

R & R BIBLE STUDY 2019-20



breath-taking grace

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

LESSON 4

I recently read that we are all “theologians,” since theology is really about knowing God, so then anyone who believes in God is a theologian of some sort. I had never really thought about it like that. And if true, what kind of theologian am I, good or bad? Do I rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15)? Do I neglect theology because it’s too “hard”? Somehow we think it’s for “men only” or that doctrinal truth isn’t relevant in today’s world or our life. We often have a faulty view of God which can lead to faulty beliefs. Our superficial and inaccurate understanding of God can make things worse instead of bringing truth, peace, comfort, and hope to our life situations. J.I. Packer said, “Knowing about God is crucially important for the living of our lives ... we are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who runs it. The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place, and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do not know about God. Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life, blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.” Wow ... Theology and life collide; they aren’t two separate things. Or at least they shouldn’t be. Thinking about God’s sovereignty is one thing, connecting it with personal crisis and issues is another. “Theology” helps us do that. (I recommend a book on this subject called “When Life and Belief Collide” by Carolyn Custis James. It’s really good!)

You may wonder why I’m starting our lesson this way. Romans chapter 3 is full of doctrine, or Biblical truths. The wording can be tricky sometimes, so you may have to read the text over and over, as well as consulting various translations that may help the chapter make more sense to you. That’s ok. Don’t give up. It’s healthy to dig and work through difficult verses. Remember, YOU are a theologian! You can do this with the help and guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit! Have fun!

First Day

1. Begin by reading Romans 2:17-29 to keep Paul's words in context, then read Romans 3:1-20 a few times. Do you see any repeated words, phrases, or thoughts? List any facts you observed and think are important to our discussion.
2. How does Chapter 3 relate to Paul's comments in Romans 2?
3. What do you think is Paul's main point of this chapter?
4. Paul presents his arguments as if he's having a debate with some fictitious character. Can you list the verses that represent the arguments Paul is anticipating his adversary to have? (Do you think he had already encountered these arguments within his Jewish audience?)

As we approach this chapter, remember that Paul had just been describing the Jews that imagined themselves to be clothed with a righteousness that was actually nonexistent. R. Kent

Hughes wrote, “They were duped by a misleading religious confidence, so Paul was stripping away their layers of delusion. They believed that because they possessed the Word of God, they were safe. They saw themselves as guides to the blind, correctors of the foolish, teachers of the immature. But Paul undressed them, proving that having God’s Word is no guarantee of life. Paul also stripped away their errant confidence in circumcision, showing that their religious affiliation would not save them now.”

Paul had just pointed out that they had not practiced what they preached. They had sinned willingly; they were not ignorant. Their knowledge was correct, but their actions were evil. We can’t just “know” God’s will, we must obey His will and do what’s pleasing in His sight. Circumcision of the flesh was just an outward “sign” of an inward reality, and those, circumcised or not, who trust and obey God’s Word, are His children, whether they are Jew or Gentile.

Paul knows his argument will stir up the Jews, without a doubt. They were probably thinking, “What the heck, Paul? Are you saying I’m not a Jew?” Keep this in mind tomorrow as we discuss this chapter further.

5. At this point, how do you think Paul’s statements apply to you? We aren’t Jewish, so what message does this text have for us? (What kinds of things do we tend to think can “save” us or make us “right” before God? Does going to Church, or even reading the Bible guarantee you a place in Heaven? What word or phrase could you substitute for circumcision?)

I can’t wait to develop this further. Hopefully you’re getting a sense of where Paul is going. He debates with himself quite well, don’t you think?

Memory Verse of the Week: “... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

Second Day

Meditate on your verse ...

C. K. Barrett wrote, “It’s often easier to follow Paul’s arguments if the reader imagines the apostle face to face with a heckler, who makes interjections and receives replies which sometimes are withering and brusque. We may even go further and picture Paul the Pharisee and Paul the Christian in debate with each other, as in Philippians 3.”

1. Romans 3:1-20 consists of two sections which begin with basically the same question. Let's begin by reading verses 1-8. What question does Paul say his readers are probably asking?

