

The Universality of Unrighteousness

Romans, Part XV

Romans 3:9-20

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I. God's Wrath Against Unrighteousness

II. A Litany of Objections

- What then is the advantage of being a Jew? (3:1-2) *Much in every way!*
- Jewish unfaithfulness doesn't nullify God's faithfulness, does it? (3:3-4) *Certainly not!*
- God's ability to turn unrighteousness to His glory doesn't undermine His righteous judgment or human responsibility, does it? (3:5-8) *Certainly not!*
- So are we Christians better than Jews and Gentiles? (3:9-20)

III. The Universality of Unrighteousness

A. The Question Asked & Answered (9)

⁹What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

Who is the "we"? I think that the "we" refers to _____ not *Jews* (cf. 2:17ff; 3:1-3). Paul is applying what he has been saying about *both Jews and Greeks*, about *them*, to himself and his audience, the Roman Christians. His answer? "*Not at all.*" Christians too are born with sinful hearts.

B. The Answer Established (10-18)

¹⁰As it is written:

¹¹	"There is <u>none</u> righteous, no, <u>not one</u> ; There is <u>none</u> who understands; There is <u>none</u> who seeks after God.	[Ps 14:1; Eccl 7:20] [Ps 14:2-3; 53:2-3]
¹²	They have <u>all</u> turned aside; They have <u>together</u> become unprofitable; There is <u>none</u> who does good, no, <u>not one</u> ."	
¹³	"Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips";	[Ps 5:9] [Ps 140:3]
¹⁴	"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."	[Ps 10:7]
¹⁵	"Their feet are swift to shed blood;	[Prov 1:16; Is 59:7-8]
¹⁶	Destruction and misery are in their ways;	
¹⁷	And the way of peace they have not known."	
¹⁸	"There is no fear of God before their eyes."	[Ps 36:1]

So let us note the progression of Paul's quotations. First, his quotation of Psalm 14 emphasizes the *universality of sin* (10-12). Paul then cites various texts that describe the way our sinfulness manifests itself (13-17), the _____ that it actually bears. Finally, he concludes his quotations by identifying the _____ of our rebellion (18). As John Calvin writes, "*all wickedness flows from a disregard of God*" (Calvin, 67).

An Outline of Romans

- I. Introduction
 - A. Opening Greeting (1:1-7)
 - B. Travel Plans (1:8-15)
 - C. Theme (1:16-17)
- II. Credenda: "The Righteous by Faith" Shall Live
 - A. God's Wrath vs. Unrighteousness (1:18-3:20)
 - B. The Revelation of God's Righteousness (3:21-5)
 - C. The Triumph of God's Righteousness (6-8)
 - D. The Universality of God's Righteousness (9-11)
- III. Agenda: The Righteous "Shall Live by Faith"
 - A. Transformed not Conformed (12-13)
 - B. Patient not Proud (14-15:13)
- IV. Conclusion
 - A. Paul, Minister to the Gentiles (15:14-21)
 - B. Travel Plans (15:22-33)
 - C. Closing Greetings and Benediction (16)

C. The Significance of the Answer (19-20)

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

In these verses, Paul is helping us understand what the quoted Scriptures establish: universal sin and guilt. Those who possess the law are not exempt from the general human condition but are enabled to understand it more fully. Hence, our fundamental problem is not in the privileges we do or do not possess but in our _____. Law and conscience simply reveal our sinful nature; that we are unable to be justified, set right with God, by anything that we can do.

IV. Bad News for the World

A. The reality of moral rules (cf. Rom 1:32; 2:15, 18; 3:20)

Moral laws outline God's expectations for us as human beings. Since we are made in God's image, we are moral creatures, created to operate according to God's moral law. Violate the law and bad things happen – in this life and in the next.

So how do we learn these moral laws or what Paul calls "*works of the law*" (3:20)? Some learn "*the works of the law*" through the _____, that is, the Scriptures (cf. 2:18). Others learn "*the works of the law*" through their _____.

B. The proper function of moral rules (3:20)

So what is the proper function of the law? Does the law show us the path to peace with God? Paul answers, "*Not at all!*" The proper function of the law is to define what is right and wrong and highlight our guilt. "*By the law,*" Paul writes, "*is the knowledge of sin*" (20b). The "law" reveals that all are sinners in need of forgiveness and salvation.

Our own moral deeds cannot deliver us from God's wrath. Why not? Because none of us does *the works of the law*. This is the lesson of ancient Israel. Our problem is not that we lack moral rules but that we fail to observe those we know. We are sinners.

C. The end or goal of moral rules (Rom 8:3-4; 10:4; Gal 3:24)

³For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:3-4)

V. Conclusion