

Romans – Bible Study – Chapter 3:1-20

Adriana started attending Campus Gospel Youth Group a few months ago during a time of personal crisis that made her wonder if there was any meaning to life. Having come from an atheistic background, she's been pleasantly surprised by her experience with CGYG. She's been attending quite regularly and asking probing questions about the faith. One evening, Pastor Simon and his wife Nina invite her over for dinner. Over dessert, they ask her where she stands with God, to which she replies, "I'm sort of torn... I've really been drawn to what you've been teaching about God and Jesus... but when I look around, everyone in your group is so good and seems to have it all together, and to be honest, my life's a real mess right now... lots of things I'm not proud of, that I need to clean up before God would ever accept me..." What would you say to Adriana?

For review: God's Righteous Judgment on Mankind

In Romans 1:18-3:20, Paul presents an extended argument that all people are subject to the righteous judgment and wrath of God because of their sin and rebellion against God. In 1:18-32, Paul begins by arguing that men are subject to God's wrath because they have suppressed and rejected the truth about God and have chosen instead to live in rebellion against Him. While 1:18-32 likely applies primarily to Gentiles (i.e. non-Jews), in chapter 2, Paul turned his attention to those who thought themselves to be exempt from God's wrath (in particular, those of Jewish background), whether because they thought they were morally superior to others, or because they had special status with God. In chapter 3:1-20, Paul concludes his argument by dealing with some possible objections (3:1-8), and by showing that there are none who are righteous in God's sight (3:9-20).

1. **Read Romans 3:1-8.** What potential objections to his argument (that Jews and Gentiles alike are under God's wrath) does Paul raise, and how does he address them?

3:1-4 [objection: v.1,3; response: v.2,4]

- Objection: Paul seems to say that there is no advantage at all to being a Jew, and that God has reneged on His covenant with Israel (v.1,3)
- Paul's response:
 - There is much advantage in being a Jew - first of all, being entrusted with God's law, with all its benefits (v.2)
 - Israel's unfaithfulness does not negate the faithfulness of God (v.3)
 - God's truthfulness/faithfulness will be vindicated
- Paul does not develop his thoughts on this issue further here, but will do so more fully in Romans 9-11

3:5-8 [objection: v.5,7; response: v.6,8]

- Objection: Isn't it unfair for God to pour out His wrath on us, if our sin/unrighteousness brings him glory by highlighting His righteousness? Or if my lying brings him glory by highlighting His truth?
- Response:
 - Paul dismisses this outright. He affirms that God will indeed judge the world (v.6) and that there is no unjustness/unrighteousness with God (otherwise, how could He judge the world, if He Himself is unjust?)
 - he dismisses this argument as ludicrous - it's akin to saying, "Let us do evil that good may result" (v.8); those who say such things are justly condemned

Read Romans 3:9-20. In these verses, Paul quotes several Old Testament Scripture passages in rapid succession:

- 3:10-12 - quotes Psalm 14:1-3 and Psalm 53:1-3
- 3:13 - quotes Psalm 5:9 and Psalm 140:3
- 3:14 - quotes Psalm 10:7

- 3:15-17 - quotes Isaiah 59:7-8
- 3:18 - quotes Psalm 36:1

2. What does Paul mean when he asks in v.9, "Are we [Jews - ESV] any better?" Better than what? Does his answer to this question contradict what he says in 3:1? Why, or why not?

- i.e. are the Jews better off than the Gentiles, where it comes to their standing before God's judgment?
- the answer is 'not at all' - because all, both Jew and Gentile alike are under sin, and therefore subject to God's judgment
- this response is very much in line with what Paul has already said in chapter 2; does not contradict 3:1 because they are talking about different things
 - 3:1 is talking about the advantages/privilege Jews have wrt being entrusted with the law - but this does not translate into privileged standing wrt God's judgments on mankind

3. What is the common thread that runs through all these quoted Scripture references in v.10-18? What is the main point that Paul is making in these verses (including v.19)?

- common thread is that all are sinners
 - there are none righteous; none who seek God or understand His ways
 - none who do good; rather, all are bent on doing evil in their words and deeds
 - all have turned away from God, to the way of ruin and misery
 - no fear of God in their eyes
 - [also, the idea of the pervasiveness of sin, affecting every part of our being (minds, throats, tongues, lips, mouths, feet, eyes)]
- Paul's main point is that all people - Jews and Gentiles alike - are under sin
 - following on chapter 2, Jews are not exempt, because what the law says, it says to those under the law (v. 19) - i.e. these things are said in the Scriptures to those possessing the Scriptures (cf. 3:2), i.e. **to the Jews**
 - i.e. these Scriptures are spoken to the Jews and apply to them (as well as to the Gentiles)
 - like the Gentiles, they will be without excuse (cf. 1:20) and their mouths will be silenced before God, i.e. they will have nothing to say in their defense
 - hence, the whole world - Jew & Gentile alike - is under sin and will be held accountable to God (v. 9,19)

4. What is Paul's conclusion? (v.20) According to Paul, what is the purpose of the law (see also Galatians 3:21-24)?

- no one will be justified (i.e. declared righteous) in God's sight by his own obedience to God's law
 - not a single person, apart from God's grace, can stand before God as righteous
 - no one is capable of doing anything to gain acceptance with God
- the law makes us conscious of sin --> shows us that we are worthy of God's righteous wrath because we are unable to keep it
 - as per Galatians 3:21ff, the law cannot impart life - it only brings judgment and wrath (Rom. 4:15)
 - it is the *paidagogos* (pedagogue, schoolmaster) that has been put in charge to lead us to Christ
 - the law helps us recognize that we are sinners, through our constant failure to live up to its demands

In Romans 1:18-3:20 Paul makes it clear that all people - Jew and Gentile alike - are "under sin" and are justly deserving of the righteous wrath of God. On our own, there are none who can stand before God as righteous, and nothing that we can do to gain acceptance with Him. What hope is there then, for sinners such as us? As Paul will begin to develop in 3:21, our only hope is in receiving the righteousness of God that comes as a gift of His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe in Him.

Where do you stand with God? Do you realize that you have sinned against God; that you will one day have to give an account of yourself to Him; and that in yourself, there is nothing you can do to gain His acceptance? If you have never received God's gift of righteousness in Jesus Christ, talk with your study leader after tonight's session about how. If you have come to trust in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins, what implications should this knowledge (that you are a sinner saved by God's grace through faith in Christ) have on the way you live?