

Sent: Wednesday, November 08, 2017 5:45 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Romans 3:1-20

Last nite we had the last of three lessons, covering Romans 1:1-3:20, demonstrating the desperate need for all people--both Jews and Greeks--to have God's righteousness because of the sin and "wretchedness" of the human heart and the resulting divine wrath that's due them! "Walk Through the Bible" teacher J. Vernon McGee called this section of Romans a "sinner-rama"! And we began our time together by singing the great old hymn, written by Charles Wesley, "And Can It Be!"--which helped prepare us for this lesson discussion!

By the end of Romans 2, you'd think that all Paul's readers would have grasped his basic point! Jews and Gentiles stand on the same footing before God, since both have been given "general revelation" about God through creation--and the Jews have been given additional "special revelation," through the Law and other Old Testament writings! And yet they both had failed miserably in living up to God's requirements! But Paul, being a Jew himself, and having been a scrupulous student of the Law, and thus understanding how religious-oriented Jews thought about things, knew that they really weren't convinced about their "lost estate," and that he needed to make his case clearer! And so, in our lesson last nite (in 3:1-20), Paul began by asking, and answering, for a likely inquirer, four basic rhetorical questions--beginning with the question as to whether the Jews had, in fact, an advantage over the Gentiles on these religious issues, because of who they were and how they lived!

In answer to this first question lurking in their minds, Paul, surprisingly--based on his earlier assessment of their standing--wrote most emphatically that they clearly had an advantage! After all, they "were entrusted with the very oracles of God" (among other things noted in 9:3-5, and elsewhere). They knew that God had given them "His very words" through the Law and many detailed instructions on how to live and be blessed! (According to John MacArthur, the Bible claims 2,600 times to be the "Word of God"!) And they knew (although not noted here) that God had actually chosen them to be the people through whom He would reach the whole world! And they, of course, were even given the "rite" of circumcision, which was a "sign" of His eternal covenant with Israel! And they were told through Moses that "if they would indeed obey God's voice and keep His covenant, then they would be His possession among all peoples...and a kingdom of priests...!" (Exodus 19:3-6)

God had also given the Jews first opportunity to receive His Son! Jesus said (in John 1:11) that "He came to His own, but that His own received Him not..." And after His ascension (in Acts 1:8), the gospel message was first given witness in Jerusalem, and then to Judea and Samaria; and then to the rest of the world"! Paul and Barnabas followed this pattern as well by first speaking to the Jews, on the Sabbath--before "being repudiated...and turning to the Gentiles!" (Acts 13:45-47)

And so, did the Jews have an advantage? Yes, they certainly did! What Douglas Moo calls a "salvation history" advantage!

Then Paul's second rhetorical question: Wouldn't God be unjust if He nullified His promises and faithfulness to the Jews--just because they were (sometimes) a bit unfaithful (the way they

viewed it)? To this Paul responds, "May it never be!" God would always be faithful and just in keeping His promises, including by demanding a penalty for sin as well--an idea confirmed by his reference to Psalm 51. In this example, a "broken" and repentant King David, acknowledged his grave sin of adultery with Bathsheba, recognizing that his sin was "against God, and God alone...and evil in His sight..."--and that God was therefore totally "justified when He spoke and blameless when He judged"! As they knew, from Old Testament teaching, David was judged severely for his sin in this life--but, also, that God had faithfully kept His covenant (made in II Samuel 7:12-13) to "raise up a descendant after Him" (Jesus Christ, the "son of David") and to "come forth and establish His kingdom"! MacArthur calls Psalm 51 the classic passage in the Old Testament of man's repentance and God's forgiveness of sin!

Moo writes that "God's faithfulness to His word (vs. 3-4) includes His commitment not only to bless His people but also to punish them for their sin"! And in future lessons, we'll learn more about the all-important truth about how God can be both "Just and the Justifier" of them who turn to Him!

But on to questions three and four (in 3:5-8)! Why should God punish the Jews for their sin ("minor sin," they probably thought!) if their sin actually manifested and magnified God's glory and grace? In fact (question four), wouldn't it perhaps be better (for God!) if they sinned even more? Since it would only make God's mercy and grace, by contrast, appear even greater and more glorious?

How absurd, Paul responded! "Shall we do evil that grace may abound?" It hardly warrants a further response! Moo writes: "God cannot overlook sin, even when it becomes an occasion for a greater display of His mercy and glory!"

And so, this brings us to the very heart of our text (vs. 9-18), where Paul concludes that the Jews are really no better off than the Gentiles in their standing before God, because of the "sin problem"! They're all (and we're all!) "under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one!" (Romans 3:10, which just happens to be our memory verse for this lesson!)

Then, in the verses that follow, Paul uses five quotations from Psalms and one from Isaiah to show how sin affects all aspects of the human personality--what he says, what he does, and how he thinks! And the "universality of sin"--how we're all (Jews and Gentiles alike) under the power and dominion and condemnation of sin!

The quotation in vs. 15-17, taken from Isaiah 59:7-8, is considered by some as one of the most forceful passages in all of Scripture, depicting the "total depravity" of man--something that affects all of man's being--and all people, Jews and Gentiles!

Interesting that the quotes from Psalms, according to Thomas Constable, "would normally be read within the synagogues as a way of bolstering the assumption that the (Jewish) righteous could plead against the (Gentile) wicked"! But Paul makes it clear that these were directed primarily to the Jews themselves! And he does this by including verse 19: "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law (and that would be the Jews!),

so 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...!"

And then the closer (in vs. 20), that seals Paul's case--and that prepares us for the "good news" of lesson to follow! "Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin!" Galatians 3:24 amplifies that understanding: "Therefore the Law has become our tutor (KJV says "schoolmaster") to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith!" The Law was (again, in the words of Thomas Constable) "never was intended to provide people with as a series of steps that would lead them to heaven, but to expose their inability to merit heaven!"

J. Vernon McGee put it this way: "To hold onto the Law is like a man jumping out of an airplane; and instead of taking parachute, he takes a sack of cement with him!"

William Newell wrote: "It is no kindness, but a terrible wrong, to hide from a criminal the sentence that must surely overtake him unless pardoned; for a physician to conceal from a patient a cancer that will destroy him unless quickly removed; for one acquainted with the hidden pitfalls of a path he beholds one taking, not to warn him of his danger!"

In Romans 3:1-3:20, Paul has given us the "bad news" of mankind's desperate sinful condition before a holy and righteous God--all in preparation for the "good news" of His mercy and grace, which is to come! And we'll be getting into that in more detail, beginning next week as we look at Romans 3:21-32 and a new section on the "imputation of God's Righteousness"! And can it be!

Have a great week, men!

Lowell