



Scotts Hill Baptist Church

ROMANS •

WHY WE NEED THE GOSPEL: BECAUSE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT ON ALL PEOPLE! •

ROMANS 3:1-20 • 10/8/2023

MAIN POINT

Apart from the grace and mercy of God we are without hope because the law cannot save a us.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Why is it difficult for many people, including many preachers, to talk about every person's problem of sin?

What event awakened in you the fact you are a sinner in need of Jesus Christ?

How were you prompted to respond to the gospel at this realization?

Sin and judgment are not easy topics to grasp on an individual level, and they are much less easy to broach in conversation with others. We want to feel good about ourselves and help other people feel good about themselves, too. Any teaching that doesn't elevate a person can be taken as offense, and we fear it might drive them away from God, not to Him. But as we'll read in Romans 3, who we are and what we do doesn't impact who God is. We are sinful people, but God is faithful.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ROMANS 3:1-8.

What two “absolutely not” questions/statements did Paul make in verses 1-8?

In your own words, how would you describe God from these verses?

Paul apparently had been accused of undermining the importance of the Jewish people in God’s plan for salvation. He replied that being a Jew had considerable advantages, the first of which was receiving the spoken words of God. God had chosen the Jewish people to be the instrument of His revelation. Some Jews had not responded positively to the gospel, but this rejection did not mean God would be unfaithful to His side of the covenant. His judgment on the sins of Jews did not represent a rejection of the promise He had made to the Jewish people.

Why is it important that we realize the full weight of our sin? What is the problem with thinking we have only committed minor sins?

Paul asked if there was any advantage for the Jews and any benefit to being circumcised. Paul then raised the question of whether God is faithful if Jews do not believe Him. He also answered his questions.

What were his answers and reasons for answering this way?

What are some areas where we have to trust that God is true despite many convincing lies of the world?

Paul raised the question of whether it is fair for God to punish us for sin if our sin highlights His righteousness. He answered that question, too.

Why did Paul raise this question? How did he answer the question?

What “human argument” did Paul use in discussing our unrighteousness?

Why did he use this argument?

How does your response to the gospel show you reject false ideas about the relationship of grace and sin?

Why is condemnation deserved by those who claim their sin serves to make God look more glorious? How is this a gross misunderstanding of the gospel?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 3:9-18.

Do you think most people in the world think they are righteous or unrighteous? How would you explain to someone that they are not righteous?

How do you reconcile verse 11 with the many Scriptural references to people seeking God?

Which description of unrighteousness from this passage do you think best fits modern society? Why?

Which description of unrighteousness from this passage reminds you the most of yourself before Christ? Why? How have you seen Him change you?

Why do you think God gets such little fear today?

From the Psalms, Isaiah, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs come the thoughts that Paul “quotes” in order to show the Jews one thing: the texts which God committed to them for the purpose of being a light to the Gentiles have now been turned upon them. It is as if someone grabbed their sword out of their hand—the sword by which they were to fight their way through the darkness of this world—and killed them with it. The root problem is lack of vision, as Paul’s quote of Psalm 36:1 reveals (v. 18). With our eyes we order our steps. When we fail to look to God and give Him the proper fear or reverence He deserves, then we will fall.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 3:19-20.

According to these verses, what is the Law’s purpose?

What makes verses 19 and 20 such hopeless verses? How does this concept connect with what you see in Romans 1:18-21?

Paul had maintained earlier we will be judged by works (see Rom. 2:5-7). In that context he was writing of the fruit of a faithful life. In the present context he wrote of works performed legalistically as a means of justification before God. Paul had tried such an approach as a Pharisee and in his estimation had been rather good at it. Ultimately he found that approach completely incapable of saving him. Then what is the function of law? It is a diagnostic device. Through the law comes the knowledge of sin. The law should awaken in us an awareness that we need what only God can supply. The law reveals sin.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How would you counsel someone who struggles to acknowledge sinfulness?
Someone who struggles with guilt over sinfulness?**

Where do you need to remember God's faithfulness this week? How does this passage encourage you in that?

Do you know anyone who is without hope? If so, how can you help them this week?

What can our group do together to share the hope of Christ with the hopeless of our community in the near future?

PRAYER

As you close in prayer, thank God for the law, which enables us to know God's expectations for us so we can be truly repentant in regards to our sin. Also thank God for sending Jesus, our hope, to bear the burden of our sin and be the fulfillment of the Law on our behalf.

COMMENTARY

| ROMANS 3:1-20

3:1-2. It is a great privilege to be Jewish—considerable in every way. They heard God speak the “ten words” or Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-20) directly to them. Then through a long series of prophets, God's words came to them. No other people on earth had this privilege.

3:3. Even if some of the Jewish people did not believe, God will be faithful to His covenant and will bring His promises to fulfillment. Paul referred particularly to the promises centered in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

3:4. After he was confronted by the prophet Nathan for his sins surrounding the Bathsheba incident, David confessed in Psalm 51:4 that God is justified in His judgments.

