

GOD'S GLORIOUS GOSPEL**Romans, chapter 3****The Gospel: God's Righteousness for our Unrighteousness****I | CONTEXT AND CONNECTIONS**

1 / The one over-arching, all-encompassing theme of the Romans letter to the saints in Rome is **the Gospel of God [ch 1.1]**. It is the most comprehensive declaration and definition of **the Gospel** we have in the Bible. BUT, it is in no way just an academic 'dissertation-like' treatise on the Gospel. RATHER, Romans is a passionate, heart-felt, and personal proclamation of the Gospel! Paul is *preaching the Gospel* even as he excitedly tells the Roman saints that *he so desperately longs to come to Rome and preach the Gospel among them!* It is so personal to Paul, that he says in **ch 1.1** that he has been **set apart for the Gospel!** The Gospel is not only his confession of his own faith, but it is his very vocation, life's work, and what he lives and breathes for! And, he even calls it **my Gospel** at least two times in this letter [**chs 2.16; 16.25**]. So, it is my prayer and aim through these studies that you and I will also believe it, trust it, embrace it, experience its power and blessing, and rejoice in it!

2 / So, **what is the Gospel?** Well, we know it is **God's Good News!** But, what is the Good News of God's Gospel? Here's where we have come so far:

[1] **The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes** [notice how he immediately introduces the theme of 'faith' which he will repeatedly emphasize in his Gospel proclamation], **to the Jew first and also to the Greek** [Gentiles—another all-inclusive theme Paul will repeatedly emphasize];

[2] **The Gospel is the revelation of the righteousness of God—"by faith from beginning to ending"** (**ch 1.17**). Nail this down in your observation and understanding from the get-go here: **the Gospel is all about God's own perfect, sinless, flawless righteousness—that He alone possesses in Himself, but which He requires from us also!** BUT, as Paul will meticulously lay out from the beginning here, *God's righteousness is a righteousness we don't have by our own born, human nature and condition.*

[3] Which leads us to the third Gospel declaration that Paul lays out in the beginning of this letter: **The Gospel's first keynote** [and a very minor note it is, too!] is that **God's Gospel reveals His wrath from Heaven against all ungodliness and un-righteousness of men, who by their un-righteousness suppress the truth...of God's righteousness and how we are justified [made righteous] before God!**

3 / And so, in our last lesson, we noted the three groups of people, which will encompass and include all humanity, who are declared to be **un-righteous** before God:

ch 1.18-32: the un-righteous Gentile world who are without excuse before the condemnation and wrath of God...

ch 2.1-11: the religious moralists [both Jew and Gentile, 2.10] who seek to 'justify' themselves by their religiosity, and judge and condemn others who are not like them...

ch 2.12-29: the religious Jews among them [ch 2.17], who seek to 'justify' themselves by claiming that they are 'righteous' because of their religious heritage, background, and because they have been identified with that heritage by being **circumcised**. But their physical **circumcision** does not make them **righteous** before God. Only **faith in Christ**, which is an **inward circumcision, a matter of the heart** will please God [**this is the 'point' of the whole discussion in ch 2.25-29**]. And this **circumcision of the heart** is given equally to both Jews and Gentiles—without ethnic distinction, favoritism, or exclusion when one believes and receives **the Gospel of the gift of God's righteousness through faith in Christ!**

4 / So, that is where we will pick up Paul's continuing proclamation of the Gospel in chapter 3...

II | ch 3.1-8 | Is there any advantage to our knowing God's righteousness from the Old Testament Scriptures and the Law as we have learned it and practiced it?

1 / What follows here is a continuation from **ch 2.17**—Paul's confrontation with the Jews' claims to superiority or 'being better than' the Gentile world because they had received the OT covenant teachings which were summarized in their ethnic/religious identity as **'the circumcision'...**

2 / Paul engages them in a series of Q&A over these eight verses—there are nine questions Paul will pre-expect them to ask, and he will answer. I'm going to copy and quote Timothy Keller here from his Romans for You commentary:

Q: Paul, are you saying there is no advantage to biblical religion (v 1)?

A: No, I'm not saying that. There is great value in having and knowing the words of God (v 2).

Q: Yes, but those words have failed, haven't they, because so many haven't believed the Gospel of righteousness revealed in God's Son Jesus. What has happened to the promises (v 3a)?

A: Despite His people's failure to believe, God's promises to save are advancing. Our faithlessness only reveals how committed to His truth He is (think of what He's done in order to be faithful to His promises!) (vv 3b-4).

Q: But if unrighteousness is necessary for God's righteousness to be seen, how is it fair for Him to judge us (v 5)?

A: On that basis, God would not judge anyone in the world. And we (ie: Paul and religious Jews) all agree God should judge (v 6).

Q: Well then, if me sinning makes God look better, that means that I should sin more, shouldn't I, so that His glory is more clearly seen (vv 7-8)?

