

## - Week 5 -

Romans 3:1

### 3:1-18

One can almost hear Paul citing Jesus's parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:10-14). Remember that Luke was one of Paul's closest associates, and the parallel *is not accidental*. Paul launches into a series of arguments against the Jewish sense of superiority toward the unrighteous and the well-intentioned pagan in the previous two chapters.

- What does Paul mean by “the oracles of God”? (v 2)

This is Paul's first usage of the Greek phrase *mē henoitō*, often translated as “God forbid!” or “By no means!” It is the direct opposite of the word *amen!* He will employ it several times throughout the book as a sort of punctuation point.

Paul delivers a series of rhetorical questions to provoke us to discussion. They are all under the umbrella of his initial question: *what advantage has the Jew?* (v 1)

- Does unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? (v 3)
- Is God unrighteous to inflict his wrath on us? (v 5)
- Why am I still being condemned a sinner? (v 7)
- Why not do evil that good may come? (v 8)

At one point, Paul quotes Psalm 51:4 to make a point. If you are familiar with the context of that psalm, share it with the group.

*What do you think Paul is hoping to move us toward understanding with this series of questions?*

Paul's conclusion is found in his rhetorical question at the beginning of verse 9 – *Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all.*

- The lengthy quote Paul makes after this is composed of two psalms (Ps 14:1-3 and 53:1-3). How do these two psalms begin? Do you think Paul is making a point to his hearers?

### 3:19-26

This passage begins Paul's complex exploration of the relationship of the Law (in this case, the Law of Moses) and the righteousness of God.

- Why do you think Paul makes this distinction between Law and righteousness rather than Law and grace?
- What does the Law accomplish in human experience? (v 20)

- How had the righteousness of God been manifest *apart from the law* (v 21)?

Allow me a brief digression here. Have you ever wondered *why* Luke’s gospel begins with so much detail about Jesus’s birth? The book borrows heavily from the framing and storytelling devices used by the Greeks when talking about demigods. Some critics see this as Christianity just “picking up” a pagan belief system, but it is more than that.

Paul is *adamant* that the righteousness of God is manifest in creation, even if it is warped and twisted. Luke shows that the Law and Prophets bore witness to Christ (v 21) but they are not the only witness.

- Whether under the Law and the Prophets or under the “general revelation” that has been warped and twisted, God’s righteousness shows us all as what? (vv 22-23)

Consider for a moment the relationship of the components of verses 21-26. What is Paul saying here?

- Was it possible to have faith while under the Law of Moses?
- Was it possible to have faith even “apart from” the Law?

*Universalism* is the belief that God will save everybody, that it isn’t important to believe in Jesus, just that you “believe.” Is that what Paul is presenting here?

### 3:27-31

Paul forces us to consider some complex ideas in the previous verses, but his conclusion of chapters 1-3 is found in these verses.

- Who has the right to boast?
- Is the Law a component of true belief?
- Is ethnic identity?
- Was God ever just “the God of the Jews”? (v 29)

Paul concludes that he is not overthrowing the law but upholding it. Here, Paul borrows heavily from the ancient practice of setting up tablets of the law (Josh 24:26, Prov 23:10, Hosea 5:10). Will we overthrow them? Or restore them?