Romans 3

"What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: 'That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged.' But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And why not say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just. What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.' 'Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit'; 'The poison of asps is under their lips'; 'Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.' 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

Section 1

"What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: 'That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged.' But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And why not say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just" (vss. 1–8).

Brief Review and Focus

In chapter 1 Paul explained that all men have a revelation of God, but many *"suppress the truth in unrighteousness"* (1:18)—leaving them *"without excuse"* (1:20).

In chapter 2, Paul explained to the self-righteous, semi-enlightened, and specially privileged Jews that they needed a deeper revelation of their own condition—and gave them a stern rebuke concerning their hypercritical treatment of their believing Gentile brothers and sisters.

In chapter three Paul transitioned back to the Gentiles—while keeping the Jews in focus.

Notable Transitions Within the Text

The subtle transitional address changes should not be overlooked. Careful attention to detail will prove helpful here—as it does in all Scripture. Therefore, please note the pronouns "we," "you," "they," and "them" in the text. When Paul was addressing the Jews, "they" and/or "them" generally pointed to the Gentiles. Conversely, when Paul addressed the Gentiles, "they" or "them" generally pointed to the Jews. Moreover, in some cases "they" and/or "them" points to an earlier generation or other people group—as it does in Romans 1:18–32.

Jewish Advantages and Higher Standard

Paul asked, *"What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God"* (vss. 1–2).

At least four things need to be addressed here:

1) **The Jews were Chosen by God as a Special People**

   Moses told Israel, *"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth"* (Deuteronomy 7:6).

   We must always remember that God chose Israel, in order to make Himself known to her, that He might make Himself known through her, for the benefit of the whole world. This fact alone should have caused the Jews in Rome to be patient with the Gentiles. They were a chosen people, with unique privileges. Of all people, the Jews were chosen as "*a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."* Therefore, they should have demonstrated humility—having been called through the sovereign elective purposes of God. However, rather than humility, they chose prideful self-righteousness.

2) **The Jews are God's People of Covenant.**

   To Abraham God said, *"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 12:3).

   "And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered" (Genesis 13:14–16).

To Isaac God said, *"Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws"* (Genesis 26:2b–5).

To Jacob God said, *"I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you"* (Genesis 28:13–15).

Note: God's covenant with Abraham was by promise and therefore passed down through Isaac (not Ishmael), then Jacob (not Esau), and his *"descendants forever."* Moreover, much is involved in the covenant, but do note God's promise to give them land—the land of Israel.

3) The Jews had the Sign of Circumcision as a Sign of the Covenant

"This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant" (Genesis 17:10–14).

We learned in chapter 2 that the Jews (who were boasting in the law) had forgotten the fact that *"he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God"* (Romans 2:28–29). Therefore, inasmuch as circumcision was a sign of the covenant, simply being circumcised was insufficient. It was the circumcision of the heart God ultimately wanted—and the Jews (in Rome and abroad) should have known this truth.

4) The Jews Had the Oracles of God

The only way to illustrate this is to review the whole of the Old Testament. Therefore, please allow me to simplify…

God said, *"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree,*

and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (Isaiah 55:10–13).

The *"oracles"* is in the plural for good reason. The *"oracles"* encompass all the words, laws, promises/prophecies, blessings and curses God has provided Israel. They are a special people to the Lord—and the Jews knew it. Therefore, of all people, they were the ones with greater responsibility.

Higher Standard—Greater Responsibility

The fact that the Jews had special privilege did not suggest they were less sinful than the Gentiles. In fact, one might argue that their sin was all the more grievous because of greater revelation.

Therefore, Paul asked the Jews a simple question: *"will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?"* (Romans 2:27).

This question is significant! The Jews were being warned against thinking themselves better than the Gentiles simply because they were Jews. Having the "*oracles of God*" and/or being the people of Covenant would not suffice! The Jews needed/need a Savior—and so did/do the Gentiles. Therefore, these Jews should have been humbly receptive to the blessings of God—and willing to bless the Gentiles with those things they enjoyed. Therefore, Paul made it clear that their hyper-judgmental disposition was unacceptable.

We must all humble ourselves before the Lord, recognize our own sinfulness—and by all means avoid comparison and contrast with others. We are all sinners! This is the point Paul is building! Both Jews and Gentiles need a savior. All have sinned and all need redemption.

