

## Romans Chapter 3- John Karmelich

1. My title for Chapter 3 is “hopelessness and hope”.
  - a) Chapter 3 spends most of the text discussing how hopelessly sinful we are as humans. Think of it as “we’re hopelessly rotten fruit”. We’re capable of doing good things at times, but not good enough to live up to God’s standards. Most of Romans 3 gives arguments that whether you are religious, nonreligious, moral, or immoral, we are still not “good enough” for God in terms of spending eternity with Him.
  - b) In previous lessons, I mentioned that the early chapters of Romans have the feeling of an army boot camp. A purpose of such a boot camp is to break the egos of potential soldiers and train them to be good followers of their leaders. Chapter 3 is “graduation time” from boot camp. But before one gets to the end, usually comes the roughest time of training.
  - c) With that illustration in mind, I call this chapter “hopelessness and hope” because it talks about the hopeless condition of mankind. It talks about just how sinful we are as people. The important point of the chapter is “Without God, we can’t, period.”
  - d) If one is to accept the existence of God, then one also has to accept the idea that He makes the rules and not us. He created the world, and therefore it is “His”.
    - i) I believe God is perfect by definition. That means He is perfect in love toward us and also perfect in judgment toward us. In this lesson, we are going to talk about why God is perfect in love and why God is perfect in judgment. We’re also going to talk about why those two characteristics are significant.
    - ii) If heaven is where God is located, then He gets to decide who gets to be with Him forever. In this lesson, we get into the concepts of: 1) Why we have to live forever; 2) Why God gets to make the rules of who spends eternity with Him, and 3) Why God judges us by our behavior here on earth as a basis for eternal judgment.
    - iii) I am convinced the every person will stand before God one day. He will judge all people fairly. No one will walk away from God’s judgment and say it wasn’t fair.
      - a) This chapter gives some of arguments one can give God about “not being fair”. Paul then rebukes those possible arguments.
  - e) Getting back to “hopelessness”, the idea is that we all have this “sin disease” and it is hopelessly incurable. It is as if all of humanity has a deadly poison. Some people have more “poison” than others (i.e., sinful behavior), but we all have it. To put it another way, no human is perfect. God is perfect and God demands perfection to spend eternity with Him. (God makes an exception for those who die before an age of accountability, but we’ll get to that in another lesson.) Much of this lesson is about how hopeless mankind is in his relationship to God.
  - f) I also call this chapter “hope”. The latter verses of Chapter 3 deals with the “solution” to God’s problem. The issue is that God loves us and wants to spend eternity with us. How does God show perfect-love and perfect-judgment at the same time? By the time we get through Chapter 3, we’ll see how the Cross is the only solution.
2. Now, for all us veteran Christians, all of this is old news. Why should I study this stuff?
  - a) Boy, am I glad you asked that question! ☺ I was wondering about that myself.
  - b) It is important to remind ourselves of our “fundamentals”. Paul’s letter to the Romans covers Christian fundamentals. A well-trained athlete or musician will constantly practice the fundamentals of their sport or their musical instrument.
  - c) We as Christians constantly need to practice the fundamentals if for no other reason, than the fact we have short attention spans. It is so easy to get our minds off of God and unto our problems. We focus on the problems at the moment and forget that God is big-enough to handle any situation that comes our way.

- d) Also, this chapter is gives help on how to defend our Christian beliefs.
    - i) There are arguments against Christianity one will encounter as one is a witness for Jesus. Some of those arguments are discussed in the early verses of this chapter.
  - e) Finally, there are times when life gets really rough that we have to remember that we (speaking to Christians) are going to live forever.
    - i) No matter how bad the situation, no matter how difficult the pain, it is “nothing” in comparison to living for eternity. Our life span is relatively nothing in comparison to eternity. No matter what we are going through, we are going to heaven. We all need constant reassurance of that fact simply because life-on-earth can so easily change our focus.
3. As we jump into Verse 1, remember that Paul is still running “boot camp”. The first half of Romans 3 is about the “hopelessness” of our situation without God.
- a) The last half of the chapter deals with “hope”. So, if the first half of the chapter gets you depressed, hang in there, as it gets better. ☺
4. Romans Chapter 3, Verse 1: What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? <sup>2</sup>Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.
- a) In the last lesson, the main issue is that, from God’s perspective, being a religious Jew did not make one any superior in terms of salvation.
  - b) From a historical context this issue is significant because many Jewish people back then believed any Jew would automatically go to heaven. The argument is, “We (the Jewish people) are God’s chosen people. God gave us, and not to anyone else, these set of laws. If we as a people collectively disobey them, God will punish us here-on-earth. As to salvation, we have a free-pass as again, we are God’s chosen people.”
