

## Studies in Romans

### No-one is Righteous (3:9-18)

#### Context

- **1:1-17 Introduction**
  - 1:1-5 Paul's greeting and a summary of the gospel
  - 1:6-15 Paul's relationship with the Romans
  - 1:16-17 Paul's thesis: God's gospel is powerful to save all who believe
- **1:18-4:25 The problem and God's solution**
  - 1:18-3:20 The problem: God's wrath at our unrighteousness
    - 1:18-32 Mankind is facing God's wrath, both now and, ultimately, in the future, because we have all rebelled against Him
    - 2:1-3:20 There are no exceptions and no excuses; even the Jews are sinners who face God's wrath

Paul is still preparing the ground for the rest of the letter by explaining *the problem* that faces all mankind. *What problem is that?*

So, Paul has dealt with the sins of the depraved pagan world (**1:18-32**) and he's dealt with the sins of the "respectable" religious world, especially the world of Judaism (**2:1-29**).

At the end of **chapter 2** Paul says some very strong, provocative things about being a Jew. A Jew who "breaks the law" might as well be uncircumcised (**2:25**). The true people of God are defined, not by outward membership, but by a changed heart by the Holy Spirit (**2:28, 29**).

So this naturally raises a number of questions, the first being: "What's the point of the outward Jewish things, then? If they can be easily nullified, why are they there at all?"

**Romans 3:1-20** consists of two sections, both of which begin with the same question:

1. **3:1-8**
2. **3:9-20**

In our last study we looked at Paul's questions in **vv. 1-8**:

**First question (v. 1):** *"Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?"*

**Second question (v. 3):** *"What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?"*

**Third question (v. 5):** *"But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) **6** By no means! For then how could God judge the world?"*

**Fourth question (v. 7):** *"But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? **8** And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just."*

**Fifth and last question (v. 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...*

This is Paul's conclusion, summing up the discussion that began in **chapter 2**. His aim since **1:16, 17** has been to prove that God's rescue comes always and only to those who bring nothing of their own to their salvation (i.e. it's all faith—trusting in the work of Christ) and both Jews and Gentiles fall under God's wrath.

The question: "What then? Do we Jews have an advantage? Not in every way." Do the Jewish people have any advantage? Yes... But not in every way, as we've seen. There's certainly one major way that they have no advantage at all. See **v. 9**.

So how does Paul answer this question? He goes into a string of Old Testament quotations. *Why refer back to the Old Testament?*

Let's look at these Old Testament quotations one by one.

### **No-one is righteous (vv. 10-12)**

See **Psalm 14:1-3** and **Psalm 53:1-3**. If you look carefully at **Psalm 14** as a whole, you'll notice these four things:

1. **Universality.**
2. **Only one exception.**
3. **The "fools" are from Israel**
4. **The heart is where it's at**

#### **Romans 3:10-12:**

*"None is righteous, no, not one;" (v. 10)*

*"no one understands;" (v. 11)*

*"no one seeks for God." (v. 11)*

*"All have turned aside;" (v. 12)*

*"together they have become worthless;" (v. 12)*

*"no one does good, not even one" (v. 12).*

Clarification: is Paul saying that human beings can't or don't do any good at all?

### **The tongue (vv. 13-14)**

Why does Paul bring up the use of our tongues (our speech)? See **Matthew 12:34** and **James 3:1-12**.

*"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive" (v. 13).*

*"The venom of asps is under their lips" (v. 13, quoted from Psalm 140:3)*

*"Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness" (v. 14).*

Third section:

## Swift to shed blood (vv. 15-17)

Note the logical progression...

The quotation is from **Isaiah 59:7-8**.

*“Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery” (v. 15-16)*

*“and the way of peace they have not known.” (v. 17)*

## The fear of God (v. 18)

The climax: **verse 18**: *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* This quotation is from **Psalm 36:1**.

Michael Eaton writes that we need to fear God—

1. Because of who He is
2. Because He determines our eternal destiny
3. Because He determines our present destiny

The psalmist (and Paul) saw that the very heart of sin was to be found and seen in those of whom it could be said, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” But when we come to Christ and catch a glimpse of God’s greatness, we get to have a fear of God, but a fear that is combined with the wonderful assurance that His anger towards us because of our sin has been turned away and we are at peace with Him forever.

## For further discussion

(Perhaps choose one or more to think about further or to discuss with your group)

- *Using this passage and the rest of Romans to this point, how would you define “sin”?*
- *How do you think sin is expressed in:*
  - *thoughts?*
  - *attitudes?*
  - *actions?*
  - *relationship with others?*
  - *relationship with God?*
- *“I can’t believe that everybody is as bad as Paul says we are.” What do you think? How does Paul make his point?*