The Jews as a special people (by covenant) should have been ready and willing to serve their Gentile brothers and sisters. Continued prejudice needed to stop.

Dispensational Note

It is important to recognize the fact that the Gentiles were not given the Law. Gentiles who believe the Old Testament/Old Covenant Laws were given to them are mistaken.

Paul told the Ephesians, *"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ"* (Ephesians 2:11–13).

Gentiles who merge Old Testament/Old Covenant laws into their doctrine must carefully reexamine their position. It is true that the blessings given to the Jews should be understood and the principles given should be noted as great in value. However, those who require Gentiles to believe the Gospel *and* "keep the law" are in gross error. This is addressed in many of Paul's epistles—in particular his letter to the Galatians.

Promises by Covenant—Not to Be Ignored

Paul asked: *"For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?"* (vs. 3). However, he answered his own question, declaring, *"Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but*

every man a liar, as it is written: 'That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged'" (vs. 4).

Israel is blessed with covenantal promises—and the Jewish people are privileged to have them. However, the individuals who reject the faith, forfeit the blessings—at no fault to God.

Every individual must believe the promises of God and respond accordingly. Otherwise, those who reject the Lord and His promised blessings will miss out on all He has prepared from them. Moreover, Paul pointed out that unbelief does not and will not nullify the very sure word of God. God will be true to His word; and the men and/or women who deny the truth will be the liars. The promises of God are irrevocable.

An Israelogical Concern

The question posed seems to have been brought before the audience in order to answer a concern Paul may have desired to address: namely, "Do the Jews who reject the faith forfeit the Kingdom blessings promised them?" The answer is yes! The Jews must appropriate the blessings of Abraham the same way their Gentiles neighbors receive of God: by faith. Moreover, the question addresses two other important concerns: the false doctrine of Duel Covenantism and Supersessionism.

Duel Covenantism

Duel Covenantism suggests that Jews and Gentiles are saved differently. The Jews by covenant, and the Gentiles by faith. This is not the case! For the Jews to inherit the Kingdom (which requires salvation), they must trust in the promise of God—which includes faith in Jesus (either by having looked forward in faith during the pre-incarnate historical generations/dispensations, or by direct faith in Jesus during or following His first incarnational earthly ministry). This was made distinctly clear to Nicodemus when Jesus spoke with him (see John 3:1–21). (Also see Matthew 8:10–12 and Luke 13:22–30).

Personal salvation is by faith. It always has been—in all dispensations.

Supersessionism

Simply stated, Supersessionism is a belief system that suggests God has no present and distinct plan for the nation, land, and people of Israel—and no plan for her future restoration. Those who hold this view believe that Israel has forfeited all future blessings and will not be revived by God. The doctrine is also referred to as Fulfillment Theology or Replacement Theology—wherein the Church replaces Israel in the overall planned and promised blessings God has provided her. Covenant theologians embrace this line of thinking while Dispensational theologians believe there is a distinction between Israel and the Church—and that God is working in Israel today, will work with her in the future, and will fulfill all the eschatological promises made to her (see Psalm 2; 110, Isaiah 16:5, Jeremiah 31; 33:14–18, Ezekiel 36, and Romans 9–11).

The dispensational point of view is the only way to properly understand Paul's position and is a fundamental point to this epistle (as mentioned in the introduction). Paul knew of the Jewish/Gentile divide and seems to have addressed this important topic to correct the grievous error.

Coming Judgment—and The Criticisms of Man

As we harken back to the fundamental topic Paul is building, we are reminded that both Jews and

Gentiles are sinful—and guilty before God! Therefore, God, as the righteous judge, is just to condemn those who refuse to trust Him for salvation.

The prelude statement adopted from Psalm 51 *"As it is written: 'That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged'"* (vs. 4b) serves as a foundation to the following verses.

It seems some of the Romans were judging God as unjust—were He to pass judgment on them. Their argument would suggest that their sinfulness highlighted the contrast between God's divinity and man's humanity, and therefore, God should thank *them*. Absurd!

This foolish complaint was addressed by using simple rhetoric. Paul wrote, *"But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.)"* (vs. 5). He then answered their folly writing, *"Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?"* (vs. 6). Both the direct answer and the responsive question show the irrationality of such thought. God is not unjust—*and* God *will* judge the world!

