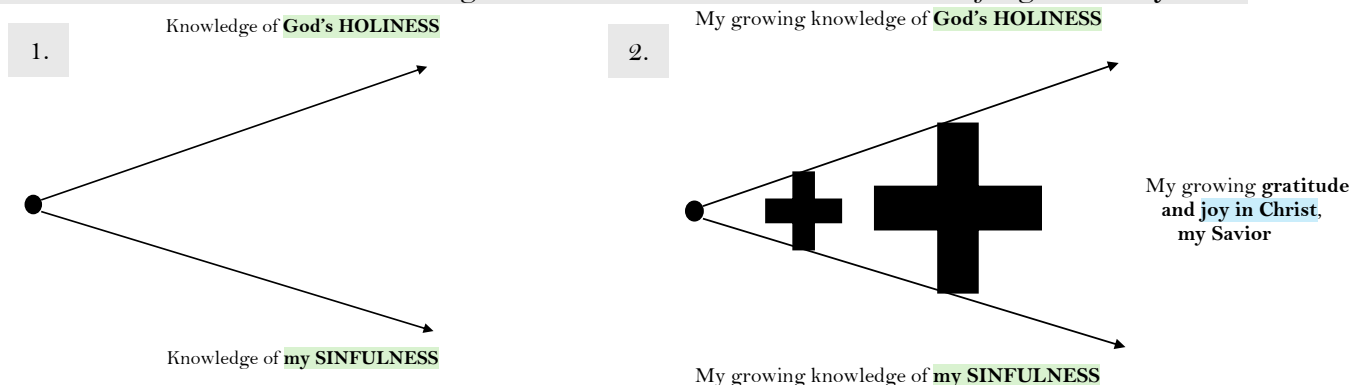


Romans 3:1–20: Real advantage? Yes. But not the kind that saves on judgement day.



(1:18–32) In and of yourself, you have **no escape** from the reality of God's judgment against your unrighteousness, **no excuse** for the reason for God's judgment against your unrighteousness, and **no element** outside of Christ, in or around you, exempt from the revelation of God's judgment against your unrighteousness.

(2:1–29) And lest you members of the **visible church** think you're better than "those immoral people," you also have no excuse and thus no escape in and of yourself because God ultimately will judge your unrighteousness with **no partiality** to your external moral and spiritual privileges.

(3:1–20) So, **visible church**, apart from Christ you need to be saved from God's righteous wrath just as much as "those immoral people" because your privileged external access to God's precepts and people give you **no advantage in God's final judgment**, when he holds the whole world to account.

We can distinguish between the "**visible**" church and the "**invisible**" church.

The invisible church consists only of regenerate (true) believers—that is, people who have received a transformed heart by the Spirit through their genuine faith in Jesus.

The visible church consists both of regenerate believers and unregenerate people who merely belong to the church outwardly but have not put their trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

1. (3:1–8) Answering objections: Visible church, God is **not unjust** for judging your unrighteousness along with everyone else's. (citation: Ps 51:4)
 - a. (3:1–4) But is God **faithful** to his covenant promises in condemning unrighteousness among his old-covenant people? [Paul will expand on this objection in Romans 9–11]
 - b. (3:5–8) But is God **fair** in condemning unrighteousness among his old-covenant people if their unrighteousness is to his advantage, in that their unrighteousness clarifies his righteousness and thus brings him glory as the holy Judge? [Paul will expand on this objection in Romans 6:1–7:25]
2. (3:9–18) Scriptural witness: Visible church, despite your outward spiritual privileges, you are **not better off** in God's ultimate judgment because, as Scripture consistently and indisputably testifies, in and of yourselves you are under sin in every area of life, just like everyone else. (citations: Ps 14:1–3; 53:1–3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Prov 1:16; Isa 59:7, 8; 36:1)
3. (3:19–20) Application: Visible church, you are under the law, which is **not a means of justification** before God but rather exposes your sin so as to render you without excuse, just like everyone else, when God holds the whole world to account in ultimate judgment.

For Reflection

For believers in Christ: What has God used in your life to help you reckon with the bad news of your need for salvation (Rom 1:18–3:20) in order to enable you to revel in the good news of the salvation he provides in Christ (Rom 1:16–17; 3:21–31)? Give some examples.

