



Welcome to Faith

The Letter of Paul to the Romans

Romans 2 & 3

A Word on Style

Letters were dictated to scribes. Romans was probably written from Corinth in 57-58 AD. Paul's health (many believe it was a problem with his eyes) is such that he is not writing his own letters.

Dealing with "oral style" - sentences not carefully crafted, grammar is not perfect (run-on sentences, etc.). **Romans is to be heard** more than read.

Early church would have been more accustomed to hearing than reading. In the Jewish tradition ear/memorization is very important.

Summary

Romans Chapters 1-3 - A Story within a Story

1. Human unrighteousness and unfaithfulness cannot undo God's righteousness.
2. Two-part story of world gone wrong.
 - Part 1* - applicable to all (Jews and Gentiles) - we all descend from Adam and Eve.
 - Part 2* - the particular story of Israel who is meant to be God's "light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6) but who in fact is "living in darkness" (Isaiah 49:6).
3. God's merciful rescue operation for the lost world (both humanity and Israel) - the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only way salvation could work.

Review: Paul and the Law

The **Law** had condemned, tried, and found Jesus guilty of blasphemy. Therefore, either the **Law** was wrong or Israel's understanding of it was wrong. Paul believes the latter. (Paul was a Jew and always remained a Jew.)

Rightly understood, the LAW is not the mediator between God and man; this function has been taken over by Jesus.



Jesus saves humanity, not the LAW.

Romans 2:1-11 - Judgment

¹ Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. ² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things. ³ Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?

Judgment

To judge another is to commit IDOLATRY. It is to assume the role of God. Judging assumes power; power is the opposite of a humble heart.

We must discern. Every day we make decisions about people.

We must not judge - we cannot judge that some people will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. A problem with religious people is they think they can act for God and decide who is going to heaven and who is going to hell.

Romans 2:5 - The Day of Wrath

⁵ But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Jews looked forward to the "day of wrath" (judgment) because they believed they would be spared (because they had the law). Paul says it will be a dark day for Jews as well.

The Day of Wrath (cont'd)

Calvin: **limited atonement** (Jesus died to save the "elect," those whom God predestined/called are redeemed in Christ.

Some others read Paul to say that God damns all (no one can follow the law) that God may save all.

Romans 2:6 Sticks out like a Sore Thumb

⁶ For he will render to every man according to his works.

Verse 6 stands in flat contradiction of justification by faith. There does not appear to be an easy way to reconcile verse 6 to the rest of Romans (example 1:16-17 and 3:23-24 - "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift ...").

Perhaps Paul is seeking to move people to repentance. For example, one Sunday the preacher says, "God loves you no matter what." The next week the preacher tells the congregation to "shape up or ship out."

Romans 2:7-11
**Right actions flow from a right
relationship with God.**

⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

Romans 2:12-16 - Conscience

¹² All who have sinned without the law will also perish without 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 before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that **what the law requires is written on their hearts**, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Conscience

Remember, righteousness is not a moral quality. Being "justified" by God is not ontological - that is, God does not give us a new heart, make us different people – we still have the old nature alongside our new nature. The old impulse to sin is alongside our new impulse to serve God.

Verse 13: no one has ever kept the law.

Conscience

Verses 14 and 15 are important: final answer as to why Gentiles are held accountable when they did not have the written law. Not only do they know about God from creation, but their conscience is an accuser, convictor.

Note: When Paul uses the term "law," he sometimes refers to the **Decalogue** (10 commandments), other times the **Torah** (first 5 books of the Bible), and sometimes he uses the term to refer to the entire **Hebrew Bible**.

Romans 2:17-19

The Jews and the Law

Paul now turns his argument from moral people to **self-righteous Jews** who would protest that they at last were assured of God's favor because they possessed God's law and bore the mark of circumcision. Paul argues that neither the law (verses 17-24) nor circumcision (verses 25-29) guarantee salvation.

National and Religious Pride in being Jewish

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely upon the law and boast of your relation to God

Intense nationalistic pride to be a Jew.

Israel divided the world into two groups: the JEW who walked with God and the GENTILES (those who did not walk with God).

Note similarity to Fundamentalist Moslems today. They divide the world into the House of Islam and the House of Nonbelievers.

Paul attacks the notion of superiority

Some have argued that Jesus was killed because he took away the exclusiveness of Judaism. Jesus' blasphemy was to say that "**God is God of all without distinction.**"

Stubborn Admiration for Jews

Verse 19 calls the Jews a "guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness." Gentiles despised and ridiculed Judaism.

1. For their eating habits (from abstaining from certain foods, i.e., pork, shellfish, etc.).
2. For their bizarre customs (circumcision, etc.).
3. Jews had their own courts.
4. Jews would not serve in the army.
5. Jews showed contempt for other religions (no tolerance).

And the hatred for Judaism carried over into hatred for Israel, BUT, they had a **profound admiration for their moral purity, their decency, and for the way that they cared for one another.**

Circumcision

Genesis 17:1-14 - Official Jewish teaching held that the circumcised Jew would be saved in the Day of Judgment and therefore need not worry about the retribution of God.

²⁸ For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. ²⁹ He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and **real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal.** His praise is not from men but from God.

