

## No One Is Righteous

Romans 3:1-20

KV 20: "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin."

Has anyone in here stood trial in the court of law? If you have, think about that experience, if not, I would like to share an experience I had with you. Several years ago, I was pulled over for turning on a red light. The sign said "No Turn on Red, 7AM-7PM," it was about 6:55pm, and I saw no traffic, so I thought to myself, well, close enough, and I made the turn. Within one minute I saw red and blue flashing lights behind my car, the policemen took my driver's license away, and required that I go to court to get it back. That day in court was a frightening day for me. I had always had this habit of bending the rules a little bit when I drive. Sometimes I can drive over the speed limit. Sometimes I don't come to a complete stop at a stop sign. I used to turn on red before 7PM when there was a sign that said not to, but I don't do that anymore. When I'm not in court, sometimes I don't follow all of the traffic laws. Perhaps that is the case for most of you – maybe some of you believe you are above the traffic law (just kidding)! But standing before the judge I am silent, I know I am guilty, and I have nothing to say for myself. The truth is, I violated the traffic law.

Now put yourself in court at the judgment seat of God. Rom 2:16 tells us that there will be a day when God will judge people's secrets through Jesus Christ. While you were here on earth, before that judgment day, maybe you bent the rules a little. You stole some candy when you were a kid even though you knew it was wrong. You cheated on some tests or copied homework from a friend. What will you say to God? But here's where it gets even more serious. Suppose you never stole candy. Suppose you never cheated on a test. In fact, you tell God – "I've kept all your commandments. I never murdered anyone, I never committed adultery, I never stole, I never slandered anyone, I never lied, ever, and I honor my father and mother. All these I have kept since I was a boy." Yet even when all these are kept, you are declared guilty. Why? Because you cannot follow all of God's law. Many of us can't even follow all the traffic laws. The law cannot and will not save us. The law only shows us that we are lawbreakers.

However, some of us don't realize *that we violate God's law*. The court date is years away, so the fear of the God is not in our mind. In fact, if I may generalize, I think that most people in this country believe they are good people, and they don't need God telling them what to do or how to act. But as for us who do believe, how well do we know God's law, how often do we think about, observe or obey it? Some people may say, if the law cannot save us, what good is it for? Gal 3:24 says, "So the law was our *guardian* until Christ came that we might be justified by faith." The laws of God are our guide, they are our guardian, and so it is important to know it. They are in essence the 10 commandments, but can also be summarized into 2 commandments. Even in traffic court, the first thing the judge will say to everyone is, "I don't want to hear that you did not know that was the law. I don't care. It's your responsibility to know the law." Ignorance of God's law will not help us, it may even be dangerous, but the knowledge of God's law, though it cannot save us, leads us to the truth of our sin and to Christ who can save us.

*The knowledge of the law was the advantage of being a Jew.* Ch.3 starts with the question in v.1, “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?” The answer is in v.2, “Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.” In the beginning, God had created a perfect world, and lived in perfect fellowship with Adam and Eve. After they disobeyed God, sin and death entered the world, and God hid his face from his people. From then on, every nation would live as they saw fit, and turned from God to worship idols. Nobody knew how to live right before their Creator – but through his word God would show the Jews what was required to be right in God’s sight. He gave them the law, the 10 commandments, and made a promise to them that if they obey these laws, he would be their God, and they would be his treasured possession. Ex 19:5 says, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Moses said to the Israelites in Deut 4:7-8, “What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?” The world did not know God. The gods they served were false gods, mute and dumb idols that were also blind and deaf. But through God’s word, the Jews would know God personally and intimately.

Even with such a great blessing, the Israelites became unfaithful to God. Eze 20:13 says, “Yet the people of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not follow my decrees but rejected my laws – by which the person who obeys them will live – and they utterly desecrated my Sabbaths.” So what happens now? Does God give up on his people? Does he say, that’s it, I’m through with you, the deal’s off? That’s the issue Paul would bring up in v.3, “What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness?” Now look at the answer in v.4, “Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar.” Paul gives an emphatic, “Not at all!” Our God is a faithful God, despite the fact that we are unfaithful.

