

Summarize.

Wrap-up. Because lesson five is long, you may decide to divide it and cover it in two weeks. Plan ahead if you want to do this.

Worship. Think of things you learned about God in chapter 2, and praise Him for them. Thank Him for what He's done for each of you this week.

The Law

By what "law" will God measure men's deeds (2:6,12-15)? Jesus gives us some clues. In Luke 18:18-27, a man asks Jesus how to inherit eternal life, and Jesus lists several of the Ten Commandments in response (Exodus 20:1-17). The inquirer fails the test when he refuses to give up the possessions he covets and follow Jesus as his Lord (compare Exodus 20:1-3,17). But Jesus hints that there is hope even for this failure (Luke 18:24-27).

Also, in Luke 10:25-28, another man asks Jesus the same question. This time, Jesus directs the man to the two great Old Testament laws—love God and love your neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). The instruction to the other man was similar: love God (follow Jesus) and love your neighbor as yourself (give your possessions to the poor). "All the Law and the Prophets [the whole Old Testament] hang on these two commandments," says Jesus (Matthew 22:40). Paul restates this very principle in Romans 13:8-10. In John 13:34-35 and 15:12-14, Jesus deepens the law of love: Demonstrate your love for Me by loving others *beyond* your love for self.

1. Cranfield, pages 50-54.
2. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), pages 83-84.
3. *The NIV Study Bible*, page 31.

LESSON FIVE

ROMANS 3:1-31

Bad News/Good News

Romans 1:18-2:29 has been grim, and Paul isn't finished with indictment. We have to face the bad news before we can grasp the magnitude of the good news. Read 3:1-31 prayerfully. Glance at the outlines on page 24 if you find they help you orient yourself.

Objections (3:1-8)

Paul has exposed the sinfulness of the mass of humanity (1:18-32). God judges both Jews and Gentiles by their deeds, impartially (2:1-16). If a Jew breaks God's Law, he is as bad as a wicked uncircumcised Gentile and worse than a Gentile who obeys God (2:17-29). Against such sin, "the wrath of God is being revealed" (1:18). A Jew might object to the way Paul puts him on an equal level with pagans. "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew . . ." (3:1) if it doesn't guarantee salvation? "Much," says Paul, for the Jews have "the very words of God" (3:2)—the Scriptures.

1. In what ways is it an advantage to know God's revelation of Himself, His promises, His deeds, and His guidance for living? (*Optional: See Deuteronomy 4:5-8, Psalm 19:7-11.*)

For Thought and Discussion: What advantages and responsibilities do Christians have in comparison to nonChristians?

Optional Application: How can you better fulfill the responsibilities you have because you know God's Word?

For Thought and Discussion: How has God shown His faithfulness to His promises to save the world through the Jews, protect them, and discipline them?

2. What responsibilities go along with being entrusted with God's words? (*Optional: See Isaiah 43:10-13, Amos 3:2, Luke 12:47-48, John 14:21, Romans 2:12-13.*)

3. What implications does this have for Christians (and you personally), who have even more of God's words than the Jews had?

God's faithfulness (3:3). God promised that He would be Israel's God, remain with and protect His people, and send the Savior of the world through them. He also promised to punish His people if they disobeyed Him, so that they would learn to obey. These promises remain valid, even though many Jews have rebelled against God and rejected His way of righteousness. God has kept His covenant; it is man who has faltered. Paul treats the topic of God's faithfulness and the Jews' unbelief more fully in 9:1-11:32.

So that you may be proved right . . . (3:4). God's judgment upon man's faithlessness (disloyalty, lying, sin) proves God's faithfulness to His righteous character and covenant promises.

But if . . . (3:5). Romans 3:4 leads to a second objection that either a Jew or a Gentile might raise: If man's faithlessness, falsehood, and sin contrast and enhance God's faithfulness, truth, and righteousness, then man's sin glorifies God. Therefore, the wrath of 1:18 and 2:8 is unjust (3:5), and sinners shouldn't be punished (3:7). Paul scarcely bothers to refute this nonsense. God is the Creator of earth and man, the Inventor of our consciences, and the Definer of right and wrong. If He doesn't have the right to judge, then no one does and morality is meaningless (3:6).

