

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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Sermon title: Humanity on Trial, Romans 3:1-20

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**INTRODUCTION:** Today, we pick up in Romans Chapter 3. In this chapter, we find a trial. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he is like a lawyer. He anticipates the opposition he'd get against God and presents his case against humanity.

This is a letter, so it's not like Paul is having a debate. But, like anyone truly prepared to defend the truth, he knew what the opposing side would say. He knew the questions that went along with the truth.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I had a friend who said one time, "I don't want to ask hard questions because I don't want to threaten my faith." In other words, he was afraid his faith wasn't strong enough to handle the hard questions.

Are we like that sometimes in the Church? We don't want to wrestle with the hard questions because we're afraid? We turn away people because they have hard questions? No, we should rather ask ourselves the hard questions, knowing our faith in Jesus is sealed. There is no question too great for him. Our finite minds might struggle, but if we aren't tackling the hard questions from within the church, how can we be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in us?

The first part of this trial scene is Paul's defense. He anticipates the opposing points by stating them, not shying away from the questions.

The second part of the trial scene is Paul as a prosecutor. He states the case against humanity—*no one is righteous*.

So, we have two sides of the trial, with Paul as both the defense and the prosecuting lawyer. There are two points to today's message:

1. Paul defends God's righteousness.
2. Paul pleads guilty for man's unrighteousness.

## **First, PAUL DEFENDS GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Paul tackled three questions head-on. He didn’t wait for them to come. He expected them. And, they fall in three categories:

1. Spiritual advantage
2. God’s faithfulness
3. God’s justice

Turn to Romans Chapter 3, starting in verse one—

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 3:1-8 <sup>1</sup>*What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?* <sup>2</sup>*Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.*

<sup>3</sup>*What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness?* <sup>4</sup>*Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written:*

*“So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.”*

<sup>5</sup>*But if our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)* <sup>6</sup>*Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?* <sup>7</sup>*Someone might argue, “If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?”* <sup>8</sup>*Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—“Let us do evil that good may result”? Their condemnation is just!*

**EXPLANATION:** The first question:

1. Spiritual advantage—*If only Jesus can save you by changing your heart, what is the spiritual advantage of being a Jew?*

This would be similar to our question, what is the spiritual advantage of having the Bible and of these outwardly religious things we are a part of?

Paul answers, there is advantage, *much in every way!* Why? Because the Jews *have been entrusted with the very words of God.*

In the Greek here, this thing the Jews were entrusted with is called *logia λόγια*. Some translations translate it as “oracles.” It is used to describe the direct words from God Moses received on Mount Sinai when he received the Law.

So, the Jews were entrusted with these very words—a huge responsibility to be entrusted with. And, many took it as a huge responsibility—teaching their children, talking about them, writing them on their doorposts of their houses and gates (see Deuteronomy 11: 19-20).

Having the Law:

- Showed people how to have a right relationship with God—Psalm 119:11 *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*
- Was a light—Psalm 119:105 *Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*
- Ultimately showed people their need for faith in the grace of God—Romans 3:20 *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

**APPLICATION:** We, as exposed as we are to the Word of God, could ask the same question as the Jews: What advantage is there in the gifts God has given you right now? As Paul states—*Much in every way!* If you have been entrusted with the very words of God, you have an advantage. If you have the Word of God, you have an advantage.

But, listen here: Many of us have grown up in the Bible belt, with access to God’s word, yet in the midst of all this advantage, so many are unfaithful. If we are honest, so many of us have been unfaithful.

Being entrusted with the very words of God is a huge gift, but also a huge responsibility. And, many fail to put their faith in God—Jesus—the very Word of God actually made flesh—even after hearing the very words of God.

**BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION:** Think of the Israelites. God had led them out of Egypt, parted the sea for them to walk on dry ground, and provided manna from heaven. After all of this, they made for themselves a golden calf—an idol—to worship. Why—because they were tired of waiting for Moses to bring down the Ten Commandments—the very words of God—from the mountain. This brings us to Paul’s second question—

2. God’s faithfulness—(verse 3): <sup>3</sup> *What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness?*

This is like one of the most common reasons I have heard for lack of belief in God or lack of faith in Jesus—the hypocrisy people see in the Church. We’ve all heard it: *Why would I want to be a Christian, when I know so many Christians who are hypocrites? If that’s what it means to be a Christian, then why would I want to be a part of them?*

Paul was not afraid to answer this objection. He answers—

**SCRIPTURE:** (verse 4): <sup>4</sup> *Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written:*

*“So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.”*

**EXPLANATION:** Even if every human, entrusted with the words of God or not, is a liar, God is still true. In their unbelief, many Jews perished without faith. Today, even with all our “spiritual advantages,” people are dying apart from knowing Christ. Is God unfaithful? Is God still just when he is allowing people to perish?

Paul goes back to the scripture to answer this question. He quotes from Psalm 51—David’s confession of his hidden sin—his adultery with Bathsheba, a married woman. In this Psalm, he talks about how his sin is always before him. He talks about how he has sinned only against God.

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 51:4 <sup>4</sup> *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.*

This is the part Paul quotes. In order to fully understand it, I want to read the next couple verses:

(Ps. 51:5-6): *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.*

**EXPLANATION:** David takes full responsibility for his sin. God does not promote unrighteousness, rather he desired faithfulness from the time David was in the womb and taught him wisdom in the secret place.

