

All have fallen short of the Glory of God
Romans 3

Galatians 3:15-29

Romans 9:1-24

Responsive Psalm 116:1-7

Last week in chapter 2 we saw that Paul had set up this dichotomy, between keeping the law, and relying upon genealogy verses living in faith. Pointing out that it is those who are living in faith, through the resurrected Christ are the ones who are indeed fulfilling the law through that faith. God has given his Son, as a perfect and holy sacrifice paying the penalty for all those who believe so that they maybe redeemed, and freed from the condemnation of the righteous requirements of the law, having now the law written on their hearts, that is the indwelling of the holy Spirit, working in us to will and to do, and as Paul wrote, against such there is no law. Paul pointed out in chapter 2 that a true Jew is one who is a Jew inwardly, not one born of the flesh and genealogy of Abraham, but rather it is one who is born of the spirit in the genealogy of Abraham's faith. Showing that when it comes to faith in Christ, which brings righteousness before God, circumcision and law keeping account for nothing. That is, the sign in the flesh of fleshly descendants, and the law which was given as a tutor to instruct and inform of God's righteousness, when it comes to bring forth righteous and holy before God do not amount to anything. But rather it is the circumcision of the heart, the new birth, and Christ being written upon our heart which enables us to have faith, and it is those of this faith who are the true offspring of Abraham and the inheritors of God's promises.

In chapter 3 that we are looking at this morning is the response to chapter 2. Paul already knowing the questions that will come up lays forth their answer here. Having spent the last chapter showing that the law and the mosaic covenant accounts for nothing when it comes to righteousness before God, he spends time here showing how though that maybe true, it isn't as though it failed in purpose, or was of no use and effect, pointing again to the fact that being an ethnic Jew and physically circumcised is insignificant. Verse 11 of chapter 2, "For there is no partiality with God, for as many as have sinned without the law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law." It is sin that is judged, not law keeping and neither having, nor not having matters when it comes to God's righteous judgment of sinful man. Verse 25, "For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law, but if you are a breaker of the law your circumcision has become uncircumcised." The Mosaic Covenant was given to ethnic Jews, to further set them apart from the world, establish them as a nation, and set forth a picture of the standard put forth by God which no man can keep. As we talked about last week, Christ pointed out this reality on the sermon on the mount, showing that no man is able to keep God's law, for the issue is of the heart where the physical actions flow, it is the want, the desire, which is shackled by a sinful nature bent toward pride and lust. Reformation in the flesh is not salvation, Salvation isn't new years resolutions where to strive to do better next time, salvation is a reformation of the heart from which drives all wants and desires, and conforms our hearts and minds to that of Christ's so that we, as the children of God may think God's thoughts after him, that is, by the Spirit put to death the sinful desires and thoughts of the flesh.

Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision count as circumcision? It is the logical conclusion, again showing that God shows no partiality, just as both those under the law, and those without the law are judged by their sin, so to those without the law will be judged by the righteousness without the law, through faith, and likewise those under the law will be judged by the righteousness of the law, through faith.

The key is it is faith in Jesus Christ, and his work on the cross that is the binding and unifying point. There is no righteousness found in the law in and of itself for mankind is unable to keep it. But God has sent his son to fulfill it on the behalf of his children, so that we may be counted as righteous before him. And as Paul pointed out, Abraham, believing God will provide for himself a lamb, a worthy sacrifice as we see in the account of Isaac when Abraham was told to sacrifice his only begotten son whom God had given and in whom was the promises, yet Abraham in faith, was obedient and did as God asked, and indeed, God did provide a ram in place of Isaac. Showing again, that Abraham as it was written, believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Abraham was looking forward to that day, he was looking forward to the promised Messiah, and his faith in God, believing in that promise though, he never saw it, was accounted as righteousness before God. And likewise, though we who have come after have not seen, yet believe on the Messiah who has come, it is that faith and belief like Abraham that is accounted as righteousness. Both operate without the law and Mosaic Covenant, one some 100's of years before, and others 1000's of years after all focus in, and rest and believe upon the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, the lamb which God has provided to take away the sins of his people.

