

## Romans 3 • From Sin to Salvation

### Introduction

It has been noted that within Romans 3, Paul establishes the foundation for teachings upon which he is going to later greatly expand upon:

- 3:1-4 deals with Israel's unbelief which will be the subject of chapters 9-11;
- 3:8 speaks of the issue of living in sin which occupies the heart of chapters 6-8;
- 3:21 raises the question of justification by faith which is the theme of chapters 4-5;
- and 3:31 pertains to establishing and obeying the Law, the crux of chapters 12-16.

Overall, the fundamental issue of sin and salvation addressed here ultimately serves to address what were originally perceived differences between ethnic Israel and the rest of the world, and serves as a milestone to show that we are no longer living in the "Age of the Law", but the "Age of Grace". Ironically, the work of Christ by grace is the only actual way to in turn keep the Law.

<sup>1</sup>Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?  
<sup>2</sup>Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

### Part I: Condemnation Under Sin [Read v.1-2]

**Q: How would you summarize the point Paul made at the end of chapter 2 which leads him to ask this question?**

A: Paul has made the case that those under the Old Covenant—"the Law", are actually condemned by the Law.

**Point:** Ethnic Israel thought of themselves as God's favorites without understanding that such a privilege and position obligated them to live exclusively holy lives. They were themselves disobedient to what they preached, and this is why Paul quotes Isaiah and Ezekiel through whom God said the result is that His name is actually blasphemed among the Gentiles because of this. In other words, there was no inward change.

**Q: Then why would being entrusted with the Word, which they were not actually obedient to, be an advantage?**

A: It provided them with the first opportunity over everyone else to know and follow God's will by putting it into practice. If they **HAD** been obedient, they would have received Christ and brought Him to the Gentiles themselves.

*"How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (Jn. 5:44-47)*

**Application:** No one should take the Word of God for granted by failing to put it into practice, understanding that its blessings come about as a result of obedience, not heritage.

<sup>3</sup>What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? <sup>4</sup>May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found 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 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.) <sup>6</sup>May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? <sup>7</sup>But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? <sup>8</sup>And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just.

<sup>9</sup>What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; <sup>10</sup>as it is written,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;  
<sup>11</sup>THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,  
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;  
<sup>12</sup>ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY  
HAVE BECOME USELESS;  
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,  
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”  
<sup>13</sup>“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,  
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP  
DECEIVING,”  
“THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;

### [Read v.3-4]

**Q: Why does Paul ask the rhetorical question if someone’s unbelief can “nullify the faithfulness of God”?**

A: God’s Word is eternal and unchangeable as a reflection of His personal character; the problem of unbelief is not the result of the nature and working of God, but man.

**Q: What is the context of Psalm 51 from which Paul is quoting in v.4?**

A: This is where King David not only openly admitted his personal sin (adultery and murder), but God’s righteousness in judging him. David declared both the righteousness of God and the truth of His Word in the course of admitting his sins.

**Application:** *The faithfulness and righteousness of God steadfastly continue in spite of man’s disobedience to His Word and ways.*

### [Read v.5-8]

**Q: What is the strange argument which arose from a misrepresentation of Paul’s teaching?**

A: If awareness of sin followed by repentance brings glory to God, why not sin more so as to glorify God more?

**Q: What is Paul’s initial response in v.6 which dismisses this notion?**

A: If that were the case, God could not judge the world.

**Q: Was this argument part of a legitimate debate or discussion concerning a fundamental doctrinal issue?**

A: No, it was a false teaching which was being formed by misquoting Paul, and in the process misrepresenting the character of God. This why Paul can say, “Their condemnation is just”, because it is not actually Paul who is being slandered, but the very person and working of God Himself.

**Application:** *The faithfulness and righteousness of God steadfastly continue in spite of man’s misrepresentation of His Word and ways.*

### [Read v.9-18]

**Q: How has the question changed the focus of Paul’s teaching?**

A: He is no longer talking exclusively about Israel’s sin, but everyone’s.

**Observation:** *In Romans, Paul teaches...*

- **There is no difference when it comes to sin:** “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Rom. 3:21–23)
- **There is no difference when it comes to salvation:** “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’” (Rom. 10:12–13)

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<sup>14</sup>“WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;  
<sup>15</sup>“THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,  
<sup>16</sup>DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,  
<sup>17</sup>AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”  
<sup>18</sup>“THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

<sup>19</sup>Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; <sup>20</sup>because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

<sup>21</sup>But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

- **There is no difference when it comes to God's grace and mercy:** “For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.” (Rom. 11:32 )

**Q: What do the Scriptures Paul quotes in v.10-12 have in common?**

A: They speak of the sinful character of the whole of mankind.

**Q: How do v.13-18 substantiate this?**

A: They detail the whole of mankind's conduct.

