

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

INTRODUCTION

- A. Last week: John Stott, *He (Paul) saw that the character of God was at stake. So he reaffirmed God's covenant as having abiding value, God's faithfulness to his promises, God's justice as judge, and God's true glory which is promoted only by good, never by evil.*
- B. Outline of Romans
1. Introduction (1:1-17)
 2. The need for God's righteousness (1:18-3:20)
 - a. Condemnation on unrighteousness (1:18-32)
 - b. God's principles of judgment (2:1-16)
 - c. Condemnation of unfaithful Jews (2:17-3:8)
 - d. Condemnation of all humanity (3:9-20)
- C. Concerning Romans 3:9-20
1. Paul declared all people, Jews and Gentiles, in need of God's righteousness in chapters 1:18-3:8. Now, he provides Scriptural proof.
 - a. He provides seven Old Testament quotations, the first from Ecclesiastes, five from Psalms, and one from Isaiah.
 - b. Leon Morris, Paul . . . follows a common rabbinical practice of stringing passages together like pearls.
 2. This passage is the bridge between the need for God's righteousness and God's provision introduced in 3:21-31.

ROMANS 3:9-20, CONDEMNATION ON ALL HUMANITY

- A. Every human being is a sinner (total depravity of mankind) (9), *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,*
1. Paul asks two questions tied to Romans 3:1-8.
 - a. *What then* deals with the Jewish privilege as a group of representing the true God and His Word to a world of false gods.
 - b. *Are the Jews better off?*
 - 1) The Greek word is only used here in the New Testament.
 - 2) *Better off* means *have an advantage*.
 - 3) John Witmer, *It seems best to take the question as coming from Jewish readers to whom Paul has just been writing and to translate it, "Are we preferred?"*
 - c. Paul's response is *No, not at all*.
 - 1) For the Jew privilege does not diminish personal accountability.
 - 2) Paul declared that all mankind is *under sin*.
 - a) Tom Constable, *Being "under sin" means being under its domination and condemnation.*
 - b) John Stott, *Paul appears almost to personify sin as a cruel tyrant who holds the human race imprisoned in guilt and under judgment. Sin is on top of us, weighs us down, and is a crushing burden.*
 - c) Douglas Moo, *For the problem with people is not just that they commit sins; their problem is that they are enslaved to sin. What is needed, therefore, is a new power to break in and set people free from sin—a power found in, and only in, the gospel of Jesus Christ.*
 - d) Other New Testament references.
 - 1] 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 stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.*
 - 2] Galatians 3:22, *But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*
 - 3) Jews were declared under sin by Paul in Romans 2:1-29.
 - 4) Greeks were declared under sin by Paul in Romans 1:18-32.

- d. A brief discussion of total depravity from Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie's Basic Theology*.
- 1) *Depravity means that man fails the test of pleasing God. He denotes his unmeritoriousness in God's sight. This failure is total in that (a) it affects all aspects of man's being and (b) it affects all people.*
 - 2) *Negatively, the concept of total depravity does not mean (a) that every person has exhibited his depravity as thoroughly as he or she could; (b) that sinners do not have a conscience or a "native induction" concerning God; (c) that sinners will indulge in every form of sin; or (d) that depraved people do not perform actions that are good in the sight of others and even in the sight of God.*
 - 3) *Positively, total depravity means (a) that corruption extends to every facet of man's nature and faculties; and (b) that there is nothing in anyone that can commend him to a righteous God.*
 - 4) *Total depravity must always be measured against God's holiness. Relative goodness exists in people. They can do good works, which are appreciated by others. But nothing that anyone can do will gain salvational merit or favor in the sight of a holy God.*
- B. Paul affirmed the depraved nature of mankind through Old Testament Scriptures (10-18)
1. Every human being is unrighteous before God (10-12), ***as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."***
 - a. *as it is written*
 - 1) Paul quotes from the Old Testament to affirm the depravity of man.
 - 2) The following list is the longest use of verses by Paul.
 - 3) All of the verses emphasize human unrighteousness.
 - 4) Grant Osborne, *He provides the basic thesis in verses 10–12: sin is universal throughout the human race. He follows this up with a list of specific kinds of sin, first of speech (13–14) and then sins of a violent nature (15–17) and finally the basic religious dimension, no fear of God (18).*
 - b. Old Testament references
 - 1) Ecclesiastes 7:20, *Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.*
 - 2) Psalm 14:1-3, *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.*
 - 3) Psalm 53:1-3 which is almost identical to Psalm 14:1-3
 - c. Comments
 - 1) *Worthless means depraved, damaged sticks, having become what was not intended.*
 - 2) Grant Osborne, *No human being is right with God. Every single person stands before him stripped of all pretensions of righteousness.*
 - 3) John Stott, *Sin is the revolt of the self against God, the dethronement of God with a view to the enthronement of oneself.*
 - 4) Tom Constable, *This passage is one of the most forceful in Scripture that deals with the total depravity of man. Total depravity does not mean that every person is as bad as he or she could be. It means that sin has affected every part of his or her being and consequently there is nothing anyone can do to commend himself or herself to a holy God.*
 2. Everyone is unrighteous as shown in their speech (13-14), ***"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."***
 - a. Old Testament references
 - 1) Psalm 5:9, *For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.*
 - 2) Psalm 140:3, *They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the venom of asps.*
 - 3) Psalm 10:7, *His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.*
 - b. Comments
 - 1) John Witmer, *These verses (13-18) describe the vileness and wickedness of various parts of the human body, indicating figuratively that every part contributes to a person's condemnation.*
 - 2) Douglas Moo, *The order of the quotations may intentionally reproduce the sequence of organs involved in producing speech: throat—tongue—lips—mouth.*

