causing the chosen/elect to have a greater appreciation of His grace.
11. The chosen/elect must persevere for the purpose of proving that they are part of the chosen/elect.
12. If a person sins excessively, it verifies that he was never chosen/elected to salvation. Excessive sin proves, in fact, that he is part of the non-elect.

Can you see how Paul's Jewish opponents, should they live today, could detect the error in several aspects of this popular teaching? Our *God's Heart* series provides an in-depth study of this topic.

### ***The Rebuttal to this Popular yet Contradictory Teaching***

1. If God were to judge the sin of the non-elect, who according to this popular teaching have no opportunity to believe, He would be totally unjust.
2. Should God receive glory through judging the sin of the non-elect, who according to this same teaching have no opportunity to believe, the non-elect would be free to sin all the more.

3. Should the chosen/elect be required to persevere for the purpose of proving their chosen/elected status, as this contradictory teaching promotes, Scripture does not mention the standard of perseverance required.
4. Because no such standard is addressed in the Scriptures, the chosen/elect, who, according to this popular teaching are chosen/elected to salvation from eternity past, can never be assured of their chosenness/election, and in turn, their salvation.

Unsurprisingly, many individuals who agree with this widespread yet contradictory teaching perceive God as the cause of all things, even sin. If God were the cause of all things, He would cause the elect to believe and the non-elect to fail to believe, yet judge the non-elect for failing to believe—making Him totally unjust. God would have also caused Satan to rebel against His authority and to continue in that rebellion. Yet, according to Revelation 20:10, God will cast him “*into the lake of fire*” where he “*will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*” He will be sent there for his disobedience, which can be traced to the heart of God should God be the cause of all things. Contradiction abounds in such thinking, making a mockery of God in the process.

This contradictory thinking confused one of the greatest minds to grace the earth. Hugh Ross, on pages 73-74 of his work, *The Creator and the Cosmos*, tells of Albert Einstein as he (Einstein) was confronted with the fact that his theory of relativity had proven that the universe had a “Beginner”:

Einstein’s “superior reasoning power,” however, was not the God of the Bible. Though he confessed to the rabbis and priests who came to congratulate him on his discovery of God that he was convinced God brought the universe into existence and was intelligent and creative, he denied that God was personal.

Of course, those clergy had a stock response to Einstein’s denial: How can a Being who is intelligent and creative not also be personal? Einstein brushed past their objection, a valid one, by raising the paradox of God’s omnipotence [His unlimited power] and man’s responsibility for his choices: If this Being is omnipotent, then every occurrence, including every human action, every human thought, and every human feeling and aspiration is also His work; how is it possible to think of holding men responsible for their deeds and thoughts before such an almighty Being? In giving out punishment and rewards He would to a certain extent be passing judgment on Himself. How can this be combined with the goodness and righteousness ascribed to Him?

None of the clergy Einstein encountered ever gave him a satisfactory answer to his objection. Typically, they responded by saying that God has not yet revealed the answer. They encouraged him to endure patiently and blindly trust the All-Knowing One.

Regrettably, Einstein lacked the perseverance to pursue an answer further. He took for granted the biblical knowledge of those religious professionals

and assumed that the Bible failed to adequately address the crucially important issue. Of what value, then, could such a “revelation” be?

Lacking a solution to the paradox of God’s predestination and human beings’ free choice, Einstein, like many other powerful intellects through the centuries, ruled out the existence of a personal God. Nevertheless, and to his credit, Einstein held unswervingly, against enormous peer pressure, to belief in a Creator.

I am grieved that no one ever offered Einstein the clear, biblical resolution to the paradox he posed. I am also sad that Einstein did not live long enough to see the accumulation of scientific evidence for a personal, caring Creator. These might have sparked in him a willingness to reconsider his conclusions.<sup>1</sup>

Had Einstein searched the Scriptures, instead of accepting the contradictory theology of the “clergy” of his day, he would have discovered that God can remain sovereign without causing all things. In fact, he would have understood that God is a righteous judge, judging only one class of individuals—those who fail to exercise their freedom to repent and believe while depraved.

Man dislikes admitting error, which can be evidenced by the arguments of the unsaved Jews of Paul’s day. However, to grow in the knowledge of the Lord we must remain teachable, never hardened by sin’s deceitfulness, always maintaining a willingness to admit our mishandling of the truth. Paul’s Jewish opponents failed to realize this fact and reaped the consequence of their error, as do many individuals who follow the contradictory teachings inundating Christendom today.

Our study of Romans 3:1-8 may be summed up in one statement:

“The strictest legalism leads to the greatest license” (author unknown).

May we forever be delivered from the bondage of the Law through the grace we have been granted in Christ!

Our foundation is getting stronger. In fact, it will be completed by the time we reach Romans 4:25. We will then be equipped to build amazing truths on an uncompromised footing!

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<sup>1</sup> Ross, Hugh (1993, 1995, 2001), *The Creator and the Cosmos; how the greatest discoveries of the century reveal God*, Published by Reason To Believe, Navpress, pages 73-74, Used by permission.