

You're worse off than you think, but God's grace is even greater - Romans 3

God loves you so much. God wants to restore what was intended in the garden – a perfect, free-will fellowship with him. When God created us with free-will, it meant inevitable failure for man. But ultimately this was the only way for a true relationship between God and man. But how does a Holy God reconcile Himself to sinful man? Recognize that we didn't initiate the process; we didn't even want to be reconciled. But because God loves each of us so much, he did what only he could do: be both perfectly holy and righteous, while also bringing the perfectly unholy and unrighteous (that's us, sinful people) back to Himself. Realizing how amazing God's salvation is can set us free from both spiritual pride on the one hand, or feeling too unworthy on the other hand, enabling us to walk closer to him today. **BLUF**

Is God unrighteous?

The chapter starts out with Paul answering the expected objections.

- Was there no advantage to being a part of the Old Covenant?
- If our sin makes God look good, why am I condemned?
- Why not do evil that good may come?

Quickly, Paul reminds the Jews that even though the partial revelation of the old Covenant Law could not make them right with God, it was still a good revelation. As to the other objections, they are kind of like what a child would say, right? Paul's response is merely:

Rom 3:4 By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,

"That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged."

The bad news is really bad!

*Rom 3:9 What 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, **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."

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.”*

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.”

18 *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

Several places in the OT talk about how there is not a human on earth who does right and never sins. Many of these verses come from Psalms, **speaking of the enemies of Israel**, but he also quotes from the Prophet Isaiah **speaking directly to the people of Israel** and their own wickedness. The point is clear – all are sinners whether you a Jew, a sophisticated Greek, or a wild and woolly barbarian.

Have you ever been guilty of:

- Not seeking God
- Going your own way
- Telling lies, or spreading bitterness
- Living without the fear of God?

Paul is making it clear that even the Jew who was doing their best to follow the Law was still falling short. So what was the purpose of God giving the Law to the people of Israel?

Rom 3:20 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.

It is part of God’s revelation, showing us who God is and how sinful we are, and how far short we fall. Paul sums it up in Rom 3:23:

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

This is the human condition. Every person ever born is a sinner. When someone says, “I try to be a good human,” “I’ve never hurt anyone,” “I do good works,” or “I go to church,” the question is: have you **fallen short of the glory of God?**

What does this even mean?

- His approval
- His holiness
- His perfection

Bottom line – apart from Jesus, you are **not** “a good person”.

Did you ever say “I am basically a good person” before you got saved? No, you weren’t.

Some people say “I don’t need God to be a good person.” That is because their definition of good is subjective, and only in comparison to “bad people”. But if we get an honest glimpse of the goodness of God, His perfect holiness, all we can do is put our hand over our mouth, fall on our face, and declare we are completely unworthy.

Are we born good and then turn bad? The idea that children are a blank slate. No. We inherited the sin nature from our great, great, X300... grandfather Adam, and so we naturally sin in greater or lesser amounts from the moment we can. We’ll see this more in later chapters.

But here is the turning point in the argument.

The Good News is better than you could imagine!

Rom 3:21 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.

Wow – so much here to unpack!

- The Law and the Prophets testify to the salvation we now know – it was always God’s plan
- Through faith to all who believe – what is faith and belief?
- Only one way to God, Jews and non-Jews have to come by the blood of Jesus
- Sacrifice of atonement
- Just and justifier

What the Old Testament showed in shadows is now revealed in the full light of day. Why does it matter that we recognize that salvation by faith in Christ was always God’s plan?

What is faith and belief?

*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.*

Through faith...to all who believe. We really need to wrestle with the idea that believing and having faith means more than just mentally agreeing with an idea. We have to go beyond just acknowledging truth.

What do we believe?

That Jesus was God, come in the flesh.

John 17:20 “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. 21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

That Jesus died for our sins and that he rose again.

1 Cor 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

That Jesus is the judge of the world

Acts 17:30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

We first have to believe the truth about Jesus. Then we repent, we acknowledge we are on the wrong path and turn around, and then put our faith in Jesus.

What is faith?

Faith means trusting our lives to God.

Faith - A response of future trust and obedience based upon the evidence of God's character and good intentions for our lives.

How do we get faith? By hearing the evidence, believing it, and living according to the truth so we continually prove to ourselves that God's word is true. [This is important! Every time our faith is tested it is a gift from God to gain more!]

