

Romans 3

December 8, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Romans 3

Session Outline

1. Tough Questions (Romans 3:1-8)
2. Bad News (Romans 3:9-20)
3. Redemption (Romans 3:21-31)

Theological Theme

The essence of God's plan for the redemption of man is salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. There is nothing anyone can do to earn this righteousness and, because we are all sinners, no one deserves it. That is why Paul described it as a gift.

Call to Action

Encourage believers to seek and share the gospel with people of all backgrounds and ethnicities, giving them an opportunity to receive the salvation of Christ.



Leader Guide

Romans 3

Introduction

- ❓ When was the last time you were completely embarrassed? If you're honest, do you ever get embarrassed about your faith?
- ❓ What are some reasons a person might be ashamed of the gospel?

All of us have likely experienced a time we were completely embarrassed by someone or something. Have you ever let the fear of being embarrassed make you miss out on something fun? Interestingly, one of the biggest reasons people don't share their faith is that they are worried about what people think. Most Christians would say they are not ashamed of the gospel, but our lives and behavior don't always back that up.

Today, we will study Romans 3, part of a letter written by Paul to strengthen and encourage the believers in Rome. Early in the letter, Paul encouraged them toward boldness in the gospel (Romans 1:16) and then in chapter 3, Paul dug into some of the key points of the gospel message. He sought to help his readers understand some hard truths as a way of making the bad news clear so that the good news is perceived as good as it really is. Because of what Christ has done, we can have boldness in proclaiming the truth about him to others.

Session Summary

In his letter to the Romans, Paul made it clear that no matter what they'd heard from various religious leaders or what kind of religious upbringing they'd experienced, there is no other way to receive salvation than by grace through faith in Jesus. The Old Testament law was no longer in force and working to keep it wasn't a factor. Jesus defeated death and paid the price for sin once and for all.

Jesus's work on the cross is at the center of God's plan to redeem humankind from the sin that plagues us. All people are born sinners, and nothing we do could ever earn salvation. To live rightly, we must look to Jesus and trust in Him by grace through faith. When we do, we accept His gift of salvation that is offered to all people. That makes all the difference.

1. Tough Questions (Romans 3:1-8)

All Scripture is true and given to us so that we can know God and live for Him. In the book of Romans, Paul spells out some of the most basic and foundational theology of the gospel. Using a thorough and strategic approach, Romans gives the big picture of the gospel while explaining salvation in a deep and personal way. In chapter three, Paul addressed some questions that might have been of concern to His audience.

Addressing the issue of how God deals with sinners whether Jew or Gentile, Paul made it clear that the Lord is faithful and righteous no matter what. The Jewish people had been entrusted as God's people throughout history and would have to answer for the way they received or didn't receive Jesus. God is justified in judging anyone who makes the choice to ignore or disobey Him. Sin deserves punishment and regardless of who sins, there are no acceptable excuses.

As a trained and devout Jew, Paul wanted to address the issues that might arise and possibly be a deterrent from the Roman Christian's acceptance of the hard truths he was writing to them. Some Jewish people might argue that their commitment to the Torah or their history with the Lord preclude them from facing the same consequences for their actions that a Gentile might face. Paul made clear there was no distinction.




How did Paul's background as a Jew give him more credibility to communicate this message? What unique opportunities has God given you to share with others?


Paul used logical arguments grounded in the gospel truth to remind his readers about the character and nature of God. His goal was to point them to the truth of God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus. Paul didn't just want to win an argument but to help equip them with theological truth that could make a difference in their lives. He didn't shy away from debate or discussion but sought that God would be glorified and His people would be equipped to spread the gospel to everyone they encountered.

God Is Just

Paul described the advantages of the Jews: primarily they have been "entrusted with the very words of God" (v. 2). To suggest that God is unfair (as the questions of 3:5,7 appear to do) is to blaspheme God. Those who question God's judgment are therefore themselves condemned. Paul brings together a series of Old Testament quotations to show that Jews and Gentiles have all sinned, and therefore all are held accountable to God.

-  What are some possible objections to or misrepresentations of the gospel in the world today? How might we answer them?


We can learn much from the way Paul addressed these questions. Both the way he addressed the issues and the approach he took are helpful for us today. We all sin, and we all tend to make excuses for our sin. This chapter points us to God's grace and to His righteousness that leads to His judgment. We want all to hear the message of the gospel, repent, and place their faith fully in Jesus.

