

Romans 3

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The Truth about Ourselves and God

At the end of chapter 2, we saw that circumcision of the flesh does not make one a real Jew but, rather, circumcision of the heart—inwardly by the Holy Spirit—makes us true Christians, true descendants of Abraham, and thus true Jews even though we were not born as such (see Galatians 3:29). As we continue with this discussion, the writings of Dr. Boice (1) continue to be a considerable aid.

Remember, there were no chapters and verses in the original writings of this great book of Romans. There were no pauses for bathroom breaks or going to the fridge for some goodies. The thought processes throughout the book are continuous, and so to understand Romans in its entirety, we cannot take a break either.

The Advantage of the Jew

Romans 3:1–2

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

The logical question Paul raises here is this: if the really important point is whether the Spirit has changed our hearts, then what benefit is there of being physically a descendent of Abraham? In Romans 3:2, he provides the answer.

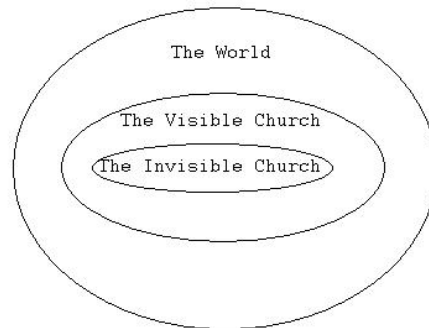
Of all of the tribes and nations on earth, God chose Abraham's descendents to have His Word. The Egyptians did not have the Law and the Word of God, so they had to seek other sources to try to understand the universe and their place in it. Similarly, every other tribe had to search for truth and meaning outside God's truth. Likewise, the members of the visible church¹ today have an advantage over other people in the world because the true Word of God is read to them at least once a week (if they regularly attend services). Just as every physical Jew was not a true believer of God, and many Jews today are not true believers of God, many members of the visible church are not members of the invisible Church² and so are not true believers. The members of the visible church still have a great advantage over the rest of the people of the world, however, because they are within a group that is entrusted with the truth of Jesus Christ, and are, therefore, closer to the truth than those who never attend church at all. Members of the visible church who are not members of the invisible Church see the grace of God every Sunday that they participate in the Lord's Supper and baptism, but the grace received from those ordinances is not applied to them. Instead, they are like Jews who have been circumcised but who are not really believers of God. So there is a great advantage—and greater judgment—to

¹ The visible church is any organized group of people who claim to be Christians such as Baptist, Presbyterian, etc. This group consists of people who are not Christians and those who are Christians.

² The invisible church is the true people of God, the ones who have truly accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and have been reborn spiritually by the Holy Spirit of God.

being a Jew just as there is great advantage and a greater judgment to being a member of a visible church.

We can visualize this separation of the world, the visible church, and the invisible Church somewhat by using the following diagram, composed of three circles. In this diagram, we see that the members of the visible church, who are not members of the invisible Church, are closer to the truth, but yet outside of the truth.



Beginning in Romans 3:3, however, Paul continues to examine this concept:

God Remains Faithful and Just

Romans 3:3–8

What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, “That Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, And mightest prevail when Thou art judged.” But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) May it never be! For otherwise how will God judge the world? But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just.

The fact that some Jews are not believers and some Baptists, Presbyterians, etc. are not really Christians does not invalidate God’s faithfulness, because He has presented the truth to both Jews and Greeks. Remember, God’s faithfulness is not dependent upon our being faithful (2 Tim 2:13). Even if there were not a single person in the world who really believed the truth of God, His truth would still be The Truth.

Some said that by our acts of sinfulness we were shining a light on the absolute righteousness of God, so why not act more sinful to further demonstrate God’s righteousness? This is such a distorted mindset that it hardly deserves an answer, and understandably, Paul says emphatically “May it never be!” If God needed our unrighteousness to demonstrate His righteousness, how could He judge the world? It is very difficult to imagine anyone saying that he should practice sinfulness so that righteousness may come. Judas certainly did evil that God used to bring about the ultimate righteousness of every chosen person, but Judas cannot claim a reward from God for his actions. Evil is evil and righteousness is righteousness. God used the evil acts of Pharaoh, the Babylonians, and many others to accomplish His righteous goals, but

they do not receive the rewards of God. God uses acts of unrighteous people to accomplish His righteous acts, but the evil people are certainly not part of God's Kingdom.

Paul continues to further demonstrate that apart from the acts of God, there are no righteous people at all.

All Are Under Sin

Romans 3:9–12

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one.

This is a perfectly clear message that does not require any elaboration. Including both Jews and Greeks encompasses every person on earth. Nobody is righteous on his own, nobody understands the truth about the universe on his own, nobody seeks the true God, nobody does any good in the sight of God, and even if all joined together in a united effort, they would be totally useless in the sight of God. Even our best deeds, our own righteousness, are filthy before the holiness of God (Isa. 64:6). Make no mistake, Romans 3:9–12 is a total condemnation on all of mankind! But if somehow we did not understand that concept in these verses, Paul goes on to explain further in Romans 3:13–18.