Redemption - to release on payment of ransom

Justified – just as if I'd never sinned.

Given...freely by his grace – none of it is earned

Propitiation – sacrifice of atonement.

*Rom 3:25a God presented Christ as a **sacrifice of atonement**, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.*

*Rom 3:25a whom God put forward as a **propitiation by his blood**, to be received by faith.*

He's the altar and the blood

This word is interesting because it is only used one other place in the New Testament, with a similar word also used a couple times. It has to do with reconciliation and mercy. The only other place this word *hilastērion* is used is in Heb 9:5 which describes the Old Covenant sanctuary where the high priest would offer blood to temporarily cover over the sins of the nation of Israel year after year.

*Heb 9:3-5 Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory **overshadowing the mercy seat**. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*

The same word for “sacrifice of atonement” is also translated as the mercy seat. The mercy seat was where God's presence was focused and symbolized the throne of God on earth (Old Covenant). This also was where the blood offerings would be made to “cover over” sins, allowing God to dwell with and bless Israel despite their sinfulness. Later in chapter 9 of Hebrews, we see Jesus also referred to as the high priest.

He is the priest and the offering

*Heb 9:11-12 But when Christ appeared as a **high priest** of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but **by means of his own blood**, thus securing an eternal redemption.*

So Jesus is the high priest AND the offering.

He is the sacrifice and the one to whom the sacrifice is offered. And finally, back in Romans we see he is also Just and Justifier.

He is just and justifier:

Rom 3:25b 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.

In perfect holiness, he overlooked sins in the past. At just the right time in history, the Creator entered his creation. He was the perfect offering.

Gal 4:4-6 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

The Old Covenant was a placeholder, covering over sin as God’s plan was revealed, a foreshadowing pointing to Jesus while the way was being prepared for God’s entry into history. We’ve mentioned this before, but there were many things that came together at this point in world history:

- God’s work with the nation of Israel was complete – prophecy complete
- A large portion of the world shared the Greek language
- The Roman Empire made getting across the world more possible

But now, we live in the age of Salvation. God made the way for us to be FULLY justified before him despite our weakness, imperfections, and despite his perfect holiness.

Jesus is the High Priest of the New Covenant, and he offers his own blood as the sacrifice.

Jesus is the Mercy Seat upon which the sacrifice is presented.

Jesus remains Just, not overlooking sin but fully paying the debt as the one who justifies us.

Jesus paid it all!

All to him I owe.

Sin, had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.

Where is the boasting?

Rom 3:27 *Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the*

circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Boasting is excluded.

Let's apply this in our lives.

1. Do you have an honest assessment of how bad off you really are apart from Christ?

Please, don't fool yourself that you are OK with God. You may be a regular church goer, but have you fallen at the feet of the cross and pledged yourself to follow him? Are you trusting in your own provision and setting your own agenda for your life? If so, can you really say that you have put your trust and faith in Christ? Or that you believe He is the one true God, creator and judge of the earth.

I plead with you today – get right with Jesus because while you may be a horrible sinner, Jesus is a wonderful savior!

2. Do you ever struggle with feeling accepted by God?

If you are here today, and you truly are a follower of Jesus but at times fall so short of his glory still. You maybe question your salvation or think change is impossible for you. It's time to put this truth deep into your heart. If you have put your trust in Jesus and committed your life to him, you are JUSTIFIED in Christ. Yes, he wants us to live holy lives, and to be transformed from sinners into obedient children, but he does not turn his face from us when we stumble in many ways. Because it didn't depend on me to begin with, as long as I remain in Christ I have confidence that I am justified before him.

3. Do you struggle with thinking you are better than everyone else?

We should never look down on sinners, because apart from Christ, we're no better.

4. Do you ever question if God loves YOU?

You can accept God loves Kirk, or me, or Nikki. But me? No, I'm too whatever... Jesus stretched out across eternity to enter creation and be Just and the Justifier. To be the high priest, the sacrifice, and the one who receives the sacrifice. Why? Because he loves you. Before you ever did anything, while you were yet a vile sinner, Jesus died for you.

Now – this doesn't mean we can just go on sinning so God's grace can increase. The opposite is true. Understanding that we are justified freely by his grace is very powerful in releasing us from the bondage of sin. We'll get into that more in later chapters.