

Romans 2-3

1. The “New Paul” perspective (Dunn, Sanders, Wright, and others) holds that the Jews of Paul’s day weren’t concerned to perform righteous acts in order to be saved. For New Paul, the Jews already considered themselves saved and performed acts of Jewish observance as a way to *remain* within the people of God. From this view, Paul isn’t arguing against legalism, but against Jewish partiality, pride and exclusivism. Stott makes the case that both are present here, legalism and ethnocentricity.

If there is a way to be proud, Christians have done it. Here are three examples: (1) Believing that your newly converted adult friend can’t possibly learn the Bible as well as you, not having had the benefit of a Christian upbringing¹; (2) Assuming that Christian behavior is significantly different from that of the surrounding culture, when in fact most American Christians are 90% American and only 10% distinctively Christian; (3) Not looking to other denominations or branches of the Church to see what they have to offer, since they fall down in a particular area. Can you think of other examples of Christian pride to watch out for?

2. Read Deuteronomy 10:15-17; Matt 3:7-10; Luke 18:9-14; John 8:31-47. Is Paul saying anything in Romans **2-3** which goes beyond what Moses, John the Baptism and Jesus taught?²
3. First-century Jewish identity depended on “boundary markers”, including the kosher and other ceremonial laws, Sabbath observance, circumcision, etc. These were elevated so they were considered not just a sign but a guarantee. For example, first-century Jews has an almost superstitious confidence on the saving power of circumcision, as demonstrated by the Rabbinic epigram, “circumcised men do not descent into Gehenna” (Stott, 92). In **2:12-16**, Paul addresses the law as a boundary marker, and in **2:17-3:8** he turns to circumcision.

Paul makes it clear that the *only* condition for membership in God’s people is faith in Christ (**3:27**, “Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith”). Imagine an anthropologist from Alpha Centauri visits earth and attempts to discern Christian boundary markers without knowledge of human languages. What would the anthropologist conclude if it studied fundamentalists in Georgia, Amish in upstate New York, Orthodox Christians in Greece, or our church here in Rochester?

4. In **3:21-28** Paul brings his argument home and argues that faith alone is important, not works of the law, not ethnic background and not observance of Jewish cultural boundary markers: “all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (3:24). “Justified” translates the verb *dikaioō*, which is a legal term indicating acquittal; the justified person has been declared innocent. Some scholars have equated this with granting a pardon, but it is very different [Stott, 100]:

To condemn is not merely to punish, but to declare the accused guilty or worthy of punishment; and justification is not merely to remit that punishment, but to declare that punishment cannot be justly inflicted... Pardon and Justification therefore are essentially distinct. [C. H. Hodge]

The voice that spells forgiveness will say: “You may go; you have been let off the penalty which your sin deserves.” But the verdict which means [justification] will say: “You may come; you are welcome to all my love and my presence.” [M. Loane]

¹ Okay, I was guilty of that one. Two of my atheist friends converted in grad school and wow, they studied the Bible *like a boss*.

² See also Lev 26:40-45; Jer 9:25-26, 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27, 44:9.

- . On a scale where 1 is pardon and 10 is justification, how do you experience God's justification?
 - . Pardon is consistent with our weekly confession and plea for forgiveness. Is justification?
 - . When *you* forgive the sins of a friend, spouse, relative, coworker, etc., do you pardon or justify?
5. There are three ways Paul uses justification (*dikaioō*) differently from Jews of Paul's day [Moo, 87]: (1) justification was in accordance with the facts (as it says in Prov 17:15, "acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the Lord detests them both"); (2) it generally occurred at the same time as judgment, not aeons before; (3) it applied to the case at hand, whereas the justification Paul describes applies to future sins as well.
- Focusing just on the first of these, and using Romans 3, how can God acquit those God *knows* to be sinful?
6. In **3:10-18** Paul strings together a number of quotations, primarily from the Psalms, regarding human sinfulness.
- . True or false, in the wider context of each of these quotations, God addresses the named wickedness? (Hint: it's true. In the privacy of your own home read Isa 59:7-21, marveling that God planned all along to deal with human sinfulness himself.)
 - . How many body parts are named in 3:10-18?
7. In **2:12-16**, Paul says even Gentiles have a conscience which serves as a sort of law, parallel to the law of Moses for the Jews. Stott, commenting on this passage, writes,

...it is often said that we should address ourselves to people's conscious needs, and not try to induce in them feelings of guilt which they do not have. This is a misconception, however. Human beings are moral beings by creation. That is to say, not only do we experience an inner urge to do what we believe to be right, but we also have a sense of guilt and remorse when we have done what we know to be wrong... Thus conscience is our ally. In all evangelism, I found it a constant encouragement to say to myself, 'The other person's conscience is on my side.' [Stott, 89]³

There are many atheists who seem nothing like the Bosch-painting debauches of Romans 1. Many are thoughtful, giving and show integrity. If you are thinking of sharing the gospel with such a friend, how might you make use of his or her conscience? Is Stott's advice useful not just for open-air preaching but also for relationship evangelism?