2. Did Paul think the Jews had advantages, according to verse 2? Which one does he list?

“Paul’s ‘first of all’ or ‘much in every way’ sets us up for a list of advantages possessed by the Jews. However, he doesn’t resume the list until 9:4, after taking several chapters to expound the truth of justification by faith and the believer’s new status in Christ.” (Life Application Bible Commentary Series)

3. Paul anticipates God’s faithfulness will be called into question in verses 3-4. (Yes, the Jews are a privileged people, but do all Jews live according to God’s promises? Does their unfaithfulness change God’s faithfulness? Does their “unfaith” nullify God’s faith?) What’s Paul’s answer to this argument in verse 4? Paul quotes Psalm 51:4 in verse 4. How does this OT quote support his words?

4. What do the following verses say about this? 2 Corinthians 1:20, Hebrews 13:8, Titus 1:2, and Malachi 3:6.

5. Can you find some verses that refer to the faithfulness of God? (How about Lamentations 3:22-24 for starters!)

6. What does God promise to be faithful to? (Our every desire? Our every idea?) Why is it so important to remember what this truth applies to?

7. How does knowing that God is faithful to His Word encourage you today? Does your lack of faithfulness change His? (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

Swindoll says this about Paul's reference to Psalm 51:4, "In that Psalm, David is confessing his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. In doing so, he acknowledges that his sin in no way damages the character of God. David is responsible for his own actions. Perhaps another reason Paul chose to use David as an example of God's faithfulness in light of humanity's unfaithfulness, is that God promised He would raise up a king from David's line who would rule forever (2 Samuel 7:16). And not even David's sin nullified that promise. Jesus, the promised King, was indeed a descendant of David (Matt. 1:1-17)."

Because the Jews had special advantages as being God's chosen people, doesn't mean God is unreliable or untrustworthy if He condemns them. They might expect Him to overlook the sins of His people, but because He is just and fair, He does not and will not.

8. Interesting question ... How does God keep His covenant promises and pour out wrath on His covenant people at the same time?

9. "The righteousness of God is shown not only in blessing His people when they are faithful but also in cursing them when they are not. (Nehemiah 9:32-33)" What does this mean? Have you ever been angry at God for His discipline or for experiencing unfavorable consequences when it was a result of YOUR sin and disobedience?

Remember that faith has never been defined as just "believing" something to be true (James 2:19). Faith means "loyalty, keeping faith." So God's faith means His loyalty to His people and their faith means their loyalty to Him. This is why our faith is called "the obedience

of faith' (Romans 1:5; 16:26). The "obedience of faith" means to believe the promises and therefore to obey the commands of God.

I read a quote this week on a friend's social media that I really liked. He wrote, "You are free to choose, but you are not free from the consequences of your choice." Think about that ...

10. What does it mean when someone's faith is referred to as "nominal"? Why is this such a dangerous state?

11. Ok, you knew I was going to ask. Would you describe your faith as "nominal," "active," or "complacent"? What word would you use if you had to label it?

We'll look at Paul's answer to the next absurd question tomorrow. Take some time to ponder the phrase "obedience of faith" and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas in your heart that aren't so "obedient."

Third Day

What's your memory verse? Why is it so significant?

Read Romans 3:1-8 again. The heckler's argument in verse five now questions God's justice. Was God using the Jews to His own advantage, namely, to prove His righteousness by their failure? In other words, if my sinfulness makes God look so good, then why should He punish me? I'm actually helping Him out, right?

1. How does Paul answer this argument?

2. How would you respond to someone who says, "I'm glad I fell so deeply into sin. It shows how good God is and how much He will forgive"?

3. What's the next argument in verses 7-8? (How does Romans 6:15 tie in?)

4. Does God's grace enable us to abandon morally responsible living? Why or why not? (Does His grace allow us to sin freely, knowing we'll be forgiven?)

5. Have you ever fallen prey to the idea that, "It's alright to sin because Christ died for me and He has to forgive me?" Be honest. Why is this called "cheap grace"?