So if salvation is not brought about by the law, and likewise sin is judged whether one is under the law or not, that raises up the question what was the purpose of the law? If a person can be a true Jew, and truly be circumcised without being an ethnic Jew and physically circumcised then was there ever a benefit of being an ethnic Jew? After reading chapter 2, one would expect that the answer to that question is no. Paul has spent this entire time pointing out that neither the law, nor circumcision avails anything before God and that salvation is by faith, and faith alone. But right away in the first verse of chapter 3, he asks the question and answers, saying that it was very much an advantage and profitable. Let us read our passage this morning, starting at verse 1-20. On a surface reading of this chapter, it gets a bit wordy and confusing, so our mission today is to unpack what Paul is actually saying here. First off the important implications of Paul's reply is the importance and unity of all scripture. That is to say, the Old Testament is as much the word of God as is the new, it is given so that we may know him more, just as is the new. While on one hand, as Paul has said, the law has faded away, it is still a relevant tool in understanding God, in understanding man's status before God. While it may not be binding upon us as a law, for we through Christ Jesus who has fulfilled the law, by faith likewise do so. But that does not make it of no effect, or not worth studying as some may say today, but rather it gives us a bigger picture of God, the necessity of a savior, and makes the grace of God all the more sweet.

And this was the advantage given to Israel, "to them was committed the oracles of God." The Old Testament scriptures were given to Israel through by the prophets, and they were the keepers of it. There were no scriptures, or prophecies, of God outside that which was given to Israel, they were the keepers of God's word. But there was more to it than that, for Paul quickly turns his focus to belief, not just the mere physical aspect that Israel was given the prophets, the laws, and the traditions, but that all those were given to point mankind to the one and only God. What better advantage is there than to be the ones to whom God has been revealed? There is an entire study to be made on the picture fulfillment aspect of Israel, that is the aspects of the nation of Israel that was an early revelation to a later fulfillment. God had chosen a people out of the world, set them apart, separated them, made them a nation and gave them his laws. This was the work of God, Abraham did not choose it, Moses did not choose it, it was God who called them to the task at hand, he had chosen them to operate in the role that he had given them. Likewise he had chosen Israel to be set apart as an example of his people, which is as Paul had argued throughout all of chapter 2, fulfilled by faith, for all those of faith are the people of God, the true Israel and offspring of Abraham.

So you can see this promise and fulfillment, the picture of Israel was given in the old testament, a covenant was made by God with man, and was ratified by the blood of bulls and goats, but now the fulfillment of that covenant has come, and by his own blood has sealed all those who believe in a new covenant which is ratified by his blood, and who are being set apart by faith. This is not to say that there was ever two modes, or ways of being right with God, Paul just finished pointing out that it was ever only about faith and belief, and that the law was given as a teacher as he wrote in his letter to the Galatians, chapter 3:22”But the scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.”

The law was given to teach us of our rebellion and sinful nature against God, to show that there is none who is capable of being righteous before God, and that the righteousness of another is needed. The Old Covenant came with the constant reminder of this reality, being bathed in the blood of sacrifices which were given continually because man on his own continually broke the law. A constant, and real reminder of the darkness of our sinful nature, and our inability to please God outside of the righteousness that was given through Jesus Christ. We see this in chapter 3, for though the Jews believed themselves righteous having been given the oracles of God, again Paul doubles down on the fact that genealogy, not adherence to the mosaic law avails for anything before God. He had just finished saying that those of the circumcision were at a great advantage but then in verse 3 he asks, “For what if someone did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?” In this statement Paul is pointing to the fact that salvation and belief is an individual trait, not a corporate one. That is again, as he said in chapter 2, just because one is a Jew, having the oracles of God does not make one someone who believes in faith. Verse 4, he says, “certainly not! Indeed, let God be true and every man a liar.” God's faithfulness, and the salvation that he has given is not predicated on our abilities to adhere to the mosaic law. God remains righteous and just in his judgment, of sin, and our salvation is predicated upon the faith that he has given us.

In the end, it is God who will be vindicated and triumph over sin, God remains true, even if every human being is a liar. Paul cites David here, from Psalm 51, which in context is the passage of David crying out for forgiveness after being confronted by the prophet Nathan for his affair with Bathsheba. David says, “Against you, and you only I have sinned and done this evil in your sight, in order that you might be justified in your words and triumph when you judge. In the old testament context, the purpose clause here describes God's judging righteousness, not his saving righteousness. In other words, since David has sinned against God, and God alone, any judgment imposed upon him is just and righteous. Scholars have debated Paul's meaning and intention of this quote, but in the old testament context, which Paul likely would not have taken this quote out of context, it is talking about God's righteous judgment of sin, not his judgment of righteousness in salvation. Remember verse 3, we are talking about, “what if some did not believe?” The answer, we get out of the account of David, is that God is just and righteous in his judgment against them. As Shreiner points out, Up until this point in this chapter Paul had stressed God's covenant promises to the Jews, promises pledging salvation. If salvific purpose exhaust the relationship between God and the Jews, then it is difficult to understand how any Jew would experience his judgment., but we see in verse 4 that Paul introduces this theme that God's faithfulness and truth can't be confined merely to his saving righteousness. God is also faithful to his promises in the judgment of his people. In other words, the saving righteousness of God does not rule out his righteousness of judging sin.

