

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 3, Verses 9 -26
Notes from Tuesday August 24, 2010
Last Revised on August 27, 2010

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

In this class, for those of you who are new, we are studying the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Notes for all previous classes have been posted on the class web site, for your review.

Last week our reading took us up to Verse 8 of Chapter 3.

Before we read on, I will review just a little.

Review

The first 15 1/2 verses of Chapter 1 are **introductory**, but they tell us important things.

They tell us that we are reading a letter written by the Apostle Paul to **Christians** who were living in a city that Paul had never visited.

Paul is very much mindful of the fact that Christ Jesus came in fulfillment of promises and prophecies made first to the **Jews**.

The salvation that we gentile Christians have, is a salvation that we “**also** have” meaning that it came to the Jews **first** and in some sense primarily.

Yet the gospel which Paul has been set aside to proclaim finally does come to everyone, and is, Paul says in the latter half of verse 16, “**the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.**”

In this gospel, Paul tells us in verse 17, “**...the righteousness of God is revealed..**”

and in explanation of this statement, he tells us, in verse 18, that “**... the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...**”

This unrighteousness and ungodliness of man is examined in Verses 18 - 32 of Chapter 1.

We are, I think, supposed to see **ourselves** accurately described therein and all men from Adam until now, excluding only Christ.

But Paul imagines that some men may read these verses and see others, but not themselves, described there.

So he turns at the start of Chapter 2 and begins a diatribe directed against such people, against “those who judge” and this basically continues throughout all of Chapter 2.

In the beginning of Chapter 2 he seems to have in view everyone who judges anyone, and this certainly includes all of us.

But by the end of Chapter 2 he seems to be focused on those among his Christian readers who are circumcised Jews, and who may be judging other Christians, those who are not circumcised.

But throughout this chapter one fundamental point is being advanced, it seems to me: God cares only about what is true inwardly and he cares nothing about mere external appearances.

Various applications of this point are touched on in Chapter 2, finally including the point that circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter (v. 29).

If that is true, Paul asks, then is there any advantage to being a Jew, and does literal outward circumcision have any value?

This is the question that begins Chapter 3.

This question can be understood on two levels

If the question is understood to be about their role in “salvation history” then we can only answer, in a loud voice, and emphatically, that the advantage of being a Jew and the value of circumcision is very great indeed.

God himself chose the Jews and brought them into a special covenantal relationship with himself, which was symbolized by circumcision and other rites and ceremonies which God Himself instituted.

And the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God, including the Law and the Prophets and finally even including the Son of God Himself. What could be of greater value than all of this?

On another level, however, such advantages did not prevent God’s chosen people, individually or corporately from rejecting God, time and time again, to the point where one could reasonably ask if there were effectively any advantage at all of being Jewish, at least in terms of personal salvation.

Verses 3 and 4 basically assert, it seems to me, that the advantages which God bestows upon his people are not diminished by the failures of his people to capitalize on these advantages.

On the contrary God's glory is seen all the more clearly because of our sinfulness.

Yet this is no excuse for our sin --- which is the point of verses 5-8.

That brings us to the end of last week's lesson.

Any questions or comments before we read on?

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 3, Verse 9

Will someone please read verse 9 in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read that verse in English.

9What 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,

Thank you.

From reading the Old Testament and what Paul has said so far in this letter, we understand that God has conferred upon the Jews the greatest gifts imaginable,

and yet (despite their advantages) the Jews are still sinners, the same as everyone else.

Indeed the Jew's principal advantage lies in the fact that God has made them most aware of the sinfulness of man.

Q. How has he done that? (i.e. made them aware of the sinfulness of all men?)

A. (Hint: look in 3:2) He has entrusted them with the oracles of God.

So here Paul goes to those very oracles to prove his point.

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 10 - 12

Would someone please read Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 10-12 in Japanese

Thank you. Now would someone please read those same verses in English.

10 as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;

11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.

12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good,

not even one."

Thank you!

Paul here quotes the first 3 verses of Psalm 14, which are the same as the first 3 verses of Psalm 53

Both of these are inscribed Psalms of David.

As is Psalm 51 which Paul has just quoted in 3:4.

By evoking the lyrics of songs written by King David, Paul is making his point powerfully and movingly.

David **embodies** the point Paul wishes to make.

David was the most chosen of the chosen and the most favored of the favored and yet he was famously sinful.

If **David** is a wretched sinner, than all who are in Israel are likewise wretched sinners,

and if all who are in Israel are wretched sinners then so, too, are **all** men who have ever lived,

or so it seems to me.

