

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series two teachers will do Bible study from ROMANS 3:1-20.

In Romans chapter 1, Paul shows that the Gentiles are experiencing God's wrath and that they need God's righteousness. In Romans chapter 2, he shows that also the Jews are storing up God's wrath for themselves and that they also need God's righteousness. In Romans 3:1-20, he refutes the Jewish objections against his arguments and confirms his teaching that no Gentile or Jew is righteous in God's eyes. This he proofs from the Bible.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read Romans 3:1-20 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read Romans 3:1-20.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in Romans 3:1-20. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries.

(S) An important truth for me is from Romans 3:1-8. Paul refutes the Jewish objections against his arguments that both Gentiles and Jews stand condemned before God. Wherever Christians proclaim the truth, opponents of Christians will produce objections in order to try to prove the Christians wrong. Thus, the unbelieving Jews opposed the proclamation of the gospel by Paul and tried to discredit him in the eyes of the world. They opposed Paul just as they had previously opposed the prophets during the Old Testament time and Jesus Christ during the New Testament time.

The overwhelming opinion of the Jews was that God had chosen the Jews as his people since the time of Abraham. They believed that if the Jews retained their relationship to God by keeping the law and especially by circumcision, they would *never be condemned as the Gentiles would*" (Jn 8:33)! The Jews supposed that the eternal kingdom of God would be given only to the Jews in the whole world. They also supposed that the kingdom of God would be given to them, *no matter how sinful and disobedient to God they may have been!*

The Jews objected vehemently to Paul's argument in Romans chapter 2 that the Jews would be condemned together with the Gentiles in the final judgement day. The Jews had two main objections. Their first objection was that God had given the Jews certain advantages or privileges, which he had not given to the Gentiles. According to the Jews, these advantages or privileges guaranteed that the Jews would always be God's people and would never be rejected by God. The second objection of the Jews was that God was under obligation to keep his promises to the Jews, no matter how unfaithful the Jews might be.

The Holy Spirit gave Paul wisdom how to refute the objections of the unbelieving Jews. It is encouraging to know that his opponents could not stand up against the wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke (Mt 10:17-20)!

(T) An important truth for me is from Romans 3:9-20. Paul proves his doctrine that both Gentiles and Jews stand condemned before God from the Scriptures. After refuting the false arguments of the Jews, Paul concludes his argument from Romans 1:18 to 3:8 by saying that with respect to justification, no Jew had any greater advantage or privilege than a Gentile. No human being has any greater advantage than another human being. All people are under the power, the pollution and the guilt of sin, and therefore are justly exposed to God's condemnation (9).

In Romans 3:10-18, Paul proves his doctrine of the universality of sin by the testimony of the Bible. He quotes several known passages from the Old Testament to prove to the Jews that their own Holy Scriptures condemns them! The objections of the Jews are silenced by the authoritative words of God himself!

Paul concludes that the specific revelation of God in the Bible addresses everyone who is familiar with that revelation. It silences every mouth that makes objections against their sinfulness. On the final judgement day all people will stand before God's judgement throne and they will be judged according to their works. God will hold them accountable for their thoughts, motives, attitudes, plans and actions. God will not declare one single person righteous on the basis of observing the law! The law simply cannot justify or save one single person! Instead, the law makes people aware that they are sinners and in need of God's righteousness.

(S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 3:1-20 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions.

1st Question. (3:1-2). Why can God's *privileges* that he gave to Israel not be a guarantee that the Jews will be justified?

(T) In Romans chapter 2, Paul concluded that the Jews, like the Gentiles, would not escape God's judgement. They would be judged, not on the basis of their privileges, but on the basis of their own works and in accordance with how much they know of God's revelation.

The Jews objected that Paul's conclusion is inconsistent with the acknowledged privileges or advantages of the physical or national nation of Israel or the Jewish nation. The Jews were of the opinion that all the advantages God had given to them were a proof that *God had accepted them and would never reject them.*

Paul admitted that the Jews had great advantages (9:4-5; Eph 2:11-12). One of their greatest advantages was that they had been entrusted with the very words of God (2). These words of God were subsequently recorded to form the book of the Law and the Prophets (21), that is, the Old Testament.

However, Paul maintains that all these advantages of the Jews do not guarantee their justification or salvation! For example, the very book of the Law and Prophets condemn all people, including Jews, to be unrighteous (10-18)! Therefore, the Jews *are not* justified and *will not* be justified by their privileges or advantages! None of their advantages will protect them from God's wrath on the final judgement day. Later, Paul proclaimed that all people, Jews and Gentiles, *can* only be justified by their faith in Jesus Christ (22)!

2nd Question. (3:3-4). Why can God's *faithfulness* to his promises not be a guarantee that the Jews will be justified?

