

Romans 2:6 - 3:20 Paul Exposes Judean Injustice

The Transition

As Paul shifts his argument to those of the Judean faith, he adds a reminder of what God is calling people to do with their lives.

Romans 2:4

“Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

“This patience has the goal of making space and time for **repentance**, that is, for turning away from injustice towards justice. But if we are right here about the social context, then this would mean that an entire society should renounce its own injustice and turn instead towards justice (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 43).”

The call to repentance is a call for both the Judean and the Greek. As Paul states in 2:11 - “God shows no partiality.”

Romans 2:12-16

“All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 14 When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. 15 They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them 16 on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.”

As Paul transitions, he makes a bold statement about how actions point to justice, outside of the law.

“This is common sense in a way but also shocking, even for us: it is those who do or act according to the law who will be made just or recognize as just. This could even be a Pharisaic perspective: Israel’s relation to God depends not only on the possession of the law [of Moses] but on actually doing what the law requires [just as a Christian might say that what is important in God’s eyes is not simply saying that Jesus is Lord but actually following him] (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 48).”

Paul Critiques Judean Justice

Romans 2:17 - 24

“But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God 18 and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law, 19 and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, 21 you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? 24 For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

“For this to make sense, it must be clear that what is indicted is not an individual who, for example, steals, commits adultery, breaks the law, and so forth. Rather, it is the people, the social order itself even under the better polity of Israel, the constitution founded on law in which justice itself comes to expression (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 51).”

“The assertions about stealing, committing adultery, and robbing temples are rather odd here. I think we can make headway if we recall that adultery, for example, has to do with the assertion of the prophets that Israel sought security not from YHWH but from nations, the empires. Something similar maybe going on in the reference to robbing temples. What maybe at stake is that those who abhor idols nevertheless acquire idols from other temples. How does this concretely happened in the history of Israel? It is well known that Israel acquired representations of other divinities that were then displayed in the [First] temple, already beginning with Solomon [1 Kings 11:1-8]. This is also a theme of prophetic denunciation [Ezekiel 16:1-63] (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 51).”

1 Kings 11:1-8

“King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, 2 from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the Israelites, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you; for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods”; Solomon clung to these in love. 3 Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. 5 For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not completely follow the LORD, as his father David had done. 7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. 8 He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrificed to their gods.”

“It is crucial to see that's a critique of Judaism, including diaspora Judaism, is a feature of Pharisaic rhetoric. Paul is not proposing anything like a Christian critique of Israel but rather a Jewish [Pharisaic] critique. This is precisely on par with his pagan critique of the pagan social order [or rather, Greek philosophical critique of the Greco-Roman order] (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 52).”

Romans 2:25-29

“Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law. 28 For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. 29 Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.”

“The argument is one that, while it may offend some Judean sensibilities, is nonetheless built solidly on prophetic foundations. What is critical is what the law and the prophets called “circumcision of the heart.” Know this tradition from Deuteronomy 10:16, Jeremiah 4:4 and 9:26, and Ezekiel 49:9 (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 53).”

Jeremiah 4:4

*“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,
remove the foreskin of your hearts,
O people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,
or else my wrath will go forth like fire,
and burn with no one to quench it,
because of the evil of your doings.”*

“All of his Pharisee compatriots would recognize the force of his argument. It is, after all, framed as a pastiche of phrases from profits and from Deuteronomy. But for Paul gentiles as gentiles can be faithful to the messiah. It is hear that his mission to the Gentiles radically departs from what may have been his prior understanding of that mission as a Pharisee (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 53).”

“Transposed, the argument would run: it doesn't matter whether you were baptized; all that matters is whether you love your neighbor. The non-Christian who is just will judge the baptized person who is unjust. Moreover, there is no need to become in any way a Christian in order to be faithful to the messiah (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 54).”

Romans 3:1-4

“Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? 2 Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3 What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? 4 By no means! Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written,

*‘So that you may be justified in your words,
and prevail in your judging.’”*

“The advantage of the Judean, then, is that God is faithful to God's word. This will be explored at greater length much later in Paul's argument, but it is crucial at this point because what is at stake throughout this argument is the faithfulness of God, the reliability of God's promise. For it is this that must serve as the basis for loyalty to the proclamation concerning the messiah (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 55).”

Romans 3:19

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.”

Paul's point is that all are claimed by the demand of justice, a demand that the law of the gentiles like the law of the Judeans claims to articulate, a demand that is not met, however, by either people or polity. Viewed in this way, the whole world [seen as made up of Judeans and pagan nations] is under divine judgment (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 57).”

“This can only be understood, I believe, if Paul is seen to be accusing social groups as such, rather than a collection of individuals abstracted from their social setting. Universal “sin” is the characterization not of individuals as individuals but of social totalities that are in basic ways “unjust.” Individuals, whether Greek or Judean, seen simply as persons may, as Paul has said, do what is just and right. But when viewed as participants in unjust social orders, they are nonetheless judged as the social order is judged (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 57).”