The unconverted Jews thought one of their advantages was that the faithfulness of God guaranteed they would be "safe," even if they didn't repent. I know, I know, I keep saying this over and over, just in a different way. But honestly, our culture seems to support this false belief, that it's ok to live in cheap grace because our God is a forgiving God. Who cares what we do, because He'll always forgive ... and why repent? This chapter is such a good warning and reminder to us that our belief certainly does dictate our behavior, and even though there is forgiveness in Christ, we are called to an obedient faith!

6. Paul pretty much sums up his arguments in Romans 3:9. What conclusion does he come to?

All of Paul's arguments bring us to this point: All of mankind has been diagnosed with this fatal disease called sin. The phrasing means "under the power or dominion of" sin. We are corrupt at our root. I like what the Russian poet Turgenev said, "I don't know what the heart of a bad man is like, but I do know what the heart of a good man is like and it is terrible."

7. How does Jeremiah 17:9-10 support this?

Read Romans 3:9-18. Paul reminds us that we are no better. We are all in the same boat ... guilty as charged. He strings a few Old Testament passages together to prove his point.

8. How does the quote (verses 10-12) from Psalm 14 back up Paul's conclusion in verse 9?

9. According to verses 10-18, sin shows itself in 3 various ways. How does it reveal itself in:
 - a. Our hearts
 - b. Our tongues
 - c. Our actions

When you read through these verses, you tend to think Paul is talking about an ax murderer or the worst of the worst. But actually, he's talking about us, you and me. Apart from Christ, we are all guilty before Him.

10. In verses 19-20, what is an appropriate response to the Law? What does the Bible do, and what can it not do?

I love what Martin Luther said, "The principal point ... of the law ... is to make men not better but worse; that is to say, it shows them their sin, that by the knowledge thereof they may be humbled, terrified, bruised, and broken, and by this means be driven to seek grace, and so come to that Blessed Seed, Christ." (Galatians 3:19-29) Spend time thanking God for His Breathtaking Grace!

Fourth Day

What's your verse?

Congratulations! We made it through a very tough section of Scripture! Our sinfulness is scary to look at, yet so necessary. How can we enjoy or understand the grace of God until we see how undeserving we are? Swindoll wrote, "How are we to understand salvation unless we understand what we have been saved from or how utterly unable we are to save ourselves? How can we ask for mercy if we don't believe we deserve judgement? How will we be thankful for the work of Christ if we think we can work our way to God? And how amazed will we be by God's grace if we're not appalled by our sin?" Amen to that!

1. Read Romans 3:1-31, then reread it, focusing on verse 21-26. Leon Morris says "this may be possibly the most important single paragraph ever written." Paul has proved to us

that all men are sinners, now he wants to explain how sinners can be saved. After all this talk about how sinful we are, what two words in verse 21 bring us hope and now change our focus?

Paul makes sure his readers understand that God has made known a righteousness that is apart from the Law, and that this righteousness is not a new invention. Under the Old Testament Law, righteousness came in behaving; under the Gospel, righteousness comes by believing.

2. How is this righteousness embraced according to verses 22-23?

I don't think Paul is trying to go back to the point of our sinfulness in verse 23, but is rather encouraging us that the Gospel is available to all! Jews, Gentiles, men, women ... can all be granted His righteousness!

It's time to pull out the sheet that defined various terms that you received the first night of Bible study. Now we meet up with the words justification, redemption, propitiation, etc. Review them to gain a better understanding of what they mean.

Shepherd's Notes explains it well: "Paul uses 3 metaphors to describe what God has done for sinful men through Jesus Christ, His Son. **Courtroom:** Through the legal metaphor, we see a condemned man in a courtroom as he hears the verdict of acquittal. **Slave:** Through the slave metaphor, we see an enslaved man who is redeemed from his bondage and set free. **Ritual Sacrifice:** Through the sacrificial metaphor, we see a guilty man from whom the wrath of God has been removed."

