

**Romans 3**  
**February 8, 2015**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Paul spent a good portion of his letter in Chp 2 to basically say that God is NOT impressed with outward formalities, but rather obedience. God was more impressed with a Gentile who was uncircumcised and obeyed Him, versus a Jew who was circumcised and didn't obey. That's where our lesson in Chp 2 concluded. Paul knew full well how the Jews would object to this, so he anticipated it. In Paul's characteristic style, he puts out a couple of questions he knows they're thinking, and then he answers it!

**Transition:** So today we begin Chp 3 with Paul's attempt to take care of these objections and answering them satisfactorily. Now that he's proved that all men are sinners, he spends the rest of Chapter 3 on how sinner can be saved. You will be introduced to the doctrine of justification. As we go through this lesson, it is my prayer that you leave here today with a much stronger, more solidified understanding of justification and why that's important to each of us. Let's begin.

**BOOK (NIV 1984):**

**Process Observations/Questions:**

V.1:

- What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?

V.2:

- Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.

V.3:

- What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?

V.4:

- Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

V.5:

- But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)

V.6:

- Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?

V.7:

- Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?"

V.8:

- Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

- Q V.1, 2 – What's the first question Paul anticipates? [What advantage is there in being a Jew? Asked differently, "What's the point of being circumcised?"]

- Q – What was Paul’s own answer to the first question? [Much in every way! They were **entrusted with the word of God. They rec’d a special revelation of His Law.** He was never saying that being a Jew or being circumcised had *no* gains.]
- X-Ref Rom 2:17-24 – Review the content of these verses to connect this first question. [They bragged about their relationship to God; they were convinced they were a guide to the blind; taught the Law, but then didn’t keep it themselves!]
- Q V.3, 4 – What is the second question Paul anticipates? [What if some Jews did not have faith (i.e. were unfaithful with what was entrusted to them)? [Some Jews did not believe the promises of God, but there were others who did but were unfaithful to follow the Law. Paul’s point is that their unfaithfulness doesn’t change God’s attribute of being faithful!]
- FYI – Paul will address more fully the concept of God’s faithfulness in spite of Israel’s unbelief in Chp 9-11.
- Q: What did Paul mean by “Let God be true and every man a liar?” [Man should believe they all have broken their word rather than that God has broken His!]
- Q V.5, 6 – What is the third/fourth question Paul asks? [“If our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, then are we to say that God is unjust in bringing His wrath upon us?]
- Q: What was Paul’s own response to these questions and his support for his answer? [Certainly not! If God were truly unjust, then He would be barred from judging the whole world. Of course, God IS just. Thus, God will judge the world (2:5) fairly. He will not be unfair in extending His wrath on guilty Jews.]
- Q V.7, 8 – What is Paul’s next question? [If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?]
- Q – How does Paul answer his own question? [He answers it with another question (paraphrased): Why not twist this and ask “Let us do evil that good may result?”]
- Observation: Paul’s last question was important to ask because some opponents of the Way were falsely accusing him and the Jewish believers of this mindset. And obviously, nothing could be further from the truth.
- Q V.8 – Where does Paul land on his own argument regarding the condemnation from God upon Israel? [It is deserved! He chose not to reply to the slanders.]

**Read Rom 3:9-20**

V.9:

- What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.

V.10:

- As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one;

V.11:

- there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

V.12:

- All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

V.13:

- “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.”
- V.14:
- “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”
- V.15:
- “Their feet are swift to shed blood;
- V.16:
- ruin and misery mark their ways,
- V.17:
- and the way of peace they do not know.”
- V.18:
- “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
- V.19:
- Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.
- V.20:
- Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

- Q V.9 – What is Paul’s punch line to the Jews? [Both Jew and Gentile are under the power of sin and the condemnation that results from it.]
- Observation/Q: Paul decides to support this notion by quoting Psalm 14:1-3 that emphasizes that “there is no one righteous, no not one.” Given this truth, is there such a thing as a “good person?” [NO. It’s a flawed premise. You and I have no goodness in us without Christ in us! When people ask, “Why do bad things happen to “good” people,” I tell them that the question has a flawed premise. I love how Gerald Mann always answered this, “Bad things happen to good people because bad things happen to ALL people.”]
- Q V10-18 – Look at all of the descriptors: not one is righteous, no one understands, etc. How would you describe the person who doesn’t know God? [Helpless, lost, powerless, bent toward evil – this is the portrait of a spiritually lost person]
- Process the Portrait of a Lost Person –
  - V.11a Notice that the power of sin controls a man’s mind (“no one understands”)
  - V.11b Notice that the power of sin controls a man’s heart (“no one seeks God”)
  - V.12a – Consequently, a lost person who doesn’t seek God turns away from Him.
  - V.12b – the lost person has no spiritual capacity to do good.
  - V.13, 14 – Notice the human speech of a lost person. Recognize the connection between words and character. X-Ref Matt 12:34 “Out of the abundance of the...
  - V.15, 16 – Now we moved from the head to their feet. Notice that their feet lead them to destruction (“Ruin and misery” is the inevitable course.) Our feet as Christians are shod with the gospel of peace according to Eph 6.
  - V.17 – Notice that Paul addresses the sinner’s mind – he doesn’t know the way of God’s peace.
  - V.18 – Notice the picture of arrogant pride. X-Ref Psalm 36:1-4 to get stronger picture.