Continuing the rhetoric, Paul posed, "*For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And why not say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'?"* (vss. 7–8a).

The Romans seemed to have been arguing that the contrast between God's holiness and their sinfulness should be justification for an escape from judgment—and that their sinfulness should serve as a reason for God to both encourage their sinfulness—and praise them! Again, I say, this is simply crazy!

Lastly, he added a personal note of self-defense. Some were accusing Paul of doing the very thing he was suggesting the Romans avoid—*"do[ing] evil that good may come!"* He said that he and his co-laborers were being falsely accused, writing, *"As we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say"* (vs. 8b)—concluding *"their condemnation is just"* (vs. 8c).

Paul was not doing evil—and the evil workers will be judged. Moreover, this rhetorical piece vindicated God as the Righteous Judge and silenced the critics who were attempting to pass judgment on God.

The Foolish Today

Of certainty, there are those, who in self-righteousness, believe God has no right to judge them—even today. This should come as no surprise. It was true of the unbelieving during Jesus' first incarnational ministry and remains true today (see John 8:12–59 and Romans 1:18–22).

We are wise to accept God's assessment of our fallen condition and respond to the Gospel. He loves us with an everlasting love and has provided us all we need for life and godliness—in Jesus.

Section 2

"What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.' 'Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit'; 'The poison of asps is under their lips'; 'Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.' 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.' Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:9–20).

The Depravity of Man—All Have Sinned

Paul condemned the foolishness of God's accusers. However, they were not the only people in need. Therefore, continuing his case, he went further, proclaiming all as sinners—including himself. He wrote, *"What then? Are we [Jews] better than they [the Gentiles]? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin"* (vs. 9). Then added, *"As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God*.' '*They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.' 'Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit;' 'The poison of asps is under their lips;'* '*Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.' 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways*. *And the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes'"* (vss. 10–17).

The above citation is a collection of Old Testament verses gleaned from several passages. Generally, from Psalm 5:9; 10:7; 14:13; 36:1; 53:1–3; 140:3; Proverbs 1:16; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Isaiah 59:7–8; etc.

A careful examination of these citations shows at least two key points Paul was making:

1) The whole man is depraved.
2) The whole of mankind is depraved.

We are Sinners and We Sin as the Result

Paul declared that no one truly "understands" the depth of his or her "unrighteousness." He explained that no one naturally *"seeks after God."*

Even though God has revealed Himself to mankind, our propensity is to "turn away" and "take pleasure in unrighteousness." Paul demanded that the Romans (and all of us) understand that we are "unprofitable," signifying absolute moral corruption—a fact humanists deny with fervor. We, without the Lord, are not good and do no good (see Luke 18:19).

The Heart—The Affections of Man

When Paul began explaining the evils of the throat, tongue, lips, and mouth, he indirectly identified the heart, *"for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks"* (Matthew 12:34). Jeremiah wrote, *"the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9).

The Feet—The Acts of Man

Actions and their results are identified by the *"feet."* Paul made certain to include the fact that the "walk" of sinful man is "destructive," and documented the harm we cause. We are guilty for all we have done in defiance of God. We are guilty of the offences and harm we have caused others.

The Eyes—Blindness of Man

Finally, the fact that *"there is no fear of God before their eyes,"* is a two-fold concern. First, the un-regenerated man seems to have the capabilities of sight—but are willfully blind to *"their"* need for God. Secondly, the fact that there *"is no fear of God"* indicates that they refuse to know who He is and all He can do.

God is the one who holds the power of life and death, heaven and hell. The blind refuse to reverence Him. As mentioned above, some believe He has no right to judge. Others believe He has no power to judge. Some believe He has no will to judge. Some deny His existence altogether. *"The fool…"* (see Psalm 14:1). However, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"* (Proverbs 9:10), and *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction"* (Proverbs 1:7).

Every man, woman, and child, is worthy of God's wrath—and all means all. We are all sinners! All the Romans needed to know that they were worthy of judgment, wrath, and hell. We are too! Thanks be to God that He has made a way of redemption—and forgiveness of sin(s).