Romans 3

Romans - Chapter 3

After destroying the notion of privilege and the idea that circumcision is necessary to find favor in God's eyes, Paul now begins with a question (verse 1):

**"Then what advantage has the Jew?
Or what is the value of circumcision?"**

Yesterday: Jews were God's chosen people, chosen to play an indispensable role in salvation history. (v. 2 "To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.")

Today: Jews are equal with others – no advantage or privilege.

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all, for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin.

Paul Anticipates Questions

Anticipating questions and responding was a very common rabbinic teaching tool.

1. "But God promised that we were special, unique, privileged, first in God's heart!"
Paul's response: God was faithful and God is faithful. God did not change the rules, perhaps we (Israel) did not understand God.

Paul Anticipates Questions

2. "OK, but weren't we doing God a favor by being Jewish – by being circumcised and following all the laws? How can God condemn us for being human, for being flawed?"

Paul's response: God does not wink at sin/evil. Evil is real. But we have a choice! Don't blame God for your faults, "God made me to mess up" – Adam and Eve made a choice in the garden, and we make choices every day.

Paul's Dilemma

⁷ But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?

If God is responsible for ALL, God is also responsible for my wickedness, so how could God judge me?

Paul's response: Free will.

No One is Righteous

Romans 3:10-20

Paul is still responding to the question, are Jews superior to the Gentiles? Paul appeals to demonstrations from the Hebrew Bible that point to the universal fact of human sin.

When it comes to sin, everyone is equal.

Romans 3:10-20

¹⁰ as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands, no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood, ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

The True Israelite

God now does for the world what Israel could not do for the world by providing the one true Israelite who would act in covenant faithfulness.

The one true Israelite is Jesus Christ. He is Israel's representative—he alone keeps the covenant!

Righteousness = Faithfulness

Jesus is faithful to God.

God is faithful/righteous to Jesus by raising him from the dead.

In Jesus Christ, God saves Israel and the world.

Romans 3:21-26 - True Righteousness

Some call this the "heart of Paul's theology."

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, ²² the **righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction;** ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ they are justified by his grace as a gift,



through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; ²⁶ **it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.**

The Story of Jesus Christ told in terms of Redemption

Redemption was the act of buying freedom for a slave. In this case, we are the slave and our bondage is to sin (we are under its power and can not be freed by our own doing – it takes intervention).

Slave markets were common in First Century Jerusalem – in the Roman Empire it has been estimated that one in five people was a slave. In the city of Rome (the destination of this letter) one in three was a slave. This analogy of a slave having his freedom purchased was powerful. God purchases our freedom through Christ.

The Story of Jesus Christ told in terms of Atonement

Romans 3:25 - Jesus is God's sacrifice, or atonement, through his blood.

Yom Kippur

²⁵ " whom God put forward as an **expiation** by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."

expiation = mercy seat

Kipper means to cover, to cleanse, to wipe off, to cancel.

Jesus is the mercy seat where God deals with Israel's sin.

Yom Kippur

Once a year on the **Day of Atonement/Yom Kippur** the High Priest enters into the holiest place of the Temple (the Holy of Holies) to sprinkle the blood as an atonement for the sins of the people. Christ died on a cross (his blood is offered) and he entered not the Temple but heaven ("he ascended to heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty"). Christ's sacrifice is once-and-for-all (no need to repeat it yearly, as with the Chief Priest of Judaism, or weekly as with the sacrifice at the Lord's Supper).

A Debate . . .

"Propitiation" - focuses on the appeasement of someone who is angry.

"Expiation" - focuses on the sin that is straining the relationship; needs to be purified.

Crucifixion is not a bloody death—death comes more like drowning or suffocating.

Four Gods?

31.4% believe in an **Authoritarian God** who is very judgmental and engaged.

25% believe in a **Benevolent God** who is not judgmental but engaged.

23% believe in a **Distant God** who is completely removed.

15% believe in a **Critical God** who is judgmental but not engaged.

Source: The Presbyterian Outlook, October 2, 2006.

African-Americans believe overwhelmingly in an Authoritarian God (53.4%)

Regions of the U.S. also have an impact:

Easterners tend toward belief in a Critical God.

Southerners tend toward belief in an Authoritarian God.

Midwesterners believe in a Benevolent God.

West Coast believes in a Distant God.

Key: Authoritarian–judgmental and engaged
Critical–judgmental, not engaged
Benevolent–not judgmental, engaged
Distant God–not judgmental, not engaged

Jesus Christ is . . .

... the **person** who offers the sacrifice.

... the **place** where the sacrifice is offered.

... the **sacrifice** itself.

- The Death and Resurrection of Jesus is one event.
- In his death are we damned.
- In his resurrection are we saved.

Boasting is Excluded

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith. ²⁸ **For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.** ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Summary

Romans 1:18-3:20 - Paul tells the story of a world lost and enslaved to the powers of sin and death.

In 3:21-31, we learn the story of God's dramatic rescue of the world using the metaphors of justification, redemption, and atoning sacrifice for sin.

Next Week

The connection between Chapters 3 and 4 is verse 31. An imaginary heckler asks Paul, "But aren't you throwing out the Old Testament?"

Next week we hear Paul's response.