- Q V.20 – So if there is no one who is righteous, no one who does good...will God ever declare someone righteous based on their deeds? [Absolutely not! You and I will never be declared righteous based on our works. And our shortfall to observe the Law only accentuates how sinful we really are.]

**Read Rom 3:21-31 – Paul introduces justification by faith**

V.21:

- But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

V.22:

- This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

V.23:

- for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

V.24:

- and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

V.25:

- God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

V.26:

- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

V.27:

- Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.

V.28:

- For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

V.29:

- Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too,

V.30:

- since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

V.31:

- Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

- Q V.21, 22 – What a great opening verse. Paul introduces that there is a way to obtain the righteousness of God **apart from the Law**. According to v.22, how can this righteousness be ours? [Through **faith in Christ Jesus to all who believe!**]
- This section of verses (21-31) is such a central doctrine of the Christian faith:
  - Righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ. (v.22) Faith is only as good as its object. All men trust something, even if it's themselves; whereas Christians place their trust in Jesus.
  - For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (v.23) Salvation is offered to all men because all of us need to be saved

- We are justified freely (Greek word found in John 15:25 says “without a cause”) by God’s *grace* through the redemption that came through Jesus Christ. (v.24)
- God sent Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood. (v.25) [If time permits, describe the Jewish Day of Atonement in Lev 16 where they had two goats presented at the altar. The blood of animals could never take away sin, but only “cover” sin until Christ came.]
- There is no basis for boasting because we have been justified by faith, not by works! X-Ref Eph 2:8-9

**LOOK:**

God showed His amazing love to us by creating a plan of salvation for everyone who believes upon His Son, Jesus. We learned three elements of salvation:

1. Justification is by grace (source of our salvation – 3:21-24)
2. Justification is by the blood (basis of our salvation – 3:25-26)
3. Justification is by faith (condition of our salvation – 3:27-31)

**Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 521–524). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

*Paul's summation (vv. 1–8).* All of Paul's four witnesses agreed: the Jews were guilty before God. In Romans 3:1–8, Paul summed up the argument and refuted those Jews who tried to debate with him. They raised three questions. (1) "What advantage is it to be a Jew?" Reply: Every advantage, especially possessing the Word of God. (2) "Will Jewish unbelief cancel God's faithfulness?" Reply: Absolutely not—it establishes it. (3) "If our sin commends His righteousness, how can He judge us?" Reply: We do not do evil that good may come of it. God judges the world righteously.

### **The Whole World Is Guilty! (Rom. 3:9–20)**

The third declaration was obvious, for Paul had already proved (charged) both Jews and Gentiles to be guilty before God. Next he declared that all men were sinners, and proved it with several quotations from the Old Testament. Note the repetition of the words "none" and "all," which in themselves assert the universality of human guilt.

His first quotation was from Psalm 14:1–3. This psalm begins with, "The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" The words "there is" are in italics, meaning they were added by the translators; so you can read the sentence, "The fool hath said in his heart, 'No, God!'" This parallels the description of man's devolution given in Romans 1:18–32, for it all started with man saying no to God.

These verses indicate that the whole of man's inner being is controlled by sin: his *mind* ("none that understandeth"), his *heart* ("none that seeketh after God"), and his *will* ("none that doeth good"). Measured by God's perfect righteousness, no human being is sinless. No sinner seeks after God. Therefore, God must seek the sinner (Gen. 3:8–10; Luke 19:10). Man has gone astray, and has become unprofitable both to himself and to God. Our Lord's parables in Luke 15 illustrate this perfectly.

In Romans 3:13–18, Paul gave us an X-ray study of the lost sinner, from head to foot. His quotations are as follows: verse 13a—Psalm 5:9; verse 13b—Psalm 140:3; verse 14—Psalm 10:7; verses 15–17—Isaiah 59:7–8; verse 18—Psalm 36:1. These verses need to be read in their contexts for the full impact.

Romans 3:13 and 14 emphasize human speech—the throat, tongue, lips, and mouth. The connection between words and character is seen in Matthew 12:34: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." The sinner is spiritually dead by nature (Eph. 2:1–3), therefore only death can come out of his mouth. The condemned mouth can become a converted mouth and acknowledge that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Rom. 10:9–10). "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37).

In Romans 3:15 and 16, Paul pictured the sinner's feet. Just as his words are deceitful, so his ways are destructive. The Christians' feet are shod with the Gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15); but the lost sinner brings death, destruction, and misery wherever he goes. These tragedies may not occur immediately, but they will come inevitably. 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.