Lawbreakers—A Call to Shut Your Mouth

"*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (vss. 19–20)

Paul reinforced the purpose of the Law—declaring that it provides *"the knowledge of sin"* (vs. 20b), so that *"all the world may become guilty before God"* (vs. 19). Recognition of sin will "shut the mouth" (vs. 19) of those foolishly boasting in self-righteousness. Recognition of sin will "bridle the tongue" of those who think themselves "good"—for *"No one is good but One, that is, God"* (Matthew 19:17).

The Law

The law could not save—for *"by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified"* (vs. 20a). However, the Law did have purpose and was given to the Jews for at least six reasons through three divisions:

1) To provide *"the knowledge of sin."*

2) To distinguish the Jews from all other people groups throughout the world.

   Of Israel, Moses wrote, *"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth"* (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2).

   "This day the Lord your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you have proclaimed the Lord to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments,

and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. Also today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God, just as He has spoken" (Deuteronomy 26:16–19).

3) To reveal the God of Israel to all other people groups throughout the world—God made Himself known to Israel that He might make Himself known through Israel.

4) To create a civil system through which man may be governed. Of note was the then-present form of governance, the now-present need, and the prefigured future millennial reign of Christ.

5) To develop a system of worship that centrally prefigured the ministry of Jesus.

6) To establish a code by which man may know right and wrong.

   Points 4, 5, and 6 describe the three divisions of the Law: The Civil Law, The Ceremonial Law, and The Moral Law.

   Note:

   Some may argue (contrary to traditional thought) that the Law can be separated into four divisions—rather than three. These are the four they suggest: The Civil Law, The Ceremonial Law, The Moral Law, and The Health Law.

   The Health Laws (foods, drink, physical cleanliness, washings, diseases, etc.) can be cataloged within the Ceremonial. Others may suggest that the Health Law could be divided into Ceremonial and Moral. For example, it is not immoral to eat pork. However, it is immoral to infect another with a known disease. Jewish Rabbis today consider Health Laws vital to Judaism.

   It is unbiblical to suggest that dietary laws taken from Old Covenant Laws are moral issues today (see Colossians 2:16–22). Nevertheless, it is immoral to intentionally stumble a weaker brother or sister who may be offended by our maturity and liberty in the Lord (see Romans 14:1–15:6).

The Schoolmaster

The Moral Law in particular became a measuring device (tutor/schoolmaster) by which all men (Jew and Gentile) may be evaluated. However, the Civil Law and Ceremonial Law (only required of the Jews in and for Israel) nonetheless did likewise. Therefore, Paul wrote, *"The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith"* (Galatians 3:24).

Things to Remember

1) The Law provides the *"the knowledge of sin."* It defined the unattainable standards of righteousness and therefore man's shortcomings. The Jewish nation has been condemned and held in contempt *"under the law"* (v. 19a). However, the Law makes *"all the world…guilty before God"* (vs. 19b). Its effect applies to both Jew and Gentile.

2) The Law was *"the ministry of death"* (2 Corinthians 3:7).

3) The Law was not the method by which man could be saved—*"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh"* (Romans 8:3).

4) The Law was abolished in Christ—that man may be justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law (vs. 28). (See Ephesians 2:15)

5) Our justification by faith does not negate Paul's application—nor does it suggest that we make void the Law through faith. No! We establish the Law as a landmark or "high water mark," that may be used to measure our sinfulness and thereby demonstrate the "total otherness" perfect righteousness of God. For this reason, Paul wrote, *"Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law"* (vs. 31).

Section 3

"But now the righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (vss. 21–26).

Righteousness—Apart from the Law

"The righteousness of God apart from the Law" (vs. 21a) is the righteousness provided by faith in Jesus. It is defined in verse 22 as *"the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe"* (vs. 22a), both Jew and Gentile—*"For there is no difference"* (vs. 22b). It is *"apart from the Law," "for by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified"* (vs. 20).

Paul declared that the promise of imputed righteousness was *"witnesses by the Law and the Prophets"* (vs 21b), pointing out that true righteousness has never been through the Law. It has always been granted by faith—*"Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness"* (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6).

Witnessed By the Law

The Ceremonial Law prefigured (in type) the ministry of Jesus—the perfect atoning sacrifice. We can also suggest that the Civil Law prefigured the future governance of Jesus in His coming Kingdom and reign. The Moral Law standardized and demonstrated the "total otherness" (holiness) and perfect righteousness of God—moreover, the future condition of every believer.

