

## **Lesson 4: God’s Righteousness and Man’s Justification**

### ***The Good, Bad, and Beautiful***

*Scripture Reading: Romans 3:1-31*

#### **Introduction**

In the opening chapters of Romans, the apostle Paul built a careful case proving that all of humanity stands condemned before God. He examined the idolatrous Gentiles, who exchanged God’s glory for images (Romans 1:23–25), and the hypocritical Jews, who boasted in the Law yet broke it (Romans 2:21–23). Having established that neither group could claim innocence, Paul arrives at chapter 3, where his argument reaches its climax: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). This chapter reveals the bad news of universal sin alongside the beautiful news of justification through faith.

#### **God Is Just — The Good (Romans 3:1–8)**

Paul begins by addressing a natural question: if the Jews are condemned like the Gentiles, was there any advantage to being a Jew? His answer is clear—“Much in every way!” (3:2). The Jews had been entrusted with the oracles of God, a tremendous privilege (cf. Deuteronomy 4:7–8). Yet some did not believe. Does their unbelief cancel God’s faithfulness? “Certainly not!” (3:4). God remains true to His Word regardless of man’s response (cf. 2 Timothy 2:13). Paul then addresses the objection that if man’s sin highlights God’s righteousness, God would be unjust for punishing sinners. He firmly rejects this reasoning—sin is never excusable simply because God can bring good from it – it is still sin.

#### **Man Is Unjust — The Bad (Romans 3:9–20)**

Paul delivers Scripture’s most devastating indictment of human sinfulness. Drawing from the Psalms and Isaiah, he demonstrates that no one is righteous. Man’s corruption extends to his attitude, refusing to seek God (3:10–12; cf. Psalm 53:1–3); his words, filled with deceit and poison (3:13–14; cf. Psalm 5:9; 140:3); and his deeds, marked by destruction and misery (3:15–17; cf. Isaiah 59:7–8). The root cause is identified in verse 18: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Paul concludes that the Law cannot justify anyone; rather, “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (3:20). The Law’s purpose was to reveal man’s desperate need for a Savior.

#### **God Is the Justifier — The Beautiful (Romans 3:21–31)**

Having presented the bleak picture of human sin, Paul turns to the most beautiful truth in Scripture: God has provided righteousness apart from the Law. This righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ and is available to all who believe, “for there is no difference” (3:22). Man is “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (3:24). God set forth Christ as a propitiation—a satisfying sacrifice—through His blood. God is both just, requiring sacrifice for sin, and the justifier, declaring believers innocent through that sacrifice (3:26). This leaves no room for boasting, since justification comes through the law of faith, not works of law (3:27–28). Since there is one God, the same salvation applies to Jew and Gentile alike (3:29–30). Far from voiding the Law, faith establishes it by fulfilling its very purpose (3:31).

## **Conclusion**

Romans 3 forces every person to confront the reality of sin—no one is exempt and no one can earn righteousness through personal effort. Yet it also reveals the beauty of God’s plan: through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God remains perfectly just while graciously justifying all who come to Him in faith. Let us be humbled by our need, grateful for God’s grace, and motivated to live faithfully before the One who justified us.

## Thought Questions for Class Discussion

**1.** Paul says the Jews had a great advantage because they were entrusted with “the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2). What responsibility comes with having access to God’s Word, and how should that shape the way we approach Bible study today?

**2.** In Romans 3:10–18, Paul quotes extensively from the Old Testament to prove that all people are sinners. Why did Paul rely so heavily on Scripture rather than his own reasoning? What does this teach us about how we should approach difficult topics?

**3.** Romans 3:20 says that “by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight.” If the Law cannot save, what was its purpose? How does understanding the Law’s role help us appreciate the gospel?

**4.** Paul writes that God is both “just and the justifier” of those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). How do justice and mercy work together in God’s plan of salvation? Why is it important that God is both?

**5.** Romans 3:27 says that boasting is “excluded.” In what ways are people today tempted to boast about their own righteousness or spiritual accomplishments? How should the message of Romans 3 change the way we view ourselves and others?