



ROMANS ¹⁻⁴
GOD'S GOOD NEWS

STUDY #6

3:1-20



O V E R V I E W - R O M A N S 3 : 1 - 2 0

In 1:18-3:20, Paul shows why the gospel of righteousness (1:16-17) is *necessary* for all humanity. It is necessary because *all* humanity is under God's wrath - both Gentiles (1:18-32) and Jews (2:1-3:8). In 3:1-8 Paul answers several anticipated objections from his Jewish hearers in light of chapter 2. In 3:9-20, Paul sums up his argument in this section by showing how the Old Testament confirms the guilt of all humanity.

Objections Answered (3:1-8)

1-2 Having just demonstrated how Jewish privilege provided no protection or exemption from God's judgement (2:17-29), Paul answers the anticipated charge that he is denying that the Jews had *any* privilege as God's people. He affirms their supreme¹ privilege of being entrusted with the very words of God. In contrast to the world which had only *general* revelation of God's being and his righteous decrees (1:19-20; 32), the Jewish people had God's *specific* revelation of these things. Furthermore, their possession of God's Law advantaged them in recognising their sin and their need for God's intervention (v 20)

3-4 It would seem that Paul here responds to a second anticipated objection to his teaching on God's judgement upon the Jews – would not God's judgement upon God's people contradict God's covenant faithfulness to his people? Yet God's covenant stipulated punishment for disobedience (e.g. Deut 27). His righteousness *requires* him to judge sin. Paul here quotes David, who himself recognised this following his murder of Uriah and adultery with Bathsheba (Psalm 51:4). The faithfulness of God to his covenant does not do away with the need for repentance and obedience, nor does the unfaithfulness of God's people undermine his covenant promises. Even if all are unfaithful to God, he will righteously accomplish his purposes and fulfill his covenant promises. God's righteousness demands his justice, yet also guarantees he will fulfill his covenant promises.

5-8 The human arguments listed here reflect the futility of the human mind in sin (cf. 1:21). Like someone deflecting their own wrongdoing by quickly pointing the finger at someone else, these objections turn the occasion of our own guilt into an opportunity to accuse God – because God is glorified through our condemnation, it is supposedly unjust for him to still condemn us. An extension of this argument therefore concludes, "Let us do evil that good may result." Any thinking that seeks to excuse sinful behaviour and accuse God of wrongdoing is so warped and devoid of Godliness that it demonstrates our culpability in sin – *their condemnation is just!* Such culpability is seen today when people make various arguments to excuse their own sin, e.g. "after all, we're all sinners!"

The Guilty Silenced (3:9-20)

9 As mentioned above, this verse ties up the argument from 1:18-3:8. All humanity are under the power of sin. Note the language of dominion here – we are under sin's power, we are held in its sway, we are slaves to sin, we have been handed over to its desires (1:24; 26; 28). Life apart from God is not one of freedom or independence, but one of enslavement to our sinful desires which prove impossible to break away from.

10-18 Listing various Psalms and Isaiah 59, Paul reinforces his argument from the Old Testament to demonstrate that his teaching is indeed *God's* teaching. His portrait of humanity in sin (1:18-32) is vividly re-illustrated with these grabs from the Old Testament. This passage conveys what theologians call, our *total depravity* in sin. In other words, there is no part of our humanity that is untouched by the pervasive reality of sin – 'if the colour of sin were blue, every aspect of us would be some shade of blue.'² Though it might be argued that some do indeed 'seek God' (v 11), in sin, we actually only suppress the truth of the real God and instead seek God's of our own making (1:18-23).

19-20 Such quotations from the Old Testament³ have the further effect of silencing Jewish objectors, for as part of the Old Testament scriptures, they address God's covenant people and confirm their status as guilty people also. Indeed, such a picture of our total depravity in sin demonstrates how any attempts at making ourselves righteous before God through works of the law are utterly futile. We need a righteousness not our own.

¹ It's possible that Paul here begins a list of advantages that he later completes in 9:4-5. However, it's more likely that he speaks of the advantage of being entrusted with God's Word as the *supreme* advantage, or *first over all* of the advantages the Jews had.

² R. Kent Hughes quoting Dr Addison Leitch in *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Crossway: 1991), 71.

³ Christopher Ash insightfully points out that many of the Psalms quoted speak not only of the universality of God's judgement upon a sinful humanity, but the exemption of those who are the *righteous*. In so doing, they testify ahead of time as to what Paul will speak of in next week's passage – the righteousness available through faith (3:21-31), which forms covenant people. Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans: Volume One*, (Focus: 2009), 124-127.

GETTING STARTED

1. Over the last couple of weeks, what have you found particularly challenging, or even illuminating, as we've considered God's wrath against sinful humanity?

INTO THE TEXT

Read Romans 3:1-8

2. Though possessing the Word of God will not protect them from judgement (2:13; 17-24), in what way is it still advantageous for the Jews?
3. How does Paul answer the objection that his teaching of God's judgement upon unfaithful Israel (ch 2), contradicts the Old Testament message of God's covenant faithfulness? (v. 3-4)
4. See verses 5-8. How do these objections themselves demonstrate that God's *condemnation is just*? (cf. 1:21)
5. What are some of the common objections to God's judgement in our day? How might our time in Romans 1-3 help us to respond to them?

Read Romans 3:9-20

6. How does Paul sum up his argument from 1:18-3:8?
7. How do these Old Testament quotations (v 10-18) support Paul's argument?
8. What are 'works of the law,' and why are they unable to declare us righteous? (v. 20)
9. Why is the gospel such *good news*? (see 1:17)

TAKEAWAY

10. In Galatians 3:1-3, Paul writes, "*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?*"

Are there areas of your walk with Christ where you are prone to try and make yourself righteous before God through various spiritual *works*? Re-read verse 20, confess this to God, and thank him for giving you a righteousness not your own, in Christ.