Witnessed by the Prophets

The prophets declared the Law and likewise prophesied of the civil, ceremonial, and moral failings of the whole house of Israel. These men warned the people of consequential judgments but blessed them with the hope of the coming Messiah—who would redeem and guarantee a glorious future to all who put their faith in Him.

Concerning the climactic future of Israel, please consider:

> *"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord GOD, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be*

your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. Not for your sake do I do this," says the Lord GOD, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!"

'Thus says the Lord GOD: "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.' Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it."

'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them: I will increase their men like a flock. Like a flock offered as holy sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem on its feast days, so shall the ruined cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they shall know that I am the LORD"'" (Ezekiel 36:22–38).

Concerning the future state of *all* believers, please consider:

"For it pleased the Father… to reconcile all things to Himself, by [Jesus], whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight" (Colossians 1:19–22 abridged).

"…the grace of God, which was given to you by Christ Jesus, …who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless… God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:4b, 8–9 abridged).

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both *now and forever. Amen."* (Jude 24–25).

Praise the Lord!

Righteousness—To All and On All Who Believe

Paul made the case that all men may be saved *"apart from the Law"* and that all believers will be made righteous, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God. He has explained that the Law cannot save—but condemned and acted as a schoolmaster/tutor, leading us to recognition of our need, and therefore, to Christ as the only remedy for our sin(s) (see also Ephesians 2:8–9, Galatians 3:21–25).

Therefore, Stop the Criticism

The Jews were not to pass judgement on the Gentiles—who did not have the Law—and the Gentiles were not to pass judgment on the Jews who could not keep the Law. The criticism and division between Jew and Gentile needed to (and needs to) stop. Therefore, Paul boldly proclaimed, *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (vs. 23), and therefore, all men equally need a savior.

Of note is the fact that a Greek rendering of *"fall"* in this verse indicates that all *have* sinned and are *presently* falling short of the glory of God. Therefore, condemnatory judgment of others is both hypocritical and strictly forbidden (see 2:1).

In context, Paul used this important point to emphasize the fact that the Jews and Gentiles in Rome were to stop criticizing one another. However, the application is not limited to the first-century believers in Rome. It is a fundamental doctrine within the framework of Soteriology: the study of salvation.

All have sinned. Let's not lose this very important piece of the doctrinal framework Paul is making here in this vital and detailed book.

Imputed Righteousness

Righteousness is imputed—by faith in Christ. Imputation defined is "to credit." Therefore, mankind has been imputed with sin—in Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22a) but may likewise be *"freely"* imputed (credited) with righteousness at Christ's expense. All one must do is put faith and trust in Jesus—and thereby receive forgiveness of sin(s) and the gift of eternal life. God has promised redemption, forgiveness, justification, restoration, and glorification to all who believe. For this reason, Paul wrote, *"being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (vs. 24).

Redemption—At Jesus' Expense

The cost of imputed righteousness was great. It cost Jesus (the incarnate Son of God) His life—through the shedding of His blood.

Therefore, Paul continued in explanation: Our justification is freely given *"by His grace"* (vs. 24b), *"through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (vs. 24c), adding, *"whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood"* (vs. 25a), *"through faith"* (vs. 25b), *"to demonstrate His righteousness"* (vs. 25c), *"because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed"* (vs. 25d), *"to demonstrate at the present time"* (vs. 26a), *"His righteousness"* (vs. 26b), *"that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"* (vs. 26c).

Justification by Faith

The doctrine of justification by faith is documented throughout the whole of the Old and New Testaments. This fact will be illustrated more fully in chapter 4. However, as we stay in context, we recognize that Paul has built a case for the sinfulness of man, our need for a savior, that Jesus is that savior—the savior of both Jew and Gentile. Therefore, the Romans were to love one another, defuse division, and recognize that salvation, although *of* the Jews (see John 4:22), is also *for* the Gentiles (Romans 1:16). The lesson applies to us today—even as it did the Romans then.

Justification Freely by His Grace

Justification is given *"freely"* by God's grace, through the sacrificial work of Christ. Therefore, focus on justification being given free of charge harkens to *"grace"* (vs. 24) and back to *"apart from the Law"* (vss. 21 and 28). Therefore, all human performance must be set aside for the grace given by God—in Christ. The work was done in Christ. Therefore, the price He paid, purchased the redemption (see Acts 20:28) we are *"freely"* given at Christ's expense (vs. 24).

