

**Romans 3:1-20 Answers**  
**Red & Yellow, Black & White,**  
**They are Worthless In His Sight**

**Background:** Paul did not start the church in Rome but he was excited about going there to encourage the church, to be encouraged by the church and to preach the gospel to the lost.

**Themes:** Since Paul had never been to Rome, one of his purposes in writing was to lay out for them the gospel that he preached. Rome had potential to be an important base of operations. It was critical for Paul and the Romans to be on the same page regarding the gospel.

**Overview:** Romans has 16 chapters and 5 sections: Sin, Salvation, Sanctification, Sovereignty and Service. Today we continue on in the first section: Sin (1:1-3:20). The main idea of this first section is that all men are sinners, both Jew and Greek, and liable to God's wrath.

**Review:**

**Based on 1:16, how can a person get the God's power for salvation? (Reread).** It is for everyone who believes. Righteousness comes by faith. The Reformers called this *sola fide*.

**“To the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16):** Chronologically, salvation came to the Jew first, then to the Greek (1:16). In chapter 1, Paul wrote that God's wrath is upon those who suppress the truth about God. In chapter 2, Paul taught that simply knowing the law of Moses and being circumcised did not exempt the Jews from God's wrath since they committed the same sins as the people described in chapter 1. Not only is salvation to the Jew first (**1:16**), but also is judgment (**reread 2:9-11**).

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**\*\*\*\*What warped logic did Paul condemn in this paragraph (3:1-8)?** Paul condemned those Jews who said that God was wrong to inflict wrath on them since **1**) their unrighteousness served to show the righteousness of God (3:5) or **2**) because their lies caused God's truth to abound (3:7) or **3**) because their evil caused good to come (3:8). That's crazy talk!

**ESV Romans 1:22** Claiming to be wise, they became fools . . .

**\*\*\*\*1. What advantage did the ancient Jews have over other ancient peoples (3:1-2)?** (*Reread aloud*). See ahead to 9:4-5. The advantage they had was having been entrusted with the oracles of God.

**Word Study:** “Oracles” (3:2) is from *logion* which fundamentally refers to an utterance. In this case it refers to God's precepts and promises (Thayer #3051). In Acts 7:38, *logion* is used to refer to Mosaic Law. According to the *New Bible Dictionary*, oracles are “divinely authoritative communications before which men stand in awe and to which they bow in humility (p. 860). Israel was the only nation on earth that God made a covenant with and through which came the Messiah.

**Perspective:** This (3:1-2) was true in the first century in a way that it is not so true today. For the past 2000 years the Gentiles have been entrusted with the oracles of God: the Greek scriptures, the new covenant, the law of Christ and the Gospel. The Gentile church has now had the gospel longer than the Jews had the Law of Moses when Paul wrote this.

**2. What had Paul written in chapter 2 that prompted him to ask the question of 3:1?**

*Compare 2:17-19.* In Romans 2 he made the point that neither being Jewish nor knowing the Law of Moses nor circumcision makes a person acceptable to God. This fact naturally raised questions about **1)** the purpose of God's work with the Jews and **2)** God's faithfulness to promises made to the Jewish people. The truth dealt with in 3:1-2 is that there was still advantage to being born Jewish because the Jewish people at least had access to true revelation from God. (The problem was a lack of faith).

**\*\*\*\*3. What important truth about God is brought out in 3:3-4? (Reread aloud). See ahead to Romans 9 -11.** These questions and answer make the point that God is faithful to His covenant people and promises, despite their faithlessness (2:17-24). It was necessary for Paul to make this point to head off any misunderstandings based on what he had written in chapter 2. Though he deals with it here in only a cursory manner, he will deal with this issue in depth in Romans 9-11.

**“Some” — Not All:** Paul's question was what if “some” were unfaithful (3:3) — not all. There were righteous Jews, like Paul, who had the same faith as their forefather Abraham.

ESV Romans 11:5 . . . at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

**4. In 3:4, Paul quoted Psalm 51:4. What point does the quotation make?** The point is that God is just in all He does and will prevail over those who judge him otherwise.

**Technical Note:** There is a difference in reading between Paul's first century quotation from the Greek Septuagint (the LXX) and the Hebrew text as we have it today (the Masoretic text, which dates from just before A.D. 1000). It seems to me since he quoted from it that the more reliable of the two would be Paul's Septuagint version, which incidentally is also preferred by the Eastern Orthodox Church.

**\*\*\*\*Based on 3:5, what did Jewish unrighteousness show? (Reread aloud).** Their unrighteousness highlighted God's righteousness.

**5. How exactly did Jewish unrighteousness serve to show the righteousness of God (3:5)? See back to 3:3-4.** God made unconditional promises to Abraham and his descendants that God was faithful to fulfill despite the faithlessness of Abraham's descendants. Their disobedience highlights God's faithfulness all the more. The darker the night, the brighter the light.

**What false conclusion did some people reach, based on 3:5?** Evidently some disobedient Jewish people in the first century insanely thought God would be unrighteous to inflict wrath on them. Such is the insanity of sin sickness.