    - i) Given that historical perspective, Paul needed to show this is a false concept. If a Jewish person (or anyone else for that matter) thought they had an automatic-pass into heaven, they why would they need to obey God in the first place?
    - ii) Much of the book of Romans is addressed to the Jewish convert to Christianity. Much of Paul’s letter is to teach a Jewish-Christian the right and wrong views that affect their Jewish heritage.
  - c) What is equally important is the application to us: There are millions of people who think they will automatically get into heaven just because they were baptized at some point in their lives or attend church on an occasional basis.
    - i) A big growth-issue for Christians is to get rid of false-concepts about our religion.
    - ii) One of the wrong-concepts that Paul is hammering home in these early chapters is you can’t get into heaven just because one is a Jew. A similar idea is one can’t get into heaven because their parents were devout Christians or at one time in their life, or say, one once made a public commitment for Jesus.
  - d) Hopefully, everything I’ve said so far in this lesson is old news. Most mature Christians understand that salvation requires the realization that the only way into heaven is to accept Jesus payment for our sins, past, present and future.
    - i) Maturity as a Christian believer is to live a life of gratitude to God for what Jesus did for us. Christian behavior stems from gratitude and letting God work through us for the better throughout our lives.
  - e) Which leads us back to Verse 1: I knew I’d get there eventually. ☺
    - i) To paraphrase Verse 1, “If I (speaking a Jew) am saved by faith alone, and my “works” don’t make a difference, what makes being a Jewish person any better than anyone else?”
    - ii) The modern equivalent question is, “What’s the point in modifying my behavior if I am saved by faith alone?”
    - iii) I’ll take on the Jewish issue first, and then come back to the second question.

- f) First of all, understand that Paul is using the terms “circumcision” and “being a Jew” as synonyms. To a Jewish person, getting circumcised is “the” symbol for being a Jew. Much in the same way baptism is “the” symbol that one is a Christian. Therefore, when Paul asks, “What is the advantage of circumcision?” he meant it as the exact same question of asking “What is the advantage of being a Jew?”
- i) Paul answers that question in Verse 2. First, he says there is an advantage. The first and foremost thing is that the Jews were entrusted with the Old Testament.
    - a) They were “God’s librarians” to keep and preserve the God-inspired words of the Old Testament.
    - b) In that alone, they are to be commended. The oldest copies we have (The Dead Sea scrolls, 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD) match up extremely well with or modern copies. The “debatable text” is less than 1% and is relatively trivial.
  - ii) Next, understand that the Jews were not just supposed to be the “librarians” of the Old Testament, but were supposed to follow and obey God’s laws.
  - iii) I stated in the last lesson that God will judge all people fairly based on what they do know about Him. While the Old Testament is full of prophetic clues about the coming of the Messiah, I am positive the Jewish people prior to Jesus were not held accountable to fully comprehend the future.
  - iv) I believe what Paul is getting at is there are practical benefits to keeping God’s laws. God’s set of laws in the Old Testament do lead one to live a happier and healthier life. It does draw us closer to God. To live a good morale life is much better than an immoral one. Further, those laws teach us God’s standards of right and wrong. It also shows our imperfections and how “short” we fall of God’s demands for our lives.
- g) Let’s get into the modern equivalent. What advantage does the Christian have over the religious Jew, ok, besides the salvation thing? ☺
- i) Getting to the sole argument Paul is building up here, none. In terms of God’s judgment, all people, Jewish, Christian, religious, nonreligious are on equal footing with God and no one has a special advantage. The only difference for the believing Christian is on judgment day, we plead, “guilty” and then we plead, “I would like Jesus to pay my sins for me, please”.
  - ii) The other advantage the Christian should have is to realize that God wants us to have a joyful life here on earth. Being a Christian should bring one joy here on earth despite the external circumstances. Living a life to please God will bring one far more satisfaction than anything one does for themselves. We’ll get more into this in latter lessons. My point here is to understand there are also “practical” benefits to Christianity in the same way there were “practical” benefits to being a Jewish person who understood God’s laws.
  - iii) In the last lesson, I asked the question, “In terms of God’s judgment, is it better to be naïve and not know God’s laws or is it better to know God’s laws and realize we are accountable for that knowledge? In this verse, Paul is saying it is “better” to be a Jew than a non-Jew. Paul is saying it is better to know God’s laws despite the price of accountability. The more we know about God’s standard for right and wrong, the more we realize our need for Him and it draws us closer to Him.
5. Verse 3: What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? <sup>4</sup>Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: “So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.”
- a) Paul is going to spend the next set of verses in his own question-and-answer session.
    - i) It is as if he has an imaginary debate partner. This debate partner is the skeptic who brings up reasons why Christianity cannot be true as Paul teaches it. Paul defends Christianity by bringing up possible arguments against it.

- b) Before I get into the arguments themselves, let's discuss how this applies to us.
