



*Bible Study on
the Epistle to the
Romans*

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**I. Sin: The need for being
right with God (1:1–3:20)**

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- **1:1-3. Paul begins his letter with a brief summary of the gospel he proclaimed and the purpose of his apostolic ministry.**
- **Called refers to the effectual, divine calling as opposed to human self-appointment.**
- **An Apostle was a special messenger whose task was to spread the gospel message that had continuity with the OT.**
- **As a Descendant of David, Jesus Christ could lay claim to the throne of David.**

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- **In the Davidic Covenant, God promised that a son of David would rule Israel forever and provide security for her (2 Sam 7:8-17; 1Chron 17:1-15).**
- **None of David's descendants qualified, but Mt 1:1 identifies who it is: "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David . . ."**

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- 1:4-5. Jesus was declared the son of God with power.
- The resurrection signaled a change not in His essence but in His function and manifestation now as the “Son-of-God-with-Power” (Psa 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb 5:5).
- Paul’s apostleship existed to bring about the obedience of faith, which has an almost identical expression in 16:26.

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- 1:6-7. These verses indicate that the readers were predominantly Gentile.
- More important than their ethnic background was their *spiritual position, the called of Jesus Christ, called as saints, and beloved of God.*
- In this introduction, Paul presents his apostolic credentials and goals.
- He is the apostle appointed to take the gospel to the Gentiles so that they come to faith and begin to live like Christians to the glory of God.
- Our passion should parallel Paul’s!

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- **1:8-15. Paul gives the reason for his planned visit to Rome: so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established (v. 11), so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles (v. 13), and I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians . . . (v. 14).**
- **The spiritual gift is not specified.**
- **Paul would need to determine what kind of help they needed before he could specify what gift(s) he would use for their benefit.**

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- **Verse 14 provides the basis for his strong desire to minister with the Romans.**
- **He was under obligation and eager to do so, reflecting God's sovereign plans for him (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:16-20; 1Cor 9:16-23).**

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- 1:16-17. These verses are often seen as the theme verses for Romans, though they correspond better with chaps. 1–8 than 9–16.
- *For* (1:16) offers an explanation for Paul's eagerness to evangelize (1:15): I am not ashamed of the gospel.
- *For* (second occurrence in 1:16) gives the reason Paul is not ashamed: it is the power of God.

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- Power means "mighty potency; an effective, transforming force and ability."
- Salvation was a word used in Greco-Roman settings for an individual being rescued from some physical peril, perhaps from a burning house or from drowning.
- Here it is *God's deliverance of sinners from the eternal consequences of sin.*

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- Believes was used most often for trust or reliance upon a person and what he says.
- Paul uses it for one's reliance upon Christ for salvation.
- To the Jew first and also to the Greek probably describes the good fit the gospel of Christ is for the Jewish people (see 1:2-3).
- While it is true that the gospel came first to and then through the Jewish people historically (see John 4:22), Paul's point here in vv. 16-17 seems to be theological (note the words "power," "salvation," "everyone who believes") rather than historical.

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- Rom 1:2-3 appears to show the special relevance of the gospel to the Jewish people because it has its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures.
- *For (1:17) explains why the gospel is the power of God (1:16): in it the righteousness of God is revealed.*
- The phrase righteousness of [i.e., "that originates with"] God has become enormously controversial.
- Is this the covenant faithfulness of God?
- Is it God's act of announcing or undertaking the vindication of His people on the judgment day?
- No doubt it includes these elements.

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- But these signal what God's righteousness does rather than what it is.
- A better view is that the righteousness of God is God's moral virtue and excellence that prompts Him to do all that He does, including (among other things) bringing people into a proper relationship with Him, but also judging people for their sin.
- God's moral virtue and excellence includes His justice that leads Him to judge sinners, but also His love that leads Him (in Christ) to redeem them.

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- Paul's emphasis in this verse is on the latter.
- Paul will make it clear in 3:21-26 that the key is *not found in securing one's own righteousness by keeping the law*, but in God giving His own righteousness to those who have faith in His Son.

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- This righteousness is revealed (“fully disclosed”) from *faith to faith*.
- The latter phrase is difficult, and it is best not to be dogmatic.
- A parallel construction is found with “from” and “to” in 2Cor 2:16 (“from death to death” and “from life to life”).
- There the phrases suggest that Paul’s ministry resulted exclusively in death for the lost, and exclusively in life for believers.

