

5. ROMANS SERIES: All Guilty Before God

Romans 3:1-20

In our previous studies we have seen how Paul has introduced the gospel, how he has shown the guilt and condemnation of the Gentiles and is in the process of showing the same plight for the Jews. He has removed all basis for claims of acceptance with God based on human merit and thereby destroyed the Jewish presumption of a right standing before God. He has done this by showing the insufficiency of possessing the Law, of religious ancestry and of external circumcision as the means of gaining acceptance with God. Therefore the Jews have been reduced to the same position of guilt and condemnation before God, and equally are in need of the gospel.

Paul finally completes his teaching on the necessity of the gospel with a general statement of all mankind (3:9-20) being under God's wrath.

Please Read Romans 3:1-20

Verse 1: If all the things contained in chapter two are correct, that the Jews are in the same dreadful position as the Gentiles, then what advantage is there in being a Jew? This is clearly an objection anticipated by the apostle Paul in response to his teaching in 2:1-29.

NOTE INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: What advantages did the Jew have over the Gentiles as regards the gospel and acceptance with God?

Verse 2: Paul's answer to the anticipated objection is that there is most certainly an advantage, and in fact there are many advantages and privileges (Ps 147:20; Is 5:5,6; Amos 3:2,3; Mt 22:1-8; Lk 13:6; 14:16,17,24; Rom 9:4,5) of being a Jew and these ought not to be despised.

The main privilege was the possession of the written Word of God, including the precious promises regarding the way of escape for man from sin.

Verse 3: If some will not believe and indeed if even the majority do not believe and reject the truth committed to them, it does not affect the faithfulness of God to His promises and Word. Their unbelief is a product of their own sin and having despised the privilege of being born a Jew. In fact these rebellious Jews will experience His faithfulness when God moves in judgment against them.

Verse 4: The unbelief of men does not affect the faithfulness of God at all. Even though all men are liars (Ps 116:11), God is still no liar (Ps 119:9,160; Jer 10:10). Paul quotes from Psalm 51:4 to prove that no matter what men may say, God's Word will always be shown to be right.

Verses 5,6: In these two verses Paul answers another anticipated objection to his teaching. If man's unrighteousness accentuates God's righteousness, is God unjust in punishing sinners? If God gets the glory from sin, how can He punish the means of receiving that end? This is the way that some people reason.

But Paul destroys such reasoning, for how could an unrighteous God judge the world (Gen 18:25) - He is certainly not unjust.

Verses 7,8: The objection in the previous two verses is continued - if God then is not unjust, why then when my sin brings glory to Him am I still judged?

If God did not punish sin, we might as well just say, 'sin, so that good will come of it.' Therefore let the end justify the means.

This sort of conclusion is one that has been reported as from the apostle's lips himself, and those who gossip in such a way will get what such a practice deserves.

Verse 9: When we come to this verse a difficulty arises, just who is the 'we' referred to by Paul? Could it be the Jews, for Paul was one? The Jews have already been proven to be no better than the Gentiles (2:1,17-24) are, and it would therefore seem unlikely that he is raising this subject again.

Paul seems to be indicating another group of people, namely believers (3:8,9). Are Christians any better than others by nature? Obviously the answer is no, for both Jews and Gentiles have been condemned (Eph 2:3), which means that the entirety of humanity stands condemned before God.

QUESTION: What should characterize the Christian observing a world in sin? Why consider 2:1 and 3:9?

Verses 10-18: Now Paul moves to put the issue beyond all doubt, for all men stand guilty before God. The quotes in these verses come from the Books of Psalms and of Isaiah (Ps 14:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Is 59:7ff; Ps 36:1), and are quoted in order to prove the general

and universal sinfulness of men. He does not appeal to human authorities, for these are not the standards to appeal to in this area, but only to the standards of the righteous God.

There are none righteous (Ps 53:1; Ecc 7:20; Jer 17:9) enough to be able to stand in an acceptable manner before God, none who understand their situation before God (1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 4:3,4) and none even searching for God. In this passage Paul selects the prevailing sins of the time, including the tongue (Ps 39:1; Prov 10:19; 17:27; Mt 5:22,37; 10:19,20; Mk 7:20-23; Tit 3:2; James 1:19,26; 3:1-12; 1 Pet 3:10), and various other actions and attitudes to illustrate his already established point that all men stand guilty before God.

Verses 19,20: Paul refers to the whole Old Testament as the Law here (Jn 10:34; 15:25; 1 Cor 14:25). These people know the Scriptures and that the Law says to all people that they stand guilty before God because they have not kept the whole Law, and that they have no valid defence to allow them to stand acceptable before God. All stand justly condemned before God.

With the Law demanding perfection (19:2), to which we cannot attain, there is no way to gain a right standing before God by law keeping (Gal 2:16; 3:11). Rather the Law shows us our sinfulness, for it highlights our sin in our not keeping the Law.

The conclusion of the matter then is that we stand condemned before God and have no hope in ourselves.

QUESTION: What advantages do you have as a church attendee, as regards acceptance with God? How should these be then used?

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

With no room for self-righteousness, how is a person restored to a right standing with God? Explain.

Explain the meaning of 'propitiation' in 3:25

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