

To All . . . Who Believe – Romans 3

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Emperor's New Clothes*

1. Hans Christian Andersen's story *The Emperor's New Clothes* is a favorite of many. You've heard it:
2. A certain emperor fond of his appearance hired some philosophers to make him a royal outfit.
 - a. They claimed to possess the secret to weaving a special cloth that was unique.
 - b. It was the most glorious cloth ever made but could only be seen by the wise & virtuous.
 - c. They were, in fact, con-men who'd heard of the emperor's vanity & made him their mark.
3. One day the emperor sent a servant to check on their progress.
 - a. When he peeked through the door, he saw the weavers sitting at their looms.
 - b. No cloth, but their hands moving back & forth as though working.
 - c. Not wanting to be thought simple, he returned to the emperor with a glowing report.
4. More time passed & another servant was sent who returned with an even *more* glowing report.
5. When the deadline drew near, the emperor went himself to see.
 - a. Of course, he saw nothing but would not admit it lest he be thought a fool.
 - b. He praised their work & asked when the garment would be ready.
 - c. They gave the date, & a royal parade was planned so the emperor could show off his new outfit.
6. Soon everyone throughout the Kingdom had heard the tale of the Emperor's new clothes & that they were invisible to all but the wise & pure of heart.
7. The day came & the philosophers helped the emperor don his new attire.
8. As he took his naked place in the royal procession, the con-men left town with their rich reward.
9. The parade began, & the people o-oed & ah-ed their admiration for the non-existent clothes; none would admit he/she could see nothing, less they acknowledge their lack of virtue.
10. But all that changed when a small child gasped, pointed, & said for all to hear, "The Emperor has no clothes!"
 - a. There was hushed embarrassment,
 - b. Then the giggles began as everyone realized the child had told the truth.
 - c. One honest remark stripped away the pretense of an entire nation.

B. *Paul's Method*

1. Chs. 1-3 of Romans are Paul's *honest remark* about the condition of the human race.
2. People clothe their unbelief in all kinds of excuses, but they're without merit.
3. He's dealt with 3 groups of people:
 - a. Those who *reject God* & pursue a lifestyle of sin.
 - b. *Moralists* who think they'll earn eternal life by being good.
 - c. Those who think *being religious* will save them.
4. Paul had a lot of experience sharing what we read here & anticipated his reader's *reaction*, so he voices it for them . . .

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

¹What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? ²Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.

1. After destroying the arrogance of religious Jews who thought they were guaranteed heaven just because they were descendants of Abraham, Paul knew the question would rise;

-- **“What's the benefit then in being a Jew?”** --

2. If there's *no* advantage, why did God make Israel His chosen people in the first place?
 3. Paul says there were *many* **ADVANTAGES** to being a Jew.
 4. But being a Jew didn't make them **BETTER** than others.
 5. Let me explain it this way;
 - Are there advantages to being an *American* today, compared to most other countries?
 - a. Of course! We have the highest standard of living in the world.
 - b. We live in a democratic republic where we have a say in choosing our leaders.
 - c. We enjoy a level of personal freedom unheard of in history.
 - d. So great are the advantages of being an American, millions want to move here.

 - e. **Question:** Do those advantages make us *better* than others? Of course not!
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6. While there were *advantages* to being a Jew, they didn't make them *better* than others.
7. Paul identifies *the main advantage* the Jews enjoyed; they'd been given the Scriptures.
 - a. Moses & prophets had given them the Words of God.
 - b. They had a blueprint, not only for their religion but for *ALL of life*.
 - c. It informed their civil, social, & domestic lives.
 - d. It even provided guidelines to ensure their *physical health*.
 - 1) Long before mankind knew about germs,
 - 2) The Law of Moses contained rules for diet & sanitation that ensured the diseases common to others would remain unknown in Israel.
 - 3) During the Middle Ages, when the Plague was wiping out entire towns, Jewish neighborhoods were mostly untouched because they kept the sanitation laws.
8. So, even though they'd *misused* the Law as Paul makes clear in ch. 2, there were still practical advantages to their having it.

