



MOSAIC

The Book of Romans

Romans 2:17-3:20 – Knowledge of the Law is No Excuse

Romans at a Glance

- Written by Paul in 57 AD
 - Paul's longest letter (7,114 words)
 - Sixth of the 13 letters attributed to Paul
 - He had yet to visit the church in Rome
 - He hoped to visit Rome on his way to Spain
 - His best laid plans went awry, and his 1st visit was in chains
 - He was martyred during his 2nd visit (64-68 AD)
 - Roman church was already well-established
 - No one knows how the church began (Acts 2:10)
 - Romans mentioned 26 individuals and two families
 - Phoebe delivered the letter to the church at Rome

Romans 2:17-3:20: The Main Players

- **Paul**
 - Known throughout the Roman Empire as an apostle, evangelist, and church planter
 - Arguably the most influential person in the New Testament other than Jesus
- **Jewish Believers in the Roman Church**
 - Romans 1:8 – 2:16 focused on Gentiles, who do not have the Law
 - Paul next turns his focus on the Jews, who have the Law

Romans 2:17-3:20: Setting the Stage

- **God's righteousness**
 - **God's judgment is just because He is righteous and no one else is**
 - **There is no advantage to being a Jew – the Law exposes their unrighteousness**

Romans 2:17-2:24

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Observations

- **The Jews were a privileged people compared to the Gentiles (Romans 2:17-18)**
 - **They are the people of the Covenant, God's chosen people**
 - **They were the recipients of the Law**
 - **They had God's will and nature revealed to them**
 - **They approved of the Law**

Observations

- They were persuaded of their roles as teachers of the Law (Romans 2:19-20)
 - “a guide for the blind...”
 - “a light for those who are in the dark...”
 - “an instructor of the foolish...”
 - “a teacher of little children...”
 - “because you have in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and truth”

Observations

- **However, the Jews squandered their privilege (Romans 2:21-24)**
 - **They were hearers but not doers of the Law**
 - “Do you not teach yourself?”
 - James 3:1
 - **They dishonored God**
 - Isaiah 52:5
 - Ezekiel 36:20-22

Paul's Self-Awareness

- He understood his privileged position as a Jew
 - Acts 23:6
 - Philippians 3:4-6
- However, he acknowledged his failure to follow the Law (Romans 7)
 - Romans 7:15, 19
 - Romans 7:24
 - 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

A Warning for America?

“The similarities between the Jew and those who live in America are quite clear. The Jew grew up in a privileged nation in which there was an abundant exposure to the word of God and some degree of external morality. This is very similar to living in America with its great opportunity to hear the word of God. There are vast numbers the world who do not live in a nation like this. But for those in America, and especially for those in what I would call the buckle of the Bible Belt, in the south, there is an abundance of opportunity to hear the gospel. People grow up hearing about God, morality, and righteousness, though many never hear the true gospel in America.”

~ Dr. Steven J. Lawson, Trinity Bible Church

Romans 2:25-2:28

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

Observations

- **There is no salvation in the physical act of circumcision – or any other outward practice or ritual**
 - **Genesis 17:11-14**
 - **Jeremiah 4:4**
 - **Acts 7:51**
 - **Philippians 3:2-3**

Romans 3:1-8

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God. What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!

Observations

- **The Law is a gift from God**
 - Psalm 19:7-10
 - Romans 7:12
- **The Law reveals sin to us**
 - Romans 7:7
- **The Law reveals God's character**

Observations

“Paul described the law as ‘holy and just and good . . . [and] spiritual.’ Wait a minute, that’s what God is—holy, just, good, and spiritual! Thus the saying, ‘The law is a transcript of God’s character,’ prescribing how humans created in God’s image and likeness were designed to live, morally and spiritually patterned after how God Himself lives.”

~ Ellen G. White

Observations

- **Righteous**

- **God**—“The LORD is righteous in all His ways.” (Psalm 145:17)
- **Law**—“All Your commandments are righteousness.” (Psalm 119:172)

- **Truth**

- **God**—“You have redeemed me, O LORD, God of truth.” (Psalm 31:5)
- **Law**—“Your law is truth.” (Psalm 119:142)

Observations

- **Goodness**

- **God**—“Good and upright is the LORD.” (Psalm 25:8)
- **Law**—“The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.” (Romans 7:12)

- **Everlasting**

- **God**—“Then Abraham called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.” (Genesis 21:33)
- **Law**—“All His precepts are sure, they are upheld forever and ever.” (Psalm 111:7 8)

Observations

- **Holiness**

- God—“Be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16)
- Law—“Therefore the law is holy.” (Romans 7:12)

- **Love**

- God—“God is love.” (1 John 4:8)
- Law—“Love is the fulfillment of the law.” (Romans 13:10)

Observations

- **Perfection**
 - **God**—“You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)
 - **Law**—“The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul.” (Psalm 19:7)
- **Spiritual**
 - **God**—“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24)
 - **Law**—“For we know that the law is spiritual.” (Romans 7:14)

Observations

- **Just**

- **God**—“He is the Rock. His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice.” (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- **Law**—“The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” (Romans 7:12)

- **Light**

- **God**—“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5)
- **Law**—“The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light.” (Proverbs 6:23)

Observations

- **God is just to condemn us under the Law**
 - **He is faithful regardless of our unfaithfulness (Romans 3:3-4)**
 - **The fact that our unrighteousness highlights His righteousness isn't a "get out of jail free" card! (Romans 3:5-8)**

Romans 3:9-20

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.” “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, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Observations

- **The Scriptures are clear that all fall short**
 - Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20
 - Psalm 5:9
 - Psalm 140:3
 - Psalm 10:7
 - Isaiah 59:7,8
 - Psalm 36:1

Isaiah 64:6

“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.”

Observations

What's the bottom line? (Romans 3:19-20)

“You cannot observe enough religious rules, you cannot be nice enough, you cannot help enough old ladies across the street to be justified before God.”

~ Rev. Matthew C. McCraw

Mark 10:18

“Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good--except God alone.’”

James 2:10

“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

“Think of the law as a mirror that shows you who you really are . . . Mirrors don’t fix anything; they show us what needs fixing. The law was not designed to fix you, but to reveal what needs fixing.”

~ Pastor Tony Evans

Takeaways

- **Great buildings must be built on firm foundations**
 - **Luke 6:47-48**



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