  - i) Peter said, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." (1st Peter 3:15, NIV)
  - ii) What does that mean? It means that Christians should be ready to defend their faith when people ask you (as opposed to forcing the issue upon them).
  - iii) The questions of the next several verses bring up possible debate points. The application is to know how to defend Christianity against skeptics. On and off over the next several chapters, we'll get such debate issues.
  - iv) As stated, the early chapters of Romans are like an army boot camp. Another purpose of such a boot-camp is to train soldiers how to defend themselves. Paul is using debate points to show us how to defend our belief in Jesus.
- c) Let me paraphrase the debate issue of Verse 3 and Verse 4: "What if a Jewish person failed to be faithful to God's laws? Will that mean God will be unfaithful to them? God gave the Jews a set of laws. If some Jewish people failed to obey these laws, does that mean God won't be faithful to keep His promises to all of them?"
  - i) It might be helpful at this point to understand the legal terms of a "one-way contract" and a "two-way" contract":
    - a) A "two-way contract" means that "if I do this, and you do that, we have a contract (agreement)". For example, I agree to give you my product in exchange for money. If I fail to deliver the product, you shouldn't have to pay me. If you fail to pay, I get the product back." Both parties have to do "something" in order to have a two-way contract (agreement).
    - b) A "one-way" contract" means one party does "something" and that's it. For example, I agree to give you some money and that's it. You must simply agree to let me give you the money. There is nothing you have to do on your part to accept this contract.
  - ii) The Old Testament is full of "one-way" and "two-way" contracts.
    - a) There are some promises made to the Jewish people that are unconditional based on their behavior. These are the "one-way" contracts. For example, God promised Abraham that his descendants, the Jewish people would be blessed (Genesis 12). This was an unconditional "one-way" promise.
    - b) There are other promises made to the Jewish people that are conditional. God promises "blessings and curses" based on the Jewish people's ability (or lack thereof) to keep the law. This was a conditional promise.
  - iii) The mistake made was that many consider salvation an unconditional promise based on their behavior or some ritual like circumcision or baptism. Many Jews to this day consider Jesus payment on the cross "unnecessary" as salvation is either unconditional to the Jews or it is based on keeping God's laws. Paul is out to disprove both of those theories.
- d) The reason Paul is bringing up these arguments is an underlying issue: "If we don't get into heaven by obeying God's laws, what good are God's laws in the first place?"
  - i) Slowly, but surely, Paul is answering that question all through Romans. The way Paul is answering the question is by bringing up all the possible arguments one can give to defend the idea of "salvation-by-keeping-God's laws".
- e) This gets us back to Verses 3-4. The Jews could ask, "If we Jewish people fail to keep God's laws, does that mean God will be unfaithful to us? After all, the Jewish people (collectively) are promised "blessings and curses" based on keeping those laws. Does that mean we as a people are no longer on the "blessings and curses" set of rules?"
  - i) The answer is no. We'll get into the issue of the purpose and necessity of God's laws. In the meantime, we're just dealing with the issue of God's faithfulness.

- f) The last part of Verse 4 is Paul quoting Psalm 51:4. To paraphrase the point of that verse, "God's word is truth whether or not man obeys it or not".
    - i) What one has to understand is that if one knows God's laws, those laws become the "entrance examination" to get into heaven. We as humans are judged based on God's laws. The way to get around the law is to accept Jesus' payment as punishment as opposed to trying to show how we have kept the law.
    - ii) To summarize these verses, Paul is saying, "What if a Jewish person failed to keep those laws? A Jew "should" get into heaven because he or she is Jewish. If they failed to keep those laws, does that make those laws null and void? The short answer is no. God's standards of right and wrong stand no matter what man does or does not do.
  - g) OK John, this is all interesting. What does it have to do with my daily life? ☺
    - i) Understand that God's laws do apply to Christians. The secret of living a happy life here-and-now includes living in obedience to God's laws. Our salvation does not depend upon obeying, say the 10 Commandments, but obedience to God's laws do give one a happier and healthier life and draws us closer to God.
    - ii) Some of the Old Testament laws don't apply to Christians. For example, we don't have to bring animal sacrifices to church as "the" sacrifice was already paid on the cross. However, laws like "do not steal" obviously apply today, so we know that many of those laws are still in effect.
    - iii) Jesus once said in effect, that the two key laws are to "love God with all your might and love your neighbor as yourself." The rest of the laws hang on those two. (A paraphrase of Matthew 22:37-40). A famous Jewish rabbi made a similar comment by saying in effect, "Fear God, love others and the rest is just commentary". In other words, if you care about being accountable to God, and you want to love your neighbor as yourself, then the rest of the laws are practical commentary on how to perform those two commands.