(S) The Jews objected that Paul's conclusion is inconsistent with God's faithfulness to his promises to Israel. The Jews held the opinion that God remains faithful to his promises, *even when the Israelites are unfaithful to God.* They falsely believed that God's faithfulness to his promises guaranteed their justification, regardless how great their unfaithfulness towards God might be.

Paul maintains that God's faithfulness stands unassailable. The faithfulness of God, even his faithfulness to his promises to Israel, may not be called into question. However, what may be called into question is the unfaithfulness of Israel towards God! Israel's unfaithfulness is evident in their not fulfilling the conditions attached to God's promises. For example, in the very book of the Law and Prophets the greatest king of the Jewish nation, king David, admitted that he himself was completely unrighteous. He condemned himself as an evildoer, but still acknowledged that God was completely righteous (Ps 51:4)! This example in the Old Testament proves that God is always righteous, but the Jews are not righteous. God's promises to the people of Israel had two conditions: they had to believe and obey. God would remain faithful to his promises as long as Israel adhered to the conditions attached to the promises. But when the Jews neglected their responsibility to keep the conditions attached to the promises, God was under no obligation to keep his promises to them.

3rd Question. (3:5-8). Why can God's *righteousness* not be a guarantee that the Jews will be justified?

(T) The Jews expected exemption from God's righteous judgement on the final judgement day on the basis of a false argument. They argued that their own unrighteousness brought out (showed) God's righteousness more clearly. They argued that the greater the contrast between God's righteousness and their own unrighteousness, the brighter would God's righteous character shine and the easier people would be able to see how great God's righteousness was (5)!

The Jews continued to argue that if the truthfulness and righteousness of God is enhanced and brings greater glory to God by the falsehood and unrighteousness of the Jews, then God would be unjust if he condemned the Jews for their sins (7)!

Paul says that this kind of reasoning is not only very wicked, but also completely untenable. This kind of reasoning is very wicked, because it makes God equally unrighteous as the unrighteous Jews. If God would not condemn and punish the wickedness of the Jews, he would be unrighteous! This kind of reasoning is also untenable, because the wicked Gentiles could use the same argument and consequently God would not be able to judge anyone in the world! It is untenable, because it would promote the immoral teaching, namely, that 'the more evil people do, the more good

comes out of it!’ Or ‘the more people sin, the more they glorify God.’ Paul’s teaching that people are saved by grace through faith and not by their works of the law does not mean that people are saved in spite of the fact that these people continue in godlessness, wickedness and lawlessness. People who argue like this deserve God’s complete condemnation (8). *All teachings that lead to immoral behaviour are false teachings!*

4th Question. (3:10-18). How does Paul prove his doctrine that both Gentiles and Jews stand condemned before God?

(S) **One. The Bible is God’s final authority for doctrine and life.** After refuting the false arguments of the Jews, Paul concludes his argument from Romans 1:18 to 3:8 by saying that with respect to justification, no Jew had any greater advantage or privilege than a Gentile. Paul proves this teaching by quoting several passages from the Bible. This shows that it is not the opinion, belief or conviction of the Jews that is important, but what the Bible says about this matter! *The Bible is God’s final authority for Christian doctrine and life.*

The Bible proclaims that all people without any kind of distinction are under the power, the pollution and the guilt of sin, and therefore are justly exposed to God’s condemnation (9). Paul proves this doctrine of the universality of sin by quoting the testimony of the Bible. He quotes several known passages from the Old Testament to prove to the Jews that their own Holy Scriptures condemns them!

Two. The universality of unrighteousness. Romans 3:10-12 are quotations from Psalm 14:1-3 and Psalm 53:1-3. “Not even one person is righteous in himself”. “No one has a right understanding” of God’s truths or of his own deplorable condition without the revelation in the Bible. “No one seeks God”, that is, by nature or by his own power and wisdom no one obeys, serves or worships God. By nature or by himself, everyone avoids the right way that leads to God. “Everyone has become worthless”, meaning, everyone is morally depraved (corrupt). There is “not even one person in the world who does good” in the sense that God would accept his goodness. No person’s alleged good works are sufficient to take away God’s righteous anger against his sin. On the final judgement day, no one’s good works will tip the scales in his favour! Thus, the Bible proves that the spiritual and moral depravity of people is universal.

Three. The wickedness of speech. Romans 3:13-14 are quotations from Psalm 5:9, 10:7 and 140:3. There are always some people who object. They maintain that they are not sinners and not immoral or depraved. They argue that, because they do not kill, commit adultery or steal, they are not sinners! However, Paul illustrates the sinfulness of every individual by the sins of the tongue. All people, including the so-called good and decent people, commit sins with their tongue. The words coming out of people’s mouths may be like the offensive smell coming out of a grave or may be like the bite of a poisonous viper. Especially gossip, lies, deceit, cursing and bitterness, which comes out of every person’s mouth, shows what comes out of his heart and thus proves his moral depravity!