A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

- In Rom 1:17, the construction probably designates that faith in Christ is the only way one can receive God’s righteousness.
- Paul cites Hab 2:4 for support.
- It should be translated “The one who is righteous by faith will live (be saved).”
- He uses the same verse in Gal 3:11 where he cites it to support how one receives eternal life (not through works of the law).

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 1:18. *For* explains why salvation is available only by faith (1:16-17).
- People are not able to establish a right standing before God because sin sabotages the attempt.
- Therefore a right standing before God comes only through reliance upon Christ.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- *Revealed* is the same word used in 1:17 for the manifestation of God's righteousness to those who believe.
- God's wrath is "fully disclosed" against humanity because all *suppress the truth in unrighteousness*.
- Paul introduces one reason for God condemning humankind.
- People possess some truth about Him but reject it.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 1:19-20. *Because* launches the substantiation for Paul's claim that people suppress knowledge of God.
- *This knowledge is evident within them.*
- *For* (1:20) introduces the basis for that claim.
- Paul mentions a paradox when he says that God's invisible attributes are clearly seen.
- Creation displays God's power and deity, so that when people suppress knowledge about Him available through the created order they are without excuse when He judges them for it.
- No one ever responds correctly to the light of God in creation.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 1:21-23. *For* continues the theme of people being without excuse, begun in 1:20.
- They choose not to honour and thank Him, and worship created things rather than the Creator.
- Three times Paul says people exchanged the truth of God for lies (1:23, 25, 26), and three times he says God gave them over (1:24, 26, 28) to practices that manifested His judgment against them in this life.
- As people reject God's standards and afflict themselves by their disobedience, their sin becomes their punishment.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 1:24-25. *Therefore* provides a logical conclusion from the action of people in rejecting knowledge of God.
- God gave them over first to degrading religious practices (1:24).
- In various ways, false religions cause their adherents to live in fear or engage in practices that cheapen their lives (*their bodies are dishonoured*) and bring God's judgment.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 1:26-27. People “exchanged the truth of God” for idols (1:25); For this reason God gave them over, this time to perverse sexual behaviour (homosexuality (MSM)/lesbianism/bestiality).
- Some claim that Paul is saying that it is wrong only for those whom God did not create as homosexuals to engage in homosexual behavior (the underlying thought being that God has created some as homosexuals, a contention that is unsubstantiated in science or Scripture).

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- Others argue that God is forbidding the ritual homosexuality practiced in Greco-Roman religions.
- The text says neither.
- The statement indicates that the homosexual behaviour is a form of judgment against those who reject the knowledge of Him.
- If it is a form of His judgment, then the people of God must neither practice nor condone it.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 1:28-32. People *“exchanged” the natural function of the sexes (1:26) and abandoned knowledge about Him in creation (1:28)*; therefore, God gave them over, this time to social problems (unrighteousness, wickedness, greed) as a form of His judgment.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 2:1-2. *Therefore* (v. 1) connects with the idea of God’s judgment mentioned by Paul in 1:18-19, a judgment that encompasses all of humanity.
- *You have no excuse* (or “no defence”) picks up the idea from 1:20, where people have no defence before God on the day of judgment, for everyone suppresses and rejects the knowledge of God they have from creation.
- God’s judgment *rightly* (lit., “according to the truth”) comes upon people.
- That is, it comes upon them “according to the truth,” according to the facts of how they actually live.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 2:3-5. Moral people are presumptuous in their thinking.
- They strive to live a principled life, do not (usually) act as those in Rom 1, and assume that God will overlook their occasional moral lapse because they really do strive to be good.
- They do not have as many practical manifestations of God’s **judgment** in their lives as those who do not strive to be good, as seen in chap. 1.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- They mistake this lack of present judgment for God's approval, and as proof that they will escape His eschatological judgment.
- That God does not vent His wrath upon them to a great extent in this life is designed by Him to cause them to recognize His goodness and turn to Him (**repentance**).
- But if they do not repent, they will face **the righteous judgment of God** (v. 5).

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 2:6-11. Verse 6 continues the sentence Paul began in v. 5.
- God will render to each person according to his deeds is a key for the rest of chap. 2.
- God judges based on how well one lives his moral code.
- The key is what one does in his or her life, not the honourable rules for living which one applauds.
- God will render eternal life (v. 7) or wrath and indignation (v. 8) based on how one acts.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- This interpretation is shocking in light of Paul’s consistent point that salvation is always and only by grace through faith in Christ (cf. 1:16-17; 3:21-26).
- Scholars debate whether Paul is speaking of true believers whose good works demonstrate their regeneration, and Paul surely held this belief (cf. Gal 5:16-19, 24; 6:8).
- But here Paul explained what is necessary to be right with God *apart from faith in Jesus*.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- There is no clear indication that Paul referred to believers in vv. 5-11, and he made it clear that people do not obey the truth (v. 8; cf. 1:18, where unbelievers “suppress the truth”) and obey unrighteousness (cf. 1:29, where they are “filled with all unrighteousness”).