(Verses 10)

as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;

Indeed! This rather emphatically excludes everyone, including the author of the song.

And and what does this mean? that no human being is **righteous**?

Verse 11 says it means that

(Verse 11)

no one understands; no one seeks for God.

Our minds have become futile.

Our hearts are hard or totally misdirected.

This is a deep seated, complete, **inward** corruption.

Q. So how are we even aware of our moral sickness?

A. By its outward manifestation ... "by their fruits shall ye know them!"

Verse 12 reads

(Verse 12)

All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Surely all of the children of Adam throughout all of history have been seen to do all manner of wickedness,

and this suggests that all of us, and each of us, are inwardly corrupt and turned away from God

it may even mean, and I think it does, that no man is capable of doing even one truly good work.

I think it was Calvin who said that the best thing we ever do on the best day of our life is so commingled with sin that it could never please God in the slightest degree, apart from Christ,

and that is not the worst of it,

because it is not only through what we do that our inward wickedness is revealed, but also through what we say.

That is where Paul turns next.

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 13 and 14

Will someone please read verses 13 and 14 in Japanese.

Thank you. Will someone please read those verses in English.

13 "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips."

14 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."

These two verses draw on three Psalms of David: 59:9, 140:3, and 10:7.

The passages have been selected to showcase sins of speech: throat, tongue, and lips..

Because it is through what we say that we incite our most unspeakable acts of violence.

And that is the gist of the three songs quoted here, if you read them in their entirety.

We can't help but be reminded of that passage from James

(James 3:5-8)

So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

And if we think back through all the stories of the Bible, and if we think back through all the stories of our own lifetime and even in our own lives, we easily remember how the evil which is deep within each of us, comes out first from the mouth and, then, leads to violent acts, even of physical violence and murder. This is the story of mankind since Cain and his parents Adam and Eve. This is how we are!

This is how **we all still are!**

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 15 - 17

Will someone please read Verses 15 -17 in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those verses in English.

15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;

16 in their paths are ruin and misery,

17 and the way of peace they have not known."

Thank you.

We are ultimately violent, murders, destroyers....every single one of us.

If it were not for the ministrations of the Holy Spirit I dare say we would literally kill and eat one another at some point.

Indeed, if you put us all in a lifeboat without food for a little while, this seems very likely to happen.

In and of ourselves, human beings are irrepressibly wicked.

The way of peace we have not known, Paul says.

These words, Verses 15 - 17 of Romans Chapter 3, are probably remembered from Verses 7 - 8 of Isaiah Chapter 59.

Although similar words are also found in Proverbs 1:16 and 3:15-17.

So these words are prophetic **and** proverbial.

The Bible reminds us of what we already know: this is simply how human beings are.

This is how and what **we all still are!!**

Q. And why are we like this?

A. Paul selects a final quotation from scripture to remind us.

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 3, Verse 18

Will someone please read Verse 18 in Japanese.

Thank you. Will someone please read this verse in English.

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

Thank you.

This is apparently a quote from the first verse of Psalm 36, yet another Psalm of David.

David reminds us that human wickedness --- acted out and spoken out --- is proof that we do not fear God,

because if we did fear God, we would not sin.

It is that simple, and our sin is simply inexcusable.

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 19 and 20

Will someone please read Verses 19 and 20 in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read that in English.

19 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.

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

Thank you.

In what has gone before in Chapter 3, Paul has been remembering the words of David, mostly, but also the words of Solomon and Isaiah...words which speak to the total depravity of Man and, therefore of, his need to be redeemed by God.

These words come out of Holy Scripture, which we call the Old Testament, and which the Jews called Torah in the most general sense.

Now here in verse 19, Paul appeals to what is common knowledge...

(Verse 19)

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.

Surely that is what David and Solomon and Isaiah and the whole of Holy Scripture is doing, not least of all the Law of Moses if we take law in its narrower meaning.

It all speaks to the Jews and whomever would acknowledge its authority.

What it speaks to those who hear it rightly is that all men are without excuse.

We must shut our mouths and stand before God silent!

The advantage of the Jews is that they are the custodians of the oracles of God, Paul said in Verse 2 of Chapter 3.

The advantage of the oracles of God, he says here, is that they help us understand that we are all sinners, every single one of us, and utterly incapable of saving ourselves through anything that we can possibly do. Verse 20 reads...

(Verse 20)

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 doesn't fix us!!

That is not and never has been its function.

 Nobody ever seriously thought so.

 The law points to our problem and beyond that to our need for God's salvation.

 The advantage of being Israel has never been in being righteous because of the law.

