**Romans**

**Lesson 5: God’s Case against Mankind Romans 3:1-20**

At this point in Paul’s letter to the Romans, he has shown that all people—*Gentiles (1:18-32), moralists (2:1-16), and Jews (2:17-29)*—stand guilty before God. Paul’s case rests on two premises: 1) all of us are sinners, and 2) “no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing the law” (3:20). In chapter 3, Paul addresses his fellow Jews who are undoubtedly offended by their inclusion in Paul’s indictment. They find his accusation difficult to accept in light of the fact that they are descendants of Abraham, possessors of God’s Word, and identified as God’s children through circumcision. How can this be? Paul anticipates their question, “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?” (3:1). His response clarifies the significant advantages of being Jewish. Jews were entrusted with the word of God. They knew His will. The promises of God were given to them. But, according to Paul, none of these advantages gives them preferential treatment, only privilege, and with privilege comes tremendous responsibility. John MacArthur writes,

The apostle did not teach that Jewish heritage and the Mosaic Law ceremonies were not important. Because they were God-given, they had tremendous importance. But they were not in Paul’s day, and had never been, the means of satisfying the divine standard of righteousness. They offered Jews great spiritual advantages, but they did not provide spiritual security.

Self-righteous, self-satisfied Jews could not stand any attack on their supposed Abrahamic security and their man-made legalism. The apostle had learned from all these experiences that unbelieving Jews would always accuse him of teaching against God’s chosen people, against God’s promises to His people, and against God’s purity. It is therefore those three objections that he confronts in Romans 3:1-8.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Paul explains that there is no fundamental difference between Jews and Gentiles. Neither the Law nor circumcision guarantees inclusion in God’s family. Paul’s words were, and still are, particularly offensive to the Jewish people.

In chapter 3, Paul uses a debating technique, whereby the debater poses objections in the form of questions which he answers. Paul’s technique may be a result of questions and objections that troubled him before his conversion on the Damascus road. Therefore, in verses 3-8, he puts forth questions that are likely on the minds of his Jewish critics. The Jews, who were the natural descendants of Abraham, knew God’s Word and they were entrusted with it. Thus, they knew God’s promises to Abraham and to his descendants. God’s covenant with Abraham seemed to promise that all of his descendants would belong to God. Isn’t that what God’s covenant meant?

Sadly, many Jews did not have faith back then, and many still do not believe today. The first question a Jew might ask is, “If so many Jews don’t believe, hasn’t God’s Word failed?” Another question could be, “If Jews don’t believe, are God’s promises still valid?” or “Will God still be faithful to keep His word?” Paul, in essence, replies, “Yes. God is faithful, and He will be true to His promises. If God said it, you could count on it.

But, there is a great deal of confusion regarding what God actually said.” Not all objections in Paul’s argument are the objections we hear today.

Nevertheless, Paul is so concerned about his listeners that he makes sure to include any possible objections they may have. Paul’s chief desire, and one of his primary purposes in writing this letter to the Romans, was that his fellow Jews might believe (Romans 9:2-3; 10:1). However, like everyone else, they first needed to see that they were separated from God because of their sin. Circumcision means nothing if there is no heart change. Being a descendant of Abraham only affects their nationality. All people must understand that right standing with God comes only by faith.

So, once again, like a prosecutor in God’s courtroom, Paul claims there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, pagans and moralists, or religious and irreligious individuals. All are guilty and deserve God’s judgment. Verse 9 reveals that all people are “under sin,” and verse 10 confirms, “There is no one righteous, not even one.”

Verses 10-18 conclude Paul’s prosecutorial indictment. After a lengthy argument filled with evidence, he could easily have said, “The prosecution rests!” After all, chapters 1-3 of Romans introduce Paul’s case that the whole human race stands condemned. In his stinging indictment against all mankind, he reveals how sin has affected everyone and every aspect of our being. Everyone stands condemned (verses10-12). Everyone! Again, “There is no one righteous, not even one.” Accordingly, our legal standing before God is guilty. Our minds have been corrupted and darkened, and we, therefore, lack understanding (verse 11). We don’t understand God’s truth. Our motives are impure and so no one seeks God (verse 11b). “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). Our tongues spew forth deceit, bitterness, and cursing (verses 13-14). Our relationships are broken and damaged (verses 15-17). We gossip. We lie. We say hurtful things to people whom we are supposed to love. We are full of anger and resentment towards others. Subsequently, we do not know God’s peace. Ruin and misery mark our ways. The result is an absence of fear toward God among mankind (verse 18). And finally, due to our sinful and rebellious hearts, our relationship with God has been severed.

When God’s Law is held up beside mankind, the world is silenced (verse 19). There are no excuses. There is nothing man can say in his defense. He has no case. Thus, God declares, through His servant Paul, that no one will ever be declared righteous in His sight by keeping the Law because it is impossible (verse 20). Instead, the Law condemns mankind.

Moreover, if God left us in this condition, we would all be hopeless. But, He has not left us without a remedy. However, before Paul can reveal God’s remedy, man must see his sin and need for a Savior. Without righteousness, no one will ever be able to stand before God or even come into his presence. This is mankind’s dilemma. But God has a solution.

“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Romans 1:17). Our righteousness can only come from God. We can never generate it ourselves. At the heart of the gospel is a righteousness that comes by faith.