    - iv) The "practical" aspect of God's laws-and Christians is to understand how impossible it is to be in obedience to those laws without God's help. These early chapters of Romans focus on the idea of salvation and "trying to do it ourselves".
      - a) Those laws are good for our lives. Without God working through us, it is impossible for us to obey such laws.
    - v) I realize that this topic deviates away from the text itself. The text itself has to do with the issue of God's faithfulness versus our faithfulness. The application to us is about the practical aspects of "faith and obedience".
6. Verse 5: 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?"
- a) Paul is now bringing up his second debate point.
    - i) The first debate point was, "If we are unfaithful to God, will God be unfaithful to us? The answer is no, in that God's word is "truth" whether we accept it or not. In other words, we are judged by God's truth whether or not we wish to accept it as the truth.
  - b) Let me paraphrase Paul's argument in these verses, "God knows all things. Therefore, God knows when I mess up. God uses all things for His glory. Therefore, it's not fair that God judges me based on the way that I am because He knew in advance that I would act this way." Confused? ☺ Good, so let me explain this with an illustration:
    - i) Supposed someone really hurt you physically. You recovered from it. That event inspired you to start a ministry to help others recover from the same thing. Years later, you have now done much good helping lots of people recover.

- ii) Does that mean the person who hurt you is now “innocent” because the harm they did to you caused a lot of good? No, you can’t get out being guilty just because a bad thing led to many good things.
    - iii) The classic argument is Judas. He is the one who betrayed Jesus. Jesus knew in advance that Judas would betray Him. Jesus “used” that knowledge of the betrayal to get God’s will done on God’s timing. Can Judas therefore plead to God, “Hey God, you knew in advance all of this was going to happen and You used it for your glory. Therefore, you can’t blame me for betraying Jesus as You knew all of this in advance.
  - c) What we have to understand about God’s judgment is the “double-sided coin” of our free will and the fact that God knows all things in advance.
    - i) If God is perfect, then God cannot learn anything. If God cannot learn anything, then He must know all things in advance. God created time. Therefore, He exists outside of time. From God’s perspective, He can and does, use “bad things” ultimately for His own purposes.
    - ii) From our perspective, we are “stuck” inside time. We don’t know what bad things will eventually come out for good. God still holds us accountable for the sins of our life, even though it may turn out for someone else’s good.
    - iii) The point of these two verses is that we are still accountable for the sins of our lives even others may “benefit” from those sins.
  - d) Remember that Paul is going “point-by-point” to kill possible excuses we can give God. One of the no-good-excuses is that others “benefit” from our sins. That is the main point of these two verses.
7. Verse 7: Someone might argue, “If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?”<sup>8</sup> Why not say – as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say – “Let us do evil that good may result”? Their condemnation is deserved.
- a) Verse 7 expands upon the same false-argument as the previous verses.
  - b) By the way, notice the phrase, “as some claim that we say” in Verse 8. That means that Paul has actually had to deal with the false-arguments posed in these verses.
  - c) This verse is saying in effect, “If what I do wrong gives God the glory, how can God blame me? If my sins show that God’s laws are correct, then I’m really helping God!”
    - i) For example, someone could say, “If I steal, someone gets hurt. That just proves God’s law of do-not-steal is a good law. My stealing is making God “look good” and His laws look good. I’m making God look good by my sins.”
  - d) In summary, you can’t argue, “I’m helping God by being a bad example to others”.
  - e) Paul is saying that such people are accountable to God despite the fact their negative example may benefit others. We are all individually accountable to God for our sins.
  - f) This leads to the question of, “Why is eternal judgment necessary?”
    - i) After all, wouldn’t a loving God want everyone to be in heaven? Wouldn’t say, 23,845 years of punishment be enough for a lifetime of sin? ☺ How is eternal punishment “fair” for only a lifetime’s worth of sin?
    - ii) First of all, God makes the rules, we don’t. Therefore, whether we like it or not, we have to abide by His rules, not ours. If God says the penalty for sin on this earth is eternal punishment, we must accept His rules.
    - iii) Next, understand that eternal hell is “giving people what they want”. If one turns from God all of their human life, why would that same person want to spend their eternal life with God? “Hell” is an eternal existence apart from God. The pain of hell is the realization that one desires to live apart from God.

- iv) So why not just make a sinner just “stop existing” after they die as opposed to eternal suffering? The answer is to think about that as a motivation tool. If I can live for myself and sin all I want and all that happens to me, is I stop existing, then that’s a “free pass”. Even if I only have to suffer for “x” number of years and then I stop existing, that is a motivation tool to know the punishment is not forever.
- v) Let’s go back to the “positive purpose” of eternal judgment. God is also a God of love. Such a God of love needs someone(s) to show that love to.
  - a) For example, if someone has a love of canvas painting, they would paint even if they never got paid for it, assuming they had the time and resources to paint in the first place. The same for a musician or a writer. They have this talent in their heads and they need to express that talent.