Even though God had promised salvation to the Jews, no individual Jew should presume upon those promises and think that their salvation is guaranteed. God is still just, and righteous when he judges sin among the Jews, for no individual is automatically granted God's covenantal promises. Again as we saw in chapter 2:28 "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not of the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God." God is righteous in both the salvation of his people, and the judgment and punishment of sin on those who do not believe. In verse 5 Paul takes on the opposite argument, he has shown that salvation is brought upon the individual, and the promises of God's salvation is personal, but God is also righteous in judgment of those who do not believe, so Paul asks, If our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, What shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?" To understand where Paul is coming from in bringing for this argument, in verse 8 we see that this is a an slanderous accusation that is bring brought up against him and his teaching, "And why not say, Let us do evil that good may come? As we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is. What then? Are we better then they? Not at all, for we have previously charged both Jew and Greeks that they are all under sin."

So Paul is preaching, that all are under sin, there is none righteous before God, both Jew, and Gentile for God judges those who sin apart from the law, and God judges those who by sin break the law, and in that judgment he is just, and holy. Paul's Jewish opponents argue that the logical conclusion to his view of human corruption spares them from any moral responsibility. According to Paul, some Jews will benefit from God's grace, and some will not. Therefor they conclude, If human beings can't cooperate with God's grace, and if his grace shines greater in rescuing helpless human's from sin, then they are arguing that Paul is teaching that we should all do evil to advance Gods grace. And we see in these verses that Paul addresses this slanderous misunderstanding, he rejects their accusations and says, "their condemnation is just" Those who are bringing this accusations against Paul and his teaching, are teaching against the gospel, and in their arrogance will face judgment for it. Yet, though Paul condemns them for this false accusation, he follows it up by saying that he really is no better then they, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Verse 10, "As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seek God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips. Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known, there is no fear of God before their eyes." Paul quoting these old testament passages to show that all have sinned, none are righteous, either with the law, or without the law stand in condemnation before God in their sins, with the reality being that the righteousness of another is needed, the grace and mercy of God to not only wipe the slate clean of our sins, but to expose and convict us of them is necessary. In Tom Holland's commentary he breaks down each and every one of these verses the Paul quotes, and I think it is beneficial to look at them here to give a deeper understanding as to what Paul is saying.

Verse 10: There is none righteous, no, not one. Paul begins here his quotation of the Hebrew Scriptures in order to demonstrate the state of man. Each text quoted is related to the condition that led Israel into exile and the suffering she subsequently experienced. This series of texts must be understood from the perspective of one who has witnessed this happening to his people. The texts reflect on the fact that Israels exile was deserved because of the warnings of the prophets had been ignored.

Verse 11: There is none who understand, There is none who seek after God. Such a statement would anger a religious Jew. He would of course accept this as a description of a Gentile but not of the Jews. However, Paul is not saying anything here that hasn't already been said in the Old testament. When Isaiah spoke of God's distress at the condition of the nation and her inevitable exile, he said God looked for a righteous representative saying, ' I looked, but there is none to help, I was appalled that no one gave support.' And likewise Isaiah also said, "All our righteousness is like filthy rags." Both of these statements point to the failure of the Jews and their understanding and pursuit of God.

Verse 12, "They have all turned aside they have become unprofitable, there is none who do good." The description here is of the nation being worthless and is highlighted by the statement that there is not even one individual among the people of God who does good. This indicates the seriousness of their condition. The people, who had been the apple of God's eye and his inheritance, could not be described in a more stark way. The old testament passage being quoted here, (psalm 14) is speaking of those who devour God's people and it ends with a prayer that salvation would come for Israel out of Zion.

Verse 13, Their throat is an open tomb, their tongues practice deceit, and the poison of asps is on their lips." This verse which uses parts of Psalm 5, and 140 emphasis the underhanded nature of evil by using the term deceit and its open display by using that term the poison of asps is on their lips. These sinful actions come to fruition in the breakdown of human relationships. This follows Paul's description of mans decline in chapter 1 of Romans. The consequence of rejecting God, is mans rejection of fellow man. This is evident in the history of mankind, Men scheme and plot against those they are called to respect and with whom they are to live in harmony.

