

Romans 3:9-20; Bible Study

Why does Paul focus on sin at the beginning of his letter? Because the reality of our sin is the foundation for the gospel. We must emphasize the reality and seriousness of our sin in order to present the Good News of freedom from sin and have our guilty conscience cleansed (*Hebrews 9:11-14*).

Read Romans 3:9-20

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,...

This is a concluding statement for *Romans 1:18-3:8*. The Jews are not better off because they had the revelation of God and His salvation in the Old Testament. This is because simply having and reading God's Word did not guarantee them salvation. They had to believe what God's Word revealed to them - that they are sinners just as the Gentiles are. The Gentiles were convicted by the evidence for God in creation and their consciences, while the Jews were convicted by the written law in the Old Testament.

All mankind is in need of the same salvation for the same reason...because we are born in bondage to sin separating us from God.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

It is very important to remember our own salvation when discussing sin as we share the gospel with others. It gives us the necessary humility and gentleness when discussing the need to repent of sin with others.

To emphasize the reality of the human condition, Paul quotes a number of passages from the Old Testament (***as it is written***) in *verses 10-18* that reveals sin and the inability to obey the law for salvation. These verses reveal the universality of sin...that all are equally guilty of sin and in need of a Saviour to save them from sin and the eternal consequences of sin. (See *Psalm 14:1-4; 53:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Deuteronomy 31:29; Psalm 5:8-9; 140:3; 10:7; Isaiah 59:7-8; Proverbs 1:16; Psalm 36:1*).

Read verses 10-18 again. **Discussion: Are we really this bad?**

He begins by quoting: ***None is righteous, no, not one...***

There is not a single person who can meet God's standard and requirement of righteousness for salvation. We can do good things by our own standards, but we are so permeated with sin that even our good works are not good in God's eyes.

Read Isaiah 64:6

What is God's standard of righteousness? Perfection (*Matthew 5:48*). Since God's standard and requirement is perfection, no amount of human righteousness is enough. This means that we cannot rely on any amount of righteousness of our own for salvation...for the smallest of sin infects the whole person. This is why we need the perfection of Jesus.

Paul continues to reveal our condition by saying that ***no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside;...***

Read 1 Corinthians 2:14

Those who do not seek God, but turn away from Him, are incapable of understanding. Their sinful selfish perspective prevents them from not even being able to know what perfection is.

Such people ***have become worthless; with no one [doing] good, not even one.***

Read John 15:5-6; Titus 1:15-16

It is only in seeking God that we find salvation (*Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13-14*) and have God working in and through us (*Philippians 2:12-13*). Apart from God, we are worthless because we can produce nothing of true (eternal) value. This is because we are spiritually dead... and dead people are useless.

This serves as a warning to all those who think they can go to Heaven because they are good.

Having established our unrighteousness and worthlessness in the rejection of God, Paul now quotes Old Testament passages revealing this produces sin both in how we speak and how we act in injuring fellow human beings. This is the same pattern he already revealed in 1:18-32.

He says: ***Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.***

False hope in this world, which comes from lies, leads only to eternal death (*Psalms 5:9*).

...The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

Read Matthew 3:7; 12:34

The lies of the Pharisees from their teaching was deadly. No good, edifying, or life giving words come from the mouth of those rejecting God.

...Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery,...

This was demonstrated by the Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus and sought to kill Him. The goal of the one who rejects God is to eliminate God and those speaking the truth about God. We see this in our society today. This produces ruin and misery in the lives of others.

They do not know ***the way of peace***. They are hostile to God and His children. Their way is only conflict and violence toward anyone who challenges or threatens their own interests (*Philippians 2:21*). They only know what they want and will do what it takes to get it.

This is all because ***there is no fear of God before their eyes***. They reject God, which leads to a debased mind and increasingly sinful behaviour (*Romans 1:18-32*).

What is the fear of God? And what does it produce?

Read Proverbs 9:10; 16:6

The fear of God is a right understanding of His power, holiness, and majesty, which leads leads to a right response to God in how we live.

This is not a fear of condemnation for believers (*Romans 8:1; 1 John 4:18*). It is a fear in the face of who God is and that He disciplines us here on earth (*Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 1 Timothy 5:20; Hebrews 12:3-11; Revelation 3:19*) and will judge our lives for eternal rewards afterward (*2 Corinthians 5:10-11*).

How do we reconcile love for God and fear of God?

Read Psalm 118:4; 135:20; Revelation 19:5

To fear the Lord is to revere Him...to have high esteem for Him because of His power, majesty, and holiness. When we know God as holy and ourselves as sinful, we can both fear Him and love Him for His free gift of grace to us. Those who fear God, know of His love for them and worship Him.

Read Philippians 2:12-13

A proper understanding of who God is, who we are in relation to Him, and what He has done for us gives us both a holy fear of and love for Him, which guides us in humble service to Him.

Paul now sums up *Romans 1:18-3:18* in these next two verses: ***Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.***

Read Psalm 63:11; 143:1-2

Unless we are covered by grace, we will be judged according to the law. We will have no opportunity to give a defence because we will be without a defence.

...For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The law teaches us what righteousness is and our inability to achieve it. It reveals our sin. Thus, it is not a means of salvation. It serves to establish our guilt.

Conclusion:

Jesus did not come to just give us a boost to salvation...to add grace to our works to get us to salvation. We cannot provide any righteousness or works of our own to achieve salvation. Jesus came to save us, because we were hopelessly lost without any way to save ourselves. This is the bad news we must understand and accept if we are to find salvation.

We must have all our sin removed...and receive all our righteous from Jesus.

Next, with the foundation now firmly laid outlining our condition and need, Paul will present the gospel...that only Jesus was able to perfectly obey the law and is able to freely give us salvation - through faith apart from works.