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# ROMANS: THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN TEACHING

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## WEEK 3 – EVERYONE EQUALLY NEEDS THE GOSPEL

**QUESTION 1) If you had a minute in an elevator to explain to someone how we can be right with God, what would you say?**

(It's important to occasionally circle back to the gospel "in simplest terms." The gospel is "good news" of how much God loves me and what he has done for me through Christ Jesus, who 1) paid for my sins, and 2) gifted me credit for his righteous life. In other words, I personally have fallen short of the glory God intended for my life, but Jesus lived a perfect life and then switched places with me. He took the punishment I deserved. I got the credit he deserved. It's an unfair trade that demonstrates God's great love for us.)

**QUESTION 2) Do you personally tend to struggle with forgetting God's *justice* or forgetting God's *justification* more? How does forgetting one or the other affect your feelings, your outlook, and your actions?**

(Answers will vary. If someone *only* perceives God as a loving God, without remembering his holiness, the perception of God then tends to become permissive of sin, which isn't truly holy. If someone *only* perceives God as a holy God, without remembering his mercy, the perception of God then tends to become a cruel tyrant who merely makes selfish demands, which isn't truly loving.

If we forget God's holiness, we rarely transform into the person God created, Jesus redeemed, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to be. If we forget God's love, we tend to despise ourselves for falling short of what we know we could be.)

**BACKGROUND:** By this point in the letter, Paul has made the case that salvation comes apart from obedience to the Law (Rom. 1:17). Nonetheless, those who want nothing to do with God or his laws find themselves swept up in idolatry and immoral living (rest of Chapter 1). They're lost. But the religious who think they can earn their salvation through their performance (obedience to the Law, i.e. what they do) or pedigree (ancestry through Abraham, i.e. who they are) are just as lost (Chapter 2). EVERYONE needs good news that comes outside of themselves.

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### GOD'S FAITHFULNESS (ROM. 3:1-8)

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What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

<sup>3</sup> What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? <sup>4</sup> Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written:

"So that you may be proved right when you speak  
and prevail when you judge."

5 But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) 6 Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? 7 Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" 8 Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!

**QUESTION 3) In chapter 2, Paul proved that the Jews were not superior to the pagans, and in fact, struggled with the same basic impulses of pride and selfishness. The conclusion, for some, might be that Paul is suggesting the Jewish faith and its rituals/customs served no value. If salvation, still today, is ultimately about relational trust in Christ, not performance of religious rituals, do these rituals, customs, and ceremonies retain any value?**

(Answers will vary. Religious rituals *can* have value insofar as they continue to point people to the grace of Jesus Christ. If there is clear educational value and positive spiritual habituation, these rituals are good things. So, for example, continuing to learn Creeds or Prayers *can* be tremendously valuable. On the other hand, if rituals become boxes to be checked OR if we think that performance of these rituals in any way generates our rightness before God, then they become antithetical to a faith-based relationship. A good rule of thumb regarding Christian rituals might be "do the majority of believers here understand what this means and is it clearly deepening their understanding of Biblical Truth (generally) and of God's grace through Jesus Christ (specifically)"?)

**QUESTION 4) Some argued to Paul, "If our sinfulness demonstrates God's grace, why should we attempt to restrain sin? Why not just sin that much more?"**

The following are direct quotes I (Pastor Hein) have received from people in my ministry. I've heard many similar variations as well. How would you respond to each of them?

1. ***"I know sexual activity outside of marriage is wrong, but I also trust that Jesus died to forgive my sins, so I don't see why it has to be a big deal."***
2. ***"If you tell people good works don't contribute to salvation, how can you ever possibly motivate them to be good?"***

(In case #1, the person is clearly guilty of deliberate, willful sin. Hebrews 10:26-27 suggests that mentality indicates such a deadness of faith that no forgiveness for sins remains. In other words, that attitude, a trampling of God's grace, indicates no real relationship with Christ. If there is no vitality in the relationship with Christ, true faith doesn't exist, and therefore forgiveness is not received.

In case #2, you again have an issue of someone who doesn't understand *relationship* with God. In loving relationships, expressions of love are performed not merely because they should be or they have to be, but because true love simply evokes sacrificial expression. If you were only doing good works, or avoiding sin, on the basis of fear of what would happen if you didn't, then your only relationship with God is one of fear, which isn't much of a relationship at all.)

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## NO ONE IS RIGHTEOUS (ROM. 3:9-20)

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9 What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. 10 As it is written:

"There is no one righteous, not even one;

11 there is no one who understands;

there is no one who seeks God.

12 All have turned away,

they have together become worthless;

there is no one who does good,

not even one."

13 "Their throats are open graves;

their tongues practice deceit."