Let us do evil . . . (3:8). Some people believed that Paul's doctrine of justification by grace would lead people to sin, so that God would give more of His grace to mankind. Paul refutes this distortion thoroughly in chapter 6; here he merely rejects it as absurd.

Conclusion (3:9-20)

4. Jews have at least one advantage over Gentiles: they have been entrusted with God's words (3:1). However, in the final analysis, why are Jews and Gentiles essentially equal (3:9)?

Study Skill—Old Testament Quotations
Romans 3:4 and 3:10-18 are just two of the many places in which Paul quotes the Old Testament. If you compare those quotations
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For Thought and Discussion: a. Do you or anyone you know ever feel that God has no right to judge the world or that He is unfair or breaks His promises? If so, how can 3:1-8 help you see God more clearly?
b. How does 1:18-2:29 help you see why God's judgment is just?

Optional Application: Meditate on God's faithfulness and justice in judging sin (3:3-7). If necessary, ask Him to help you believe He is fair and loving.

Optional Application: Read 3:9-18 meditatively, asking God to show you how you commit any of those sins. If you are convicted, confess and ask for help to turn from those sins.

Optional

Application: Take time tomorrow to read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) thoughtfully. Ask God to make you conscious of your sin through the Law, as Romans 3:20 says. Confess and ask for mercy and the grace to change.

For Thought and Discussion: How does Paul use the repeated words "no one" and "all" in 3:9-18 to make his point?

(continued from page 55)

with the original, you will notice differences for several reasons:

1. New Testament writers often give "the general sense" of a passage rather than quoting it word-for-word.

2. They often quote from the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Old Testament which was used by many Jews and all Gentiles.

3. A New Testament writer sometimes enlarges, abbreviates, or adapts an Old Testament passage, or combines two or more passages to make his point. The Holy Spirit has inspired these adaptations just as He has inspired the rest of the New Testament.¹

Law (3:19). The whole Old Testament. In 3:10-18, Paul quotes from the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Isaiah, not the books of Moses.

Paul uses the word *law* flexibly in Romans, so we have to interpret him according to the context. For example, in 3:27 NIV and RSV sometimes render the word *law* as "principle." NASB and KJV have the literal "law of faith."

5. What are some purposes of God's Law (3:19-20)?

Study Skill—Think Paragraphs

Paul's logic is sometimes easiest to follow when we look for the point of each paragraph. Then we can see the point of the whole passage or section. If you have trouble outlining 1:18-3:20, ask yourself what Paul is saying in each paragraph. (Some Bibles suggest paragraph divisions, while others leave it to you to decide where paragraphs would be.)

6. (Optional) Sketch an outline of 1:18-3:20 by giving titles to the main section and the subsections. The titles and subtitles in lessons one through five, as well as your own summaries of the passages, may help you.

1:18-3:20 _____

1:18-32 _____

2:1-16 _____

2:17-29 _____

3:1-8 _____

3:9-20 _____

Justified through Christ (3:21-26)

Romans 1:18-3:20 was enough to make anyone worried. Righteousness never comes through lawkeeping because people just don't keep God's commands (3:20,23). Therefore, the wrath of God is being revealed. But now, having made his readers "conscious of sin" (3:20), Paul turns to the good news: "in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed" (1:17). Read 3:21-31, noting in the margin any words or ideas you don't understand. Look them up in an English or Bible dictionary if the study guide doesn't explain them.

The Law and the Prophets (3:21). The whole Old Testament. Genesis 15:6, Psalm 32:1-2, and Habakkuk 2:4 all testify to this truth.

For Further Study: If you haven't already done so, begin an outline of Romans with 1:1-3:20 on the blank pages at the end of this study guide.