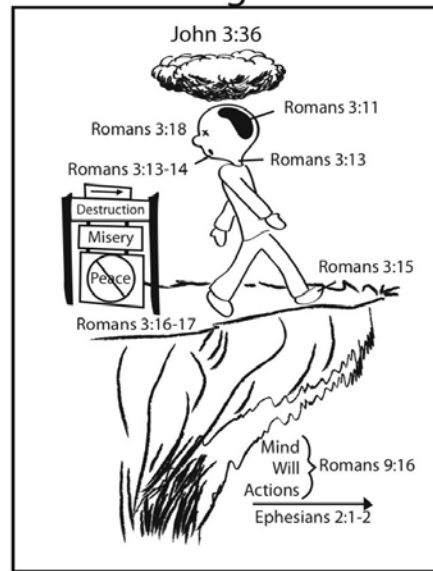
Awful Spiritual State

Romans 3:13–18

Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; Their feet are swift to shed blood, Destruction and misery are in their paths, And the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

This diagram illustrates our state before regeneration:

None Righteous



Except for our opposing thumbs, which separate us from most animals, nothing in this representation allows anyone to have any sense of pride, and we did not have anything to do with having thumbs! A dead person cannot do anything in the sphere of existence in which he or she is dead. We were *spiritually dead people*, and therefore, could not understand anything that is of a true spiritual nature.

Today we need to be careful about the use of the word “spiritual.” We have to ask, “How do you define spiritual?” A former vice president of the United States and his wife have written a book entitled *The Spiritual Family*, but how do they define “spiritual”? On page six of my article on chapter one of Ephesians: <http://livingtheology.com/EphesiansOne.htm> I quoted from a Spiritual Wellness advertisement:

This course offers a number of exercises and activities that address the spiritual dimension of wellness. Based on the National Wellness Institute’s spiritual dimension of wellness, the activities will focus on seeking meaning and purpose, and peace in human existence. The NWI model encourages seeking answers to philosophical questions such as: ‘Why am I here?’ and ‘What is life all about?’ Although for some, organized religion provides answers, the exercises provided will focus on spirituality as opposed to religion. The course will be interactive, and participants will engage in application of the exercises. (Course part of the Holistic Wellness Certificate)

Note the writers of this ad say they are focusing on “spirituality as opposed to religion,” but what sort of religion does not focus on spirituality? So we go back to the dictionary and find “spirituality” defined as: “The state, quality, or fact of being spiritual.” Then we look up “spiritual” and find it defined as: “Of, relating to, consisting of, or having the nature of spirit; not tangible or material; Of, concerned with, or affecting the soul; Of, from, or pertaining to God; Of or belonging to a church or religion; pertaining to or having the nature of spirits or supernatural.” We then look up “supernatural” and find: “That which is traditionally believed to be the vital

principle or animating force within living beings; that which constitutes one's unseen, intangible being; the essential and activating principle of a person or the will."

Now we can discern that the writers of this ad are separating spirituality from religion and, therefore, from God. Instead, they believe that every human being has a "vital principle or animating force," which they are attempting to manipulate toward some sort of "peace in human existence." We often hear people talk about "spiritual wellness," characterized by some high spiritual experience, but remember that this is apart from anyone's understanding of God or from any religion at all. So what are their standards for spiritual wellness? What are their guiding principles for obtaining it? Whose meaning and purpose are they striving to obtain, and whose definition of peace are they using? Without any external standard, such people will search without any guidance except their own feelings. But when will such searching be declared successful? Since these same people reject any absolute standards or any absolute truths, the searching is totally individual and thus subjective, and thus, there are an infinite number of possible answers that are different for each person. This process sounds like chaos, and any peace that these people obtain will be short-lived, as undoubtedly some other life event will occur to perturb them from their "peace," so they must begin the search all over again. From the above definitions, we can glean that the searching can involve spirits. In this light, these people can include astrology or mediums in their searching processes or perhaps some sort of "natural drugs" as some groups have used. In any case, these people go through life precariously perched upon a moving standard that is not based upon any absolute truth.

Christians, on the other hand, have as our definition for spiritual wellness: "Of, from, or pertaining to God." We then have an external, fixed standard—a life totally in harmony with the revealed nature of the Creator of all that is, the God of the Bible. Our concept of life is that people were originally created in the image of God, having a trinity of a body, soul, and spirit: "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). Original sin resulted in spiritual death. Paul talks about our restoration to the image of God in Christ in 1 Thess. 5:23. As a result of the original sin, all people born after that time were of the image of Adam, meaning having only a duality—a body and a soul: "When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth" (Gen. 5:3).