Romans 3:17 deals with the sinner's mind: he does not know the way of God's peace. This is what caused Jesus to weep over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44). The sinner does not want to know

God's truth (Rom. 1:21, 25, 28); he prefers to believe Satan's lie. God's way of peace is through Jesus Christ: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

In Romans 3:18, which cites Psalm 36:1, the sinner's arrogant pride is prescribed: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." The entire psalm should be read to get the full picture. The ignorance mentioned in Romans 3:17 is caused by the pride of verse 18; for it is "the fear of the Lord" that is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7).

These quotations from God's Law, the Old Testament Scriptures, lead to one conclusion: *the whole world is guilty before God!* There may be those who want to argue, but every mouth is stopped. There is no debate or defense. The whole world is guilty, Jews and Gentiles. The Jews stand condemned by the Law of which they boast, and the Gentiles stand condemned on the basis of creation and conscience.

The word "therefore" in Romans 3:20 carries the meaning of "because," and gives the reason why the whole world is guilty. No flesh can obey God's Law and be justified (declared righteous) in His sight. It is true that "the doers of the Law shall be justified" (Rom. 2:13), but *nobody can do what the Law demands!* This inability is one way that men know they are sinners. When they try to obey the Law, they fail miserably and need to cry out for God's mercy. 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.

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!

## **FATHER ABRAHAM**

### *Romans 3:21–4:25*

Paul's theme in the second section of his letter was *Salvation—Righteousness Declared*. He had proved that all men are sinners; next he was to explain how sinners can be saved. The theological term for this salvation is *justification by faith*. Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Christ on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the cross. Each part of this definition is important, so we must consider it carefully.

To begin with, justification is an *act*, not a process. There are no degrees of justification; each believer has the same right standing before God. Also, justification is something *God* does, not man. No sinner can justify himself before God. Most important, justification does not mean that God *makes* us righteous, but that He *declares* us righteous. Justification is a legal matter. God puts the righteousness of Christ on our record in the place of our own sinfulness. And nobody can change this record.

Do not confuse justification and sanctification. Sanctification is the process whereby God makes the believer more and more like Christ. Sanctification may change from day to day. Justification never changes. When the sinner trusts Christ, God declares him righteous, and that declaration will never be repealed. God looks on us and deals with us as though we had never sinned at all!

But, how can the holy God declare sinners righteous? Is justification merely a “fictional idea” that has no real foundation? In this section of Romans, Paul answered these questions in two ways. First, he explained justification by faith (Rom. 3:21–31); then he illustrated justification by faith from the life of Abraham (Rom. 4:1–25).

### **Justification Explained (Rom. 3:21–31)**

“But now the righteousness of God ... has been manifested” (Rom. 3:21, literal translation). God had revealed His righteousness in many ways before the full revelation of the Gospel: His Law, His judgments against sin, His appeals through the prophets, His blessing on the obedient. But in the Gospel, a new kind of righteousness has been revealed (Rom. 1:16–17); and the characteristics of this righteousness are spelled out in this section.

***Apart from the Law (v. 21).*** Under the Old Testament Law, righteousness came by man *behaving*; but under the Gospel, righteousness comes by *believing*. The Law itself reveals the righteousness of God, because the Law is “holy and just and good” (Rom. 7:12). Furthermore, the Law bore witness to this Gospel righteousness even though it could not provide it. Beginning at Genesis 3:15, and continuing through the entire Old Testament, witness is given to salvation by faith in Christ. The Old Testament sacrifices, the prophecies, the types, and the great “Gospel Scriptures” (such as Isa. 53) all bore witness to this truth. The Law could witness to God’s righteousness, but it could not provide it for sinful man. Only Jesus Christ could do that (see Gal. 2:21).

***Through faith in Christ (v. 22a).*** Faith is only as good as its object. All men trust something, if only themselves; but the Christian trusts Christ. Law righteousness is a reward for works. Gospel righteousness is a gift through faith. Many people say, “I trust in God!” But this is not what saves us. It is personal, individual faith in Jesus Christ that saves and justifies the lost sinner. Even the demons from hell believe in God and tremble, yet this does not save them (James 2:19).

***For all men (vv. 22b–23).*** God gave His Law to the Jews, not to the Gentiles; but the Good News of salvation through Christ is offered to all men. All men need to be saved. There is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile when it comes to condemnation. “All have sinned, and are coming short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, literal translation). God declared all men guilty so that He might offer to all men His free gift of salvation.

***By grace (v. 24).*** God has two kinds of attributes: *absolute* (what He is in Himself), and *relative* (how He relates to the world and men). One of His absolute attributes is love: “God is love” (1 John 4:8). When God relates that love to you and me, it becomes *grace* and *mercy*. God in His mercy does not give us what we do deserve, and God in grace gives us what we do not deserve. The Greek word translated “freely” is translated in John 15:25 as “without a cause.” We are justified *without a cause!* There is no cause in us that would merit the salvation of God! It is all of grace!