We break promises all the time, but when God makes promises, *he never breaks them*. Matt 24:35 says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away,” the words that go out from God’s mouth do not return to him empty, they accomplish what he desires and achieves the purpose for which he sent it (Isa 55:11). He promised that Abraham would become a great nation (Gen 12:2), and Abrahams descendants, physical and spiritual, are as numerous as the stars today. He promised King David that his direct descendant would be king of the eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7:16), and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came to fulfill that promise. The promises that God makes for his people are promises for us as well. One promise that comes to mind is what Jesus said in John 10:28, “I give [my sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.” Once we belong to the Lord, nothing will be able to snatch us out of his hand. This is a wonderful promise! God is not like a man, who can lie or break promises – God is always true and we can trust in Him.

We must “Let God be true, and every human being a liar.” That means, every time we question the character or integrity of God, or any time we blame God, *God is always right*, and we are always wrong. Because of our unrighteousness and sinful nature, we tend to judge or criticize God if something doesn’t turn out the way we want it to. Some people might say, “Why did you put me in this situation God?” or, “I’m mad at God because he took something (or

someone away.)” This reveals our lack of faith in God. Isa 40:13-14 says, “Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counselor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? What was it that taught him knowledge, and showed him the path of understanding?” What position are we in to teach the Lord knowledge, when He is the one who teaches us? Or listen to what the Lord said to Job when he appeared to him in a storm, in Job 40, 2,7-8, “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him! ... Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? *Would you condemn me to justify yourself?*” That is a question we should ask ourselves when we judge God – are we discrediting God? Do we condemn God to justify ourselves?

I was speaking with a friend who was about to get evicted from his apartment, and he said if he got evicted, he would kill himself. I tried to reason with him, and said if he did that, without believing in Christ, he would send himself straight to hell. He said he couldn’t take it, why is God making him suffer? Why does he always seem to have such bad luck all the time? He said he wished he was never born, and questioned why God made him. And I told him that he was blessed, because in some ways, God is keeping him from the corruption of the world, and in a better way, God is calling him to put his trust in Christ, that he was not born for this world, but given an opportunity to receive eternal life. We prayed before we parted, and the next time I saw him, he was in a calmer, more peaceful mood, and said that he would be able to stay in his apartment until at least through the winter.

I can’t say whether he truly has accepted Christ, but I think we both understood that God heard our prayer. The point to this all is, when we judge God it really comes from a lack of faith in Him. Isaiah 40:27-31 comforts us: “Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God’? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” Our God gives us strength, we can trust in God.

Paul addresses more criticisms people have of God in v.5-9 to continue to prove that God is true and faithful, but man is a liar. Look at v.5, “But if our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument)” In this argument the person is saying that God is unjust, because his unrighteousness is bringing God glory by bringing out His righteousness. But this argument fails because God is not unjust. He is the judge of the world, he by definition must be just to be the judge.

The same argument is restated, but in a slightly different way, in v.7, “Someone might argue, ‘If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?’” In this case again, man is a liar. He is saying “I should not be condemned because I am bringing God glory.” This is a lie because the goal of sinners is not to glorify God – the goal of sinners is to please themselves. It’s actually only coincidental that God

is glorified by the unrighteous – because when the two interact, God is clearly more glorious, and the unrighteous clearly more vile. So you see even in this situation, the unrighteous are trying to take credit for something they are not even doing. They say they're glorifying God, but they are not. In addition, sometimes they also slander God's people. Paul exposes the heart of the deception in v.8, "Why not say – as some slanderously claim that we say – 'Let us do evil that good may result?' Their condemnation is just!" The lie is this – doing evil does results in good. As they tried to justify themselves, they actually condemned God and God's people, therefore, their own condemnation is deserved.

