

# Abounding Grace Christian Church

## A Study through the Epistle to the Romans – Part 9

### I. Exposition of Chapter Three. (Continued)

#### A. Verse 13 – More characteristics of unbelievers who are “under sin” (verse 9).

1. **“Their throat is an open sepulchre”** - An **“open sepulchre”** is an open grave containing a dead body which has never been covered up. The human mouth is filled with death, decay, and moral stench. Just listen to godless people talk!
2. **“With their tongues they have used deceit”** - To **“deceive”** is to mislead and to lie.
3. **“The poison of asps is under their lips”** — The **“asp”** is a serpent whose poison is contained in a small sac at the base of the tongue. It is just as natural for the human tongue to burn and hurt others, as it is for the poisonous snake to bite.

#### B. Verse 14 - **“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness”** - The **“cursing”** speaks of blasphemous language, and **“bitterness”** refers to long-standing resentment. Man’s speech, apart from God’s grace, is sinful, selfish, blasphemous, and destructive!<sup>1</sup>

#### C. Verse 15 - **“Their feet are swift to shed blood”** - Anger, hate, and murder are natural to the human heart.

#### D. Verse 16 - **“Destruction and misery are in their ways”** - Wherever mankind has gone, there has been a path of misery and destruction. If man should ever set up civilization on the moon, someone has said. “There’s one thing that’s clear; he’ll ruin everything up there, just as he has done down here.”

#### E. Verse 17 - **“The way of peace have they not known”** - **“Peace”** is a stranger to man without God. (Isaiah 57:21).

#### F. Verse 18 – **“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”** – This basically sums it up. When people have no fear (reverence, awe and respect) for God, they’re apt to behave wickedly.

**Note: Though all of these characteristics are not found in every unsaved person, they are ascribed to fallen human nature, as we have already mentioned.**

#### G. Verses 19-20 - **The law cannot save us from our sin and the penalty it deserves.**

**“Paul added that, whatever the law (here the Old Testament) says, it addresses to those involved in it, namely, all the Jews. He wrote this to take the ground out from under a Jewish reader who might try to say that the passages just quoted refer only to the Godless. The result of its condemnation is that no one will be able to open his mouth in his own defense (cf. Rev. 20:11-14). ‘All the world’ describes all of humanity again.”<sup>2</sup>**

1. Remember that many Jewish people of Paul’s day took every passage of the Old Testament describing evil and applied it only to the Gentiles - not to themselves. Paul makes it clear that God speaks **“to those who are under the law”**, as well.
2. **“...that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”** – It’s important to point out that there are several phrases in these verses which denote all humanity.
  - a. **“every mouth,”** - **verse 19** – This expresses the idea that no one is able to defend themselves. There is absolutely nothing they can say!
  - b. **“all the world,”** - **verse 19** – This sums up everything stated in chapters 1 and 2, namely, the whole world is guilty of sin!
  - c. **“no flesh,”** - **verse 20.**
3. **Verse 20 - “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight...”** - The law cannot save us. The law can’t justify anyone. It is useful in giving us **“...the knowledge of sin”** but it cannot save us.
  - a. **“...for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”** - J.B. Phillip’s paraphrase of this phrase reads; **“... it is the straight-edge of the Law that shows us how crooked we are.”**

#### H. Verses 21-26 - **The Revelation of the Righteousness of God.**

1. **Verse 21 – “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,”**
  - a. The words, **“But now”**, provide a wonderful transition from the judgment of justification.
  - b. **“...the righteousness of God...”** – Without sacrificing His own righteousness, God found a way to bestow His righteousness on humanity.
  - c. **“...apart from the law is revealed.”** - The law cannot save us, but God revealed a righteousness that would save us. This is the essence of God’s plan of salvation in Jesus Christ: it is a salvation that is offered apart from our own earning and deserving, apart from our own

<sup>1</sup>William C. Neece, *Study Notes on the Book of Romans* (James L. Fleming, 2005), Ro 3:9–20.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Romans*, (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2013)

merits.

- d. **“...being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.”** - This righteousness is not a novelty. Paul didn't “invent” it. It was predicted long ago, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. The Old Testament said this righteousness was coming. (cf. **Isaiah 51:4-5; 58:8; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:16**).

**“This referred to two of the three divisions of the Hebrew canon (Law, Prophets and Writings). These first two were used to refer to the whole (see note at 3:19). This clearly showed that the gospel was contained in preliminary form in the OT (cf. Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 10:43). It was not an afterthought, “Plan B,” or a last minute crash program (cf. 1:2).<sup>3</sup>”**

## 2. Verse 22 - How this Righteousness is made Available.

- a. **“Even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference.”**
- b. **“...through faith in Jesus Christ...”** - God's righteousness becomes man's possession and begins to operate in his life through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 28; cf. **Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:9**).
- c. **“...to all and on all who believe...”** – This shows once again that this righteousness is available to all (which means it's for the whole world), and it comes **“on”** all who believe. In other words, it's available to everyone but it only becomes applicable to those who receive it by faith.
- 1) Biblical faith (or, believing) is not merely mental assent. It means **“to adhere”**; **“to cleave”**; **“to trust in”**; and **“to rely upon”**. Real faith is always shown by corresponding actions (**James 2:14-26**).

**“The gospel is for all humans (cf. v. 24; Isa. 53:6; Ezek. 18:23, 32; John 3:16–17; 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 4:14). What a great truth! This must balance the biblical truth of election. God's election must not be understood in the Islamic sense of determinism nor in the ultra—Calvinistic sense of some vs. others, but in the covenantal sense.<sup>4</sup>”**

- d. **“For there is no difference.”** – Paul reiterates again that this righteousness is available to all and that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

## 3. Verses 23-24 – **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,”**

- a. **“...all have sinned...”** – Another expression stating all are guilty before God.
- b. **“...fall short of the glory of God...”** – To **“fall short”** means **“to not measure up”**. The **“glory of God”** seems to be difficult for scholars. It most likely refers to His majesty, His righteousness and holiness.
- c. **Verse 24 – “...being justified freely by His grace...”** – The word **“justified”** is the same as **“righteousness”** so it means, **“acquitted”** or **“declared innocent”**.
- 1) **“freely”** – means; **“without a cause”**, **“free gift”** and **“undeservedly”**.
- 2) **“grace”** – means; **“favor”**, **“undeserved”** and **“unmerited”**.

**“being justified as a gift by His grace”<sup>5</sup> – Utley's Translation**

- d. **“...through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”** – The word **“redemption”** means; **“The recalling of captives from captivity through the payment of a ransom for them.”**; Therefore it means **“deliverance”** and **“to be set free”**.

## 4. Verses 25-26.

- a. **Verse 25 – “Whom God set forth”** – means **“preordained”**.
- b. **“Propitiation”** – **“A mercy seat”**. The mercy seat of the Old Covenant was a symbolic representation of Christ. (cf. **Hebrews 9:5**). The term **“propitiation”** implies that Jesus placated the wrath of God (cf. **Romans 1:18; 5:9; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6**). **Through His death on the cross, Jesus is the means by which God can show mercy to the sinner.**

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<sup>3</sup>Robert James Utley, *The Gospel according to Paul: Romans*, vol. Volume 5, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International, 1998), Ro 3:21.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Ro 3:22.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., Ro 3:24.