***At great cost to God (vv. 24b–25).*** Salvation is free, but it is not cheap. Three words express the price God paid for our salvation: propitiation, redemption, and blood. In human terms, “propitiation” means appeasing someone who is angry, usually by a gift. But this is not what it means in the Bible. “Propitiation” means the satisfying of God’s holy Law, the meeting of its just demands, so that God can freely forgive those who come to Christ. The word “blood” tells us what the price was. Jesus had to die on the cross in order to satisfy the Law and justify lost sinners.



The best illustration of this truth is the Jewish Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16. Two goats were presented at the altar, and one of them was chosen for a sacrifice. The goat was slain and its blood taken into the holy of holies and sprinkled on the mercy seat, that golden cover on the ark of the covenant. This sprinkled blood covered the two tablets of the Law inside the ark. The shed blood met (temporarily) the righteous demands of the holy God.

The priest then put his hands on the head of the other goat and confessed the sins of the people. Then the goat was taken out into the wilderness and set free to symbolize the carrying away of sins. “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). In the Old Testament period, the blood of animals could never take away sin; it could only cover it until the time when Jesus would come and purchase a finished salvation. God had “passed over” the sins that were past (Rom. 3:25, literal translation), knowing that His Son would come and finish the work. Because of His death and resurrection, there would be “redemption”—a purchasing of the sinner and setting him free.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan was trying to explain “free salvation” to a coal miner, but the man was unable to understand it. “I have to pay for it,” he kept arguing. With a flash of divine insight, Dr. Morgan asked, “How did you get down into the mine this morning?” “Why, it was easy,” the man replied. “I just got on the elevator and went down.”

Then Morgan asked, “Wasn’t that too easy? Didn’t it cost you something?”

The man laughed. “No, it didn’t cost me anything; but it must have cost the company plenty to install that elevator.” Then the man saw the truth: “It doesn’t cost *me* anything to be saved, but it cost *God* the life of His Son.”

***In perfect justice (vv. 25a–26).*** God must be perfectly consistent with Himself. He cannot break His own Law or violate His own nature. “God is love” (1 John 4:8), and “God is light” (1 John 1:5). A God of love wants to forgive sinners, but a God of holiness must punish sin and uphold His righteous Law. How can God be both “just and the justifier”? The answer is in Jesus Christ. When Jesus suffered the wrath of God on the cross for the sins of the world, He fully met the demands of God’s Law, *and also fully expressed the love of God’s heart*. The animal sacrifices in the Old Testament never took away sin; but when Jesus died, He reached all the way back to Adam and took care of those sins. No one (including Satan) could accuse God of being unjust or unfair because of His seeming passing over of sins in the Old Testament time.

***To establish the Law (vv. 27–31).*** Because of his Jewish readers, Paul wanted to say more about the relationship of the Gospel to the Law. The doctrine of justification by faith is not against the Law, because it establishes the Law. God obeyed His own Law in working out the plan of salvation. Jesus in His life and death completely fulfilled the demands of the Law. God does not have two ways of salvation, one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles; for He is one God. He is consistent with His own nature and His own Law. If salvation is through the Law, then men can boast; but the principle of faith makes it impossible for men to boast. The swimmer, when he is saved from drowning, does not brag because he trusted the lifeguard. What else could he do? When a believing sinner is justified by faith, he cannot boast of his faith, but he can boast in a wonderful Saviour.

In Romans 4–8, Paul explained how God’s great plan of salvation was in complete harmony with the Old Testament Scriptures. He began first with the father of the Jewish nation, Abraham.

**Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 448–452). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### 3. CONDEMNATION BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF (3:1–8).

3:1–2. A characteristic mark of Paul’s style, particularly in this letter to the Romans, is to ask and answer an obvious question his discussion has raised in his readers’ minds. The natural response to the preceding material (2:17–29) is, **What advantage** (*perrison*, “overplus”), **then, is there in being a Jew?** Expressed in other words the question is, **What value** (*ōpheleia*, “advantage”) **is there in circumcision?** The first question pertains to Paul’s words in 2:17–24, and the second question to his words in 2:25–29. Paul’s response is immediate and direct: **Much in every way!** He was not saying that being a Jew or being circumcised had *no* gains.

By the phrase **First of all** Paul suggested that he was going to list a number of items, though actually he stated only one. He did this same thing elsewhere (1:8; 1 Cor. 11:18). In this case the item he stated is the most important and in a sense includes any others that could have been mentioned. The Jews **have been entrusted** (the Gr. past tense could be rendered “were entrusted”) **with the very words** (*logia*, pl. of *logos*, “word” or “statement”) **of God.** This can refer to the entire Old Testament but here it probably means just the promises and commands of God. Yet, though in that privileged position, the Jews were unable to live up to God’s standards.