**Q: What do all of the behaviors listed in v.13-18 have in common?**

A: They are all sins committed against others. The proof of their sin against God and His Word is in mankind's treatment of mankind—their behavior toward others reflects their actual behavior toward God.

**Q: How is sin against others ultimately characterized in v.18?**

A: A lack of proper fear of God. Proper, biblical fear would cause a parallel fear of mistreating others.

**Application:** *The proof that everyone has turned aside from God's Word is in their treatment of others.*

**[Read v.19-20]**

**Q: What is the final verdict, so to speak, of all that Paul has been speaking to this point?**

A: Before God, the whole world is guilty.

**Q: What is the conundrum experienced by Old Testament Judaism?**

A: The Law did not accomplish the whole work of salvation, but instead actually provided condemnation because it evoked a clear knowledge of sin.

**Application:** *The Law by itself does not effect salvation, but condemnation by disclosing sin.*

**Part II: Justification by Faith**  
**[Read v.21]**

**Q: How has God's righteousness been “manifested”—that is, recently come into existence, “apart from the Law”?**

A: This is the opening to Paul's explanation that righteousness now depends on faith in Christ in the New Covenant rather than the works of the Law in the Old Covenant.

**Q: How was this previously “being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets”? Is this actually a completely brand new issue being presented here for the very first time?**

A: Being declared righteous by faith occurred in the example of Abraham (Gen. 15:6) and the teachings of Habakkuk (Hab. 2:4), to cite a few.

**Q: Why did Israel fail to recognize this righteousness by faith?**

*What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at*

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that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." (Rom. 9:30–33)

**Application:** The work of Christ brings to the foreground what had always been present in the God's Word.

<sup>22</sup>even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; <sup>25</sup>whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup>for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

**[Read v.22-26]**

**Q: What are the two main words which are each repeated three times in this passage which form the basis for what is being taught?**

A: "Righteousness" (v.22, 25 & 26) and "faith" (v.22, 25 & 26).

**Q: But to whom are these terms assigned?**

A: "Faith" is pointing toward us, but each use of "righteousness" is referring to God alone.

**Q: So what is the meaning of "justified" in v.24?**

A: It is being declared righteous in God's sight through the work of Christ.

**Application:** Sanctification is righteousness imparted to us in the course of our daily walk in Christ.

**Q: What work of Christ comes after "justified" in v.24? What does it mean?**

A: "Redemption". We are delivered from having to pay the penalty for our sins because the price was paid by Christ.

**Q: What is the third work referred to in v.24?**

A: "Propitiation".

**Q: What does the original word refer to? What is the greater picture Paul is providing in the use of "propitiation"?**

A: It referred to the mercy seat, the lid on the Ark of the Covenant, on which the High Priest sprinkled the blood for atonement of sins once a year during the Day of Atonement. This was the place of which God stated, "There I will meet with you".

*"You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel. (Ex. 25:21–22)*

**Q: How do these things come together to accomplish what the Law alone could not?**

A: Because of Christ's sacrifice, it is possible for God to not only forgive sinners, but to remain just Himself. Because His justice is completely satisfied in Christ, grace and kindness is available to the entire world instead of just condemnation. "...in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed..." (v.25)

*and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1 Pe. 2:24)*

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**Application:** Nothing is earned personally, but comes as a gift of grace by God through the demonstration of Christ's righteousness, of which we are partakers by faith.

<sup>27</sup>Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

<sup>31</sup>Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

### **[Read v.27-31]**

**Q: What is the difference between the "works" Paul is speaking of versus the "works" which James in his Epistle refers to?**

A: James' "works" is best understood as referring to personal behavior, to what **should** be the result of putting God's Word into practice; Paul is rather addressing "works of the Law" (v.28) in the context of using it **in lieu of** actually changing behavior.

**Q: Why can there be no boasting when it comes to the Jews having the Law?**

A: Because every sinner is justified by faith, not by the works of the Law. Otherwise only those who have the Law could be justified by God.

**Q: So how is salvation actually accomplished the same way for both Jew and Gentile?**

A: By faith.

**Q: How does this cancel the Law?**

A: Trick question—it doesn't!

**Q: How was the Law fulfilled?**

A: The Law demands death for sin, so it was fulfilled by Christ who died for our sins.

**Application:** The Gospel of Christ establishes the Law, revealing our need for grace, by which we are in turn enabled to obey the Law.

### **Overall Application**

- (v.1-8) What people say and do in the name of **God's Word** does not invalidate **God's Word**.
- (v.9-18) Everyone is in bondage to sin with or without knowledge of **God's Word**.
- (v.19-20) **God's Word** makes known everyone's sin.
- (v.21-26) **God's Word** testifies that justification for sin can only come through Christ.
- (v.27-31) The visible proof of justification is obedience to **God's Word**.