A: I've been accused of thinking this, and I certainly don't. And saying you're sinning so that God will love you is an attitude that is absolutely worthy of judgment (v 8).

3 / The conclusion that Paul is drawing here in their [our] understanding is that: Yes! It is to our great advantage to know God's Word and His will for our instruction and obedience. But NOT if we think or assume that our merely *knowing* and *going through the outward motions and rituals of 'keeping' God's Law* will make us **righteous** before God! We can't, won't, and don't become **righteous** before God through any religious effort or activity of our own. *To the contrary*, any and all of our self-worked acts of 'righteousness' only increase and compound our un-righteousness before God—and He will be **just and righteous when He condemns us**.

III | ch 3.9-20 | Every human being, regardless of our religious background, heritage, or practice [or total lack thereof]—we all are universally and without exception “under sin”...subject to its corrupting influences and just condemnation—the wrath of God.

1 / Paul continues to address the Jews among the Roman saints, including himself among them: **“we Jews.”** Two more questions following the previous ones: **“What then? Are we Jews better off?”** *What are we to conclude about whether our 'Jewish-ness / religiosity'? Does it give us a 'leg up' or move us to the front of the line when it comes to gaining any kind of 'favored' status before God? “No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.* This is a summary conclusion from his extended discussions back in **ch 1.18—2.29**.

2 / We sometimes call this teaching the doctrine of 'Total Depravity.' 'Total' means that every faculty and facet of our natural-born human nature is corrupted, depraved, and so **‘under sin’** that we are incapable of having, doing, or working anything in the sight of God that He would call **righteous** or **good**. Remember: the standard by which God measures is His own **righteousness**, which is perfect, pure, sinless, flawless, uncorrupted by anything **un-righteous**. When we judge and call anyone or anything 'good,' we are judging and comparing by some 'good' standard of our own.

3 / So, what Paul will do here is: he will do an 'autopsy' of the universal human nature. Every faculty and element of our human nature will be examined. Paul will use the testimony of Scripture and the Law of God—who God is and what God requires us to be—as his instruments of this spiritual 'autopsy' and to record God's findings and judgments against us all: **“...as it is written...”** The findings will be conclusive, the report will be damning, and judgment of God against us will be **righteous, just**, and deserved [**vv 19-20**]. So, here is how thoroughly corrupt, depraved, and **un-righteous** we are in our natural, human-born nature and condition...

- **v 10b: None is righteous, no, not one...** This is our *legal standing* before a **righteous, just, and holy God**. The quote here is from **Psalm 14.1-3 and 53.1-3**. *This is a summary indictment and judgment...*
 - **v 11a: no one understands...** This is the depravity of our *minds*. To **not understand** goes back to **ch 1.19-32**. Review those verses, highlight/repeat again all the words and phrases that reflect our rejection of knowing God, acknowledging Him, and giving Him his rightful preeminence in our worship.
 - **v 11b: no one seeks for God**. Our *motives, desires, and the love of our hearts*—what we **seek**—is not God. Quite the contrary according to **ch 1.18-32**. *If we seek God, God has first sought us!*
 - **v 12a: All have turned aside; together they have become worthless...** Our *wills* are so corrupted that we choose our own ways instead of God's. We live for ourselves—our desires, our pleasures, our goals, our glory. The quote here is from **Isaiah 53.6**.
 - **v 12b: no one does good, not even one**. Our *works and deeds* are thoroughly corrupt, depraved, and corrupted by our self-will and self-seeking. Even the 'good' things that we do—our human kindnesses, helping one another, generosity, etc.—all of our 'good' works and deeds are corrupted and **not good** before God because they come from our corrupted nature.
 - **vv 13-14: Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.** Our *tongues and words* are thoroughly corrupt, depraved, and unrighteous. Remember: Paul is describing every human being who is **under sin**, and apart from **the righteousness of God which is given to us through faith in Jesus Christ**. The reason why our tongues and words are corrupt—every one of them—in our natural human-born condition is because every word comes from our hearts, which are corrupted by sin. These direct quotes are from **Psalms 5.9; 140.3; 10.7**.
 - **vv 15-17: Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.** All our *human relationships* have been corrupted by our sinful nature. These descriptions include all our social violence, injustices, prejudices and class warfare, conflicts and wars both between persons and among nations, lying and deceit, oppression, using others as 'leverage' to our own advantage—and all the rest of our broken relationships practices that characterize our human culture and history.
 - **v 18: There is no fear of God before their eyes.** This, again, is a summary statement that includes all the rest. This is *our relationship with God*—and it is corrupted, depraved, and un-righteous—**lost!**
- 4 / And so, Paul comes to the end of this section that began in **ch 1.18**: **“For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth...”** What Paul has been proving in this whole extended section is that: ***God's wrath against our sin, un-godliness, and un-righteous is just, righteous, fair, and deserved—because it is a violation of all that God is and all that God has required us to be!***

5 / That's why Paul concludes by issuing this universal indictment against the whole human race—Jews and Gentiles alike—because we have broken God's **righteous Law**, and in so doing, we have presented the evidences against ourselves that we are guilty before God and deserving of His **wrath that has been revealed from Heaven** against us. **“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by the works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin”** [vv 19-20].