Paul says we're "justified" as a gift, because God declares us righteous while we are still sinners. Swindoll wrote, "**Justification** is a legal declaration, an announcement of one's status before God. Its opposite is condemnation. Justification doesn't mean that we become instantly perfect and holy, but we are instantly forgiven and loved by God. Christ's righteousness is instantly accredited to our account. So when God looks at us, He sees the perfect obedience and holiness of His Son. Once justified, the process of spiritual growth, or sanctification, begins." Some define it simply as we've been made "just as if we've never sinned." Jesus took on Himself the consequence of sin. He justifies, or makes right with Himself, those who have faith in Christ.

Propitiation: God provided a substitute, a sacrifice, to atone for the sins of humanity. He is our propitiation. Jesus "satisfied" God's need to judge sin, the sin of all who would believe in Him. By pouring out His wrath on His own Son, God rightly judged our sin, even those sins "previously committed," past sins that deserved His judgement but were judged in Christ on the Cross. Not only was our sinfulness transferred to Christ and paid for by His blood, but His perfect righteousness was transferred to our account. Thus God retains His character as a just judge of sin while extending mercy to us in Christ."

Chris Ash wrote, “At the heart of this passage lies this truth: God is right to rescue sinners because He has punished sinners at the cross. He has not just punished sin; in Jesus He has punished every sinner who is united with Jesus by faith. He not only punished my sin, He punished me. And so, because He punished me, He does the right thing when He declares me righteous in Jesus. It would be hard to exaggerate the wonder of this truth.”

3. How important is God’s justice in this world? How much does it matter to you? What are some examples of “injustices” that bother you, both large and small?

4. Has anyone ever “paid your debt” in some way or taken responsibility for something you did, letting you off the hook? How did that make you feel?

5. So, according to verses 27-28, what should be our response to God’s amazing gift? Can we boast or take credit? Read also Ephesians 2:8-10. How, then, is God glorified?

6. Do you know anyone who thinks they’re “ok” because they are a “good person”? How would you explain this truth to them?

“To understand what grace and faith mean is to reject the way of pride and boasting.”

(Leon Morris)

7. Perhaps you are the one who’s been thinking you’re good enough, or do enough, or try hard enough, to earn salvation. Has God changed your perspective through this chapter? How?

8. Why do we try to “earn” His love so often? Why do we continue to fall into this trap? Why is it so dangerous?

9. What do verses 29-30 again remind us of?

Perhaps Paul felt that his readers would want to throw out the Law altogether, which wasn't his point. Remember that the Law wasn't evil or to be ignored. The true purpose of the Law was to reveal our sinfulness and drive us to Christ. We'll talk more about this in Romans 8.

10. So how does this section bring us light and hope after exploring the deep sinfulness and depravity of man?

11. I read that our salvation is more than just a rescue – it's a reward. What do you think that means?

Gosh ... so much to wrap our heads around! So beautiful, so rich, so breathtaking! I pray that we never take this gift of salvation for granted!!!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory!

Let's end our lesson with some basic thoughts, starting with the topic of boasting. 😊

1. If we truly understand the last few chapters, we will understand that the only boasting that is now in order is not in what I have done for Him, but in what He has done for me. Read the following verses and write your thoughts. Which one specifically speaks to your heart?
 - a. Psalm 44:8

Do you do this?

- b. Psalm 34:1-3
How often should we do this?
 - c. Galatians 6:14
Are you glorying in something or someone else besides Christ?
 - d. Jeremiah 9:23-24
Do you take pride in your wisdom, riches, or strength?
2. What are some examples of how we can trust in our “strength”?
 3. What are some examples of how we can trust in our wisdom?
 4. You know the next question... what does it mean to “trust in our riches”?
 5. What does the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross prove about God? (25b-26)
 6. What is your biggest “take-away” from our lesson this week?

Justification is really a miracle, isn't it? If you aren't yet a believer who has received His radical righteousness, are you ready to do so now? Can you acknowledge that there is no one righteous, no not one? Can you admit that all have sinned, all have turned away, and there is no one that does good, no not one? Can you tell God that you are ready to put your faith in Christ who died for your sins, and thank Him for forgiving and cleansing you? If so, I'm sure your leader would love to hear about it and pray with you!

See you next week, ladies!