Four. The wickedness of actions. Romans 3:15-17 are quotations from Isaiah 59:7-8. They teach that people sin by their violent acts, which destroy lives and property. “Their feet are swift to shed blood” means that people commit murder on the slightest provocation! “Ruin and misery marks the way” of the people on earth. The people on earth continually invent reasons to make war, even so-called *holy wars*, but all their wars are for unjust reasons! The result of all wars is senseless destruction and unimaginable distress. By nature or by themselves, the people on earth “do not know the way of peace”. That is, they have not “come to know” the way of peace, because violence almost continually prevails among them. Thus, especially the prevalence of violence and wars among the nations and various factions on earth prove that the whole human race is spiritually and morally depraved!

Five. Godlessness. Romans 3:18 is a quotation from Psalm 36:1. By nature or by themselves, the people on earth do not show any reverence to the only living God, the God of the Bible. They do not trust God. They do not show any piety towards God. They do not dread God’s judgement. They act as if there is no God. They live as if they never have to give an account to God of how they live. Thus, the disrespect of people towards the living God proves that spiritual depravity is universal. Both the Old and New Testaments teach the universal depravity of man.

5th Question. (3:19-20). What is the final conclusion of Paul’s argument that both Gentiles and Jews stand condemned before God?

(T) The word ‘law’ has several different meanings in the letter to the Romans.

One. The ‘law’ is God’s holy and righteous requirement for all people. The holy and righteous God of the Bible requires that all people live 100% holy and righteous lives. And he requires that all unholiness and unrighteousness of all people must be punished. The ‘law’ is God’s holy and righteous requirement for justification: it requires how people should be justified or saved. And the ‘law’ is God’s requirement for sanctification: it requires how holy and righteous God’s people should live. The godlessness and wickedness of the Gentiles, which is described in Romans 1, the lawlessness, unfaithfulness, unrighteousness and falsehood of the Jews, which is described in Romans 2 and the

testimony of the Bible, which is quoted in Romans 3, lead Paul to make this conclusion. Romans 3:19a says that this law 'speaks' to all people in the world in every nation and culture.

Two. The 'law' is the commandments, prohibitions and regulations contained in the Bible. There are three kinds of such laws in the Old Testament: First. There are the moral laws. God's holy and righteous requirement for belonging to him and living with him are *expressed in* the Ten Commandments and other moral commandments and prohibitions in the Bible. The quotations from the Psalms and Isaiah in Romans 3:10-17 are examples of this law. Romans 3:19b says that all people in the world are *in* (not *under*) God's law. This means that all people are *included* in God's holy and righteous requirement as expressed in these commandments and prohibitions in the Bible. The 'law' in this sense acts like *a judge*. It silences every argument against God and his revelation and makes people responsible to give an account to God. Romans 3:20b says that the 'law' in this sense acts like *a mirror*. It shows people how sinful they really are and makes them conscious that they are depraved. And Romans 3:21a says that the 'law' in this sense cannot act like *a saviour*. It cannot and does not reveal a way of justifying people. It cannot and does reveal a way of salvation. Second. There are the ceremonial laws. God's requirement how people should approach him in worship and prayer during the Old Testament period were expressed in various ceremonial laws, like laws about the temple, the priests, the sacrifices and the religious festivals. Jesus Christ fulfilled these ceremonial laws and they are no longer valid in the New Testament period. Third. There are the civil laws. God's requirement how the national and political state of Israel should function during the Old Testament period has been replaced by the teachings of Jesus Christ about the kingdom of God in the New Testament.

Three. The 'Law' is a part of the Old Testament Scriptures. God's holy and righteous requirement is expressed in commandments and prohibitions and these are written in the Old Testament 'Law'. The whole Old Testament Scriptures are called 'the Law and the Prophets'. Romans 3:21b says that the 'Law' in this sense *does reveal* a way of making people righteous or a way of saving people. The Old Testament Scriptures reveals that righteousness must come from God and must be received or acquired by faith in God and his message and not by doing the works of the law in one's own power.

Four. The purpose of the 'law' was never to justify or save people, but rather to reveal God's requirement for belonging to him, for approaching him and for living before his eyes. Because not a single person in the world can keep God's requirements perfectly, these 'laws' drive people to despair and lead them to Jesus Christ to save them.

(S) STEP 4 and 5. APPLY and PRAY

Do not forget to make possible applications, a personal application and to pray to God about one truth that God has taught you in Romans 3:1-20.

(T) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. Use "the five steps" Bible study method to prepare Romans 3:21-31.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net.

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".