Verse 14, "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." Paul here is painting a picture of Israels depravity more strikingly. Such a description does not typify her whole history, but it does match a sort of evil the eighth century prophets preached against when they predicted her exile if she did not repent. This cited passage is from Psalm 10, where evildoers afflict the weak. While Paul has attributed this text here to Israel, it originally referred to her enemies whose raiding parties scattered the Jewish communities. In other words, Psalms is speaking of outside oppressors who have no respect for God. Again Paul is taking texts which speak of the sin of the Gentiles and is applying them to Israel.

Verse 15, Their feet are swift to shed blood" Paul's description of Israel has touched on her rejection of God's word, her search for worthless pleasure and her evil speaking and vilification of others. Now Paul is saying that their feet are swift to shed blood,the people are searching for an opportunity for violence toward those they hate, and they pursue it with excitement, and pleasure. This verse, along with the citation of the next 2 is from Isaiah 59 which is part of God's indictment against Israel and his justification for sending her into exile. Throughout the new testament we find Jewish leaders who rejected God's word and turned against those who accepted it. Their involvement in the death of Jesus, Stephen, and James bears witness of this rejection. With these facts in mind, it is understandable why Paul painted such a horrific picture of his own people.

Verse 16, "Ruin and misery mark their way." The people of God who had been called to be a light to the nations, live in the same darkness as the Gentiles. The Nation of Israel which boasted that the glory of God dwelt in her midst, lied in a condition of sin that mirrored the nations around her. This was so distressing to God that he called Israel a harlot because she had given herself to the gods of the surrounding nations.

Verse 17, “And the way of peace they do not know.” Instead of being characterized by the peace of God, Israel was noted for its absence. How tragic that a nation chosen for such a blessing had sold her heritage for the favors of gods with whom she had flirted. Her children should have known joy and happiness, but instead experienced fear and terror. Her elderly should have been valued and respected, but were insulted and abused. Her women should have been held in honor and treated with dignity, but were treated as being valueless nothing more than objects of violence and exploitation. The covenant people were ever as much as vile and depraved as the Gentiles, the norms of decency were overthrown and life was lived for self advancement and satisfaction.

Verse 18, “There is no fear of God before their eyes” Like the Gentiles that Paul had just written about in chapter 1, The Jews had lost their capacity to be ashamed. They argued God was not displeased and that they had done nothing to offend him. They argued and protested that the prophets were negative and should have spoken of the good things their religion gave the people rather than about the God whom they should fear.

As we can see Paul here in quoted these Old Testament verses is pointing out a harsh reality. In chapter 1 he points out the sinfulness to which the gentiles are inclined, and in chapter 2 and 3 he is pointing out that likewise the Jews are lost in sin as well. Israel was sent into exile because she had disobeyed the law that was given to her through Moses. She was “under the law” serving out the sentence the law passed on her as a result of sinful disobedience. Paul uses the terminology, under the law, and under sin, in the same way showing that those under the law were sent in exile, out of their lands, separated from God in a sense just as those who are under sin, are living in exile, apart from God. Paul's view of man's condition is that all are under sin, held captive by Satan just as Israel was held captive in Babylon. Israel's captivity was a picture, or a type of mankind's condition to sin. Israel was giving the promised Davidic deliverer who would lead her out of bondage in Babylon and Paul relocates that promise made to Israel and applies it to the deliverance of man from the bondage of Satan by the true Son of David. By doing so, he keeps true to their original context, using them to show how Israel's history had been typological, as they are a picture of man's condition and response to God.

Paul argues that all of mankind is in spiritual exile from God, “every mouth shall be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.” This is the inevitable outcome of humanity, without Christ who has come and paid that price for his people. And this is all summed up in verse 20, the last verse we are looking at today. “Therefore by the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” And there it is, the purpose of the law was to expose the sinful nature of mankind. It wasn't about finding justification before God through its adherence, but rather it was to expose man's need for a messiah, for one who could fulfill God's law on our behalf. All of humanity is lost in sin, both Jew and Gentile, all of humanity is in exile and estranged from the God who created her, and it is only through Christ that we who are in exile and estranged from God can be brought back into his presence. He is our hope, our light, our life, once Christ has become these things to us, the more we pursue him, the less the things that distract and draw us away from him in this world matter.

We are all in a hopeless state by nature, we are children of wrath born for the day of destruction, yet God, who is rich in mercy, by his grace has come to save for himself a remnant, and establish his kingdom. Are you a part of that remnant? Have you followed this Son of David out of exile? You are either in Christ, or lost in sin, there is no middle ground and there is no finding righteousness without him. Repent, believe, take up your cross and follow him, and you will have found a treasure more precious than gold and riches.