3:3–4. The fact that the chief benefit of being a Jew was being “entrusted with the very words of God” raised another question. **What if some did not have faith?** This verb “did not have faith” also means “be unfaithful.” This is preferred since the same verb is rendered “entrusted” in verse 2. It is true that some Jews did not believe the promises of God, but also some Jews were unfaithful to their trust. **Will their lack of faith** (this noun can also mean “unfaithfulness,” which is preferred here) **nullify God’s faithfulness?** To that possibility Paul responded, **Not at all** (*mē genoito*, “Let it not be,” a frequent exclamation by Paul; cf. vv. 6, 31; 6:1, 15; 7:7, 13; 11:1, 11). Though some Jews did not believe or were unfaithful (evidenced by their sinful conduct mentioned in 2:21–23, 25), God remains faithful to His Word (cf. Deut. 7:9; 1 Cor. 1:9; Heb. 10:23; 11:11; 1 Peter 4:19). This concept of God’s faithfulness in spite of Israel’s unbelief is developed more fully in Romans 9–11.

Paul continued, **Let God be true and every man a liar.** This means, “Let God keep on being true even though every man becomes a liar.” This idea is taken from Psalm 116:11. As still further support, Paul quoted Psalm 51:4.

3:5–6. The apostle then pursued his argument with additional questions. The first is, **What shall we say** to the idea that the Jews’ **unrighteousness** served to accentuate **God’s righteousness?** Could they conclude that God’s **wrath on Jews is therefore unjust?** Paul immediately interjected, **I am using a human argument,** and responded with the answer, **Certainly not!** (*mē genoito*, the same response as in v. 4; cf. v. 31) **If that were the case, that God were unfair in judging unfaithful Jews, then He would be barred from judging the world.** And of course, that could not be. So, since God will judge the world (cf. 2:5) He will not be unfair in extending His wrath on guilty Jews (cf. 2:11).

3:7–8. A second question is this: **If someone’s lack of truth enhances God’s truthfulness, how can God in fairness condemn (lit., “judge”) him as a sinner?** In other words, since sin seemingly benefits God, how could He turn around and judge sinners for their sin? Paul raised these two questions, which are examples of unsaved people’s casuistry, because some opponents were falsely accusing him of advancing them and proclaiming, **Let us do evil** (lit., “the evil things”) **that good** (lit., “the good things”) **may result.** The apostle did not reply to these slanders. He assigned such persons to God and simply observed, **Their condemnation** (*krima*, “judgment”) **is deserved.** Later, however, he did discuss a similar question (6:1). To suggest, as

did these two questions (3:5, 7), that God is unfair in condemning sin is to blaspheme the very nature of God. Such persons who question God's condemning are therefore themselves condemned!

#### *D. Condemnation against all human beings (3:9–20)*

In this section Paul concluded not only his indictment of the Jews but also the first section of his discussion that God's righteousness is revealed in condemnation against the sinful human race.

##### 1. ALL ARE UNDER SIN (3:9–18).

3:9. Paul asked, **What shall we conclude then?** and, **Are we any better?** The exact meaning of this Greek verb *proechometha* (used only here in the NT) is difficult to determine. 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?" Both the material preceding and Paul's answer (**Not at all!**) support this solution. "Not at all" is literally "not by any means." This is not Paul's characteristic *mē genoito*, used in verses 3, 6, 31, and elsewhere. Jews have advantages over Gentiles (2:17–20a; 3:1–2), but God does not give them preferential treatment.

As evidence that the Jews have no preferred position, Paul stated that he had previously accused both **Jews and Gentiles** as **all under sin**, that is, they stand under sin's power and control and under the condemnation that results from it (cf. 1:18; 2:5). The order of accusation was first Gentiles (1:18–2:16) and then Jews (chap. 2). This order is reversed here because the Jews were most recently discussed.

3:10–12. To validate his accusation that everybody is "under sin" Paul quoted in verses 10–18 from six Old Testament passages. Romans 3:10–12, taken from Psalm 14:1–3, makes the point that all people without exception are not **righteous** (cf. Rom. 1:18, 29–31), do not understand **God** (cf. 1:18b, 28) nor seek (lit., "seek out") Him, **have turned away** from Him (cf. 2:5; Isa. 53:5), are **worthless** (from *achreioō*, "become useless," used only here in the NT), and do not do **good** (*chrēstotēta*, "kindness," or "benevolence in action"; cf. 2 Cor. 6:6; Gal. 5:22; and comments on Rom. 2:4). Apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit people cannot exhibit this fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). They have no inner spiritual capacity whereby they can normally and automatically exercise genuine kindness toward others. Instead sin causes them to be selfish and self-centered.

These seven condemnatory phrases end with the words **not even one**, which are also in Romans 3:10. This repetition stresses that not a single exception in the human race (except, of course, the Son of God) can be found.

