

Review of Romans 1:18-3:31

- I. **Background: God's Righteousness (Romans 1:16-17).** The meaning of righteousness in Romans is grounded in the Old Testament. The righteousness of God refers to God's character and the actions that flow from God's character.
- A. *Faithful Covenant Partner.* God keeps God's promises; God is reliable and trustworthy; God can be trusted to do the right thing.
 - B. *Impartial Just Judge.* God is the impartial judge who is unequivocally against sin, evil, and death, and who will vindicate those subjected to injustice and oppression. God has a special concern for the marginalized, powerless, and helpless.
 - C. *Savior.* This speaks to God's covenant faithfulness to the entire creation, to God's promise and power at the end of history to ultimately destroy sin, evil, and death and to renew the earth in peace and justice.
- II. **The World Gone Wrong (Romans 1:18-3:20).** Paul's main point in this section is that *everyone* stands guilty and silenced before God, and all are deserving of God's wrath.
- A. *The Universal Fall of Humanity: The Legend of Adam and Eve (Representative of Gentiles).* Paul explains that everything went wrong when human beings exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images of creatures.
 - 1. **Idolatry:** For Paul, idolatry is the root of sin, making something other than God our ultimate concern or expecting finite things to ultimately secure us, which only God can do. Today people still worship false gods: Mars (war), Eros (sexual love), Narcissus (beauty), Zeus (power), Dionysus (pleasure), Caesar (political power and might), Plutus (wealth), and others.
 - 2. **Moral Declension:** Once we turn away from God we are "handed-over" to our own selfish passions and gradually surrender our freedom for the good. As we commit immoral deeds immorality takes root and begins to shape all of life.
 - 3. **Darkened Heart/Mind:** The final result of our willful and disobedient turn away from God is slavery to the sin and death. Our hearts and minds enslaved to sin and death can no longer clearly distinguish right from wrong and glorify evil as good.
 - B. *The Unfaithfulness of Israel (Representative of Jews).* Some Jews might argue, says Paul, that as the chosen covenant people of God they are an exception: either because (a) they are more righteous by virtue of their possession of God's Law or (b) because of their special covenant relationship God will not ultimately judge and punish their wrong doing. But Paul explains that God is an impartial judge and that Israel is not an exception in terms of guilt before God. They are "special" in the sense that they have been entrusted with "the oracles of God," but they were chosen for this purpose to be "a light unto the nations." God set them apart in covenant relationship in order to reflect God's character and the relationship that God desires to have with all people. Instead of being a light, Paul says, Israel's sins reveal the depths of her own darkness. Lost in darkness, Israel fails to accomplish what God intended for them. By repeatedly

breaking the covenant, the law that was given for peace and blessing becomes an indictment of unfaithfulness.

- C. *Main Point*: All (Jews and Gentiles alike) have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and all stand before God guilty and deserving of punishment.

III. God's Rescue Operation: The faithfulness of Jesus. Human unfaithfulness cannot undo God's faithfulness. Even though all of humanity has been shown to be unfaithful, and even though God would be just in condemning the world, God remains faithful to creation and all of the people who inhabit it, despite their willful turning away from God. God rises above His just claim of condemnation in passionate love for the world and acts in the only truly faithful person, Jesus the Jewish Messiah, to enact forgiveness, rescue humanity from slavery to sin and death, and accomplish reconciliation between God and human beings. God acts in love and faithfulness despite human hatred and unfaithfulness. Paul explains how God accomplishes the rescue mission in Jesus by using three powerful metaphors:

- A. *Justification (Metaphor: Court of Law)*. Question: What happens to prisoners (to sin) condemned to death? God's just verdict on sinful humanity is death, and no one is exempt from God's judgment. But despite human unfaithfulness, God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves—is perfectly faithful to covenant relationship: God the Father “puts forward” God the Son whose faithful obedience proves to be perfect (“even unto death on a cross”). The one Jew, Jesus, is and does what Israel was supposed to be and do. Furthermore, Jesus' faithfulness reveals God's faithfulness to humanity because he “gives up” Jesus *for us* (the creature turned sinful). In the death of Jesus God acts to “put things right” with humanity; God has commuted our death sentence, declared us innocent, and has given us a full pardon!
- B. *Redemption (Metaphor: Ransom)*. Question: Will the lost family member be ransomed from kidnappers? Human beings have essentially given themselves up to slavery to sin and death (just as Israel was enslaved in Egypt). We have been kidnapped, so to speak, by sin and death and Jesus gives his life for us as a ransom (to redeem = to buy back, to pay the ransom money) to rescue us.
- C. *Atonement (Metaphor: Israel's Sacrificial System)*. Question: Will the sins of the people separate them from God's forgiveness? Our sin separates us from God, but God acts to overcome this separation, to bring at-one-ment. Jesus Christ (God the Son) is the agent of reconciliation and his death on the cross is the means of reconciliation. Just like the paschal lamb in ancient Israel was sacrificed as a sin offering to renew the covenant with God, God the Son gives himself up as a sacrifice for our sin, resulting in peace with God and the birth of a new covenant that includes all of humanity. Again, the death of Jesus reveals God's faithfulness to humanity.

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