For Thought and Discussion: Thinking about paragraphs may also help you follow 3:21-31. What is Paul's main point in 3:21-26? In 3:27-31? Now, what is the whole section about?

For Thought and Discussion: a. How does Paul emphasize that God's way of righteousness means declaring people righteous who fully deserve to be declared guilty (3:24-25)?

b. Why isn't justification a legal fiction (since we are declared not guilty even though we are guilty)? How is it fully just as well as generous to give us righteousness?

For Thought and Discussion: How does Jesus' death in our place prove God both just and merciful (3:26)?

Optional Application: Explain God's way of righteousness to someone.

Glory of God (3:23). "What God intended man to be. The glory that man had before the fall" (Genesis 1:26-28, Psalm 8:5-6, Ephesians 4:24).²

Justified (3:24). Declared righteous, not guilty. The guilty person's sins are declared to be paid in full, so he has a clear record before God.

Grace (3:24). See the note on 1:5,7 on page 28.

Redemption (3:24). Release by payment of a ransom. The image is of someone freeing a slave by buying him from his master, or someone paying a criminal's fine to release him from jail.

Sacrifice of atonement (3:25). "Propitiation" in KJV, NASB. "Expiation" in RSV. The penalty for sin (rebellion against God's will) is death (Romans 6:23), but God does not want sinners to die. The Old Testament sacrificial system was designed to illuminate both God's just hatred of sin and His merciful desire not to punish. God allowed men to kill animals in place of themselves. These sacrifices "atoned for" (covered) sin, "expiated" (removed) man's guilt, and "propitiated" (satisfied, appeased) God's justice. See Leviticus 16:11,15-16,20-22.

Romans 3:25b-26 explains that those Old Testament sacrifices were not sufficient payment for sin in themselves, but they were sufficient in that they represented what Christ was going to do. By putting faith in the sacrifices commanded to cleanse sin, the Israelites were putting faith in God's way of righteousness which is fully revealed in Christ. Thus, the sacrificial law testifies to God's way of righteousness by faith apart from works (3:21). Now, however, the sacrificial system is ended because the act it foreshadowed has occurred.

His blood (3:25). The sacrificial animal's shed blood signified the life that was being given up for the person's sin. Likewise, Christ's blood signifies the life He poured out for our sin and the death He accepted in our place.

Justification is a concept from the law courts. *Redemption* is from the slave market. *Atonement* is from the Temple.

7. In your own words, explain how Jesus has enabled us to become righteous if we put our faith in Him (3:24-25). (Consider: How does Jesus' death "redeem" us and "atone" for our sin?)

8. Why is the phrase "freely by his grace" (3:24) important?

Implications (3:27-31)

9. Why does God's way of righteousness make it impossible for anyone to boast about himself (3:27-28)?

Optional Application: Do you feel more lovable and closer to God when you've been doing good things than when you've done wrong? Ask God to help you put your trust more actively in Jesus' death than in your own performance.

Optional Application: Meditate on God's justice and mercy. If you've had nagging feelings that God is demanding, unfair, vindictive, or soft on sin, confess those feelings and ask God to change your attitudes. (The book of Jonah is relevant here.)

Optional Application: Why is Christ's work important for you personally?

For Thought and Discussion: How does God's way of righteousness put both Jews and Gentiles on the same level before God (3:29-30)?

Optional Application: Are you ever tempted to feel superior to unbelievers or to Christians who live less righteously than you? If so, how does 3:27-30 affect your attitudes? Ask God to impress these truths within you.

For Further Study: On Romans 3:31, see Psalm 40:8, Jeremiah 31:33-34, Hebrews 9:14.

For Thought and Discussion: What does 1:18-3:20 reveal about God's character? What does 3:21-31 show about God and Christ?

10. How does righteousness by faith in Christ uphold God's Law (3:31)? See 3:9-20,23,25.

Your response

11. What implications does 3:1-31 have for your life? Name as many as you can. (Consider the optional questions in the margins.)