Though Paul did not quote Psalm 14:2, "The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men," that verse is significant, for what follows in that psalm is God's indictment of humanity.

3:13–18. These verses describe the vileness and wickedness of various parts of the human body, indicating figuratively that every part contributes to a person's condemnation. In sequence these quotations are taken from Psalm 5:9 (Rom. 3:13a); Psalm 140:3 (Rom. 3:13b); Psalm 10:7 (Rom. 3:14); Isaiah 59:7–8 (Rom. 3:15–17); and Psalm 36:1 (Rom. 3:18). They pertain to three actions: talking (**throats ... tongues ... lips ... mouths**; vv. 13–14), conduct (**feet**; vv. 15–17) and seeing (**eyes**; v. 18). Their speech is corrupt (**open graves**; cf. James 3:6), dishonest (**deceit**; cf. Ps. 36:3), damaging (**poison**; cf. James 3:8), and blasphemous (**cursing and bitterness**; cf. James 3:9–10). From talking of sin, they commit sin, even to the point of quickly murdering (cf.

Prov. 1:11–12, 15–16). As a result they and others are destroyed materially and spiritually, are miserable, and **know** no inner **peace** (cf. Isa. 57:21). All this is summarized in Paul’s words, **There is no fear of God before their eyes**. Fearing God (i.e., reverencing Him by worship, trust, obedience, and service) is the essence of a godly person (cf. Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Ecc. 12:13). So for a Jew not to fear God was the height of sin and folly. In these verses (Rom. 3:10–18) Paul left no basis whatsoever for Jewish readers to say that his point that Jews are sinners contradicts the Old Testament!

## 2. ALL ARE CONSCIOUS OF SIN (3:19–20).

3:19–20. Paul concluded his discussion with a final statement to the Jews concerning the purpose and ministry of **the Law**. He included himself with his Jewish readers when he said, **Now we know**. The principle is obvious: the Law’s pronouncements are **to those who are under the Law**. The Law was not a special talisman that the Jews could obey or ignore as they wished; they were “under” it and accountable to God (cf. Jews and Gentiles being “under sin,” v. 9). The Law’s ministry was **so that every mouth may be silenced** (lit., “stopped”), **and the whole world held accountable** (lit., “become answerable”) **to God**. **No one** can argue in his own defense that he is not under sin. The Law points up God’s standards and illustrates people’s inability to live up to them.

Finally, **the Law** is not a way for a person to **be declared righteous** (justified) **in His sight** (cf. 3:28). That was not its purpose (Acts 13:39; Gal. 2:16; 3:11). Instead, **the Law** was given so that **through it we become conscious** (lit., “through the Law is full knowledge”) **of sin** (cf. Rom. 5:20; 7:7–13). The Mosaic Law is an instrument not of justification but of condemnation.

## III. God’s Righteousness Revealed in Justification (3:21–5:21)

In God’s condemnation of the human race His own personal infinite righteousness was revealed along with the fact that not a single human being—the Lord Jesus Christ excepted—has ever or will ever be able to meet that standard and be accepted by God on his own merit. Now in this second major section of Romans Paul discussed God’s “provided righteousness” for people through Jesus in justification. Justification is a forensic declaration of righteousness as a result of God’s imputing to believers Christ’s righteousness, provided by God’s grace and appropriated through faith.

### A. *Provided righteousness explained (3:21–31).*

3:21. By the words **but now** Paul introduced a sharp contrast with what preceded. He had just affirmed, “No one will be declared righteous in His [God’s] sight by observing the Law” (v. 20). This is now followed by the statement, **Apart from Law** (in the Gr. this phrase is in the emphatic first position) **a righteousness from God ... has been made known** (i.e., made plain). This in essence repeats the words of 1:17a. But Paul added the fact that **the Law and the Prophets testify** to this fact. What Paul was introducing about God’s righteousness was not foreign to the Old Testament. “The Law and the Prophets” was often used of the entire Old Testament (see references at Matt. 5:17), the Law referring to the first five books and the Prophets, the other books. In Romans 4 Paul illustrated this truth from the Law (Abraham: Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:1–3, 9–23) and from the Prophets (David: Ps. 32:1–2; Rom. 4:4–8).

3:22. The first part of this verse is not a new sentence in the Greek; it is an appositional clause, and could be rendered, “a righteousness from God **through faith.**” These words reminded Paul again of the Jewish insistence on their special position before God. As a result he added, **There is no difference** (cf. 10:12), introduced in the Greek by the word “for” to tie it to what precedes. Any prior privilege the Jews had is gone in this Age when God is offering a righteous standing before Him to all sinful people on the basis of faith in Christ alone. Since all are “under sin” (3:9), salvation is available “to all” on an equal basis.

