

THE ARGUMENTS OF THE RELIGIONIST (JEW) AGAINST A HEART RELIGION ROMANS 03:01–08

Introduction

Paul has said there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, between a religionist and other men (chapters 1-3). All men stand before God guilty of sin and condemned. Now at this point Paul imagines the religionist seeing exactly what he is saying. The religionist also sees the tremendous weight of Paul's argument; therefore, he strains to counter Paul with three arguments, arguments often made by Christian religionists and church members who profess Christ and attend church only enough to salve their consciences. (See *Religionists*, Rom. 2:17-29.)

- I. What value is there in being a Jew, a religionist — in being circumcised or baptized — if all are guilty before God (vv. 1-2)?
- II. Does unbelief void God's promises — make God a liar (vv. 3-4)?
- III. Is God unjust if He punishes the unrighteous (vv. 5-8)?

ROMANS 02:17–29 RELIGIONISTS

A religionist is a person who is interested in religion and professes religion. It was because of the Jews' extreme interest in religion that they were looked upon as the epitome of religionists. However, most people are considered religious and profess some religion regardless of nationality. Therefore, most people can be called religionists. There are two classes of religionists.

1. There are those who feel they are good enough for God as they are, that they are doing enough good for God to accept them. They cannot believe that God would reject them when they stand face to face with Him. True, they do wrong, but not that much wrong, not enough for God to reject and condemn them for eternity. These persons go about living as they wish, worshipping God only enough to satisfy their consciences. The vast, vast majority of people are in this class of self-righteousness. Few men believe they will be rejected by God and refused entrance into heaven. They feel they have enough goodness to make them acceptable to God.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Prov 20:6 Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?

Prov 30:12 Those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth.

2. There are those who have a sensitive conscience and feel the need to give themselves to good works as much as is humanly possible. They work and do good in order to secure the favour of God. They believe that good works is what it takes to make them righteous and to build them up in the eyes of God. Therefore, they labour all their lives trying to build up virtue and merit before God. They try their best to make themselves acceptable to God.

Rom 3:20 *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*

Gal 2:16 *Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

Eph 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Note that a genuine believer is not being classified as a religionist. The reason is pointed: the true believer does not follow a religion; he follows Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is alive; He is living in another world — the spiritual world, the spiritual dimension of being. The believer is in touch with Him daily, communicating through the Holy Spirit and prayer. What the believer does is follow Christ; he lives the life of Jesus Christ, not the rules of a religion. Therefore, the genuine believer is a disciple of Christ, not of religion.

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Eph 2:22 *And in him [Christ] you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (see 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19)*

Phil 1:21 *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

Col 1:27 *To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

1 John 3:24 *Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

Rev 3:20 *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. □*

I. Romans 03:01–02 Value of Being a Jew or a Religionist

The question is, “What value is there in being a Jew or a religionist — in being circumcised or baptised or a church member? What do you do with the Jew who is Abraham’s seed? The promise of God to Abraham was that his seed (the Jewish nation) would be the children of God (see *Israel, God’s Special People*, Jn. 4:22; see Gen. 12:1-4). If a man is born a Jew (born into a Jewish family) and he professes to be a Jew, a follower of God, is he not acceptable to God (Rom. 2:17-29; see vv. 1-29)? If not, then what value is there in being a professing Jew, a follower of God? You are saying there is no advantage in being a Jew or a child of Abraham.”

The application of this passage concerns every man. If a man is born a Jew or a Christian (the right nationality), if a man is born into a Jewish or Christian family (the right heritage), if a man claims to be a Jew or a Christian religionist, and he is *still* not acceptable to God, what profit is there in being a religionist?

Paul’s answer is simple: the advantages are great. The Jew and Christian are highly privileged, especially in that God has committed His Word to them (Rom. 3:2; 9:4-5). They have the privilege...

- of possessing God’s Word
- of reading, hearing, seeing, obeying and living God’s Word
- of living within a society that has been affected by God’s Word

These are enormous privileges. A man born within a nation and a family that has God’s Word has every advantage in coming to God and in living for God. In fact, such a man could have no greater privilege. His privileges are so great that he is left without excuse if he fails to live for God.

John 5:24 *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

John 6:63 *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”*

John 6:68 *Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”*

John 8:51 *“I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”*

John 15:3 *“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”*

John 20:31 *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Rom 15:4 *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

Eph 5:26 *To make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.*

1 Pet 1:22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Psa 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

Prov 6:23 For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life.