3:5-8. Paul addressed several implications to which critics mistakenly thought his teachings would lead. For example, if God is shown to be in the right by man's sin and error, then God is honored by our shortcomings. How then can God punish us when we

have helped display His righteousness? But Paul answered that as a matter of principle God's judgment of sin is always righteous. People who think otherwise deserve condemnation, for their true focus is not on glorifying God but on giving free reign to their sinful desires.

Paul uses his summary of Jewish accountability before God to remind his readers that all—Jews and Gentiles alike—have demonstrated their unrighteousness before God.

3:9. Some of Paul's fellow Jews contended they enjoyed a privileged status as God's people that precluded their being subject to judgment. Paul returned to that theme with stark pronouncements that sin has infected every person. Though the Jews have had the advantage of receiving God's words, they have no privilege when the subject is sin and are not any better with regard to salvation. Not at all could actually be translated as "not altogether" or "not in every respect." This would allow for the one advantage Paul cited in verse 1 and others he anticipated with the phrase "considerable in every way" in verse 2. Paul's focus in this present verse, however, is on sin and salvation. In this respect Jews could expect no favoritism.

3:10. The solemn formula as it is written again calls attention to God's Word to prove Paul's argument. The words in verses 10-12 come from Psalm 14:1-3 or Psalm 53:1-3. Paul had studied the Hebrew Bible in his training. Also he apparently had a Greek translation of the Old Testament available, which this quotation closely follows. A Jewish audience would have been receptive to the Scripture, so Paul quoted this psalm to indicate the universal sinfulness of humanity. Written by David, the psalm shows racial distinctions do not matter with regard to sin. Those who trust in their own righteousness to bring salvation need God's clear word: There is no one righteous. The quote is written as a couplet, one phrase repeating the thought of the previous phrase. This method of "rhyming" characterizes Hebrew poetry.

3:11. A second couplet underscores Paul's argument. Understanding translates a word that indicates the ability to use reason to comprehend a given concept. No one seeks God indicates a person who holds on to sin or to reason alone will never find God. In our age we often hear about people who are searching for God. People who undertake this search using only the faculty of reason will end up with the biblically indefensible position of "many paths to God." The path to God is walked by faith, not reason.

3:12. A third couplet adds the idea that not only are people unrighteous and pursuing the wrong path, they consciously have turned away from God. God provides plenty of signposts. If we choose to ignore them, we are doing the same thing as turning away.

3:13-14. In verses 13-14 Paul cited passages that deal with the throat, the tongue, the lips, and the mouth. The ungodly display their fallen nature when they open their mouths to speak. God provided us with the gift of communication so that we may honor and praise our Creator. We tend to take the gift and place it in the service of our own sinful nature. The throat of the unrighteous is an open grave. Others understand the expression as a reference to the deadly effects of the psalmist's enemies. Their tongues were used to deceive. The poison of vipers was on their lips. Their mouths were full of cursing and bitterness. Jesus said that "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt 12:34).

3:15-18. The feet of the unrighteous are swift to shed blood (v. 15). Their natural instincts encourage them to kill. The desire to prevail at any cost leads to suffering and disaster. Evil inevitably overreaches itself. It creates the conditions for its own collapse. In a moral universe wickedness earns its own sentence of personal retribution. The way of peace is unknown to those who turn from God. Their lives are marked by unrest and lack of genuine satisfaction. They live out their days haunted by a dim vision that there must be something in life that would satisfy their deeper longings. They do not venerate God or hold him in esteem.

Paul's portrayal of the unrighteous person may seem overly pessimistic to many contemporaries. However, Paul was making a specific point and was under no obligation to mention all the extenuating circumstances. Then, of course, we participants in this fallen world tend to minimize the difference between our own conduct and the expectations of a holy God. In view of what God intends, humans fall lamentably short (cf. Rom 3:23).

3:19-20. Paul declared that all have sinned (3:9). The Old Testament declares that all have sinned (3:10-18). And finally, the law declares that all have sinned (3:19-20). The law here has a dual reference in Paul's words. First, it simply refers to the verses he has just quoted, showing that the law speaks to those who are under the law. Paul is not asking the Jews to give heed to the sacred writings of some other religion, but to their own. If you claim these writings, he says, then receive their claim upon your life. Do not own them without letting them own you. Receive their verdict without objection.

Second, however, Paul says that the law's purpose is to let you know that the law cannot make you righteous. Rather, it is through the law that we become conscious of sin. In other words, when the law says, "Do this or that," it is really saying, "You can't do this or that." The law wants you to know that you are guilty of not being able to keep it, and that

your righteousness will never have its source in the law. The law tells you of your unrighteousness; the gospel tells you of the righteousness of God.

Paul has concluded his words concerning his beloved kinsman (Rom. 10:1-3). He has brought the church at Rome to the point where they understand that they are unrighteous (Jew and Gentile), the Romans are unrighteous, the “barbarians” in Spain and beyond are unrighteous, that there is no one righteous, not even one (3:10). He is now ready to tell them who is righteous—God alone—and more importantly, how a bridge may be built upon which they may move from their unrighteousness to the righteousness of God. This he will do beginning in 3:21—“a righteousness from God ... has been made known.”