**6. Why did Paul feel the need to add parenthetically, “I speak in a human way” (3:5b)?**

He clearly was very uncomfortable even writing such thoughts and he wanted his readers to know these were not his thoughts but those of the unrighteous Jews.

**7. Paul answered his own question of 3:5 with “by no means”. What did Paul mean when he next asked, “for then how could God judge the world” (3:7)?** The idea is that if God could not judge the Jews since their unrighteousness showed forth God’s righteousness, then neither could he judge the rest of the world (the Gentiles). Here is the truth:

**ESV Romans 2:9** There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek . . .

**\*\*\*\*8. What are the answers to the questions of 3:7-8?** Liars are rightly condemned as sinners because lying is a sin. It does not matter that their lies cause God’s truth to abound more and more. It is insane to advocate doing evil that good may come. That is like saying Hitler should not be condemned because world war two led to the advancement of science. These people tried to justify their sin, to rationalize it.

**ESV Romans 9:20** . . . who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"

**Based on 3:8, with what false accusations was Paul dealing?** Those who opposed the gospel were claiming Paul taught people to do evil that good may come. They essentially accused him of antinomianism. Paul called it slanderous. (Note that this is a parenthetical remark).

**9. What in the gospel could be perverted to claim Paul advocated doing evil for the sake of good (3:8)?** Perhaps the doctrine of justification by faith (as opposed to good works) was the basis for this slander. The idea is that if you tell people they can be made right with God by faith, they will abandon all restraint and do evil. This is the same reasoning that says the doctrine of eternal security leads to immoral living.

**According to 3:8, what fate rightly awaits those Jews who thought God unjust to inflict His wrath on them?** They will rightly be condemned.

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**\*\*\*\***The question “What then?” (3:9) flags a conclusion or application. Here comes the *coup de gras*: **Why are Jews no better off than Greeks (3:9-18)?** Jews are no better off because both groups are “under sin,” 3:9b.

**Technical notes:** Paul includes himself among the Jews by using “we” in 3:9, though the word “Jews” is not in the actual Greek text. Hendriksen even goes so far as to argue that the “we” refers to Paul and the believers in Rome (p. 120).

**Where was it “already” charged that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin (3:9)?** See *back to Romans 1:18-3:8*. The fact that both groups are under sin was the point of 1:18-3:8.

**What does it mean to be “under” sin (3:9)?** To be under sin is to be controlled by sin's power or influence (BAGD, p. 43).

**What does “sin” (3:9) mean?** From *hamartia* (266) “missing the target” (NBD, p. 1117). The root, *amart*, means “err.” Thus, “to miss the path of righteousness” (Thayer). It is a violation of God's Law and of that which God's glory demands and is, therefore, in its essence the contradiction of God (NBD, p. 1117). Synonym for 3:9, “violated God's Law.”

**10. In 3:1 Paul said there was much advantage in being Jewish yet in 3:9 he said the Jews were no better off. How are both true?** There was advantage to being Jewish in that Jewish people had more truth about God and thus potential to be right with God. Yet in terms of sinfulness, they were no better off for having the law, since both Jews and Greeks are under sin.

**Technical Note:** The Greek under “not at all” could also be rendered, “not altogether” or “not in every respect”. Whereas it is true the Jews had an advantage (3:1), the advantage was offset somewhat by the fact that the Jews also were sinners (Cranfield, p. 190).

**11. How do all the quotations\* of 3:10-18 relate back to 3:9?** The quotations found 3:10-18 are masterfully woven together Old Testament proof that no one is righteous (whether Jew or Gentile).

\*The quotations are most assembled from Psalms but also from Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Isaiah.

**\*\*\*\*12. What awful truth is revealed in 3:10-12 that we must all accept? (Reread aloud).**

The awful truth is that no one is righteous (neither Jew nor Greek), no one understands, no one seeks God, no one does good. This is called total depravity.

**What does “righteous” (3:10) mean?** From *dikaios* (1342) “upright, just”; conforming to the laws of God and man; it was applied to model citizens in the Greco-Roman world (BAG p. 195). Synonym: “conformed to God's law.”

**13. Why were the words “no, not one” added in 3:10?** It is because the Jews tended not to see themselves in need of salvation. Even today, the tendency is for people to read this and think, “except for me.” An evangelist once observed that the hard part in evangelism is not getting people saved; it is getting them lost! Humanly speaking, unless you see yourself as unrighteous, you are not a candidate for salvation.

**Firing For Effect:** There are no exceptions. “None . . . no not one” (3:10), “. . . no one . . . no one” (3:11), “. . . all . . . . no one . . . not even one” (3:12).

**14. In context, what is it that no one understands (3:11)?** In context the idea is that no one really understands about the depth of their own sinfulness or the righteousness of God. People might understand math or medicine or electronics, but not their sinfulness. Certainly people are religious, but the fact is there is no real understanding of metaphysical reality (apart from Christ).

**15. In what sense have both Jew and Greek turned aside and become worthless (3:12)?** It is not that people are worthless to God. It is that all peoples have turned aside from the truth about God and are worthless with respect to being able to find God. We are worthless with respect to saving ourselves. We have a total inability to save ourselves.