B. Vs. 3-8

³For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? ⁴Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged."

1. Remember that what we find in Romans is what Paul had taught many times.
 - a. He knew the objections people would toss at what he's saying here.
 - b. He anticipates the *objection* of those who try to poke a hole in his argument against the *automatic salvation* of Jews.
2. They say if salvation comes through faith alone, & unbelieving Jews *won't* gain heaven, as Paul contended, then that meant the *promises of God* weren't true because He *promised* His people eternal life.
3. **Exactly** – & that's why Paul said at the end of ch. 2 that the **true Jew** is not one who is merely a physical descendant of Abraham.
 - a. God looks at the heart. And *what* He's looking for is *faith* in Him.
 - b. Faith is what *releases the promises* of God to *become* operable in our lives.

4. Paul quotes Psalm 51 at the end of v. 4. David wrote this when he repented of his sin with Bathsheba.
 - a. God was ready to forgive David.
 - b. But the *condition* of that forgiveness was David's repentance & faith in God.
 - c. At first David *didn't* repent. He tried to cover his sin & by sending Bathsheba's husband to his death.
 - d. It wasn't till he confessed & repented that he was forgiven.

⁵ But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) ⁶ Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? ⁷ For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? ⁸ And *why* not say, “Let us do evil that good may come”?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.

5. The best way to explain this is to go back a couple weeks to the illustration of the jeweler.
 - a. Remember how the salesman shows the ring against the black cloth?
 - b. The diamond sparkles all the more brightly because of that dark background.
 - c. I used that as an illustration for what Paul does in these first chapters of Romans.
 - 1) He describes humanity’s dark & desperate condition,
 - 2) And uses *that* as the platform to present the glorious Good News of Christ’s salvation.
 - d. But like any illustration, *we can’t press it too far*.
6. Some were doing that with Paul’s message; claiming that as he’d used humanity’s sin to reveal the *glory* of Christ’s salvation, **MORE** glory was brought to the Gospel by *making* the background darker.
 - a. If God’s **forgiveness** appears greater when there’s more to be forgiven, then it’s good to sin more!
 - b. If God’s **glory** is made clearer by contrast with man’s sin – then heap more glory to Him by sinning like mad!
7. Paul was accused by his enemies of saying this, though they knew their charge was *bogus*.
 - a. They persisted in spreading this rumor about him because it damaged his reputation,
 - b. And inoculated people from listening to him.
 - c. That’s why he says their judgment is deserved.
8. You see, Paul knew while people would only reach out to a Savior if they realized their need, he also knew God’s glory isn’t made brighter by being compared to man’s spiritual darkness.
9. A diamond can only **REFLECT** light – so the black cloth enhances its beauty.
10. But a light-**maker**, like a star, isn’t made brighter by the darkness of space – it consumes it!
11. God’s glory is a light, not a reflection.

C. Vs. 9-20

⁹ What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

1. As we’ve seen, while there were advantages to being a Jew, those advantages did not make them better.
2. Paul’s made his case in chs. 1 & 2 that *everyone*, regardless of who or what they are, are *sinners*.
3. He knows the reluctance of his moralist & religious readers to resist this label, just as many people today get angry when they think you’re calling *them* a sinner.
4. When you mention the cross & that Jesus died for *sinners*, they balk.
 - a. “Sinner!?! Are you calling me a sinner?”
 - b. “I’m no sinner! I’m not perfect, but I’m certainly no sinner.”
 - c. “I’m a good person. I mean, I haven’t murdered anyone.”
5. This objection is not new. It’s as old as the human race.
 - a. When God challenged Adam just after he ate of the forbidden fruit,
 - b. Instead of accepting his guilt & admitting his error, he tried to duck responsibility by blaming Eve.
 - c. When God questioned her she blamed the serpent.
6. Knowing the reluctance of his readers to admit they’re sinners, Paul quotes several passages that identify humanity’s **total depravity**.