Prov 14:34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

JOHN 04:22 ISRAEL, GOD'S SPECIAL PEOPLE

“You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.” John 04:22

Why did Jesus Christ come to the Jewish nation and come to earth as a Jew? Very simply stated, the Jews were God's special people. They had been born by a special act of God. It all started long, long ago. God had wanted four things.

1. He wanted a people who would love Him supremely and give Him their first loyalty. (See Gen. 17:7; Isa. 43:10.)
2. He wanted a people who would witness to all other nations that He and He alone was the one true and living God. (See Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Acts 13:26, 47.)
3. He wanted a people through whom He could send the promised Seed, the Saviour and Messiah, Jesus Christ, to all men everywhere. (See Gen. 3:15; 17:7; 22:18; Gal. 3:16; Jn. 4:22.)
4. He wanted a people through whom He could send His written Word, the Holy Bible, and preserve it for all generations. (Rom. 9:4-5; 1 Pet. 2:10-12.)

In searching the earth for such a people, God could find none (Rom. 1:18-32). God could do only one thing. He had to find one man and through him raise a new people, a new nation.

1. God found and chose Abraham and through him established the Jewish nation. (Gen. 12:1-5; 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8, 15-19; 22:16-18; 26:2-5, 24; 28:13-15; 31:13; 35:9-12.) God chose one man and challenged him to worship God supremely. If that man would worship God supremely, then God would cause a special people to be born of his seed. That man was Abraham. Abraham was the first Jew (Gen. 12:1-4; Gal. 3:16). In the Old Testament the Jews and their land (Palestine) were continually pointed to as the very special people and land of God. They were called...

=> God's treasured possession (Exo. 19:5; Deu. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psa. 135:4).

=> the Lord's portion (Deu. 32:9).

=> the Lord's land (Lev. 25:23; Jer. 2:7; 16:18; Hos. 9:3).

=> the holy land (Zec. 2:12).

However, the Jewish nation failed to obey God supremely. The whole plot of the Old Testament centres around God's pleading and dealing with the Jews. Again and again, He gave the nation the opportunity to obey Him. He dealt with them in mercy and in judgment, but at every turn they refused to heed His pleading.

2. God chose the family of David. (see Jesus Christ, King of Israel, Jn 1:49). God had no choice but to make another move, so He chose one faithful family within the Jewish nation and gave to that family one great promise. The family was that of King David, and the promise was that of the Messiah, God's great King, God's very own Son. God's Son was to come through the line of David and establish an eternal nation of people who would love God supremely. However, the Jewish nation again failed God. They misinterpreted God's Word — the prophecies of His coming.

a. The Jews misinterpreted God's Word by saying the seed of Abraham included only the Jewish nation. In their minds, God had no children except the children of the Jewish nation. The Bible says explicitly that the seed of Abraham is Christ, and the special people of God are those individuals within all nations who worship God supremely (Gal. 3:16).

b. The Jews misinterpreted God's Word by saying that the eternal kingdom promised to David was the Jewish nation and the Jewish nation only. They expected Israel to be established as an earthly nation forever and all other nations to be subservient to Israel. But again, God's promise was not that narrow, nor was it that prejudiced. The Bible says there is not, and never has been, any respect of persons with God (Deu. 10:17; 2 Chr. 19:7; Job. 34:19; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17). God did say that Christ was to come from the Davidic line, but He also said that He was going to establish an eternal nation made up of people everywhere who would love God supremely (Rom. 2:28-29).

By misinterpreting God's promises, the Jews failed to be the missionaries to the world that God had chosen them to be. They became earthly bound and materialistic minded. They twisted the idea of the promised Messiah to fit their own schemes. They conceived of Him as One who was to establish an earthly kingdom for the Jewish nation alone. They failed to see that God was speaking...

- of an eternal kingdom of righteousness.

- of a kingdom that is of another dimension entirely — the spiritual dimension.
 - of a new heaven and a new earth that would give each person an eternal life beyond just one earthly generation.
3. God had no choice but to make a third move. This He did by sending His own Son into the world through the Jewish nation. God sent Him so that the world through Him might be saved (Jn. 3:16-19). However, man rejected God's Son and crucified Him. This act — the killing of God's Son — was the final blow. When man slew the only Son of God, the whole world was involved. Both Jew and Gentile were represented symbolically in the Jewish religionists and the Roman authorities. They both actually did the plotting, sentencing and execution. If the world were ever to be saved, it was now perfectly clear that God had to make every move Himself.