-  Application: Where are you tempted to twist the message of the gospel for your own benefit? How is God speaking to you about that?

2. Bad News (Romans 3:9-20)

Referencing several Old Testament passages, Paul explained the problem for mankind. He pointed out that whether Jewish, Gentile, free, enslaved, poor, or rich, that the sad fact is we are all sinners and we deserve judgment. This has been the case since the Genesis 3 when sin entered the world. As these verses make abundantly clear, no one is exempt, and no one is righteous by nature. Apart from God, no person does anything completely in accord with God's holy standard. There is no hope in our flesh because we have all been tainted by sin.

While these words may seem hard and blunt, Paul's message is helpful because it is true. Consider the dramatic terms and imagery Paul used: worthless, throat as an open grave, tongues that deceive, venom under their lips, swift to shed blood, ruin and misery with no peace. Paul left no doubt that apart from Christ all are ruined by sin and without hope for redemption in themselves.

-  Which phrase that Paul used stands out to you most and why? How do you receive these descriptors as true about you (at least at one time)? Why do these words offend us?

Until we comprehend the depth and widespread effect sin has on our lives, we miss the necessity of the gospel. It is important to understand that our sin deserves nothing less than death considering the holiness of God. The good news of the gospel starts with the darkness of our sin so the light of Christ can shine even more brightly.

Instead of being discouraged by these verses, we can be encouraged by the reality that Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation

when we were at our lowest and without a desire to draw near Him. Paul made clear that we had no hope of saving ourselves. When we get to the bottom of our own efforts, we can receive what God offers through faith in Christ Jesus.

- ❓ How has it impacted you to clearly see the bad news of your life to accept the good news of the gospel?
- ❓ Application: From this perspective, how are we free to confess our sin without feeling the need to justify or cover for ourselves?

3. Redemption (Romans 3:21-31)

Imagine receiving the greatest gift without any need to work, pay, or earn in any fashion. That is exactly the imagery Paul used as he described the righteousness of God as a gift. As amazing as it is, the gift we receive through faith in Jesus is not the result of anything we can possibly do. It is described as a gift for a reason.

- ❓ What makes us uncomfortable about the fact that salvation is free? What makes us want to try to earn it somehow?

Paul stressed that the righteousness of God is brought to light apart from the law. This disqualified anyone from assuming a higher standing because of any form of the law kept alongside the finished work of Christ in the gospel. Paul made it clear that no religious, moral tradition or law gives exception to every person's need of being saved by faith through grace. The path to salvation is the same for all.

The religious leaders of the day had become experts in preaching the importance of working for righteousness to the point that people had become burdened and weighed down from the effort. This way of life fed the sin of pride and self-focus because people easily believed they were earning God's favor by their own efforts. This mindset is in direct conflict with the truth of righteousness as a gift anyone can receive from the Father, as Paul explained.

The gift of righteousness we receive through faith in Jesus is all due completely to the great love of God that sent Jesus to the cross. We are forgiven through the blood of Jesus and empowered to live in righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the good news of the gospel that Paul wanted the believers in Rome, and us, to fully understand.

- ❓ Ironically, Paul ended this chapter by saying that those who have been freed from the law actually uphold the law. How have you experienced this reality that a right understanding of the gospel always impacts the way we live?

Every man and woman must recognize that we have no righteousness apart from Jesus Christ. We are all sinners from birth and must look to the Lord as our source of righteousness. God loves us so much He offers the redemption we desperately need through faith in Christ. This is all from God and not our own works. Sin still exists but redemption abounds for those who accept the gift of righteousness by faith.

- ❓ Application: How are you personally confronted by this passage? How will you respond?

Conclusion

There is bad news and good news. The world we live in is full of bad news and spreads many false teachings that go completely against the truth of Scripture. With common philosophies like that there are many different ways to heaven; if you are more good than you are bad then you will be saved; any kind of love is equal and embraced by God; and many others, it is no wonder that people are confused and desperate for hope. People struggle to decipher what is true and end up trying everything until they are exhausted and frustrated. That's the bad news.