Propitiation—By His Blood

Propitiation is sacrificial satisfaction. Herein we learn that God did not indiscriminately and randomly forgive sins with disregard to justice. Someone had to pay the price for sin(s). To forgive otherwise would be to disregard justice. Therefore, Jesus gave His life in exchange for ours—as a substitute, in our place.

According to John, *"He [Jesus] Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"* (1 John 2:2). Moreover, he wrote, *"this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins"* (1 John 4:10).

To say that Christ paid *"by His blood"* is to say, He gave His life—through the shedding of His own blood (see John 3:16) on our behalf. Peter wrote, *"you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you"* (1 Peter 1:18–20).

To Demonstrate His Righteousness

The demonstration of *"His righteousness"* (vs. 25c) is twofold: First, Jesus could not have died in our place for our sin(s) if He were anything but perfect (as mentioned in 1 Peter 1:19 above); Secondly, God could not "righteously" forgive our sins if someone did not/had not paid the price for our trespasses. Therefore, He demonstrated His personal righteousness as the only one without sin, and His practical righteousness by making Himself an offering for sin(s).

The author to the Hebrews wrote of Jesus, *"For such a High Priest [Jesus] was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those [Old Testament/Old Covenant] high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He [Jesus] did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the [Old Covenant] law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints [Jesus] the Son who has been perfected forever"* (Hebrews 7:26–28). (Also see Hebrews 9.)

Of interest, the word for "mercy seat" in Hebrews 9 is the same Greek word translated "propitiation" elsewhere.

Forbearance of the (Passed Over) Previous Sins

During all pre-cross dispensations, God "covered" and "forgave" sin through His great mercy via the sacrificial system. However, *"it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins"* (Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, God *"passed over"* the sins "previously committed" during the pre-cross dispensations via the sacrificial system while awaiting the *"once for all"* sacrifice that could and would "take away" sin(s) (see Hebrews 10:8–10). This fact was recognized by John the Baptist (among others) when he introduced Jesus, saying, *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29b). A revolutionary statement that many Jews in Israel failed (and still fail) to understand.

The Demonstration

Jesus, having died in our place for our sins, has demonstrated His great love for us, His redemptive plan, the redemption itself, and thus His righteousness, by laying down His own life for us, in our place, for our sins.

Therefore, Paul could declare that God has “demonstrate[ed] at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (vs. 26).

All who put their faith in Jesus have been “imputed” with (declared) righteousness. We who have put our faith in Jesus have been justified by Jesus’ blood (Romans 5:9). We are declared sinless (just-if-I’d) as if we had never sinned.

Oh, what joy! Oh, the peace! We are “freely” forgiven—"apart from the Law”—by faith in Jesus, alone. We are redeemed, justified, reconciled, sanctified, and glorified in Jesus—and all for His glory.

Section 4

"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (vss. 27–31).

No More Boasting

Concluding his position, Paul posed several questions to re-emphasize the fundamentals he made: all men are sinners, all remain deficient, and no one has reason or right to boast in self or personal accomplishment—for *"all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags"* (Isaiah 64:6).

1) *"Where is boasting then?"* (vs. 27a). Answer: *"It is excluded"* (vs. 27b).

    a. The Jews could not and cannot boast in their privileged position—even though *"to them were committed the oracles of God"* (vs. 2). For, *"by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (vs. 20).

    The Jews could not boast in their accomplishments, for *"all have sinned and fall (are falling) short of the glory of God"* (vs. 23). *"As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.' 'Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit'; 'The poison of asps is under their lips'; 'Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.' 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.' Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God"* (vs. 10–19).

    b. The Gentiles, like the Jews, are in the same position—even if *"by nature [they] did/do the things in the Law"* (2:14).

    Gentiles who attempt to justify themselves by keeping the law are deceived. Those who attempt to keep the law while boasting in their accomplishments act and speak against the work of Christ (see Philippians 3:18–19). The same injunction applied to the Gentiles in Rome as it does today—*"by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (Romans 3:20).