This He did once-for-all. In His eternal purpose and plan for man's salvation, God took the sins of all men and laid them upon His Son while He was being slain upon the cross. He allowed His Son to bear the sins of the world (1 Pet. 2:24). Then He took His Son and raised Him from the dead — never to die again. He did what man had always failed to do: in His Son's resurrection God began to build a lasting kingdom of righteousness, a new nation that is presently being made up of men from all earthly nations who desire and are willing to follow Jesus Christ supremely. He is calling out and forming a new people who have genuinely been born again — spiritually. These new born people shall live eternally — beyond just one earthly generation. These people are identified as His church, as a body of people who genuinely believe and follow Him. They are destined to be the inhabitants of the new heavens and earth. Believers become God's new community, new society, new race, new nation of people. They become His church, His new creation — spiritually and supernaturally born again — who comprise the true family of God (Lk. 8:21; Eph. 2:11-18; 4:17-19.)

***Eph 2:18-22** For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

God, acting solely upon His own through the death and resurrection of His Son, has fulfilled His promises to both Abraham and David. All the people of the nations of the world now have the opportunity to become children of God, the special people of God. □

II. *Romans 03:03–04 Unbelief, Religionist, Salvation*

The question is, “If you say some Jews do not believe and are condemned, doesn’t that void God’s promises and make God a liar?” Or to say it another way, “What if some disbelieve and reject God’s Word, will their unbelief cause God to void His Word and promises? God promised the Jews a special place and special privileges through Abraham and his seed (see *Israel, God’s Special People*, Jn. 4:22). If some Jews do not believe God’s promises and God condemns them, isn’t He breaking His promise to Abraham and his seed? Isn’t He voiding His Word and Covenant and making Himself a liar? God’s Word could not be based on heart religion and on moral character alone. There has to be something else, something outward — a rite (circumcision, baptism, church membership) — that shows we are religious (Jews). If we go through the rite or ritual, then God is bound to accept us. He has promised to so accept us. He is not going to break His Word.”

The application of this question concerns every religionist. The thinking religionist poses the same objection and question: “If you say some religionists do not believe and are condemned, doesn’t that void God’s Word and make God a liar? God’s Word promises the religious person special privileges and the hope of eternal life. His Word tells us to believe Christ and to possess His Word, be baptised and join the fellowship of the church. If we do that and God still condemns us, is He not voiding His Word and becoming a liar?”

=> Not at all.

=> God will be faithful. His Word and promise of salvation will stand even if every man lies about believing and lies about giving his heart to serve Jesus.

=> God will prove His Word: He will be justified and proven faithful in what He has said. He will still save *any person* who gives his heart to Jesus and obeys Jesus.

=> In fact, God will overcome; He will prove His Word another way. He will judge all who make a false profession and who judge Him and His Word, who accuse Him of being unfaithful and voiding His Word. David himself said that God would judge the unfaithful or disobedient man (Psa. 51:4). David had sinned greatly, not keeping the commandments of God, so God judged David and charged him with sin. David did the right thing: he confessed his sin and repented and began to live righteously. But David did something else: he declared that God’s charge and judgment against him were just, that God was perfectly justified. And God was, for God is always just, and He is always justified in what He says and does.

The point is twofold.

1. God is not unfaithful. God never breaks or voids His Word when He rejects the religionist. The religionist who possesses God’s Word and belongs to a church but does not obey God’s Word is not acceptable to God. It is righteousness God is after, not religion. God is not after an outward religion, but an *inward righteousness*. God wants a heart that will not only possess the Bible, but will keep His commandments.

God is after a spiritual rebirth, a new creation, a man who has been truly born again. God wants a heart and life that are focused upon Christ and that keep the commandments of Christ. The only man who is acceptable to God is the man who has given his heart and life to Christ and who lives righteously, trusting God to accept His faith in Christ. (See Rom. 2:28-29.)

2. God never voids His Word or promises; He never has and never will be a liar. God has promised salvation and eternal life to men. Even if there should never be a single person who believed God's promise, His promise would still stand. He would still save any person who did what He said.

The problem is in doing what God says, in coming to God as He dictates. God demands that men give their hearts and lives to His Son, Jesus Christ. God demands that men live for Christ, worship and obey Him. But this is too hard for men. They want an *easier* salvation. They want to be able to do something, get it over with, and then be free to live as they wish, giving God some attention here and there. Therefore, men prefer to be saved by being religious: being baptised, joining a church, buying a Bible, and then being free to go about their own lives. But this is *not enough* for God; it is *not doing everything* that God says; it is not giving one's heart and life to live for Jesus Christ by obeying, worshipping and serving Him. Therefore. God...