For the past 4 weeks we have dealt with the sinfulness and unrighteousness of man, from first a Gentile perspective, then last week and today, a Jewish perspective. Paul is now preparing to conclude the matter, and puts everyone on equal standing. Look at v.9, "What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin." This is the reason that we cannot follow and obey the law: it is because we are all under the power of sin. We are oppressed and enslaved by the power of sin, which makes it impossible for us to obey the law. From the first people on earth, Adam and Eve, we inherited the sinful nature, and no one is exempt. Some people might object and say, "I didn't ask for it," or "that's not fair," but these do not excuse our sins against God. Some people are born Caucasian, some Korean, some Mexican – but you did not ask for these. Neither did you ask to be a man or a woman, or what height you will be, or what color your eyes are. In the same way we are all born into a sinful race – with our sinful attitudes and behaviors described in detail in verses 10-18. Within these verses there are 3 groups: the first is a sinful heart, the second is a sinful mouth, and the third is sinful actions. The root cause of these is described in the last verse.

The sinful heart is described in v.10-12: "As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.'" The sinful heart does not seek God, nor does it care to seek God. It has no understanding that God is his creator, his sustainer and author of life. It has no understanding that it is sinning and violating God's law. When approached on the subject of God, it either turns away, avoids it, or attacks it. So then it becomes worthless, unable to find true and everlasting life, or lead others to it. Titus 3:3-6 says, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." A sinner cannot turn back to God by his own righteousness – a sinner turns back only by God's mercy.

Look at v.13-14, "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." These all describe sinful mouths. People's throats are like open graves, from it come the vile stench of death and decay, or they are pits for people to fall into. With their mouths they practice deceit, flattering or manipulating people to get their way. The poison of vipers is on their lips, their words can sting and bite and hurt. Those with mouths full of cursing and bitterness speak hatred

against others. James 3:6 says, “The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell...No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” Wow. And this is true, sometimes I wish that I had never said some things that come out of my mouth. And does anyone remember those teenage years when you thought it was cool to put a curse word in between every word? Even today we may stumble and say a thing we regret. This is evidence of our sinful natures still with us.

Verses 15-17 describe sinful actions – can we look at those together: “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.” I don’t think any of us here have feet swift to shed blood – in other countries though, like Syria, many innocent victims are being killed caught in the middle of a civil war. Closer to home, some have witnessed personally a crime epidemic in Chicago, where recently the number of shootings have increased. When I read an article about this, the main areas are those that are border lines between gang territories, and another reason being a breakdown in gang leadership. Young kids are killing each other for stupid things now, maybe for just a dirty look, for being made fun of, or some other trivial reason. For the young criminals, ruin and misery undoubtedly mark their way, and they shall never find peace, unless they find it in the Lord.

The root of all the sinful behaviors above is described in v.18: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” They do not fear God, they do not have an awe or respect for God, and so they have no respect for God’s laws. They do not understand, do not seek God, and do what is right in their own eyes. Prov 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Prov 8:13-14 says, “To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have insight, I have power,” and finally Prov 16:6 – “Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord evil is avoided.” How may we get understanding? How may we receive sound judgment for sound speech? How may we avoid evil? By having a healthy fear of the Lord.

Now to conclude, please look at v.19-20, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. No one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.” The law does not make us righteous, but convicts us of our sins. The Jews can no longer boast in having the law. In Rom 1:15, the law convicts Gentiles in their hearts. Whether Jew or Gentile, every mouth is silenced before the judgment seat of God, because everyone is guilty of sin. James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all.” We are guilty of breaking the whole law of God – and our hearts deceive us if we don’t believe it. Our condemnation is deserved, and we can say nothing to justify ourselves. The punishment for sin is everlasting punishment. We desperately need God. We desperately need his mercy. While the law cannot save us, God, in his loving kindness, has provided a righteousness apart from the law that can save us – and that is through faith in Jesus Christ, His Son. We will learn about that more next week.