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Fun fact: "Indeed, justification is 'by faith alone', *sola fide*, one of the great watchwords of the Reformation. True, the word 'alone' does not occur in Paul's text of verse 28, where Luther added it. It is not altogether surprising, therefore, that the Roman Catholic Church accused Luther of perverting the text of Holy Scripture. But Luther was following Origen and other early Church Fathers, who had similarly introduced the word 'alone.' A true instinct led them to do so." [Stott, 117, emphasis added.]

Fun contrast: Paul: "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded" (Rom 3:27). Donald Trump: "I am proud to be a Christian."

³ Wesley has a similar philosophy: "I think, the right method of preaching is this: At our first beginning to preach at any place, after a general declaration of the love of God to sinners, and his willingness that they should be saved, to preach the law, in the strongest, the closest, the most searching manner possible; only intermixing the gospel here and there, and showing it, as it were, afar off.

After more and more persons are convinced of sin, we may mix more and more of the gospel, in order to 'beget faith,' to raise into spiritual life those whom the law hath slain; but this is not to be done too hastily neither." (*Works of John Wesley* [Jackson Edition], 11:486-6)

Leader's Notes

In chapter 1, Paul condemns humanity for its sinfulness. If that chapter made Gentiles squirm, these chapters will do the same for Jews. Here Paul dismantles reliance upon the law and ethnic privilege.

Perhaps the most important passage here is 3:21-28, where Paul describes justification by faith. And the key insight there is the use of *dikaioō*, a term which means God declares sinners not just pardoned, but innocent. It is a surprising and breathtaking turn.

The two things, then, to focus on, in these chapters, are Jewish “boundary markers” and justification by faith.

Notes on Romans 2-3

a. Outline

i. *2:1-11: Don't judge; we are all sinners*

1. 2:1-3: Since *all* are sinful, no one can look down on anyone else
2. 2:4: Judging others is scorning God's patience; "God's kindness is meant to lead to repentance"
3. 2:5: Their impenitence leads to God's wrath
4. 2:6: *For* God repays our *deeds*
5. So: Paul draws this parallel structure:

Those who judge others	Those who don't
Despise God's kindness and patience and forbearance	
Impenitent heart; storing up wrath	
Those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality	Self-seeking and obey not the truth but wickedness
Eternal life	Wrath and fury
anguish and distress	Glory and honor and peace

6. .

ii. *2:12-16: What matters is keeping the law and doing right, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile*

1. (So Paul is coupling here heart attitude toward God and one's fellow, with a moral life; these appear to go hand in hand. Using the two-roads approach he's removing the option of saying you are righteous and approved of by God while not showing humility and mercy toward your fellow.)

iii. *2:17-24: Far from being good examples the Jews bring shame on God*

1. Jews say they
 - a. Rely on the law, the embodiment of knowledge and truth
 - b. Boast of their relationship with God

- c. Know his will and are instructed by the law
 - d. Are sure they are guides to the blind, lights to those in darkness, correctors of the foolish, teachers of children
 - 2. They do the very sins they accuse others of, and so need to teach themselves, not others
 - 3. It's because of them that God is blasphemed among the nations
- iv. *2:25-29: Circumcision is nothing; ethnicity is nothing; following the law is everything*
 - 1. 29: "A person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal"
- v. *3:1-8: What advantage is it to be a Jew?*
 - 1. 2: Jews were entrusted with the scriptures
 - 2. 5: God is right to show his wrath to Jews who are wicked
- vi. *3:9-20: All are sinful*
 - 1. 9: Both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin
 - 2. 11-18: All are sinners
 - 3. 19-20: No human being will be justified by obedience to the law since the law shows us our sin
- vii. *3:21-26: The righteousness of God has been revealed, apart from the law, to all, since all have sinned, a righteousness though faith in Jesus' atoning death, as a gift*
- viii. *3:27-31: God justifies Jew or Gentile by faith, not by works of the law—since there is only one God, so his means of justification is the same for all. This doesn't overthrow the law.*

b. Themes and question ideas

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c. Left to do:

- i. Review notes taken so far
 - 1. Read Matera
 - 2. Finish Wright