Thankfully, Paul addressed both the good and bad news in this letter to the Romans. After giving the truth of our desperate state, he moved to sharing the good news of the gospel. Paul summed up God's plan to redeem mankind from the sin that plagues us by clearly stating the truth. He described salvation as a gift that no one can earn but everyone can have. When we trust in Jesus and accept the grace we don't deserve through faith, we experience salvation and are empowered to live in righteousness for God's glory.

- ❓ Where are you prone to depend on your own goodness to receive God's favor? Why is this always a problem?
- ❓ How can we as a group encourage one another in the truth of the gospel regularly?
- ❓ Who will you seek a gospel conversation with based on the truths of today's passage?

Prayer of Response

Thank the Lord for His great love for you and the gift of righteousness He offers so you can be saved and made new to live for Him. Confess the ways you can get caught up in trying to earn God's favor by your own works and seek renewed trust in Him to live in the fullness of His love each day.

Memory Verse

The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe, since there is no distinction. — Romans 3:22

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Romans* by Tony Merida
- *Romans* by Kenneth Boa
- *Be Right* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Romans

Purpose

Paul's purpose in writing Romans can be identified from his direct statements in the text and inferred from the content. He expressly wrote that he wanted to impart spiritual strength to the believers at Rome (1:11–12; 16:25–26). He asked for prayer for the difficult task he was undertaking (15:30) and that he might be able to come and see them (15:32). He hoped to enlist the Roman churches to support a mission to the west (15:23–29). The content of the letter shows that the churches experienced tensions between believers from different backgrounds. Paul wanted them to be united and to avoid dissension and false teaching (16:17–18). The content also reveals his exposition of what is essential Christianity and what are matters of indifference.

Author

Paul the apostle is the stated and indisputable author of the book of Romans. From the book of Acts and statements in Romans, we learn that Paul wrote this letter while he was in Corinth and on his way to Jerusalem in the spring of AD 57, to deliver an offering from the Gentile churches to poor Jewish Christians (Ac 20:3; Rm 15:25–29).

Setting

All of Paul's writings grew out of his missionary/pastoral work and were about the problems and needs of local churches. The book of Romans is also of this genre, but it is the least "local" in the sense that Paul had not yet been to Rome. This letter was his opportunity to expound the good news message (the gospel). He could discuss the essence of sin, the salvation accomplished on the cross, the union of the believer with Christ, how the Spirit works in the Christian to promote holiness, the place of the Jewish people in God's plan, future things, and Christian living or ethics. Though Paul did not write Romans as a systematic theology, his somewhat orderly exposition has been the fountain for the development of that discipline.

Special Features

Paul's letter to the Roman house churches has been preeminent among the New Testament writings for its theological and pastoral influence. It focuses on the doctrine of salvation, including the practical implications for believers as they live out the salvation given to them through Jesus Christ.

Extended Commentary

Romans 3:1-31

3:1 It might seem from chap. 2 that being a Jew and being circumcised conferred no advantage, but Paul listed many Jewish advantages in 9:4–5. In our day it is advantageous to have Christian parents, to attend a church, to be baptized, to attend a Christian school, and to read the Bible—but none of these advantages can save us.

3:2 It is a great privilege to be Jewish—considerable in every way. They heard God speak the “ten words” or Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1–20) directly to them. Then through a long series of prophets, God’s words came to them. No other people on earth had this privilege.

3:3 Even if some of the Jewish people were unfaithful, God will be faithful to his covenant and will bring his promises to fulfillment. Paul referred particularly to the promises centered in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

3:4 After he was confronted by the prophet Nathan for his sins surrounding the Bathsheba incident, David confessed in Ps 51:4 that God is justified in his judgments. Let God be true, for it would be against his infinitely perfect nature to be otherwise.

3:5–8 Paul addresses several implications to which critics mistakenly thought his teachings would lead. For example, if God is shown to be in the right by man’s sin and error, then God is honored by our shortcomings. How then can God punish us when we have helped display his righteousness? But Paul answered that as a matter of principle God’s judgment of sin is always righteous. People who think otherwise deserve condemnation, for their true focus is not on glorifying God but on giving free rein to their sinful desires.

3:9 All the world is under sin, and yet sin is considered an archaic topic in our secular society. It is not hard to guess why. Vice is something done against oneself; crime is something done against society or an individual; but sin is against God. Since modern culture is essentially atheistic, “sin” has become a meaningless term.