  - b) The same applies for God and His love. He desires to show that love upon someone. He happens to chose humans to show that love. Before He can spend eternity showing us His love, He wants us to choose Him out of our own free will. If we are forced to love God, that is not “true love”.
  - c) That is why I consider one of the most important bible verses as follows:
    - (1) That means that God is picking a group of human beings who He choose (His perspective) and we choose to be Him (our perspective) to spend an eternity so that God can express His love upon us.
- vi) What about those who choose to reject God’s love? God designed us to live forever, whether we like it or not. Therefore, God has to put everyone else “somewhere”. We call that place “hell” because it is a place for those who choose out of their own free will to reject God.
- g) This gets us back to Romans Chapter 3. What we have in these verses is the possible excuses mankind can give to God.
- 8. Verse 9: What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.
  - a) There appears to be a contradiction in Paul’s letter to the Romans. On one hand, the Jewish people are “more special” than others. On the other hand, the Jewish people are not any more special than others. Let me explain further:
    - i) The Jewish people are more special in that God choose them to be His witnesses to the world. God entrusted them with His laws and predictions for the future (i.e., the collective works of the Old Testament).
    - ii) The Jewish people are not “more special” in that all humans are imperfect beings and God requires perfection to spend eternity with him. In other words, being a Jewish person is not an automatic ticket into heaven.
  - b) Paul ends these debate points by saying that all people are accountable to God no matter how little or much knowledge they have about Him. All people have this incurable “sin disease” and God demands perfection in order to be Him for eternity.
- 9. Verse 10: As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup>there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” <sup>13</sup>“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” <sup>14</sup>“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” <sup>15</sup>“Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup>ruin and misery mark their ways, <sup>17</sup>and the way of peace they do not know.” <sup>18</sup>“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
  - a) Sometimes, as a bible teacher, it is best to comment on parts of verses. Sometimes it is best to spend a lot of time explaining what each verse means. And sometimes, like right now, it is best to read 8 verses all together as a single unit.
  - b) These verses are quotes of Psalms 14:1-3; 5:9, 140:3, 10:7 and 36:1 and from Isaiah 59:7-8.

- c) I've always admire Paul's knowledge of the Old Testament. How he was able to remember and accurately quote all of this without bible software is amazing. ☺
- d) At this point, I encourage you to re-read this paragraph and look for words like "all" or "no one" or "not even one". The point of these quotes is that they apply to all humans.
- e) In a sense, the first quote is adequate for the whole paragraph.
  - i) It says, "There is no one righteous, not even one."
  - ii) The rest are colorful expressions that expand upon our human depravity.
  - iii) If Chapters 1-3 are "an army boot camp", then this passage is your typical army drill sergeant yelling at us-troops telling us how worthless we are. After convincing the soldiers how hopeless they are on their own, the army then sets out to make them into good soldiers through the army's training method.
    - a) That is a rough illustration showing us how bad God sees us without His help. It should make us appreciate all the more God's free gift of salvation simply based on our own depravity.
- f) The interesting thing about this paragraph is most, if not all of those quotes are addressed to the religious Jews, i.e., the "readers" of the Old Testament. The point is if "those guys" were thought of this way, imagine how bad it was for the nonreligious types!
- g) Another good exercise is to read this paragraph and put in your own name.
  - i) I already tried it. It's pretty depressing. ☹ At the same time, it should make us realize God's love for us and the fact He wants to save us despite our attributes.
- h) OK, it's time for me to play drill sergeant myself. I can see some people reading this and saying, "Well, I'm not that bad. For example, Verse 15 says, "Their feet are swift to shed blood". I've never been in a hurry to kill someone nor actually done it."
  - i) OK, has someone ever cut you off in traffic and you wanted to harm them? If you have said yes, welcome to the human club of murder-desiring depravity. ☹
  - ii) Have you ever been so angry at someone, you have for the moment, seriously considering killing them? Welcome to the human world.
  - iii) This reminds me of a cute joke. "Grandchildren are your reward in life for not killing your children when you seriously considered it." ☺
    - a) A point of that joke is all parents at some time have seriously considering harming their kids for some act they did.
- i) We are now two verses away from ending the section on "hopelessness". We will then start getting verses on "hope".
  - i) Paul is ending this section, which is the first 2.5 chapters of Romans by saying in effect, "Look, whether or not you are religious or nonreligious, moral or immoral, you may see yourself as better than someone else, but God doesn't. God sees all individuals as hopelessly sinful and going down the wrong path. Some people act out their thoughts more than others, but everyone, with no exception is hopelessly sinful and in effect, turns their back to God because deep down, we would rather be living our sinful behavior than living to please God."