12. Think about your answers to questions 3 and 11. What one implication of 3:1-31 would you like to concentrate on for application this week?

13. What action and prayer will you pursue in order to put this insight into practice?

Study Skill—Application
You may find after awhile that application has become an effort to make yourself better, and that sheer effort is not making you more Christlike. When that happens, scale back your do-list, stop watching yourself for failures, and take more time just thinking about Christ. Ask yourself if you are relying on God or self to enable you to succeed.

14. Reread 1:16-17. How would you summarize Paul's message in 1:18-3:31?

15. List any questions you have about 3:1-31.

For the group

You may want to take two weeks for this long lesson or discuss just a few of the questions. The key concept is what God has done for us through Christ. Be

For Further Study: Add 3:1-31 to your outline of Romans.

sure that everyone grasps the doctrines of atonement, justification, etc. But don't be satisfied until the group wrestles with how their actions and attitudes should be affected by these truths.

Warm-up. Here are two possibilities:

1. "Has your awareness of your own sin grown, lessened, or stayed the same since you became interested in following Christ? Can you explain why?"

2. "Do you feel that God likes to punish people who commit sins? What makes you feel that He does or doesn't?" The word *feel* here is deliberate; many people believe one thing about God in their heads but let their feelings about Him, acquired perhaps in traumatic childhood circumstances, govern their lives. Confronting our feelings can help us hear deep in our hearts the truth in 3:1-31 about God's character.

Read aloud.

Summarize.

Questions.

Evaluation. It is a good idea to evaluate your study after a few weeks so that you can improve it for the future. Here are two approaches to evaluation; you can select from both if you prefer:

1. Look at the goals you set at the beginning of this study. Are you doing the best you can to meet them? (For instance, in what ways are you getting to know God and each other better? Is the study encouraging you to grow more like Christ, or to know and act on the Bible better? If not, what is lacking, and how can you improve the study?)
2. Ask the group these three simple questions:
What did you like best about this meeting?
What did you like least?
How could this study be changed to meet your needs better?

Worship. Praise God for His justice in judging sin and His mercy in providing a way to justify sinners. Thank Him for sacrificing Jesus for you. Praise His holy hatred of sin and His holy love for sinners.

The Law Court

To understand Paul's explanation of the gospel, we need to grasp the legal background. The Old Testament portrays God as a Sovereign who accepts the nation Israel as a subject people (a *vassal*). The agreement between Lord and vassal is called a *covenant* (treaty, pact, testament). This covenant legally binds the vassal to obey the Sovereign or face punishment. A person or the whole nation is "righteous" if he is in good standing with the Lord because he has kept the covenant. If he breaks the covenant, the Sovereign summons him into the royal court, tries him for treason, and sentences him (Deuteronomy 7:7-11, 29:9-15). All this is in accord with the legal systems of the ancient world.

At the same time, however, the Lord makes it clear that He is the King and Judge of not just Israel but the whole world (Genesis 18:25, Amos 1:3-2:16). Isaiah describes scenes in which the Lord summons the pagan nations into His throne room for trial and calls Israel as His witnesses (Isaiah 41:1,21-24,28-29; 43:8-13). In that trial, both Israel and the nations are declared unrighteous—guilty of treason and covenant-breaking. However, the Lord promises to reveal His own righteousness by forgiving and restoring the rebels.

How can He forgive the rebels without breaking His own law that requires traitors to die? Isaiah 52:13-53:12 finds the solution in the laws of sacrifice for atonement. The Lord will raise up a Servant who will die as "a guilt offering" (Leviticus 5:16, 6:5; Isaiah 53:10) for the people. That substitute death will satisfy the law of capital punishment for treason. Isaiah stresses that this Servant will be guiltless Himself (Isaiah 53:9), for the law requires an unblemished offering for any sacrifice (Leviticus 1:3-4, Malachi 1:8).

1. *The NIV Study Bible*, page 1709.
2. *The NIV Study Bible*, page 1710.