3:10–18 In these verses Paul linked seven OT passages to demonstrate that all of humanity is under sin’s dominion. No one is righteous; no one understands (Jn 8:43–44; 1Co 2:14), and no one . . . seeks God. Since Adam and Eve’s fall, people have hidden from God, but God sent his Son “to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10). All have gone astray (Is 1:2–4; 53:6), and in God’s sight none are right. Paul cited Bible passages that show the extent of corruption. As Jesus taught, “from within, out of people’s hearts” (Mk 7:21) come all sorts of evil. Humans are quick to shed blood. During the past century more than thirty-nine million people lost their lives in wars. And by conservative estimates, human governments killed an additional 125 million people—led by Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Hitler, and others. The root problem is that humans are often practical atheists even when they profess belief in God. They choose against God’s will and show no fear for it.

3:19 Someone may argue that the seven passages cited above are addressed not to Jews but to pagan nations. But everything in the Hebrew Bible is first addressed to the Jews for their instruction so they can learn about sin’s power. All people from every nation and ethnicity are sinners, and God will judge the whole world. In God’s court, everyone is speechless.

3:20 No one can earn justification by obedience to the law’s requirements. The law was never intended to be a means of salvation. A primary purpose of the law was to reveal sin in its full scope, thus pointing to humanity’s need for the gift of righteousness.

3:21–26 The phrase but now marks a decisive shift in Paul’s argument. This paragraph (one long sentence in the original Greek) is a wonderful compression of theology. The righteousness of God was manifested and given through the cross of Christ. Sinners gain pardon not through their adherence to the law, but through faith in the one who fulfilled all righteousness on their behalf. The Law and the Prophets refers to the OT, and the entire OT is correctly understood as a witness to Jesus and his work.

3:22 Jesus is the object of faith and the means of obtaining the gift of the righteousness of God. The gift is for both Jews and Gentiles who believe.

3:23 All have missed the mark that God intended for the human race and have lost the glory of the original creation (Ps 8:5). Believing the good news starts the process of the restoration of glory (Rm 8:30; 2Co 3:18).

3:24 Justified means that Christians are declared to be righteous (5:1, 9; 8:30; 1Co 1:30; 6:11). Sinners stand condemned in God’s court, and yet he declares believers “not guilty” because of Jesus’s work on the cross. Freely means that God grants justification not due to any merit in Christians but solely by his grace, the undeserved love and mercy of God. Redemption is a commercial term that refers to purchasing freedom for slaves. All people are slaves to sin by their fallen nature. The purchase price for our freedom was the blood of Christ Jesus (see Mk 10:45; 1Pt 1:18–19).

3:25 Atoning sacrifice translates the Greek word *hilastērion*, a term borrowed from the sacrificial system and the temple. It was used in the Greek translation of the OT for the cover of the ark of the covenant—the “mercy seat” (see Ex 25:17–22; Lv 16:14–15). On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would sprinkle blood over the ark to atone for the nation. By this rite sins were deemed expiated or wiped away. Moreover God’s wrath was averted or propitiated. But human sins could not literally be atoned for by the death of animals. “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4). Thus Jesus came to accomplish what no priest slaying an animal could ever hope to accomplish: full satisfaction of God’s requirements for atonement. God presented his Son as an atoning sacrifice. By means of Jesus’s blood—his sacrificial death—God’s holy wrath against sin was appeased, and the sins of those who place their faith in Christ are taken away.

3:26 The present time of the cross and preaching of the good news vindicated God, showing that he is righteous and declares righteous the one who has faith in Jesus.

3:27–28 No one can boast in one’s works. No one can boast even in one’s faith. Faith is not the cause of justification but the means of justification. The cause of salvation is grace and mercy.

3:29–30 There is only one God and only one way to be justified by him, no matter your ethnic and national identity: by faith. The phrase who will justify does not mean that justification occurs at a future time (at the last judgment) and is therefore not a present reality for the believer. Rather, it points to the fact that God counts each of us justified as we come to faith. Thus God “will justify” your neighbor tomorrow if your neighbor comes to faith.

3:31 Does the gospel destroy the law? To answer this question, Paul considered the case of Abraham (Rm 4).¹

References

¹ Edwin A. Blum, “Romans,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1784–1786.