    - a) In a sense, what Satan does is try to satisfy the desire we have for anything and everything that is not pleasing to God. All of these things bring some pleasure, or else we wouldn't want to do them in the first place. The problem is most, if not all of these sinful acts are never satisfying unto themselves and make us want more and more. God's laws are an attempt to set us down the right path. The problem gets back to my introduction where I said, "Without God, we can't".



- ii) That is why, these quotes of Psalms and Isaiah, when put together, show the hopelessness of mankind without God, period. Remember the earlier part of this chapter deals with the issue that God's word is truth whether we obey it or not. Part of that "truth" is understanding how bad we really are as human beings.
- j) One of the fundamental truths for both Jews and Christians is the fact that human beings are basically bad people who are capable of doing good.
  - i) Sometimes, we are capable of good based on self-discipline. I find that religious people do the most good for society. I've yet to see a hospital built by atheists. The point is that it is through God that such good occurs.
  - ii) The difference between Judaism and Christianity is that Judaism teaches that we can be good people by following God's laws to the best of our ability and live a good life based on our behavior. The problem with Judaism is it still doesn't deal with our incurable sin-nature. There is no assurance of salvation in Judaism because with good works alone, you never know how much is "enough".
  - iii) The "humanist" view, which is the opposite of the Judean-Christian model, is that humans are basically good people who sometimes do bad things. This model goes against the truth of God's word. It also puts a false-hope in mankind's ability to change on their own. It makes a "little god" out of mankind and self-discipline.
    - a) These verses shoot down the humanist view and teach just how depraved we are as human beings. Again, "without God, we can't".
- k) OK, two more verses on moral depravity and we can get into the more upbeat stuff. ☺
- 10. Verse 19: 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. <sup>20</sup>Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.
  - a) These verses can best be explained by an illustration. Let's say you're speeding down the highway driving at oh, 80 miles per hour. The signs on the road are clearly posted that read the speed limit is 50 miles per hour. You are guilty of speeding because you are aware that you are driving over the speed limit.
    - i) Now supposed there were no signs whatsoever. Suppose the place where you live never published the speed limits on the highway. It was never advertised anywhere and it is never discussed in driver's education classes. If you are now pulled over for speeding, you can claim your innocence out of ignorance.
  - b) That is why Jesus didn't die on the cross right after Adam and Eve sinned. God needed to show the world what His laws were. We can't be guilty of disobeying the law if we don't know what the law is in the first place.
  - c) I should point out that illustration is not technically correct. There is a difference between "innocent" versus "in-right-standing before God (righteousness)".
    - i) Before Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they were innocent, but not necessarily righteous before God. God gave Adam and Eve free will. They used that free will to choose the wrong thing. That means the desire to do wrong did exist even before they actually ate the fruit.
    - ii) And your point is? ☺ God is demonstrating through human history that the free will desire to turn from Him is harming our lives. Having free will is necessary in order to choose God in the first place. If we study the history of the human race, we also see the horrible things caused by deep-down desire to turn from God.
  - d) The classic question of "Why does God allow so much evil?" can be explained that we are sinful people and God allows free will. We need to have free will so some of us can choose God. God has to allow free will and also God has to allow sinful tragedies, partially to show how bad we are as human beings.

- i) This is why eternal judgment is necessary. The only way God can be “fair” to the human race, and make right the wrongs that are committed is to judge us based on our behavior.
- e) These verses summarize Romans to this point by saying that those who know God’s laws are accountable based on that knowledge. (Verse 19). The main purpose of God’s laws is to make us understand our sinful nature.
  - i) Again, those who never formally heard of God’s laws are still guilty as God has made us instinctively know for example, that stealing and murdering are wrong.
  - ii) In summary, we are all accountable to God no matter what we know of the Law.
- f) There is a classic pastor joke that goes as follows: A pastor shows up late to a pastor’s conference. He spots one empty seat near the back. He says to the guy sitting next to the empty seat, “Is this seat saved?” The other pastor sitting next to the empty seat says, “I don’t think the seat is even under conviction”.
  - i) What that joke means is people have to be convicted of their sins prior to realizing they need forgiveness (i.e., “saved”).
- g) Paul just spent almost three chapters in boot camp explaining just how bad we are as human beings. Now that our hopelessness has hopefully sunk in, ☺ we can discuss our “hope” of the cure for our internal, incurable sin disease. (i.e., verse 21)
- 11. Verse 21: But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.
  - a) Let’s start with “but now”. This is a reference to Jesus death and resurrection.
  - b) Here is Paul’s directly preaching of the Gospel message. It is saying there is a way to be in right-standing-before God (i.e., “righteousness”) without having to be perfect. To put it another way, we can be “perfect” without ever disobeying any of God’s laws.
