

Romans – Fall 2023 D-Groups

For Wednesday, September 13
Romans 1-3 with a Focus on 3:21-31



The Big Picture - Romans 1-3

(Throughout the Fall, we'll make our way through the entire book of Romans. Even though our primary focus in D-Groups is on a smaller text, we encourage you to read this broader section.)

In 1:1-17, Paul provides a typical opening to a 1st century letter. There is a particular emphasis on the Gospel/Good News (they mean the same thing = the announcement of what God has done for us in Jesus). That reaches a climax in verses 16-17 where Paul lays out a basic theme for this letter as a whole. It's all about the Good News that God saves us through our faith in Christ - not only from the eternal consequences of sin, *but also* from its power. ("Saved" means to be made whole or put back right - as in restored to health; Romans highlights both dimensions of God's salvation.)

From that point on in Romans 1-3, there are several ideas that emerge, but the over-arching message focuses on these related themes: **(1) our problem of SIN** and **(2) God's solution of SALVATION through Jesus**. In a way, this is over-simplifying the complex argument Paul develops in these chapters, but it's good not to "miss the forest for the trees." We could break it down like this:

Through 3:20 = diagnosing the human PROBLEM of sin - Paul establishes that everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, has sinned and, as a result, is deserving of God's wrath (see 1:18-32). People choose to reject His authority and His way, replacing Him with substitutes (*i.e.* "idolatry"). As a result, He "hands them over" to experience the consequences of sin - both the earthly *and* the eternal - as judgment. In this way, His wrath is the righteous expression of His holy character against rebellious creatures even as He wants to extend kindness that leads people to repentance (2:4). While the people of Israel viewed the Law as the solution, even it couldn't really fix the problem. Paul drives home the point about this universal sin problem (*it infects everybody!*) with a rapid-fire selection of OT texts in 3:10-18. *He even summarizes the theme in 3:23 as the text moves from the problem to the solution God's provided in Jesus.*

3:21ff = God's SOLUTION of salvation through faith in Jesus (a single text that clarifies and explains the Good News) - We flesh out this section in "The Close-Up" below, but first, let's complete this summary. Verse 21 marks out something new with the words "**But now ...**" In other words, in spite of the problem of all humanity, including a failed solution like the Law, God has provided a real solution in Jesus ... one that actually works! Occasionally, something comes along that revolutionizes how we go about life (think in terms of a discovery or an invention). On a far greater level, through the Gospel, God has provided a revolutionary new solution for the problem of sin. Through Jesus' death on the cross, He received on Himself the punishment we deserve; through our faith in Him, we are made right with God. In this way, God is both true to His character *and* able to save us from our sins. **Good News indeed!**

If you are interested in looking at this broader section more deeply, there are a few videos in a RightNow Media series on Romans by Michael DeFazio that are helpful.

The Close-Up - Romans 3:21-31

Some notes on these verses (a great section to memorize - whatever you can from this chunk!):

3:21 ... this transitional verse celebrates the revolutionary way we can be made right with God in spite of our sin (*i.e.* we can be declared “not guilty!” by the Judge - a legal term; each of us can be made to be “**just-as-if-I’d**” never sinned). It’s not through the Law, even though it’s consistent with the Law and the Prophets - the whole OT anticipation of Jesus.

3:22 ... the only way for this to happen is through faith in Christ. One way to read this verse is that it’s actually about *Jesus’* faithfulness - He has kept God’s standard, making salvation available to sinners. Through faith in Christ what He has accomplished becomes ours.

3:23 ... a summation of the diagnosis that all have sinned.

3:24-25a ... the basic message of the Gospel (see Ephesians 2:1-10) - we are made right with God because of His grace and through our faith. This text has 3 major words connected to our salvation: **(1) “justified/made right”** (a legal term meaning we’re declared to be “not guilty”), **(2) “propitiation” or “sacrifice of atonement”** (a term describing a sacrifice that satisfies God’s wrath - what Jesus took on for us as our substitute) and **(3) “redemption” or “freed us”** (a term to describes a slave whose freedom has been purchased).

3:25b-26 ... with this solution, God even reaches backwards to sins committed previously. Through Jesus’ death as the One faithful to God’s standard, God is able both **(1) “be just”** - have integrity as the Judge because the penalty has been paid (faithful to His righteous character) and **(2) “be the Justifier”** - He makes righteous those who place their faith in Jesus.

3:27-31 ... a tremendously important implication: there is absolutely ZERO room for boasting in Christ! Why? Because anyone who is “in” can only be in because of faith in what Jesus has done. As it’s been said, “the ground is level at the foot of the cross.” No matter who we are, when we turn to Jesus in faith, trusting His death as a substitute for our sins, God forgives us. That has implications for how we think about our own salvation (it’s only by His grace) *and* how we think about others (in Christ, I can be no better than anyone else).

Some additional questions to reflect on leading-up to next week’s D-Group:

- ***Why does it matter that we understand the Good News/Gospel and how it works?***
- ***What happens when we diminish the problem of sin? Think about it like a diagnosis. What happens when we get it wrong, even when it comes to solutions we propose as fixes?***
- ***Consider the words used in 3:24-25a (see above). How do they each help us capture an angle of salvation? Reflect on the picture they each paint for us re: the Good News.***
- ***One of Paul’s purposes in Romans is to deal with a divide between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome. It’s why he uses the phrase “there is no distinction” in 3:22 (see also 1:16) - both in the problem of sin and in faith as the only solution, it doesn’t matter. How does the Good News level things for all of us, regardless of any earthly distinctions?***
- ***Reflect on vv. 27-31 and Paul’s words about boasting. How does it change our perspective when we see salvation as a free gift as opposed to a wage we’ve earned/deserve?***