- 3) John Stott, *These bodily limbs and organs were created and given us so that through them we might serve people and glorify God. Instead, they are used to harm people and in rebellion against God.*
 - 4) Warren Wiersbe, *The connection between words and character is seen in Matthew 12:34: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."*
3. Everyone is unrighteous as shown in their actions (15-17), ***"Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known."***
- a. Old Testament references
 - 1) Isaiah 59:7-8, *Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways. The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace.*
 - 2) Proverbs 1:16, *for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.*
 - b. Comments
 - 1) Warren Wiersbe, *The lost sinner is on the broad road that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13–14); he needs to repent, trust Jesus Christ, and get on the narrow road that leads to life.*
 - 2) Grant Osborne, *The paths of God are peace and worship, while the paths of wicked humanity are destruction and horror. Only in God via Christ can there be a lasting peace, but without the violence of the cross, that peace could never have been secured.*
4. Everyone is unrighteous because of disregard for God (18), ***"There is no fear of God before their eyes."***
- a. Old Testament reference: Psalm 36:1, *Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.*
 - b. Comments
 - 1) Here, as in each of the verses in this section, *their* refers to all of mankind, as seen in verse 9, *all are under sin.*
 - 2) The root problem of sin is seen here in that man has no innate reverence for God because of the sin nature.
 - 3) Douglas Moo, *The text exposes the root error that gives rise to the manifold sins of humanity: lack of "fear of God."*
 - 4) The fear of God includes reverence, worship, trust, obedience and service.
 - a) Job 28:28, *And he said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.'*
 - b) Proverbs 1:7, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*
 - c) Proverbs 9:10, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*
 - d) Ecclesiastes 12:13, *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*
 - 5) William Barclay, *Paul believed that men and women without Christ were bad, but he never considered them too bad to be saved. He was confident that what Christ had done for him, Christ could do for anyone.*
 - 6) Grant Osborne, *In light of the certainty of a heavenly future it is illogical to spend so much time and effort preparing for retirement in the few years we will have left on earth and to be totally neglectful in preparing for eternity. To fail to give much thought to our eternity with God is the height of folly.*
- C. The purpose of the law is not a means of justification but condemnation (19-20)
1. The purpose of the law was to show that mankind is accountable to God (19), ***Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.***
 - a. *Now we know*, Paul is speaking of Jews who were under the law, the Old Testament, that they are accountable to God for not keeping it.
 - b. The result is that if the Jew is accountable, the whole world is accountable.
 - 1) Tom Constable, *He wrote this to take the ground out from under a Jewish reader who might try to say that the passages just quoted refer only to the godless.*
 - 2) Douglas Moo, *Probably Paul is using an implicit 'from the greater to the lesser' argument: if Jews, God's chosen people, cannot be excluded from the scope of sin's tyranny, then it surely follows that Gentiles, who have no claim on God's favor, are also guilty.*

- 3) Grant Osborne, *To continue the judicial metaphor Paul uses so often in these chapters, all humanity has no defense when they stand before the Judge of all the earth and give account for their sins. They are rendered silent in their guilt as they await their sentence at the great white throne judgment seat of Revelation 20:11–15.*
2. No one is justified by the law (20a), ***For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight,***
 - a. *works of the law . . . no human being will be justified*
 - 1) Douglas Moo, . . . *since “works of the law” are simply what we might call “good works” defined in Jewish terms, the principle enunciated here has universal application; nothing a person does, whatever the object of obedience or the motivation of that obedience, can bring him or her into favor with God.*
 - 2) John 7:19, *Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?*
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *Neither Jew nor Gentile can obey God’s Law; therefore God must save sinners by some other means. The explanation of that means by which man can be saved occupied Paul for the rest of his letter.*
 - b. Affirmation from other Scriptures.
 - 1) Acts 13:39, *and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.*
 - 2) Galatians 2:16, *yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*
 - 3) Galatians 3:11, *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”*
 3. The knowledge of sin comes through the law (20b), ***since through the law comes knowledge of sin.***
 - a. The purpose of the law is the reason why mankind can’t be justified by it.
 - b. It was given to show man his sinfulness and not a means of salvation.
 - 1) Martin Luther, *The principal point ... of the law ... is to make men not better but worse; that is to say, it sheweth unto them their sin, that by the knowledge thereof they may be humbled, terrified, bruised and broken, and by this means may be driven to seek grace, and so come to that blessed Seed [sc. Christ].*
 - 2) Tom Constable, *The purpose of the law was not to provide people with a series of steps that would lead them to heaven. It was to expose their inability to merit heaven.*
 - 3) Galatians 3:24, *So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.*
 - 4) Warren Wiersbe, *Neither Jew nor Gentile can obey God’s Law; therefore God must save sinners by some other means. The explanation of that means by which man can be saved occupied Paul for the rest of his letter.*

CONCLUSION

Warren Wiersbe, *The best way to close this section would be to ask a simple question: Has your mouth ever been stopped? Are you boasting of your own self-righteousness and defending yourself before God? If so, then perhaps you have never been saved by God’s grace. It is only when we stand silent before Him as sinners that He can save us. As long as we defend ourselves and commend ourselves, we cannot be saved by God’s grace. The whole world is guilty before God—and that includes you and me!*