ESV **Romans 5:6** . . . while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

**Why do the words “not even one” appear again in 3:12?** They are there because these are such hard truths to accept. We read these words and think, “Except me”. I once used this passage in sharing the gospel with a Mormon leader. He immediately saw the import of its words and since he believed in a works based salvation, could not accept them. A way out had to be found. In desperation he asked to whom it was written. Upon seeing it was for Jews and Greeks, he declared it did not apply to him since he was neither Jew nor Greek!

**16. Speculate: In light of the truth of 3:10-12, how does anyone ever come to salvation?** The fact is that no one would come to Jesus for salvation apart from the sovereign work of God:

ESV **John 6:44** No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

ESV **John 3:3** . . . unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

\*\*\*\***17. What is the main point of this anatomical tour (3:13-18)?** (*Reread aloud*). The point is we are thoroughly sinful, from head to foot. All people are by nature under the power of sin.

**Kid’s Song:** Remember the kid’s song: “Heads and shoulders, knees and toes. Knees and toes”? Paul’s version is “Throat and tongue, lips and mouth, all deceive!”

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\*\*\*\***Why did God give the law to the Jews (3:19-20)?** The purpose of the law was not so that people could be justified before God by keeping it. The purpose of the law is to bring about a knowledge of sin (3:20).

**According to 3:19, to whom does the law speak?** See 2:12. The law speaks to those who are under its jurisdiction (i.e. the Jews). The Gentiles of the first century did not have the law.

**What does it mean to have one's mouth "stopped" (3:19)?** See 1:20, 2:1. It means you have no excuse for your sin. There is no defense that can be offered. You stand speechless because of the weight of evidence brought against you. Calvin said it describes a guilty person who "without saying a word awaits his condemnation" (Cranfield, p. 197).

**18. What role did the law play in causing the whole world to be held accountable to God (3:19)?** The Jews agreed with Paul that pagan Gentiles deserved judgment. The problem was they thought themselves exempt simply because they had the law. Paul's goal from 2:1 up to now was to convince the Jews that they too were liable to God's wrath. Having the law was no excuse. In fact, the law made the Jew accountable to God along with the Gentiles. Thus, the whole world (Jew and Gentile alike) was under sin and accountable to God. Both those "under the law" (3:19) and those "apart from the law" (2:12) will be accountable.

**Review: According to 3:20, by what method will no one be declared righteous?**

**What does "justified" (3:20) mean?** It is from *dikaioo* (1344), "to show or declare to be righteous." The root, *dikaios*, means "correct, innocent." Also in NAS as "acquitted, vindicated." It means "to declare guiltless, to pronounce righteous and therefore acceptable" (Thayer). To be justified means to conform with God's laws (NBD, p. 646). It is the same root as the Greek word for righteous. A synonym for 3:20 could be "pronounced in conformity with God's law" or "declared righteous".

**Review: Since righteousness does not come through the law; what does come through it?** Through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

**19. How does the consciousness of sin come through the law (3:20b)?** It showed the Jews basic right from wrong.

**ESV Romans 7:7 . . .** if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

### So What?

Today's lesson concludes the section on sin. We are all sinners and liable to wrath. This is the bad news. Remember that the good news of the gospel is that righteousness from God can be ours through faith in Jesus (1:16).

**What historical advantage did the Jews have over the Greeks up until the first century (3:1-2)?**

**In what sense were the Jews no better off than the Greeks (3:9-20)?** They were not better off in the sense they were under sin as surely as were the Greeks.

**Since no one seeks God (3:11), how does anyone ever get saved?** Though the answer is not stated in this text, later in Romans Paul makes it clear that God has predestined certain people to be saved and so works in their lives as to cause them to have faith in Jesus.

**20. What was a major ministry of the law for the Jews (3:19-20)?** The ministry of the law was to show the Jews their sinfulness, preparing them for a righteousness from God apart from law, through the Messiah.

**Since the law was to show those under it (the Jews) their sinfulness, what purpose does it serve when witnessing to Gentiles?** Some evangelists, such as Ray Comfort, feel we should use the law today with Gentiles to cause people to realize their sinfulness. Other have a different understanding. For instance, the *First London Baptist Confession of Faith*, 1646 Edition, Article XXV, says: "The preaching of the gospel to the conversion of sinners, is absolutely free; no way requiring as absolutely necessary, any qualifications, preparations, or terrors of the law, or preceding ministry of the law, but only and alone the naked soul, a sinner and ungodly, to receive Christ crucified, dead and buried, and risen again; who is made a prince and a Saviour for such sinners as through the gospel shall be brought to believe on Him."

**21. What applications can we walk away with from 3:1-20?**

1. I am not righteous on my own (apart from Christ).
2. I cannot go to heaven by keeping the law (but in Christ I will want to keep the commands of Jesus).
3. On my own I do not understand God (apart from Christ).
4. Left to myself I do not seek God (apart from Christ).
5. My body is an instrument of sin (apart from Christ).

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at [www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF](http://www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF).

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