"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;

16 ruin and misery mark their ways,

17 and the way of peace they do not know."

18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

**QUESTION 5) Since Christians believe in right and wrong as well as just punishment for sin; they can sometimes be labeled as "judgmental." How do verses 9-12 disprove that accusation?**

(We've noted before that there is a difference between making moral evaluations and being spiritually judgmental. Moral evaluations are necessary – society can't exist without defining some things as wrong and hurtful. Everyone makes moral evaluations. Christians just base those evaluations directly on Scripture, not their personal feelings. Spiritual Judgmentalism, on the other hand, is perceiving yourself to be superior to others. Verses 9-12 indicate that every human being, believer and non-believer alike, are all equally under the power of sin and deserving of the penalty of sin. There is no difference from best to worst in our standing before God. This doesn't mean that everyone has committed the same sins, or the same amount of sins, but that our standing before God for sinfulness is all identical. A Christian therefore understands that it logically, biblically makes no sense to look down on anyone else as inferior.

Admittedly, sometimes Christians are not very logical about this. But, according to the Bible, no human is right to perceive themselves as superior or inferior to anyone else, as we all are sinful, and all require God's grace for salvation.)

**QUESTION 6) If we have some conception of right/wrong printed on our hearts (cf. Rom. 2:14-15), and if the law cannot be used to earn salvation (vs. 20a), we might be inclined to think the law has no value. According to vs. 20b, what is a value of the law? What would be the consequence if someone failed to understand or regularly meditate on the law?**

(Verse 20b says that “*through the law, we become conscious of sin.*” This must mean that without correct understanding of the law or regular meditation on the law, we become unconscious of our sins. In other words, we all naturally have consciences that sound like alarms when we violate God's universal code of right/wrong. But as time goes on, our fallen flesh, a sinful world, and Satan seek to recondition our consciences so that we lose track of what is good or wicked. Only regular use of God's Word sharpens us enough to not fall victim to the rationale of the spiritual forces in this world. The Law reminds us of God's will, and subsequently of how far we still are from what God made us to be.)

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### RIGHTEOUS THROUGH FAITH (ROM. 3:21-31)

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21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. 28 For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, 30 since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. 31 Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

**QUESTION 7) Romans 3:21-24 is the heart of Christianity. It's SO important, and yet hard to understand fully at first glance. Walk through each clause and put them into your own words:**

- **21 “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known,” –**

(rightness with God can never come from your obedience to the law, so God offers it to us in a different way)

- **“to which the Law and the Prophets testify.” –**

(this new path to righteousness has been taught, certainly foreshadowed, in the Old Testament)

- **22 “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” –**

(by simply trusting in Jesus as your Savior, his righteousness is gifted to you)

- **“There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,” –**

(this righteousness is equally available to all, no matter who you are, what you've done, or where you came from)

- **23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” –**

(every human is in the same boat by nature – equally lost, equally undeserving of God's love and acceptance)

- **24 “and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” –**

(but every human is equally able to be declared “not guilty” before God due to the undeserved love shown to us in the sacrifice of Jesus)

**QUESTION 8) In verse 27, Paul now brings up the issue of spiritual boasting. What is a boast? And what does the boast of a Christian sound like? More personally, why do you have cause for boasting?**

(A “boast” is a statement of personal identity, purpose, and reason for why you think a situation will ultimately turn out favorably for you.

A Christian's boast is something like *“I am a sinner. I was completely lost in my sins and running from God. But God found me, called me, and he paid the debt of my sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Now, through his Spirit he has adopted me, and has done everything necessary to take care of me so that we will live together eternally.”*

For the personal boast, it's simply a matter of sharing the particulars that fit into that story. So...WHY were you, at one point, running away from God either as your Lord or Savior? Were you ever living unrepentant of sins? Were you ever self-righteously believing you deserved God's love, acceptance, and blessing? Were you self-indulgent, self-righteous, apathetic, or self-centered in any way? However Jesus pulled you out of that, that's reason to boast in him.)

**SUMMARY:** Romans 3 offers us some of the best summaries of the gospel in all of Scripture (particularly Rom. 3:23-24). Paul has said that the Jews benefitted from the religious customs, not to mention the inspired Word, that God had shared with their people. But these blessings didn't make them less sinful. The Jews required just as much gracious saving as the rest of the world. All humanity is united in our inherent flaw and capacity for wickedness. But we're also all united in the fact that God's grace and the hope of eternal life is extended to us through Jesus. We're fundamentally more alike than we are different, and the gospel is the ultimate unifying force between God and man, and mankind with one another.

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## CLOSING PRAYER (GATHER PRAYER REQUESTS)

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