3:23. Paul explained that “no difference” existed among human beings because **all have sinned**. The Greek is literally, “all sinned” (*pantes hēmarton*). The same two Greek words are used in 5:12 (cf. comments on that verse). Since the entire human race was plunged into sin with Adam, all (whether Jews or Gentiles) are sinners. It is impossible to say there is a “difference,” that the Jews’ privileges (2:12–21; 3:1) exclude them from God’s condemnation.

Not only did all sin, but also all **fall short**. This single Greek verb is in the present tense, stressing continuing action. It can be translated “keep on falling short.” The simple fact is that as a sinner not a single human being by his own efforts is able to measure up to **the glory of God**. God’s glory is His splendor, the outward manifestation of His attributes. God desires that humans share that splendor, that they become like Him, that is, Christlike (cf. “glory” in 5:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 1:27; 2 Thes. 2:14). Yet their sin keeps them from sharing it.

3:24. In view of man’s sin God has stepped in with His provided righteousness, because all who believe **are justified** (the pres. tense may be trans. “keep on being declared righteous,” i.e., each person as he believes is justified). “Justify” (*dikaioō*) is a legal term, meaning “declare righteous” (not “make righteous”; cf. Deut. 25:1). See comments on Romans 1:17 on Paul’s frequent use of this verb and its related noun “righteousness.”

God’s justification of those who believe is provided **freely** (*dōrean*, “as a free gift,” i.e., without charge) **by His grace**. God justifies by the instrument of His grace, His unmerited favor. Grace too is a favorite word of Paul’s, used by him in Romans 24 times (in the Gr.). But God would not declare a person righteous without an objective basis, without dealing with his sin. That basis is **the redemption that came by Christ Jesus**. The Greek word for “redemption” is *apolytrōsis*, from *lytron*, “a ransom payment.” *Apolytrōsis* is used 10 times in the New Testament (Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15). (See the chart, “New Testament Words for Redemption” at Mark 10:45.) The death of Christ on the cross of Calvary was the price of payment for human sin which secured release from the bondage of Satan and sin for every person who trusts God’s promise of forgiveness and salvation.

3:25a. **God presented Him, Christ, as a Sacrifice of atonement.** The Greek word for “Sacrifice of atonement” is *hilastērion*, rendered “propitiation” in the KJV and the NASB. This noun is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in Hebrews 9:5 for the mercy seat (NIV, “the place of atonement”) of the tabernacle’s ark of the covenant. There a goat’s blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement to cover (atone) Israel’s sins (Lev. 16:15), and satisfy God for another year. Jesus’ death is the final sacrifice which completely satisfied God’s demands against sinful people, thus averting His wrath from those who believe. (The verb *hilaskomai*, “to satisfy by a sacrifice, to propitiate,” is used in Luke 18:13 [“have mercy”] and Heb. 2:17 [“make atonement”]. And the related noun, *hilasmos*, “propitiation,” appears in 1 John 2:2; 4:10.)

Christ, God’s propitiatory Sacrifice for sin, was “presented” (lit., “set forth”), in contrast with the tabernacle’s mercy seat which was hidden from view. This work of Christ is **through faith in His blood** (cf. Rom. 5:9). It is appropriated by faith (cf. 3:22). By the death of Jesus and the

shedding of His blood the penalty for sin has been paid and God has been satisfied or propitiated. The phrase “in (or by) His blood” probably should go with “a sacrifice of atonement,” not with “through faith.” A believer places His faith in Christ, not in His blood as such.

3:25b–26. God’s purpose in Christ’s death was **to demonstrate His justice** (i.e., God’s own judicial righteousness, *dikaiosynēs*; cf. comments on 1:17) **because in His forbearance** (*anochē*, “holding back, delay”) **He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished** (cf. Acts 17:30). Why did God not always punish sins in the past? Does this mean He is not righteous after all? Previously Paul said God was forbearing because He wanted to lead people to repent (Rom. 2:4). Here God is said to be forbearing because He anticipated His provision for sins in the death of Jesus Christ. Such forbearance was an evidence of His grace (cf. Acts 14:16; 17:30), not of His injustice.

Paul was so insistent that God’s righteousness be recognized that (Rom. 3:26) he repeated (from v. 25) the words **to demonstrate His justice** (*dikaiosynēs*, “righteousness”). God’s purpose in the redemptive and propitiatory death of Jesus Christ was so that He could be seen to be **just** (*dikaion*, “righteous”) **and the One who justifies** (*dikaionta*, “the One who declares righteous”) **the man who has faith in Jesus**. God’s divine dilemma was how to satisfy His own righteousness and its demands against sinful people, and at the same time how to demonstrate His grace, love, and mercy to restore rebellious, alienated creatures to Himself. The solution was the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God’s incarnate Son, and the acceptance by faith of that provision by individual sinners. Christ’s death vindicated God’s own righteousness (He is just because sin was “paid for”) and enables God to declare every believing sinner righteous.