The Law was a tutor designed to show men their sinfulness (see Galatians 3:24–25). In Christ it is fulfilled, abolished, and obsolete: *"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes"* (Romans 10:4). And, *"He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity"* (Ephesians 2:14–16). Moreover, *"In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away"* (Hebrews 8:13).

Therefore, *"Where is boasting?" "It is excluded."*

Paul wrote, *"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"* (Galatians 6:14).

2) *"By what law? Of works?"* (vs. 27c). Answer: *"No, but by the law of faith"* (vs. 27d). *"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law"* (vs. 28).

Clearly, Paul documented that the Old Covenant Law could not save. However, the law of faith, a term some may struggle against, is the pathway to justification.

The law of faith is summed up by faith in the Christ and in His finished work.

Simply put, we are *"justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness"* (Romans 3:24–25a). God has demonstrated *"at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"* (Romans 3:26 abridged).

For this reason, Paul wrote, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast"* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

3) "Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles?" (vs. 29). Answer: *"Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith"* (vs. 30).

God has seen fit to use the Jews—and the Jewish Law—in order to ensure *"that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God"* (Romans 3:19b).

Every Jew, and every Gentile, is guilty of sin. However, every Jew, and every Gentile, may be justified by faith in Jesus, for *"the righteousness of God, [is granted] through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference"* (Romans 3:22b).

"For as many of you as were baptized [into the body of Christ, by faith in Christ] have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27–28 abridged and modified).

The comment *"the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith"* (vs. 30b) should be understood. It is simply a declaration:

a. The Jews (who were given the Law and promises) are to be justified *"by faith"* in God—as earlier documented throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. *"Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness"* (Genesis 15:6). The declaration of imputed righteousness was given Abraham centuries before the Law was given—and years before he received the sign of *"circumcision"* (see Romans 4:3, 10–11 and Galatians 3:1–18). Therefore, *"apart from the deeds of the Law"* (vs. 28).

b. The Gentiles are justified *"through faith"* in the God of Abraham *"apart from the deeds of the Law"* (vs. 28). Therefore, not by faith, in faith, or faith in just any god (the Romans were pagan and had many)—but through faith in the God of Abraham, and thus "through *the* faith."

4) *"Do we then make void the law through faith?"* (vs. 31a) Answer: *"Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law"* (vs. 31b).

   a. The Law (as mentioned earlier) is a tutor/schoolmaster used by God to lead every man and woman to the knowledge of their need for a savior. Therefore, the high standards of the Law prove useful when declaring the guiltiness of all men, *"for by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (vs. 20b).

   Indeed, we have a higher Law, the law of faith in Christ. However, the watermark/landmark of the Law proves *"all the world guilty before God"* (vs. 19b)

   The Law is not void of power to condemn mankind. Therefore, the establishing of the Law proves beneficial to all—as it leads us to our need for a savior and therefore to Jesus.

   "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.
   Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. [25] But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (Galatians 3:19–25).

The vortex of Romans 1–3 establishes the fact that we must not "*make void the law through faith[.]" No, "Certainly not!"* (vs. 31a)—for the Law prophesied of the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. Therefore, *"we establish the law"* (vs. 31b).

The Law and The Prophets: A Reprise

The prophets throughout the Old Testament dispensations prophesied (in one way or another) that there would be redemption from sin. From the time of the fall until the first incarnational ministry of Jesus, the Law and the prophets declared through objective statements, types, and illustrations, the promises of the then-coming Jewish Messiah—Jesus, our deliverer.

In Genesis, God told Abraham, *"I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 26:4). The "seed" is Jesus.

Isaiah prophesied of Jesus, *"Indeed [God] says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth'"* (Isaiah 49:6).

We can see in these two passages alone that God will save Israel through her Messiah—and offers salvation to the Gentiles!

Furthermore, the Scriptures declare the re-creation of the whole of creation—as the result of Christ's finished work. God said, *"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind"* (Isaiah 65:17).

Therefore, let it be known: Those who intend to inhabit and enjoy the new heavens and the new earth, must be redeemed—and Jesus is the (only) Redemer!

Remember, we are "*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 3:24). Why would anyone refuse such a gift?

End Note:

"Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted'" (Luke 18:9–14).

We would all be wise to take the above to heart. There is none righteous, no, not one. We all need a Savior—and Jesus it that (one and only) Savior.