 The advantage of being Israel has always been the advantage of knowing, because of the law, that no one is righteous, except only God.

 The law is God's light shining on our rottenness, and on His goodness.

 We need to die.

 We need to be remade.

 We need to be reborn in the likeness of Christ!

 This is where Paul is going next.

 Any questions or comments to this point?

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 21 -26

Will someone please read verses 21-26 in Japanese

 Thank you. Now will someone please read those verses in English.

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it---

22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

In reading our Old Testament, and Paul's letter to this point, we understand that the entire human race is fallen into complete depravity.

Interestingly God has not destroyed humans or abandon us, because he is not finished yet; he has a plan to save us.

The Bible is the story of God's salvation.

Very early on in this story, God's salvation plan involved the establishment of a special relationship with the Jews who, among other things, and as Paul has already said, became the custodians of the oracles of God.

What this helped them to see was that even Israel, and therefore all of mankind, was unrighteous before God, and therefore nobody except God could ever save them

Their whole history looked beyond itself for how God would finally save them from themselves, and save the gentiles through them.

The oracles of God --- the law and the prophets --- spoke of it ... of forgiving past sins and creating a new heart within men...and of Israel becoming a blessing to all the nations.

Now, Paul says, the appointed time has finally come.

Again we are reminded of that first two verses from The Letter to the Hebrews:

(Hebrews 1:1,2)

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Paul is catching that same thought here, in Verse 21, which reads

(Verse 21)

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it---

Here the grammar makes it plain that Paul is speaking of something which has already but very recently happened.

Clearly he speaks of Christ: his life, death, and resurrection, which had just happened among them.

This was nothing new to God. It had been his plan for the salvation of the world since

before there was a world.

This righteousness of God apart from the law was not unknown to David, or to Isaiah or to the other prophets and heroes of faith of the Old Testament about which we read in Hebrews 11;

They all somehow knew of this righteousness, of God their Savior, in a vague and preliminary way.

But now, in the day of Paul and his readers, this righteous has been made fully manifest in Christ.

These others saw the sun of righteousness peeking over the horizon, and that was enough light to save them, but now the sun has risen and what was formally seen obscurely and in shadows is seen clearly in the noon day sun.

What is now seen clearly in the light of Christ, for all those who believe, is the righteousness of God, so clear and so brilliant that it has become the power of God unto salvation.

Verse 22 reads:

(Verse 22)

the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:

As we discussed in connection with Chapter 1, Verse 17, the expression “righteousness of God” may mean God’s own righteousness or it may mean the righteousness which comes to us from God.

But it is not necessary to chose one of these, I think, because through faith in Christ both types of righteousness are revealed to us.

We see through what God has accomplished in Christ just how good and faithful to us and true to himself and just how utterly amazing our God really is!

God’s people always knew it somehow --- but now in Christ they can actually see it! God’s righteousness revealed!!

And we also see through what God has accomplished in Christ the means whereby we can be reconciled with God and made righteous in his sight, for Christ’s sake, something that none of us could ever have accomplished on our own!

God’s people always knew that somehow he would save them and make them righteous, but now they can see how!!

And because this reconciliation is accomplished by God through Christ alone, and not by those who are being saved, it applies equally to all who are being saved by it: Jew and Gentile.

There is no distinction.

And so without denying the historical importance of Israel, and without denying the lasting value of all that God did and spoke in Israel, it can be said that, through Israel, all are saved, the Jew first and also the Gentile.

Indeed part of the glory of Israel is that through them all the world has been blessed in Christ Jesus.

Verse 23 reads

(Verse 23)

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

The equal hope of all who believe. lies in the equality of our fallenness.

All have sinned --- both Jew and Gentile

All fall short of the glory of God --- both Jew and Gentile.

Essentially these two statements mean the same things. To sin is to miss the perfection which is necessary to exist in God's presence and, therefore, to sin it so separate ourselves from God.

No matter who we are, we can never approach God as we are,

Verse 24 says that we

(Verse 24)

[and] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

We cannot approach God from our side, because we have been corrupted and cannot make ourselves uncorrupted.

This does not just mean that we are unable to keep the laws that God has given us, even though we agree that they are right, but of course we cannot.

Our unwillingness and seeming inability to obey the law is merely a symptom of a much deeper and more fundamental problem: we are essentially corrupt; we do not and can not

know God or fear him; there is no hope at all from our side.

