

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

January 4, 2023

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

The Letter to the Romans

The Righteousness of God

Text – Romans 3:9 – 20 – *“The Verdict – Guilty”*

Introduction

Paul will now give his closing arguments of his prosecution of all humanity as to their guilt before a holy and just God. He declared the infidel guilty in Romans 1:17 – 32. In chapter 2, he announced that the moral and religious man were just as guilty, even the religious Jew. He then answered all the rebuttals or objections in the beginning verses of chapter 3:

1. (vs. 1 – 2) Was there ever any benefit, or is there a benefit now in being a Jew as is evidenced by the outward badge of circumcision?
2. (vs. 3 – 4) The second objection had to do with Israel’s unbelief. If some in Israel didn’t believe, did it cancel God’s faithfulness to the Nation?
3. (vs. 5 – 6) The third objection had to do with the fact that their faithlessness demonstrated God’s faithfulness, so was God being fair when He judged them for their unfaithfulness?
4. (vs. 7 – 8) The fourth objection was why should I be punished if my sin makes God look good by comparison? Is it really sin, and shouldn’t we sin more, because the more we sin, the better we make God look?

Paul will now draw the conclusion in verse 9:

What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; (Romans 3:9)

Preaching Point – I am no better than anyone else, and neither are you.

Sometimes we get to where we begin to think that we are better than others. Perhaps it’s because we have cleaned up some things on the outside. We need to remember that it is Christ that cleaned us up, and that left to ourselves we were completely hopeless.

Illustration - In 1954, William Golding published his Nobel prize-winning novel *Lord of the Flies*, which tells the story of British schoolboys shipwrecked and stranded on a small island. They began well, creating an ad hoc society that provided food, shelter, and safety for all, and even maintained a signal fire to attract passing ships. Before long, however, most of the boys abandoned their society for savagery, even to the point of killing some

of the weaker boys to get what they wanted. A small minority chose to remain civilized. One crucial factor divided the savage boys from the civil: hope of rescue. Those who expected to be found and subsequently held accountable for their actions behaved well. Those who abandoned that hope saw no reason to keep their natures in check, and their depravity found complete expression.¹

Paul will sum up the utter depravity of mankind, that is, mankind without God.

Note – Please do not confuse total depravity with total inability. The Calvinist would say that a person is totally depraved and without the ability to turn to God for help. A man may not be seeking after God, but he can know that he is in a lost condition, and he can recognize God when God comes looking for him.

I. Paul Defers to the Old Testament (v. 10a)

“As it is written...”

It seems that Paul is still focusing his attention on the religious Jew, though his conclusion applies to everybody, Jew, and Gentile alike. This passage is replete with direct quotes from and references to the Old Testament, which would be meaningless to a Gentile.

Notice the following Old Testament Passages:

“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (Psalms 14:1-3) also Psalm 14:1 - 3

“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

“For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.” (Psalms 5:9)

“They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.” (Psalms 140:3)

“His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity.” (Psalms 10:7)

“Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they

¹ Swindoll, Charles R. (2010-03-24). *Insights on Romans* (Swindoll's New Testament Insights) (p. 55). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace." (Isaiah 59:7-8)

"The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes." (Psalms 36:1)

Why would Paul quote from the Old Testament? Because it was the only authority that the Jewish people would listen to. It is the same reason we use a lot of Scripture in our messages today. People may reject what the preacher says, but believers won't reject what God says, if they trust the Word of God.

Preaching Point – Tell people what God said – don't just offer your opinions.

Everything that Paul will tell them in this section is from the Word of God.

II. Paul Describes the Total Depravity of the Human Condition (vs. 10b – 18)

Now using the Old Testament Scriptures that we already mentioned, Paul will now describe man's utterly depraved condition.

A. This Depravity Includes Every Person. (vs. 10 – 12)

Notice the pronouns used in this passage – none (used 4 times); not one (used twice); all; together

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." (Romans 3:10 - 11)

Sinners do not seek after God – God must seek after them:

*"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, **Where art thou?"** (Genesis 3:8-9)*

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:44)

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)

Man does come after God, He hides from Him; but God can use His word, His Spirit, and His ambassadors to alert man of His need for a Saviour.

"They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Romans 3:12)

B. This Depravity Includes Every Part of the Person – He is depraved through and through. (vs. 13 – 17)

"Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known:" (Romans 3:13 - 17)

C This Depravity Is Rooted in Pride (v. 18)

"There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:18)

"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate." (Proverbs 8:13)

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7)

"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD:" (Proverbs 1:24-29)

III. Paul Deduces That Justification Cannot Come Through the Deeds of the Law. (vs. 19 – 20)

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Romans 3:19)

All these Old Testament passages convicted those that are under the Law. So, the Jew was just as guilty as the Gentile. Every mouth, even the religious Jew, is stopped, and all the world is guilty.

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20)

Notice the phrase – "in His sight"

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 4:13)

It is very important to realize that though men may fool other men into thinking that they are good, God knows the truth.

David understood this principle well: (Turn to Psalm 139)

Preaching Point – Don't think you have God fooled.

Don't try to hide from God.

Those who preach, need to preach the whole truth, and the whole truth includes the dark side of man.

Conclusion

Here is Paul's conclusion - no man is justified by works. If man is going to be justified, it will have to be through some other means, and that means is faith, which we will examine in the next section, but for a little preview look at vs. 21 – 22:

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:21-26)

In the next section, Paul will give us the good news about salvation, but first, he had to show us the bad news. Man must know that he is a sinner and has need of a Saviour before he can be saved.