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- All people sin and consequently deserve the wrath that awaits them.
- The phrases *to (or of) the Jew first and also to the Greek* (vv. 9, 10) indicate that there is essential equality between both people groups regarding both the prospects of judgment, or of salvation apart from faith in Christ.
- But there is a place of prominence for the Jewish people because of their special privilege in God's programme, both as it relates to righteousness and to judgment (cf. the comments on 1:16, and Amos 3:2; Luke 12:48).

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 2:12-13. *For* (v. 12) introduces Paul's explanation about God impartially judging all people on the basis of their deeds.
- Sinful actions make one liable to judgment, whether that one has the law or not (v. 13).

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 2:14-16. *For* (v. 14) signals that Paul gives the basis for maintaining that a Gentile without the law of Moses will perish in God's judgment.
- Based upon the natural circumstances of their birth, Gentiles do not have the law, but sometimes do instinctively the things of the law, probably a reference to its moral requirements (e.g., loving one's neighbour; not bearing false witness) rather than the ceremonial aspects (sacrificing a red heifer).

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- When those who do not have the law sometimes do some of the things prescribed by the Law of Moses (the work of the Law, v. 15), they are a law to themselves, i.e., Gentiles indicate that they have their own moral code that overlaps with the law.
- God created humanity with a sense of right and wrong (cf. 1:32), and while Adam's fall damaged that, it did not erase it altogether.
- One's moral code may be as rudimentary as "treat everyone fairly" or "be nice to everyone."

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **That moral code is an imperfect reflection of the morality God instilled in humankind, seen most clearly in the law.**
- **The problem is that no one lives up to whatever moral code he or his culture approves.**
- **As a result, their conscience bears witness to how well they have kept their own moral code, and will accuse or defend them on the day of judgment.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **Each one's conscience will say, "You kept your moral standards when you did this and this . . ."**
- **But the conscience will also say, "You broke it here and here and here!"**
- **God knows the secrets of men, i.e., what their conscience tells them, and He will use these accusatory thoughts as evidence for condemnation on the day of judgment.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **Although Gentiles do not have the OT law, they are still sinners and will still face condemnation from God.**
- **There are some who claim that God would give eternal life to someone who never hears about Jesus, as long as that person responds correctly to the light of God in creation, is sincere in his own religion, and is kind to other people.**
- **But Paul indicates otherwise.**
- **Such a Gentile is still a sinner, even on the basis of his own moral norms, and as a sinner will experience God's judgment and wrath.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **2:17-24. Paul begins to turn his attention to the sinfulness of those in covenant with God, the Jewish people.**
- **He noted the special privileges the Jewish people enjoyed (vv. 17-20), but also their failure to live up to their privileges.**
- **Paul's point is not that every single Jew has stolen or committed adultery, but rather that the Jewish people as a whole have acted with such sinfulness that they disqualified themselves from being used by God to enlighten the world.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **Worse yet, by their sinfulness, they served to dishonour God (v. 23).**
- **The same thing can be said about Gentiles who profess to be Christians, but live ungodly / scandalous lives.**
- **They harm God's reputation now as much as unbelieving Jews did then.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **2:25-29. Circumcision (v. 25) was viewed by later generations of the Jewish people as a virtual guarantee of eternal life (according to ancient rabbinic commentaries), and may have been in Paul's day as well.**
- **Sin in the life of a circumcised Jew canceled out the benefits of circumcision.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **Conversely, if a Gentile kept the law and did not sin, he would receive the benefits of the covenant people of God.**
- **Once again, Paul's point is that disobedience brings condemnation whether one is a Jew or not, and obedience without sin brings salvation (vv. 26-27).**
- ***For* (v. 28) begins an explanation as to why being circumcised does not guarantee salvation.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **Here only in chap. 2 does Paul refer to believers, in this case exclusively Jewish believers, and his point is to argue that being right with God comes as He performs spiritual surgery upon the heart, not as one complies with the letter of the law, by undergoing circumcision in the flesh (v. 29).**
- **Note that Paul is speaking only of true, believing Jews in these verses.**
- **Gentile believers are not in view, and the idea that Gentile Christians are the new Israel is foreign to this section.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 3:1-2. If both Jews and Gentiles are in equal danger because of their sin, as Paul said in chap. 2, then what benefit is there in being Jewish?
- Paul concedes that the Jewish people do have an historical advantage over Gentiles.
- They were entrusted with the oracles [the Hebrew Scriptures] of God is one advantage Paul mentions (see 9:4-5 for others).