IV | ch 3.21-31 | The Gospel reveals first the wrath of God against all our un-righteousness ... so it can then reveal the righteousness of God that justifies us through faith in Christ!

BTW, this is a good time and place to be sure we all understand the relationships of these theme words we have already heard...and will hear repeated over and over throughout the rest of this letter: **‘righteous,’ ‘righteousness,’ ‘just,’ and ‘justify’—they all are related forms of the same root word.** So, ‘the **just**’ are ‘the **righteous**’; and ‘to **justify**’ means ‘to **righteous-fy**’ or ‘make **righteous**’ with the very **righteousness of God!**

1 / So, **BUT NOW**, after all that 'bad news' of the Gospel's Good News, Paul will lay out the premises of how God **justifies** [**declares to be righteous**—'**righteous-fies**'] all who believe and have **faith in Jesus Christ**! The "**But...**" is connected with **ch 1.17**: "**For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'**" Paul is going back now to 'flesh that out' after having interjected the 'bad news' of the Gospel in **ch 1.18**: "**For [because] the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth...**" [NOTE the repetition of '**reveal**'—the Gospel reveals both God's **righteousness** and His **wrath against our unrighteousness**].

2 / So, what he will do '**now**' is to show how God saves us from His **righteous wrath** which our **unrighteousness** deserves—which He must **reveal** because He is the impeccably **righteous and just Judge**! And the "**now**" hones in on "**the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction...**" Paul will make this expression three times: "**But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law [21]; This was to show God's righteousness...[25]; It was to show His righteousness at the present time...[26].**" The "**But now**" and "**at the present time**" is the Gospel of Jesus Christ revealed in His substitutionary death on the Cross...

2 / So, here's how God **reveals** and gives His **righteousness** to sinful people—and does so without compromising His own **righteousness**, either in His personal character or His **just** judgment...

[1] **Righteousness comes "through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe"** [v 22]. This has been the consistent, unswerving testimony of God from the first of His revelation in Scripture. It has been accomplished "**But now**" in time and history...**although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it [see ch 1.1 & 17]**. No one has ever been saved—ever in Old or New Testament times—except **through faith in Jesus Christ**. OT saints were saved **through faith in Jesus Christ** by believing and trusting in the OT sacrifices as Paul will declare in **vv 24-26** which was yet to come—'on future credit,' as it were!

[2] **Righteousness cannot, does not, and will not ever come to us through our own efforts or actions—our 'works of the Law' which we do [v 23 (& v 20)]**. "**...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" We cannot produce **the glory of God**, which is His **righteousness** from ourselves [see **vv 9-20**]. All we can produce or work out from ourselves is **unrighteousness** which deserves and receives His **righteous condemnation and judgment—the wrath of God**.

[3] **Righteousness is given to us "freely—by His grace as a gift."** This is what **faith** is—it is receiving **the gift of righteousness** which God gives us when we believe in and trust in Jesus Christ. **Faith** is not a 'work'—that is, something we 'do' to deserve grace! As Paul will explain again in **Ephesians 2.8-10**, even our **faith is the gift of God**.

[4] **Righteous is freely given to us by God when we believe in, have faith in Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the Cross—and not just in Jesus as a good 'model' for us to emulate or admire**. We must have **faith in "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forth as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith"** [vv 24-25]. So, here's how God makes us **righteous**: God requires a perfect righteousness—His own righteousness—from us. And He will reveal His wrath against all who come short of it. But none of us has it, nor can we attain or produce it. Jesus Christ is the only One who can—and did! And, on the Cross, Jesus Christ assumed responsibility for our unrighteousness—God charged Christ with our unrighteousness and punished Him in our place. He becomes the 'propitiation' [sin-offering] to appease God's wrath. Our sin has been fully punished in Christ! And, as the Perfect Sacrifice for our unrighteousness, God receives Christ in our place when we believe and place our faith in Him!

3 / "**...so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus!**" The **righteous Judge** does not compromise His **righteousness and justice**—He punished our **unrighteousness** in our Substitute. And having done so, He can now '**righteous-fy**' even the **ungodly** [ch 4.5] when that believer trusts in **Christ, our Propitiation and Redeemer**!

Faith in Christ is both a *righteousness-transfer*—His to us [vv 21-26]; and a *boasting-transfer*—from boasting in anything we have done...to boasting only in what Christ has done for us! [vv 27-31].