¹⁰As it is written: “*There is none righteous, no, not one;*” ¹¹ *There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.* ¹² *They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.*” ¹³ “*Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit*”; “*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;*” ¹⁶ *Destruction and misery are in their ways;* ¹⁷ *And the way of peace they have not known.*” ¹⁸ “*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*”

1. Paul quotes from the Psalms & Isaiah 6 times, revealing the *total depravity* of the human race.
 - a. When we speak of the **total** depravity of humanity, we’re not saying everyone is as evil as they *could* be.
 - b. What that term means is that there isn’t one particle of creation that isn’t tainted by the Fall.
 - c. Even seeming good things are *marred* & imperfect.
 - d. The best of charitable deeds are *tinged* by a measure of self-interest.
 - e. One theologian put it this way; if sin were blue, all of creation would bear an azure stain.

2. This passage is a point of attack by the secular humanists.
 - a. They *reject* Christianity BECAUSE of the depressing portrait they paint of humanity.
 - b. The basis of all man-made philosophy & religion is the *innate goodness* of man.
 - c. The founding premise of humanistic thought is that man is essentially good & it’s only external influences that are the problem.
3. While what Paul wrote here isn’t popular, it’s *true*.
 - a. How many *righteous* are there? None
 - b. How many do good? None

4. Wait a minute! People do good things.
 - a. What about the acts of charity & kindness we see & hear about all the time?
 - b. What about all those good people you encounter?
5. Really, when we call something “good” we’re *comparing* it to some other possibility & saying it’s “better” than what *might* have been.
6. The problem is, we’re not holding it up to the right standard.
7. No, we use a standard that makes it *look better than it really is*.
8. Billy & Mark were at a week long Summer camp. The craft for the day was making arrows.
 - a. The adult instructor showed the boys how to pick a good branch,
 - b. Strip off the leaves, peel the bark & straighten it.
 - c. The goal was to produce a straight shaft.
 - d. The boys went out to find their branches & returned to camp to get to work.
 - e. They cut off the twigs, sanded the rough spots, & put the shafts into a special vise that straightened the kinks.
 - g. When they were finished, 10 year old Billy compared his arrow to 6 year old Mark’s;
 - h. Billy’s was much straighter & he felt superior to Mark because his arrow was truer.
 - i. Then the instructor came around & held his perfectly straight arrow next to Billy’s, which now appeared far *more* bent than Mark’s had compared to his.
9. We look at our works & call them “good” because we’re comparing a less bent life to one more bent.
10. If we held ourselves up to the only standard that matters, God’s perfection, none of it would appear good.

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

1. Paul reminds them why God gave the Law. It wasn't given to *make* them holy. It was meant to *identify* sin & *reveal* its presence in men & women.
2. He explains it this way in Ch. 7 –
 - a. He was cruising along in life thinking he was a good guy.
 - b. Then one day he read the commandment against coveting & realized all along he'd been a sinner because coveting was something he did *all the time*.
 - c. Realizing it was wrong, he tried to stop it, but it only got worse.
 - d. Comparing himself to others didn't help because while he seemed to be better than they in *many* ways, he could not break free of the envy & greed that fueled his selfish ambitions.
3. Again, God didn't give the Law to make us holy but to help us see clearly **WE'RE NOT!**
4. Indeed, we're all sinners. What we need isn't more law – we need a Savior to deliver us from sin & heal the brokenness that keeps us trapped in it.