This state of being born in the image of Adam is why Jesus said that we must be born again: Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

The second birth is the birth of our spirit, so we can respond to spiritual things, meaning those things pertaining to God. So when each of us was physically born, we possessed a body and a soul, but because we had no spiritual component, we could not understand anything spiritual. We behaved as people of this world under the leadership of Satan ("the prince of the power of the air"). Notice that Paul also said that Satan is "the spirit that is **now** working in the sons of disobedience." We bold the word "now" because some people think Satan's defeat at the cross and Christ's resurrection was total, for all time, beginning then. There is certainly a sense in which Satan was defeated then and forever; however, this defeat is still not yet worked out in the world, as we can easily see by reading the daily newspaper or watching TV. There is still evil in the world that will continue until Jesus returns.

Remember, Jesus taught us to pray: "Thy kingdom **come**. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). He also taught us to pray: "And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). Obviously, the Kingdom of God is not totally here yet or there

would be no evil in the world, so we talk about the Kingdom of God **future**. Certainly, God's will is always done, for He is sovereign; however, the kingdom is only here spiritually. The total working out of the physical establishment of God's kingdom on Earth is still a future event for which we are commanded to pray. Satan is still roaming about (1 Peter 5:8). We began our lives walking according to "the course of this world" (Eph 2:2). The word "course" means "onward movement in a particular direction; the direction or path taken by something that moves, as a stream."

The natural movement of the world is the one taken according to directions given by Satan, as Paul told us. When we are regenerated, we are now moving "upstream," so to speak. Have you ever tried to swim against the current? It is very difficult to move in a direction counter to the natural movement of the world. The unregenerate think we look very foolish, working so hard to move in this unnatural direction when we could just relax and let the current carry us down stream. Of course, they do not know they are being led toward destruction. This worldly mindset says, "If it feels good, do it" and "Live life to its fullest, for you only have one trip here." These people have no true spiritual life, so they cannot answer the deep philosophical questions such as "Who am I?" "What am I doing here?" and "Where am I going?" To the regenerate person, however, these questions have easy answers: "I am a child of God"; "I am here to glorify God"; and "I am going to live forever with God." All of our philosophy is God-centered, and thus carries eternal meaning. The world's philosophy changes as mankind drifts further and further away from God, seeking spiritual wholeness, but without knowing the meaning of what they are seeking. They are blind people with no reference point, no means of determining a preferred direction in life, and therefore, without hope. And we were once just like them as we can read in Eph. 2:12!

Law Gives Knowledge Only

Romans 3:19–20

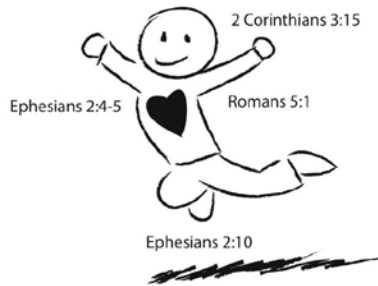
Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

One purpose of the Law is to show us that we have no defense before God, that we are all guilty and accountable to Him. The Law only shows us how depraved we are and that there is no chance for us. We read in James 2:10 that even the smallest infraction in truth makes us guilty of all the Law so we all stand guilty. So is it possible that some people have sufficient deficiency of depravity that they can still choose to come to God? Consider what Jesus said: "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44).

The Greek word translated "draw" is a forceful word also used in secular writings concerning drawing water from a well. We have to be *dragged* by the Father to the Son. None of us has any innate desire to choose God (Rom 3:9-12). Only God can cause a person to be born again with a new heart and with eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mind that can comprehend the things of God. The following drawing pictures the person after God's regeneration. This person is now capable of choosing God.

New in Christ

John 1:12



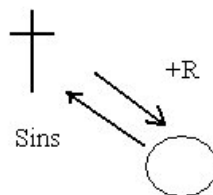
Paul now gets to “the meat of the matter.” Everyone has sinned. Nobody can be justified before Holy God by any of his or her own actions. The only way to be justified in the sight of God is by the means He made possible—by faith (given by God) in Jesus Christ, our justifier.

Cure for Sin

Romans 3:21–26

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God effected a wonderful double imputation in the lives of His chosen people. He put the sins of these people on Jesus Christ so that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. He then imputed the righteousness of Jesus Christ to our account so that now, before God, we have no sin and only righteousness as shown by the following diagram where +R is for the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Praise God!



2 Cor 5:21

Double Imputation

Faith Establishes the Law

Romans 3:27–31

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

Now we understand that we can boast of nothing on our own behalf. God has worked a wonderful act in the lives of His chosen people, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. We also see that since God has imputed to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ, then we, who are His chosen children, are in total obedience to the Law in the sight of God, for Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Law for us. The Law was given first to the Jew and then passed on to the entire world. Nobody could obey the Law but Jesus Christ, God Himself. God then arranged for Christ to take His wrath for the sins of all of His chosen children throughout all ages and to impart His righteousness to those same people. In that sense, the Book is closed! At least for those who are His children, certainly the loop is now closed. Now we are all working out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12) as we await our final glorification.

Praise God! Amen