DAY 1. Read Romans 3:1-8.

1. What advantages did the Jews have according to Paul (v. 2, Romans 9:4-5)?
2. What advantages do you have living in America with churches on nearly every street corner? What advantages have you personally enjoyed in terms of hearing the gospel?   
   What comes with that privilege (Luke 12:48)?
3. (Challenge Question) Paul puts forth the idea that when it comes to salvation (belonging to God’s family), there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews had a problem with this line of thinking. They considered themselves God’s chosen people. They believed they belonged to God. It was their birthright, plus they could point to the covenant of circumcision that God made with their father, Abraham. Thus, Paul anticipated several objections from them. Frankly, these objections are understandable from the Jewish perspective because God made a lot of promises to Abraham and his descendants (the Jews).

Stott writes,

The details of the debate are a little hard to grasp, not because Paul’s position is “obscure and feeble,” but because he gives it to us in only the briefest outline. For the elaboration we shall have to wait for Romans 9-11. We do have before us in 2:25-29, however, the teaching of Paul which prompts the objections, namely that there was no fundamental difference between Jews and Gentiles, and that the law and circumcision guaranteed neither Jewish immunity to the judgment of God nor Jewish identity as the people of God. This seemed to call in question God’s covenants, promises and character.[[2]](#footnote-2)

* 1. Explain how Paul’s teaching seems to undermine God’s covenant with the Jews (vv.1-2; Genesis 17:1-14).
  2. Explain how Paul’s teaching seems to nullify God’s faithfulness (vv. 3-4).
  3. Explain how Paul’s teaching seems to make God appear to be unjust, thus impugning His character (vv. 5-8).

DAY 2. Read Romans 3:9-18.

1. What charge does Paul make about Jews and Gentiles alike? What does it mean to be under sin (v. 9; Romans 5:12; 6:23; John 8:34; Ephesians 2:3)?
2. What is the verdict concerning everyone who has ever lived according to verses 10-12 (Romans 3:23; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 14:3; Proverbs 20:9)?
3. List at least ten charges Paul makes concerning mankind (vv. 10-18).
4. Explain what these two phrases mean to you:
   1. Verse 17: “The way of peace they do not know”
   2. Verse 18: “There is no fear of God before their eyes”
5. Can you see any evidence of a lack of fear of God in our society? If yes, explain.

DAY 3 . Read Romans 3:9-18 again.

1. It has been said that “the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.” The Bible mentions the word “heart” over 500 times. The “heart” includes one’s mind, will, and emotions. It is within one’s heart where beliefs are formed and decisions made. Every word that comes out of a man’s mouth originates in his heart.
   1. Why is the heart so important to God (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:34; Mark 7:21-23)?
   2. According to the following verses, what does the Bible declare to be the condition of mankind’s heart?

* Genesis 6:5
* Jeremiah 17:9
* Matthew 13:15

1. Read Psalm 51.
   1. According to verse 5, when does man’s sinfulness begin?
   2. According to verse 10, what did David desire for God to create within him?
   3. Verse 17 states, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Explain what this means to you.

DAY 4 . Read Romans 3:19-20.

1. What did God give to the world to reveal that we are all sinners?
2. What does it mean to be “under the law” (Verse 19)?
3. How should the world respond when it reads or hears God’s Word (The Law)?

Keller writes, “Whenever someone reads God’s law, however loyal, kind, thoughtful, generous or loving they are, their response can only be: I am a sinner. I have nothing to say to God—no defense to make or offer to make. I am in desperate trouble…(emphasis added)

A silent mouth is a spiritual condition. It is the condition of the person who knows that they cannot save themselves.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

As John Gerstner explains:

The way to God is wide open. There is nothing standing between the sinner and his God. He has immediate and unimpeded access to the Savior. There is nothing to hinder. No sin can hold [you] back, because God offers justification to the ungodly. Nothing now stands between the sinner and God but the sinner’s ‘good works.’ Nothing can keep him from Christ but his delusion…that he has good works of his own that can satisfy God…All they need is need. All they must have is nothing…But alas, sinners cannot part with their ‘virtues.’ They have none that are not imaginary, but they are real to them. So grace becomes unreal. The real grace of God they spurn in order to hold on to the illusory virtues of their own. Their eyes fixed on a mirage, they will not drink real water. They die of thirst with water all about them.[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. Read Galatians 3:24-25.
   1. What was/is the Law’s real purpose (The Mosaic Law was given specifically to the nation of Israel and included The Ten Commandments, the ordinances, the worship system; Exodus 20-40; Leviticus 1-7; 23)?
   2. Explain how the Law was designed to lead a man to Christ (Romans 3:20; 7:7).  
      (Hint: Think about what a man’s life looks like compared to the Ten Commandments.)
2. Why will no one be declared righteous by observing the Law (Exodus 20:1-17)?
3. Read Galatians 3:25 thoughtfully.
   1. What does it mean to be “under the supervision of the law”?
   2. How does faith remove us from being under the supervision of the law to being under the supervision of grace (Ephesians 2:8-10)?
4. What is the greatest truth you have learned in this lesson?

1. John MacArthur, Ph.D., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Stott, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Keller, 75-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John Gerstner, *Theology for Everyman* (1965): 72-73, quoted in Timothy Keller, *Romans 1-7 for You* (Epsom, Surry, England: The Good Book Company, 2014), 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)