D. Vs. 21-31

²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; [STOP]

1. This is where Paul turns the corner from describing the problem & moves to the solution.
2. God requires righteousness!
3. If it doesn't come through good works or keeping the law, then how?
4. Well—the righteousness God requires is *PERECT* righteousness.
 - a. As we saw a couple weeks ago, His judgment isn't based on our having done *more good* in life than bad.
 - b. It isn't having *kept* more of His Law than *breaking* it.
 - c. *All* sin, *every* sin, must be punished. And since even the smallest sin is a hideous breach of the holiness of God, the punishment is severe, too severe to survive.
5. *No one* is righteous—yet *perfect* righteousness is *required*.
6. Since there's only One who is perfectly righteous, the only solution is for God to replace our unrighteousness with His perfect righteousness.
7. This transaction takes place, as do *all* transactions between God & man, on the basis of faith.
8. As v. 22 says, it's for *all* who believe, no matter where they begin. As a –
 - a. Hard-core **sinner**,
 - b. Goodie 2-shoes **moralist**,
 - c. Or dyed-in-the-wool **religionist**.

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9. Now Paul begins a long, doctrinally-packed sentence that runs all the way thru v. 26.

For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

10. That's *every* person in this room today; me, the person sitting next to you, & the person sitting in *your* chair. Yeah – you!

²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

11. While we could spend hours pulling this apart for the riches here, let me summarize them this way.
 - a. 'Propitiation' means *an offering that appeases wrath*.

- b. That's what Jesus did at the Cross – He became the sacrifice that satisfies the requirements of God's justice for our sin.
- 12. What Jesus did accrues to us only one way – through faith!
- 13. When we *believe* that Jesus paid the penalty for our sin, God removes our guilt & replaces it with His righteousness.
- 14. This is why God doesn't thump us the moment we sin.
 - a. He gives us time to repent, confess our error, & receive His forgiveness.
 - b. But as we saw a couple weeks ago, if we don't take advantage of that time to repent, one Day God's judgment *will* fall.
- 15. Since justification is a gift God bestows by faith, not as a reward for being good enough, Paul asks . . .
²⁷Where is boasting then? It is excluded.
- 16. Heaven's not going to be like the end zone of a football field, with people doing vamps because they made it by their own skill.
- 17. The only boasting in heaven will be the praise we give to the God who saved us from start to finish.
**By what law [Did people make it] ?
Of works? No, but by the law [principle, rule] of faith.**
- ²⁸Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.**
- ²⁹Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.**
- 18. The way of salvation is the same for *all people* – it comes by faith in Jesus Christ.
- 19. I'll come back to that in a moment . . .
- ³¹Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.**
- 20. If salvation isn't by keeping the Law but through faith in Jesus, does that mean we can write off the Law?
 - a. No way! Remember what Paul said – The Law points out our *need* of Christ.
 - b. It identifies & reveals sin.
 - c. When used the way God intends, the Law convinces the lost of their need of a Savior.
- 21. So the Law is necessary because it strips away our false self-righteousness.

III. CONCLUSION

A. One Way

- 1. Vs. 29 & 30 make it clear there's only one way to salvation; for all.
- 2. It's crucial we understand this because there's a growing movement among certain groups to say that God has one way of salvation for Gentiles & another way for Jews.
 - a. That there are different covenants for each.
 - b. It's Jesus & Grace for Gentiles, & Moses & the Law for Jews.
- 3. This idea gained force when certain Christians began to feel bad for the centuries of persecution the Church has heaped on Jews.
- 4. In discussions with Orthodox Jewish leaders, these Christians were told it was wrong to evangelize Jews & win them to faith in Christ.
- 5. After all, we believe in the same God. So let each other alone & follow God according to your own way.
- 6. So the Christian leaders came back from these meetings determined to make amends for the centuries of persecution by honoring the wishes of the Jewish leadership.

7. And they came up with this idea that there are 2 ways to God – Jesus & Moses.
8. Their ideas are good-hearted but terribly wrong-headed.
9. And Paul would have *nothing* to do with them.
10. What he says here stands – There *is* One God for the Jew & Gentile – & He's given only 1 way to salvation – Faith in Jesus!