3:27–28. After explaining God’s provided righteousness for sinners, Paul considered five questions (in Gr.) which he anticipated his readers might ask. Two are in verse 27, two in verse 29, and the other in verse 31. The first is, **Where, then is boasting?** How can Jews have any boasting in their special position? (2:17–20, 23) Paul’s response was abrupt: **It is excluded** (“completely shut out”).

Since justification is by grace (3:24) through faith (vv. 22, 25–26), boasting because of one’s accomplishments (works) is ruled out. This prompted a second question: **On what principle?** (“Law” here in the Gr. means “principle.”) **On that of observing the Law?** (lit., “through works”) Paul’s response was, **No** (lit., “not at all,” an intensive form), **but on that of faith**. Doing works (i.e., observing the Law) is no basis for boasting for the Law cannot justify. It was not given for that purpose (cf. v. 20). The apostle then summarized, **For we maintain** (the verb *logizometha*, “to reckon,” here has the idea of coming to a settled conclusion) **that a man is justified** (“declared righteous”) **by faith** (cf. vv. 22, 25–27) **apart from observing the Law** (lit., “apart from works of Law”).

3:29–30. The next two questions cover the same issue of Jewish distinctiveness from a different angle. Because the Gentiles worshiped false gods through idols, the Jews concluded that Yahweh, the true and living God (Jer. 10:10), was **the God of Jews only**. That was true in the sense that the Jews were the only people who acknowledged and worshiped Yahweh (except for a few proselyte Gentiles who joined with Judaism). But in reality Yahweh, as the Creator and Sovereign of all people, is the God of all people. Before God called Abraham and his descendants in the nation Israel to be His Chosen People (Deut. 7:6) God dealt equally with all people. And even after God’s choice of Israel to be His special people, God made it plain (e.g., in the Book of Jonah) that He is **the God of everyone, Gentiles** as well as Jews. And now since there is “no difference” among people for all are sinners (Rom. 3:23) and since the basis for salvation has been provided in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God deals with everyone on

the same basis. Thus **there is only one God** (or “God is one”). Paul no doubt had in mind here the “Shema” of Israel: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD [*Yahweh*] our God [*‘lōhîm*], the LORD [*Yahweh*] is One” (Deut. 6:4). This one God over both Jews and Gentiles **will justify** all who come to Him regardless of background (**circumcised** or **uncircumcised**) on the **same** human condition of **faith**.

3:31. The final question is, **Do we, then, nullify the Law by this faith?** Paul responded in his characteristic expletive, **Not at all!** (*mē genoito*, “Let it not be”; cf. comments on v. 4) and then explained, **Rather, we uphold the Law**. The purpose of the Mosaic Law is fulfilled and its place in God’s total plan is confirmed when it leads an individual to faith in Jesus Christ (cf. v. 20; Gal. 3:23–25). Paul repeatedly affirmed that faith, not works of the Law, is the way of salvation. He wrote the word “faith” eight times in Romans 3:22–31! (See vv. 22, 25–28, 30 [twice], and 31.)

**Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 1684 – 1685). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.**

**3:10–18** That no one is righteous indicates human inability to secure salvation apart from God’s provision. This does not mean that people are as bad as they can be, or that they cannot do good things from a human perspective. However, as to eternal salvation, their situation is hopeless so long as they are left to themselves. God’s initiating grace must come first. Righteousness must come from God (vv. 21–22).

**3:25** What sins has God passed over? In Eden God threatened death as punishment for disobedience and sin (Gn 2:17). In the fall Adam and Eve died *spiritually*, being separated from God and subject to sin and death even though they did not immediately die *physically*. Implementing His plan to redeem His lost creatures, God sought out those who obediently trusted Him (e.g., Abel, Gn 4:4; Enoch, Gn 5:24; Noah, Gn 6:9; Abram, Gn 15:6; and their spiritual successors). Though they were sinners, God spared them from eternal damnation, the just punishment for their sin. Paul explained God’s justice in passing over these sins: In due time, Christ would die in their place (Rm 5:6). Christ’s death covers the sins of all believers both prior and subsequent to His atoning death.

But what kind of God (Father) sends His Son to such a horrific death to satisfy His own sense of justice? First, Jesus voluntarily gave His life (Jn 10:14–18). So this was the eternally agreed-upon plan by Father, Son, and Spirit. Second, the triune God—not just the Son—is involved in this world’s suffering. The Father & Spirit were not detached observers but were intimately involved with the Son’s suffering on the cross. Third, consider God’s holiness and sin’s offensiveness to such a perfect, unsullied, personal Being. Sin elicits His just, wrathful response—the removal of all traces of both sin and sinner. Fourth, we must grasp God’s limitless love for His human creatures made in His own image. Though He could justly write us off forever, in love God acted to save those who trust in Him. So while His holiness required the just payment of death for sinners, in love He paid the penalty Himself in the person of His only Son.

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