Here we have Paul's answer to the question: "Does man's unfaithfulness make God unfaithful?" No, we are responsible for our own sin. And, we are responsible to God.

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 5:8 <sup>8</sup>*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

In his defense of God, Paul comes to his last human argument:

3. God's justice—Should we sin to bring God even more glory? Wouldn't God's judgment of our sin make him unjust?

(Verse 5): <sup>5</sup>*But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)*

(Verse 7) says it another way... "*If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?*"

(And, verse 8)... "*Let us do evil that good may result?*" *Their condemnation is just!*

**EXPLANATION:** This is, as Paul says, a human argument. It is a tempting one, too. What a dangerous way to think! See how Paul answers:

(Verse 6): <sup>6</sup>*Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?*

**EXPLANATION:** First, to be just, God has to judge sin in the world. Sinful humanity tries to twist this around, but God is just. His Word stands forever. Sin brings death, while his Word brings life. Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but Jesus came so we could have life to the full (John 10:10).

So, we have in this trial:

- Paul’s defense of the opposition—upholding God’s righteousness

## **Second, PAUL PLEADS GUILTY FOR HUMANITY’S UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Paul is putting to trial no single person, but humanity as a whole. Continue in Verse 9—

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 3:9-20 <sup>9</sup> *What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin.* <sup>10</sup> *As it is written:*

*“There is no one righteous, not even one;*

<sup>11</sup> *there is no one who understands;*

*there is no one who seeks God.*

<sup>12</sup> *All have turned away,*

*they have together become worthless;*

*there is no one who does good,*

*not even one.”*

<sup>13</sup> *“Their throats are open graves;*

*their tongues practice deceit.”*

*“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”*

<sup>14</sup> *“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”*

<sup>15</sup> *“Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

<sup>16</sup> *ruin and misery mark their ways,*

<sup>17</sup> *and the way of peace they do not know.”*

<sup>18</sup> *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

<sup>19</sup> *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.* <sup>20</sup> *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul’s case outlines the charges against humanity.

1. First, no one is righteous.
2. No one understands: This is not about not having enough knowledge. This is about not being able to understand spiritual things apart from the Holy Spirit.
3. No one seeks God: This is about our will. Without Christ changing our hearts, we will not want to seek God. This is “the bondage of the will” as Martin Luther said it. Without God’s grace, we don’t even desire him. We have a void, feeling that we need something more. We can fill it with all kinds of things and even empty religion, which only hides our true desires and emptiness.
4. All have turned away, they have together become worthless: As David said, we were sinful from the beginning, but God created us for good from the beginning. Apart from Christ, all are living a life against what we were created for.
5. No one does good: As those who don’t understand or seek God, and in our turning away, we are incapable of truly doing good.

The case against humanity shifts to the physical evidence. There are six anatomical parts of the body as evidence for the guilty verdict.

1. Throats- open graves
2. Tongues-practice deceit
3. Lips- has poison of vipers on them
4. Mouths-full of cursing and bitterness
5. Feet- swift to shed blood
6. Eyes- with no fear of God

**EXPLANATION:** Earlier the chapter, Paul quoted David, who had said he sinned against God alone. We also see now, too, how sin affects others in its path as well—the sinner and those around him or her. There is a total lack of peace and violence toward others. Ruin and misery mark their ways.

**APPLICATION:** So, we see how unrighteous man has no way to stand up against a righteous God. There is no argument that can exempt us. Our evil lips can't say enough things, our feet can't take us to the right places, and our eyes can't see hope apart from Christ.

The jury of this world—all those around us—our fellow sinners themselves—might try to convince us we're alright, but before God, Paul says, we stand silent. (Verse 19)...*every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.*

Standing before the judge, with the Law before humanity, we see one declaration—GUILTY. We are now conscious of our sin. We are totally desperate.

**CONCLUSION:** Silently, we stand before God. This is where we must be before we put our faith in him. If you continually try to defend your faith and say the right things, perhaps you should let the Holy Spirit silence you. If you try over and over to know all the facts of the Bible, perhaps you should let him help understand. Yes, we are depraved. Yes, no is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks God. But, there is hope.

- Luke 19:10 <sup>10</sup> *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*”
- Our once violent and wandering feet are now... *feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace* (Ephesians 6:15).

As we continue on in Romans, we will study God's hope for us—how through God's righteousness, we—as silenced, desperate sinners are made holy and called his children.

I want to close with a time Isaiah was silenced before God. I think a lot of us can relate to this and find encouragement from it.

Isaiah saw the Lord in all his glory, and this was his response...<sup>5</sup> *“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty”* (Isaiah 6:5).

But, the seraphim, one of the angelic creatures, took a coal and touched Isaiah's mouth with it and said, *"See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for"* (v. 7).

Isaiah was guilty, without any words to justify himself before the Lord. His lips were unclean and unable. But, after experiencing the grace of God in taking away his sin, he could speak.

The Lord asked, *"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"*

*And [Isaiah] said, "Here am I. Send me!"*

The Lord has great intentions for you. He wants you to go with the gospel of peace. He wants to use you in his great plan. But, first, we must all stand silent before him.

Woe is me! We are a people of unclean lips. But, thank you Jesus, you have provided a way for our lips to praise you.

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