  - c) Remember that Paul was writing to a primarily Jewish-Christian audience. The idea of not having to obey to perfectly obey God’s laws for salvation was a radical, foreign concept. At this point in the church history, many Jewish-Christians held the view that one still must obey the law, but still Jesus paid the price for sins. They didn’t grasp the concept that salvation comes from accepting Jesus payment and “that’s it”.
    - i) What many Jewish Christians feared is the idea that, “If all I have to is believe in Jesus, then we’ll all suffer from moral depravity and ignore God’s laws”. That is not Paul’s teaching and we’ll get to that later. The other fear is “What will happen to the promises given to the Jewish nation if that nation is no longer significant?” We’ll get to that issue in Romans Chapters 9 through 11.
  - d) Let’s get back to the text. Notice the phrase, “to which the Law and the Prophets testify”.
    - i) What does that mean? It is a reference to the fact that there are predictions about Jesus all through the Old Testament.
    - ii) “The Law and the Prophets” is a nickname for the Old Testament. The “Law” refers the first five books of the Bible, where the “laws of God” are located. The other books are collectively called, “The Prophets” as they are all written by and/or about people considered prophets of God.
    - iii) This verse is saying in effect, “There are bits and clues of the Gospel message all through the Old Testament, but now that the actual event of Jesus’ death and resurrection has taken place, there is no more mystery. Now that this event has happened, one can look back through the Old Testament and understand the prophetic passages with much more clarity.”

12. Verse 22: This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.
- a) Verse 22 is the Gospel message in “Paul’s vocabulary”. It is saying that anyone and everyone can go to heaven (i.e., a right-standing-with God, or “righteousness”) through faith in Jesus of His’ payment for our sins.
  - b) Does that mean all I have to do is believe Jesus is God, and that He died for my sins and then never change my life? Technically, yes, that can bring you salvation. However, God desires far more than that of our lives. To grow as a Christian is to trust in those facts and then change our behavior accordingly. If we truly believe Jesus is the “Lord” of our lives, then we act on that belief. Our behavior should then be evidence of our belief.
  - c) Verse 22 then says, “There is no difference”. That is the first verse of a long discussion on the topic that in terms of salvation, there is no difference between being a Jew and being a non-Jewish person prior to believing in Jesus. A lot more on this topic is later in Romans.
  - d) Verses 23 and 24 are among the most famous in the bible. It’s memorization time. ☺
    - i) Verse 23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.
    - ii) Verse 23 is a good summary of the book of Romans so far. The first 2.5 chapters of Romans show us how depraved we are as human beings. To put it another way, nobody is perfect, and a perfect God can only spend eternity with perfect people. God’s laws are His standard of right and wrong. Since everybody failed to live up to that God’s requirement, we can’t make it into heaven without the cross.
    - iii) Again, there are exceptions. God judges people fairly. People who die before an age of accountability are an exception. That is in Romans 7. Further, there will be many people in heaven who never heard of Jesus that God will judge fairly based on their limited knowledge of God.
    - iv) The point here is that “nobody’s perfect” and the perfect solution is to have a perfect God pay the perfect penalty for our perfectly sinful nature. (Now do you perfectly understand? ☺)
  - e) A key word is “redeemed”. That word is like when someone gives us a check, and then we take the check to the bank to cash (“redeem”) it. Our belief in Jesus paying the price for our sins was the “cashing of our check”. In this case, the check says, “You may now come to heaven as the price for your sin is paid”. Accepting that fact is cashing the check.
  - f) Another key word in Verse 24 is “freely”. Going back to my check-cashing illustration, we don’t have to do anything to collect that check. All we do is accept it. Paul even teaches that even our acceptance of that check is God’s gift. In other words, God “gets the credit” for putting the desire in our heart to “cash that check”. (See Ephesians 2:8).
  - g) We have now spent a few chapters on Romans saying how rotten we are as human beings. Given that, why did God do this? Why the “free-gift” of salvation?
    - i) The answer gets back to God’s love. If God is perfect in love, He needs to express that love upon “somebody”. He chooses us to express that love upon. He dealt with the sin issue so God can spend eternity showing us His love (See Eph. 2:6-7).
  - h) That leads to the classic question, “How do you know God picked me?” The answer is to accept Jesus as payment for your sins, and then you will know that God did pick you!
  - i) The other question is, “Why can’t we earn salvation by our efforts? Why can’t God give us a chance to show if we are “worthy” of Him?” In a sense God does give us a chance. That is what “life” and “history” is all about. With God “doing it all”, He gets the glory.
  - j) One reason Jesus came about 1,500 years after the law was first given was to show how much of a failure man is to keep the law. A purpose of history is to show man’s failure to be obedient to God both before and after God’s laws were formally given.

13. Verse 25: God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — <sup>26</sup>he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.
  - a) In the last few paragraphs I focused on God's love as a motivation tool. Now it is necessary to get back to God's justice. A big point of Romans so far is how bad mankind is and the necessity of God's justice in order to "set things right again".