For not-yet-believers in Christ: Which element of the bad news articulated in Romans 1:18–3:20 are you finding most difficult to trust? And what alternative view do you hold relating to this implausible-seeming element in Romans 1:18–3:20? Why do you hold this alternative view?

Visible church: to what extent does your **outward profession** of faith in Jesus reflect an **inward, Spirit-ual reality**?

Romans 2:6 He will render to each one according to his works:

⁷to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;

⁸but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

⁹There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,

¹⁰but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.

¹¹For God shows no partiality.

Romans 2:6–11 | On judgment day (“the day of wrath”; 2:5), God will judge each person according to her works. Why? Because he is impartial; he shows no favoritism; he deals fairly with every person.

- Those who **obeyed unrighteousness** will be receive wrath and fury in the age to come, **condemned** on the basis of their works of unrighteousness, for which they have no excuse.
- Those who **obeyed the truth** will receive eternal life in the age to come, **commended** on the basis of their righteousness in Christ, which is Christ’s righteousness imputed to the believer. Believers’ saving faith in Christ is proven genuine [evidenced] by their “obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5; 16:26) from conversion onward—such as “by patience in well-doing seeking for glory and honor and immortality” (2:7, 10). In other words, believers’ deeds don’t earn their salvation, but rather demonstrate their salvation.

Judgment day for everyone includes at least: (1) **review**; (2) **ruling**; (3) **recompense** (punishment [unbelievers] or reward [believers]).

So, for EACH AND EVERY believer in Christ on judgment day:

REVIEW (GRACE): no condemnation (Romans 8:1); **no shame** (1 John 2:28)

RULING (GRACE): justified in God’s sight on basis of Christ’s imputed righteousness (R 3:21–22; 5:9–11)

RECOMPENSE (GRACE): rewarded by God with co-inheritance with Christ; also reward on basis of obedience of faith in this age, empowered by Christ and prepared for her beforehand by God [Rev 4:10 elders in heaven, casting their crowns before Lamb]

John 6:29 Jesus answered them, “**This is the work of God**, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. ... ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, **in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us**, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 14:10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” ¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

¹ Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. **¹⁴If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.** ... ¹Corinthians 4:1 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ²Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. ³But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. **Then each one will receive his commendation from God.**

² Corinthians 5:10 (... we make it our aim to please him.) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one **may receive what is due** for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Revelation 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. **Then another book was opened, which is the book of life.** And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone’s name was not found written in **the book of life**, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

How Does Old Testament Law Function for Its Original, Old-Covenant Audience?

Though law can never in and of itself transform the human heart (Gal 3:21), OT Law is an expression of and means of divine grace (Ps 19:7–11), given to God's people in the context of a covenant relationship in which blessed fellowship with and devotion to God is the goal. Old Testament Law functions for its original audience on multiple levels, which the OT and NT make explicit. The functions of OT Law for its original audience include:

- **to reveal God's character and will** to his covenant people and, through their obedience, to surrounding nations (Exod 19:4–6);

Asserted in Romans 3:2

Shown negatively in Romans 2:17–24

- **to sustain a relationship of faithfulness** with the LORD among the Israelites that would bring them blessing, including tenure in the land of Canaan (Deut 11:26–28) and his ongoing presence among them (Lev 26:11–12);

Pointed to in Romans 2:25–29

- **to establish a righteous society** under the LORD's rule (Deut 16:18–20), which involves restraining transgressors and protecting the innocent and vulnerable (Matt 19:8; 1 Tim 1:8–11);

Illustrated as needed in Romans 1:24–32 because world under God's judgment

- **to expose sin and multiply transgression** (Rom 4:15; 5:20; 7:7–13);

Asserted in Romans 3:19–20; compare citation of Ps 51:4 in Romans 3:4

- **to be a guardian for God's people** until the completion of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Gal 2:24–25; 4:1–2);

Pointed to in Romans 3:25–26

- **to point prophetically** to the person and work of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27; John 1:45; 5:46; Acts 28:23).¹

Asserted in Romans 3:21

¹John Calvin names **three uses of God's inscripturated law**: (1) "The law shows the righteousness of God, as a mirror discloses our sinfulness, leading us to implore divine help"; (2) "The law restrains malefactors and those who are not yet believers"; (3) "Principally it admonishes believers and urges them on in well-doing"; Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:354, 1:358, 1:360, respectively.