

Romans Chapter 3
New American Standard Bible®

Copyright © by The Lockman Foundation
Used by permission." (www.Lockman.org)

Romans, Chapter 3

All the World Guilty

¹Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ²Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written,

"THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."

⁵But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) ⁶May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? ⁷But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? ⁸And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just. ⁹What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰as it is written,

"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹²ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

**¹³"THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,"
"THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; ¹⁴"WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; ¹⁵"THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, ¹⁶DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, ¹⁷AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." ¹⁸"THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."**

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Justification by Faith

²¹But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. ²⁸For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. ²⁹Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of

Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. ³¹Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

All of the world is guilty

¹Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ²Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written,

"THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."

If all of the world is guilty, then what advantage does the Jew have? What benefit do they enjoy from holding to the covenant with God (circumcision) and their great religious heritage?

Is Paul saying that there is no benefit to be had from being a Jew?

No – he does not say that at all. In fact he empathically states, “May it never be!”

Paul says that the Jew has great benefit from the covenant. The Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God – the infallible revelations and pronouncements God made throughout his history with mankind – the message he has for humanity – still as true today as when He gave it to the people he selected to receive it. Paul goes on to say that if some Jews failed in their belief that God is still faithful in his commitment. What God professes – what He promises, He will deliver, even though we lie to Him, he remains True.

We need to remember the solemn warning in Paul’s words, “Let God be found true” even if/when we lie, so that we “May be justified in (our) words, and prevail when (we) are Judged”

Let God be found true. Paul writes and we know that God remains faithful to his promises even though all of us show ourselves as False (liars). The privilege of the Jew (and us) only increases our responsibility in God's sight. God demands more from those who have more light (understanding of the truth) than he does from those who have less. Paul reminded the Jews that God would not withhold his judgment from them because they happened to have a long and respected religious heritage -- it doesn't make any difference. The identity of our parents or grandparents and the size, shape and strength of our family tree makes no difference to God.

We can be grateful for a committed upbringing, and Godly parents are a blessing, but we get no pass from God for good parents. God has no spiritual grandchildren, nieces and nephews, only spiritual children.

Paul goes on to say that our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God.

⁵But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) ⁶May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? ⁷But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still

being judged as a sinner? ⁸And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.

If God is Holy and righteous and we are not and our evil lives serve to demonstrate his righteousness, then why not just rely on His love and not worry about our unrighteousness and the way we live. Shouldn't everything work out with a righteous loving God?

This is Paul's answer. "God will work out all his plans. Even through the actions of those who oppose him, he will make his plans come to be. If God let everyone off on the basis of his righteousness how could he judge the world? Everyone would get off then. Evil would never be judged. It would continue unrestrained and a Holy God would be proven as accepting evil and unjustness if he did that."

Paul goes on to say I am not teaching "let's do evil that good may come," -- as some were reporting that he was teaching -- because, even though God uses the wrath of man to praise him, still man is responsible for his own evil, and God will judge that.

Otherwise we would say, "Everything turned out all right in the end - God's is nothing to be concerned with. Why should he condemn me since He is glorified by the way I live."

Paul assures us that God must judge the evil of man's heart.

The second part of this section (verses 9-20) deal with the condition of Mankind before God.

⁹What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

We are not the Jews, so, are we any better off than them?

Our sin is the same as theirs. There is no defense in stating, "He is worse than me." If one looks at all of mankind, what Paul indicates when he refers to Jews and Greeks, no one can please God outside of Jesus Christ.

What does Scripture say?

¹⁰as it is written,

"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹²ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

**¹³"THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,"
"THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; ¹⁴"WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; ¹⁵"THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, ¹⁶DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, ¹⁷AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." ¹⁸"THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."**

There is no greater authority than scripture and in this case scripture says it all. If all of humanity were gathered together for judgment – Jews, Christians, Greeks, Romans, Baptists, Hindus, Muslims, elderly and young the verdict would be certain:

"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹²ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

- Our character is lacking (no one is righteous) – all of us know good people who are kind and considerate. All of us fail at righteousness.
- Our knowledge is faulty (no one understands) – in spite of searching and seeking after knowledge we remain as those we look upon as heathens. We are without understanding.
- Our commitment fails (no one seeks for God) – we attend church, we go to temple, we listen to our pastor, priest or Imam. We follow ritual. None of this is adequate. We fail – we do not truly seek for the God of Truth and Justice – The Holy one of the universe.
- All of us have turned aside – away from seeking after God. There is no exception. Paul quotes scripture, which says "ALL"
- We may look good in church. Our Bible may be well bound and our shoes well polished, but God knows what we think and what moves through our heart. These words bring to light our collective condition. They illuminate how God sees us.

"THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

Why would God think this about us?

**¹³"THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,"
"THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; ¹⁴"WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS";**

- There is our speech – what we say. Our speech begins down deep (throat). It moves up past our tongue, which gives shape and substance to what is deep inside of us. It passes across our lips and exits our mouths. From the very deepest, our speech shows what we are. Two words make sense in describing how our speech must seem to God - vulgarity and hypocrisy.
- Even how we shape our words (open and hidden meanings) show deception. We think it is smart. God sees it as wrong.
- What we say and how we say it is laced with poison – no better than from a snake's mouth. We put people down with sharp, caustic words, with sarcasm that cuts someone off and depersonalizes our fellow man. Everyone is guilty.
- Our mouths are full of cursing (profaning God) and bitterness (blaming God and others for problems we likely created).

