

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

December 14, 2022

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

The Letter to the Romans

The Righteousness of God

Text – Romans 3:1 – 9 – *I Object*

Introduction

In chapter three, Paul will conclude his thoughts that began on verse 17 of chapter one:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" (Romans 1:18)

Paul makes his argument against all of humanity, beginning first with the depraved and immoral men and women of the Gentile world described in vs. 18 – 32. He doesn't just condemn them, however, because in chapter two he makes his case against the religious Jew. All people are deserving of judgment because all people are sinners.

This is what Paul means in v. 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)

Paul will sum up these thoughts and come to a final conclusion in v. 20: everybody 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)

You can't get to Heaven by being good because you and I are not good. The only hope for mankind is Jesus Christ. Goodness is imputed to us through salvation. The saved man, though corrupt in his flesh, has goodness in Him because God is in him. He has a new nature now indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, and though he still retains his flesh (the "old man"), he now also has Someone dwelling within him to help him to do right, and to depict the light of Christlikeness in the midst a dark world.

However, before he concludes regarding the guilt of all men, he will answer a few hypothetical objections that might be raised by the Jew who he addressed in chapter two.

In a courtroom, it would be the defense attorney's job to object to some of the arguments raised by the prosecutor, but here Paul will raise their objections for them, and then he will answer them.

I. Objection One (vs. 1 – 2) – What was the benefit of being circumcised in the first place or what was the benefit of being a Jew?

"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." (Romans 3:1-2)

In other words, if ultimately the Jews were going to end up lumped in with the Gentiles, then why did God establish the Jewish people in the first place, and why did He make us get circumcised to set us apart from other people?

First, let's deal with the circumcision question. Circumcision is profitable, because it was intended to be an outward badge of a sanctified or set apart people. It demonstrated on the outside what was supposed to have taken place in the heart. Baptism and church membership today are similar. They can't save anyone, but they are something that God expects a saved people to do. They demonstrate to the world on the outside a relationship that is on the inside. Circumcision never produced righteousness, and neither does baptism or church membership. The objection raised here is made because the people of Israel were trusting in their circumcision as righteousness itself, which it never was.

Next, Paul will answer the question about the benefit or advantages of being a Jew. He replies to this objection by stating that the chief advantage the Jews had over other people was that God had given them the "oracles" (λόγιον *logion*), meaning the Word of God.

*"They, and they only, amongst all mankind,
Received the transcripts of the Eternal Mind;
Were trusted with His own engraven laws,
And constituted guardians of His cause;
Theirs were the prophets, theirs the priestly call,
And theirs, by birth, the Savior of us all."*

(William Cowper)

"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:" (Acts 7:37-38)

This not only means that God had given them the Word so that they could benefit from its teaching and communicate it to the rest of the world, but it also means that God had

made special promises concerning only them in the Word. The Nation of Israel is still set apart from the rest of the world, and they still retain a special relationship with God. God had not forsaken the Jews to start Christianity. The “oracles” contained instruction and promises for everybody, but they also contain promises specifically for Israel. God has not, and will not forget Israel:

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Romans 11:25)

Paul only gives one of the advantages here in chapter three, but he will add more to the list in future chapters of this letter.

Preaching Point – There is great advantage in being a church member as well, and it is profitable to be baptized; but those things do not produce righteousness.

Baptism publicly demonstrates that you are a follower of Christ.

Benefits of Church Membership:

Preaching and Teaching

A Place to Serve

Praise and Worship

Corporate Prayer

Fellowship

Counseling Through Difficulties

II. Objection Two (vs. 3 – 4)

"For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged."

(Romans 3:3-4)

This objection is very reasonable. If “some” of Israel have not believed, does their unbelief undo the faithfulness of God. Paul answers his own objection – “God forbid”. In other words, does God remain faithful, when His people are unfaithful – absolutely! God is always faithful, even when all men are liars. (ψεῦστης *pseustēs* – literally unfaithful)

Notice the passage Paul quotes from Psalm 51:4:

"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." (Psalms 51:4)

God is the only One that can judge sin, because He is the only One who is without sin. Now we will see that His holiness is contrasted with man's sinfulness.

III. Objection Three (vs. 5 – 6)

"But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?" (Romans 3:5-6)

This objection states that since man's unfaithfulness demonstrates the faithfulness of God, then is God wrong to judge us. In other words, our sin makes God look better, and anything that makes God look better, can't be wrong, so God shouldn't punish it. Paul's answer – "God forbid". This is what J. Vernon McGee calls an *argumentum ad absurdum* – an absurd argument.

IV. Objection Four (vs. 7 – 8)

"For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just." (Romans 3:7-8)

This objection takes the last one to its logical conclusion: if my sin makes God look good by comparison, then is it really sin at all?

Paul will deal with this line of thinking again later in this letter:

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans 6:1-2)

This is a common objection that many lost people have with the claims of Christianity. They tell us that if God forgives all sin, then that gives us a license to sin. Paul would say, "God forbid". We do not have the freedom to sin even when we have been given freedom from the penalty of sin.

Conclusion (v. 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)

Here is the conclusion of Paul's arguments: Guilty, Guilty, Guilty! Both Jews and Gentiles alike are all "under sin", meaning under the condemnation of sin.

In vs. 10 – 20, Paul will give his closing arguments in his prosecution of all mankind as to their guilt or innocence before a holy and just God.

Preaching Point – Don't cry out for justice – plead for mercy.