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 3:3-4. Paul was apparently seeking to correct the idea held by many that God promised to save virtually every Jewish person.
- In response, Paul wrote that God's promises include not only promises to save, but also to judge (cf. Deut 30:15-20; Jer 16:10-15).
- He cited Psa 51:4, David's confession of sin with Bathsheba, where David recognized that God was just to punish him for that sin.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- Whenever a sinner, whether Jewish or Gentile, stands in the courtroom of the Judge and pleads his case, the Judge will *always* be found to be in the right and will win the case.
- When the verb are judged is in the middle voice as it is here, it often means “to go to court” or “to engage in a legal dispute,” and is the likely meaning here (so NIV; HCSB).

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 3:5-7. Paul put another argument on the lips of an imaginary opponent, a rhetorical device called “diatribe” (v. 5; for other examples of diatribe, see e.g., 2:3; 3:1; 6:1-2, 15; 9:19; 11:1, 11): “My unrighteousness (moral corruption) demonstrates just how morally excellent and virtuous God really is.
- Therefore, a person might object that since my sinfulness does God a favour by making Him look so good, He is not *unjust or unfair*, and therefore will not condemn me!”

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **However, if a Jewish person could use this argument, so could a Gentile, for their lives were arguably more corrupt, and could make God look better still.**
- **Therefore, it would be unfair of God to judge Gentiles (the world, v. 6).**
- **But the Jewish people relished the prospect of God judging the Gentile world, and would not have conceded this point to Paul.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **3:8. Some accused Paul of teaching that one should sin more to give God a chance to bring greater glory to Himself by providing more grace to counteract it.**
- **See the comments related to this in 5:20–6:2.**
- **But this is a misrepresentation of Paul's views, and any Jewish antagonists who assigned this belief to Paul deserved the condemnation they received.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **3:9-18. The question, Are we [the Jewish people] better than they [Gentiles]? probably looks back to the advantage of having the oracles of God in 3:2.**
- **The Jewish people had advantages, but without a proper response to them, they were no better off salvifically than Gentiles.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- **Paul wove together several OT verses, cited loosely, to support the theme of humanity's universal plight.**
- **Verses 10-12 describe humanity's rejection of God (from Psa 14:1-3).**
- **There is none who seeks for God (v. 11) should be understood with its full force, and does not allow room for anyone to respond positively to the light of God in creation.**

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- If it were not for God seeking people, no one, left to their own motivation, would seek Him.
- Verses 13-14 describe the harm that comes from words, vv. 15-17 the harm that comes from actions.
- Paul loosely cites several OT passages (v. 13 = Psa 5:9; 140:3b; v. 14 = Psa 10:7) that indicate the comprehensiveness of humankind's spiritual disease.
- In vv. 15-18 he cited Isa 59:7-8, written by Isaiah about the sin of the Jewish people (Is 58:1,14), so that Paul, once again, included them in the world's troubles.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- 3:19-20. *Whatever the Law says* (v. 19) includes Gentiles, since all people are under some kind of moral code that they fail to keep adequately (cf. 2:12-16).
- Therefore, everyone is accountable (“subject to being prosecuted and found guilty”) to God.
- The reference of works of the Law (v. 20) has become astonishingly controversial.
- Works of the Law refers to deeds the Law requires in order for one to remain in a proper covenant relationship with God.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- Paul mentioned works of the Law again in 3:28, but in 3:27 he used the solitary noun “works”, also used alone in 4:2, and the cognate verb “work” in 4:4, 5.
- *Works* without the phrase *of the Law* refers to general (religious) deeds anyone might do to enter into or maintain a right relationship with God, but *works of the Law* refers to the religious deeds from a Jewish vantage point, since their religious deeds were defined by the Mosaic law.

B. the need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)

- Doing the Law does not save a person, for one intent of the law was to inform Israel about what sin was (through the Law comes the knowledge of sin) so that she could avoid God’s judgment and be used by Him to mediate His grace to the world.
- But the Law of Moses was not designed to save *per se*.
- Salvation came through responding to God in faith in response to the promises He made in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:6), never through keeping the law of Moses (see Gal 3:6–4:7).