¹⁵"THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, ¹⁶DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, ¹⁷AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." ¹⁸"THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

- Wherever we go, ruin follows. Destruction of family, home, nation, world
- We have no idea how to take a “path of peace.”
- From the way we act, there can be no doubt that we do not acknowledge or fear God or see any reason to do so. When men reject God, they lose everything.

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

What does the Law accomplish?

It closes our mouth – takes away any defense we might raise to claim righteousness. That is the one great accomplishment of the Ten Commandments; to make all of guilty (without Christ). Once we acknowledge the Law, we become guilty – our mouths close with no defense. We become accountable (and guilty) to God. Because under the Law all flesh is corrupted in the sight of a Holy God.

What does the Law accomplish? It serves to condemn us to our sinful nature and state.

Paul points out three things the Law accomplishes:

1 – It closes our mouths – we are without any response to the Law. We shut up and stop arguing back at God. Against the Law, we have only one word of truth “guilty”. At that point, there is no reason to go any further – our mouths are closed.

2 – It makes everyone “The whole world” accountable to God. There is no saying that God’s laws do not apply to us. To read the Law and see the Law is to know that it applies to you and everyone else. None are free from the Law. It is Holy and Just and universally applicable.

"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment," (Hebrews 9:27)

3 – The Law reveals clearly what Sin is. Flesh cannot be justified under the Law because it gives us knowledge of Sin. (Self Ish Ness). With knowledge of the Law, we see our failure to act as the Father wants. We fail to live the lives of Love he desires us to experience.

“But now – a righteousness from God”

Paul has left little doubt to our condition, but that can't be the end – and it isn't. There is Jesus Christ – God's response to our lostness in sin and failure before the Law.

Justification by Faith

²¹But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

A pastor once said, you can almost hear the sigh of relief coming from Paul as he says “But now...the righteousness of God and been manifested”. Now that we know our condition (no one can make it in God's sight) Paul will share God's response.

Here is the Outline:

- Verse 21 is God's answer to man's failure.
- Verses 22-24 explain how God's gift of righteousness is obtained.
- Verses 25-26 explain how and why God's Gift works.
- Verses 27-31 give the results that follow.

²¹But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

"The righteousness of God has been (made known) manifested" In his first letter to Timothy, Paul calls this "**the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1 Tim 1:11)**. It is the good news God has for us. That He is willing to give us righteousness (we can "be made righteous" and not required to earn righteousness). We often see righteousness as actions – we act righteous. In Romans, Paul equates righteousness with what we are. We act righteous because we are righteous. Our behavior comes from what we are – not our righteous behavior making us righteous.

The gift Paul shows here is that we obtain a righteous standing before God as a gift – "**apart from the Law.**" We receive it from God and do not earn it by action (apart from the Law). That is the good news of this gospel. God is willing to give to us what we can never earn through any action on our part - under the new covenant of His son.

This gift from God is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. It was not something that only Jesus brought to light. Jesus did make it known, so that we understand it far more clearly because of his coming, but it is found in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Many who lived before the cross knew and experienced the wonder of this gift just as much as we do today, although they came to it by a different process.

The Law bore testimony to this righteous gift of God by providing for sacrifice (recompense) in the Temple. The Jews knew that they did not (could not) measure up to God's standards, so the Law itself provided a system of offerings and sacrifices that could be brought and offered on the altar. This system was a picture of the death of Jesus; the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament is a witness to mankind that One is coming who will be "**the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world," (John 1:29b)**. All of sacrifice bears witness to this righteous gift.

The Old Testament Prophets also -- Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others not only talked about this gift, but experienced it themselves. In a Psalm 32 David said "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity, whose sins are covered." The good news was not new. Paul knew the many places in the Old Testament that pointed directly to Christ.

How do we obtain God's gift?

²²even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

"Through faith in Jesus Christ" Everything begins in Faith and Christ Jesus by those who believe.

There is no distinction in this. The rules do not change for Jews or Greeks (Americans or Mexicans) because "**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**".

There is only one way to obtain righteousness from God.

Paul immediately centers his thoughts on the person of Jesus Christ – not on his teachings or his works. It is nothing except Christ. We base our faith on him. Jesus is the Savior; it is not what he taught, or what he gives. It is He – Jesus the Christ who saves us. God's gift to us involves our relationship to a living person. In accepting salvation (being made righteous before God), we open our lives to Christ and ask Him to be our Lord and Savior.

Later in Romans, Paul will write, **"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved [another term of this gift of righteousness]. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved," (Romans 10:9-10).**

Verse 24 tells us our reckoning unto righteousness is **"justified as a gift by His grace"**. It is God who does this. We accept Christ and ask him to be Lord, but it is God who makes us righteous. And he does it "By his Grace" Righteousness is something we obtain that we do not deserve (grace). We are justified, declared righteous, declared of worth in God's sight, by his grace. If we try to add baptism as a requirement to that, or church membership, or works or anything else, we destroy the grace of God. It is freely and completely and wholly God who saves us. We do not contribute a thing.