Thus if we are to be saved, it can only be as a gift from God.

and this a gracious gift, meaning that it is totally undeserved by us,

It is God who justifies us,

“To justify” means “to declare righteous” or “deem innocent”

And while this is an attribution to us of a status we did not earn and do not deserve, it is not a “legal fiction.” It is a legal reality backed by all of the power and authority of God. To be declared “not guilty” by God is to be set free from the power of sin and welcomed into God’s kingdom eternally!

This is all God’s doing and none of ours, because there is nothing we possibly can do!

But how does God accomplishes this?

He can not simply set us free, and still be God.

He accomplishes this, Paul says, “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

The meaning of the word “redemption” at least includes the thought of salvation.

Remember the “gospel” is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

But the word “redemption” also has the connotation of paying to recover or restore something

I first remember hearing the word “redemption” in connection with returnable pop bottles.

In the old day when Coca Cola, and other soft drinks, were sold in reusable/refillable glass bottles, the bottling companies would pay a certain price to “redeem” their empty bottles.

They paid money to get their bottles back. The bottles were said to be “redeemable.”

Later in life I learned about pawn shops, where you could sell your watch or musical instrument or some other item of value, while retaining the right under certain conditions to buy the item back.

The guy in the shop would give you a coupon keep your item in his pawn shop.

Later if and when you had enough money to do so, you go back to the pawn ship, with you coupon and your money and you “redeem” your watch or musical instrument or whatever.

Finally there is the example of slavery or indentured servitude which has been fairly common in various forms throughout human history, at least until recently..

Under various arrangements a person might sell themselves, or be sold against their will, to a third party whose service they would be in or whose property they would, in some sense, be unless and until they had been redeemed.

This concept of redemption is a Biblical concept and the word used to describe it is a Biblical word with which Paul would have certainly been familiar.

So when Paul uses the word “redemption” in verse 24, he probably means to say more than just that our free gift of salvation is found in Christ.

The salvation was free to us, but it was not simply free,

somebody paid the price for our salvation

we were redeemed

and the name of our redeemer is Jesus Christ....

(Verse 25)

whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

The price of our redemption was the life (or rather the death) of Jesus Christ.

Paul says that God put Jesus forward for this purpose,

as a propitiation, which is a sacrifice offered as a payment for sin.

an alternative translation has it that God had planned or purposed this for Jesus.

I don't see any difference between the two, and surely both of them are true.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross at Calvary in order to redeem us from sin.

To some extent this looks back to the animal sacrifices done in Israel and, especially, to the mercy seat that covered the Ark of the Covenant, in the Holiest place within the Tabernacle, which was the symbol of God's presence among his people.

It was symbols such as these which had foreshadowed Christ Jesus, who would finally come to shed his blood, the perfect and eternal propitiation, the price which God demands and

accepts for the gift of salvation which God has freely given to all men who believe in Christ Jesus.

But why did God do it this way?

We should be shy of asking questions about why God does things, but here it seems an answer or two are being offered: First, we are told that **“This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.”**

Indeed he had...passed over former sins.

The Holy Scriptures are filled with stories from the very beginning of God's divine forbearance, of his “passing over” sins.

It is kind of hard to understand the Old Testament for this reason, until we read it in the light of the cross and finally come to understand that God “passed over” former sins because in the fullness of time the Son of God would come to earth, live a perfect life, and die to atone for these sins and to establish a perfect eternal kingdom..

So the cross of Christ sheds new light on the history of Man, in general, and the history of Israel, in particular. In light of the cross we can see that God is perfectly righteous: not willing to excuse even the smallest sin but himself willing to bear the penalty of all sin so as to redeem his children from bondage to sin and grant unto them a blessed eternal life.

Verse 26 reads...

(Verse 26)

It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

All men who have ever lived, except for Jesus, have been sinners.

It follows, then, that “the one who has faith in Jesus” is a sinner too.

Yet this one who has faith in Jesus is forgiven by God for Jesus sake,

because Jesus has redeemed this one from sin at the price of his own blood.

And so this one who has faith in Jesus belongs to Jesus and is declared innocent,

and having been reconciled with God in this way, such a one may enter into God's presence and therefore into a blessed eternal life.

Therefore conversely such a one is finally and eternally saved from death.

So again we see how the gospel is God's power unto salvation for the one who believes.

This is not an advertising campaign, in which God seeks to justify himself by projecting a certain image on the cross.

Rather the cross portrays what God must do in order to save us, because he is righteous.

When we see Jesus on the cross, we finally encounter and understand the God who saves us, the God who made us, the God who is worthy of all praise, the God who is righteousness itself, and who intends finally to make us righteous as he is!

To come to love just this God, is to be saved.

Closing Prayer