  - b) Going back to my "perfect God" illustration, that perfect God can stand no wrong whatsoever. People must be punished for their sins for the sake of justice. The people who are harmed by sin require justice in order for God to be "fair" as well as perfect.
  - c) The purpose of the Cross is not only to demonstrate God's love for us, but also to demonstrate how seriously God takes sin.
    - i) In the Old Testament, especially in the Book of Leviticus, is a whole set of rituals and animal sacrifices necessary to deal with sins. One commentator referred to Leviticus as, "It reads like a book on how to carefully dispose of nuclear waste" (Phillip Yancey, paraphrase). The point is God takes sin seriously.
    - ii) All of those animal sacrifices "cover" sin, but don't eliminate our sin nature. For example, have you ever notice that after you sin, you still have the desire to sin again? We still have a "sin disease" within us even though we are forgiven. The antidote for our "sin-poison" isn't actually received until our next life. God leaves us with the sin-problem here and now to remind us of our dependency upon Him.
  - d) To summarize the idea of these verses, it would be like going to a courtroom and a prosecuting attorney shows you every sin you ever committed in your life. You and I are obviously guilty by the evidence. The judge then pronounces us guilty. But instead of the judge sentencing us to jail, the judge himself goes to jail for us. That is "God himself" paying the price for our sins out of His love for us. That illustration is a good summary of justification (i.e., just-as-if-I-have-never-sinned) by faith.
14. Verse 27: Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded.
  - a) I stated earlier that a purpose of the cross is that so we can't boast to God how "good we really are". If Jesus himself pays the full price for our sins, we can't brag before God about how good we are.
15. Verse 27 (cont.): On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.
  - a) The "principle" Paul is talking about in Verse 27 is that we can't brag before God about all the good things we have done. We are only saved by our faith in God.
  - b) I've stated many times that I am convinced Satan's greatest lie is one can go to heaven by "being a good person" or "our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds and God will let us in to heaven as the balance of good deeds wins out". That is completely contrary to Romans and the Gospel message. Paul has spent most of Romans so far discussing just how hopeless we are as human beings and how our efforts to please God is meaningless. Paul's message of "hope" comes from our faith in Jesus and not our efforts.
  - c) If all of that is true, what's the point of trying to be a good person? The short-answer is we live to give glory to God. We live to help mature other believers grow in their faith and trust in God. We live to tell others the Good News of Jesus. Our behavior does matter, but it is not about "earning points" to get into heaven.
16. Verse 29: Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, <sup>30</sup>since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. <sup>31</sup>Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

- a) There is an underlying “problem” for a Jewish person at this point: To paraphrase, “If I am saved by faith alone, what’s the point in being a Jew in the first place?” If I (speaking as a Jew) am part of God’s chosen people, what advantage do I have over a non-Jewish person? If I don’t get any special benefit for being a religious Jew, why bother?”
  - b) The short-answer, given in Verse 31, is that the Jewish people are responsible to “uphold the law”. That means God gave them the responsibility to make God’s laws known to the world. As I stated early in this lesson, they are “God’s librarians” to preserve His laws.
  - c) Notice that Paul states God’s laws are not nullified by faith. To put it another way, you can’t be guilty of committing a crime unless you knew it was a crime in the first place. God needed someone to show the world what “is” a crime (a sin). Thus the Jews were, are, and always will be God’s chosen people. Again, more on that fact later in Romans.
17. These lessons are primarily designed for those who already believe in Jesus. Let me summarize the next big question: “I pretty much know all of this. Now what?” ☺
- a) Reading the early chapters of Romans reminds us just how bad we are as humans. Let’s face it, our egos like to creep in on a regular basis and think that we’re not really that bad. We read our bibles, go to church, pray and start thinking we are morally superior to others. We have to revisit “boot camp” every now and then just to realize our daily dependency upon God for every aspect of our lives.
  - b) First, we have to realize that, “We are poisoned and God provided the antidote through His Son”. Then, the question becomes, “Once we’ve taken the antidote, how are we showing gratitude to God? Do we pray to Him for guidance as we need Him daily? Do we help others grow in their faith of Jesus? Are we praying for others who don’t have “God’s antidote” for sin? In other words, the real question is if we believe in Jesus, what are we doing about it? That is why Christianity is a “double-sided coin” of faith and action. We are saved by faith in Jesus. That faith should affect our behavior.
18. Let’s pray: Father, thank You for these reminders of just how much we need You. Help us to realize that any and all good that we do comes from You, and not through ourselves. As we live to glorify You, help us to keep our egos in check and realize we are no better than others. Help us to have humility as we are Your witnesses to the world. May You be glorified in all that we do, and realize it is You working through us, and not us acting alone. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.