- charges the religionist with sin
- judges and condemns the religionist

Now note another fact. God fulfils His Word by judging the religionists. God has told men how to live and what would happen if they failed. Therefore, He is justified in His sayings, "proved right" when [He] speaks by following through and by judging the religionists.

=> God will not void and break His Word. He will fulfil it all.

=> God is justified in fulfilling His Word by doing exactly what He said, that is, in accepting men *only* as He said and in judging men if they do not come to Him as He commands.

ROMANS 03:03 ERRORS OF MAN: UNBELIEF, LACK OF FAITH

*What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? **Romans 03:03***

This is one of two common but gross deceptions of men — that unbelief makes a thing ineffective and voids it. A man argues: "If I deny something, ignore it, refuse to accept it, push it out of my mind, it will not be, nor will it come to pass." Some even think of God's Word in this way. They think they can deny and reject some part of it and it will not be so. They accept the Scriptures that stress the love of God and allow them

to live as they wish, but they reject the Scriptures that stress the supernatural and miraculous power of God and the desperate need of man to be saved from sin, death and an eternal hell. They reject the Scriptures that demand that man live responsibly.

Mat 5:18 *“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”*

Luke 21:33 *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”*

2 Tim 2:13 *If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.*

Psa 111:7 *The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. □*

ROMANS 03:04 JUDGING GOD, JUDGMENT

*Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: “So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.” **Romans 03:04***

Men judge God. They judge Him to be true or false. They judge whether He exists or does not exist. They judge His Word. But in the final hour, God will end up judging men. He will overcome all those who judged Him to be less than He is and less than what He said.

Rom 2:2 *Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.*

Ezek 12:25 *“But I the Lord will speak what I will, and it shall be fulfilled without delay. For in your days, you rebellious house, I will fulfil whatever I say, declares the Sovereign Lord.” □*

III. **Romans 03:05–08 Love and Justice**

The question is, “Is God unjust if He punishes the unrighteous? If my unbelief and sin give God a chance to overcome (v. 4) and to show His justice, then my sin brings greater glory to Him. It gives Him a chance to fulfil His Word. How can He punish me for that? Is He not unjust in inflicting punishment?” The answer is fourfold.

1. Certainly not! (me genoito): away with such a thought! No! Never!
2. God is moral; therefore, He must judge the world. He would not be moral and just if He did not judge the world.

3. Such an argument is contradictory. Think about it. “If my sin and disobedience give God a chance to demonstrate His righteousness, why then am I called a sinner for that? My sin is really a good thing. It gives God a chance to show how good He is. I may sin, yes, but only good has come out of it. When God accepts me as I am, a sinner, God has a chance to show how gloriously merciful He is. You can’t condemn me for giving God a chance to show His mercy.”
4. The condemnation of persons who argue this point is *just*, deserved: it is not unjust, undeserved. Such arguments are common among every generation of men, but the arguments are gross deceptions. A man exclaims: “A God of love cannot take vengeance. He is too good and loving. He will be denying His very nature of love if He judges me.”

What this argument fails to see is that *genuine love is just*. Love expressed unjustly is not love; it is license and indulgence. God’s love is perfect, absolutely unbiased and impartial. It is shed upon all (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 2:2). It is not license and indulgence; neither can it be, not in its perfection. Neither can it allow license and indulgence. God’s love is completely and perfectly just. It demands justice. In no respect can it be unjust by failing to judge. Neither can God be accused of being unloving when He executes justice (Rom. 2:2-16). God’s love is just; God’s justice is the demonstration of perfect love. The cross was where God exacted His perfect justice upon His Son, and it is the perfect example of the glorious truth. The cross is the perfect demonstration of both the love and the justice of God.

Thought 1. The cross is the perfect demonstration of God’s love and justice.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Rom 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

2 Cor 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Gal 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

Eph 5:2 And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

1 Pet 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

1 Pet 3:18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.

Thought 2. Men shall be judged and condemned if they have rejected the love and salvation of God provided in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Mat 16:27 “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”

Mat 25:31-32 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

1 Pet 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

2 Pet 2:9 If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

2 Pet 3:7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Jude 1:14-15 Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

Rev 22:12 “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.” ■