The last words in verse 24 are this: It is **"through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."** Christ is the one who accomplished something that does the work of redemption. This statement brings us face-to-face with the cross, with the death of Jesus. Paul leaves no doubt here as to Jesus' part. The teachings of Christ are important, but the cross is everything. If we do not acknowledge the cross, we do not acknowledge the gift of the Gospel. The real gospel (good news) is based only upon the redemption which Jesus accomplished in his cross.

How and Why God's gift works:

²⁵whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Verse 25 and 26 contain the heart of the Gospel and the foundation of God's assurance. They are the words for anyone who struggle with assurance of salvation. Assurance can be no more simply put - If these words are true, then our salvation through faith and the blood of Christ Jesus is assured. God accomplished a propitiatory sacrifice. He presented Jesus as a "sacrifice of atonement" through faith in his blood. The Greek word hilasterion that Paul uses can be translated "sacrifice of atonement" "expiation" or "propitiation" Expiation is that which satisfies justice; Propitiation is that which awakens love. Both Expiation and Propitiation are involved in the death of Jesus. Although Justice was involved, Love is the key element in the sacrifice of Christ. It was an act of sacrificial love on God's part that he would sacrifice his son for our salvation and the establishment of righteousness in us.

If we look at the cross in terms of expiation and human reasoning - our sin injures God and justice demands that we must pay in some way for that injury. In the death of Jesus that punishment was accomplished, so that God's justice was satisfied. If you read this as expiation, that is all the cross means. In a way, it means that it paid God off, so that he no longer holds us to blame.

But that is not all that Paul is saying here.

If we look at the cross in terms of propitiation and Godly reasoning – we understand that God's love has been awakened toward us, and he reaches out to love us, and grants us the feeling of worth, acceptance, righteousness and value in his sight. That is what propitiation means and that is what the death of Jesus does. It did satisfy God's justice, but it went further; it awakened his love, and now he is ready to pour out love upon us.

Paul explains why this works, beginning with the middle of verse 25

This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

For centuries, God overlooked the sins of man. He (in human terms) ignored the things that hurt him so badly. It may well have been that the only previous time he showed justice to mankind was at the time of the flood. Paul calls this "God passing over sins previously committed."

But the cross settled all of that. In the cross, God remained just in response to our sins. All the stored-up punishment amply deserved by the human race, was poured out without restraint upon the head of Jesus on the cross. God did not spare his Son one bit of the wrath that mankind deserves. Just because Jesus was his beloved Son, he did not lessen the punishment a single degree. All of it was poured out on him. That explains the cry of abandonment that comes from the cross, **"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34)**. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faced the possibility of being shut away from all love, all beauty, all truth, all warmth, all acceptance, the possibility of being forever denied all that makes life beautiful. There he faced the eternity of emptiness in the judgment of God, and this is what he experienced on the cross; all of it was poured out on him.

That is the glory of the good news of the gospel. God's love has been freed to act toward us, and his justice satisfied, so that it is no longer compromised by the fact that he forgives sinners.

What are the results of this forgiveness?

²⁷Where then is boasting? It is excluded By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. ²⁸For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. ²⁹Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. ³¹Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

Paul asks three questions to show us the natural results of the acceptance God grants us through (in) Jesus Christ.

1 - First, who can boast?

No one can boast - absolutely no one. How can any of us boast when everyone receives the gift of grace without any merit on his part? Any justification for self-righteousness is done away with (this is why the ugliest sin among Christians is self-righteousness). If and when we attempt to look down on people who are involved in wickedness, greed, crime, adultery or whatever and begin to think that we are better than they are, we have denied what God has done for us. All boasting is excluded. There are no grounds for anybody to say, "Well, at least I didn't do this, or this, or this." The only ground of acceptance is the gift of grace.

2 - Is God the God of Jews only?

The truth is, no one is excluded from God's grace, Jew or Gentile. No special privilege or favor counts in God's sight. He has no most-favored-nation. All are alike before him. Paul argues, "Is God the God of Jews only? Then there must be two Gods -- one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. But that cannot be; there is only one God; God is one." Therefore he is equally the God of the Gentiles and the God of the Jews, because both must come on exactly the same ground. This is the wonderful thing about the gospel. All mankind is leveled; no one can stand on any other basis than the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

3 - "Does this cancel out the Law or set it aside? Do we no longer need the Law?"

Paul's answer is, "No, it fulfills the Law." The righteousness which the Law demands is the very righteousness that is given to us in Christ. So if we have it as a gift, we no longer need to fear the Law, because the demands of the Law are met. But it is not something we can take any credit for; indeed, whenever we act in unrighteousness after this, the Law comes in again to do its work of showing us what is wrong. That is all the Law is good for. It shows us what is wrong, and immediately, all the hurt and injury accomplished by our sin is relieved again by the grace of God, the forgiveness of God.