

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

No One is Righteous

Romans 3:1-20

2000

Introduction

Story: "The Emperor's New Clothes" by Hans Christian Andersen

A certain emperor who was quite vain and concerned with appearances

He hired a group of clothing designers to make him some new and expensive clothes

They promised a garment that would be so magnificent, so refined, that only the wise and pure in heart would be able to see it.

Then these con men went to work pretending to weave.

The king's officials checked on the progress of the work, and though they couldn't see any clothing being produced, rather than be accused of being foolish and impure, they reported to the king that the garments were extraordinary!

Well, you know the rest of the story:

The king, not wanting to appear stupid, also claimed the new clothes to be beautiful!

He gave the designers medals and then paraded through town in the buff as the whole city praised the beautiful new clothing, lest they be thought of as fools.

However, one little innocent boy timidly finally said, "The emperor has no clothes!"

At once everyone acknowledged the truth of the statement and the hypocritical pretense of an entire nation was stripped away.

The moral of the story:

People, through peer pressure and social stigma, can be influenced into denying what would otherwise be plainly obvious.

The world says that man is basically good. Our persistent problems stem from lack of education, substandard environments, lack of economic opportunity, lack of government intervention, and poor self-esteem. This view is continually reinforced by psychologists, liberal media and even religious leaders.

But in chapter 3 of Romans, Paul strips away the psychobabble and diagnoses our real problem: *we are sinners!* We may not like to hear that. We may resist it. We may reject it. But it is true, nonetheless. The problem of mankind is sin. Until we admit that the root of all evil in the world is found in the heart of every man woman and child on the face of the earth, any human effort to eliminate the effects of sin will fail.

Paul had spent a great deal of time, going from place to place, teaching the principles found in the book of Romans, so he was very familiar with the fundamental objections that the Jewish mind would raise.

I Paul's Rhetorical Objections

A. What, then, are the advantages of being a Jew or value in circumcision?

This is a reasonable question. If being a Jew inwardly and circumcision of the heart is what counts, what advantage is there to being a Jew, or being circumcised or of having the Law? Paul responds by saying, "Much in every way!"

Application:

It would be similar to saying, "If being raised attending church, reading my Bible, being baptized, and serving in the church doesn't guarantee my salvation, what is the advantage of participating in these activities? Much in every way!"

1. They have been **entrusted** with the very words of God

Ps 147:19-20 "He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the LORD."

Having the written revelation who God is a huge advantage for any people. Through the Bible we know what God is like (the rest of world has no idea what God is really like), we know what we are like (others without the Word are deluded into thinking that they are better than they are), and we know what He requires for salvation.

B. Will the Jews' lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? NO!

In other words, if an individual Jew fails to live a life of faith in God, will God renege on His promises to the Jewish people? No! The Jews mistakenly believed that God's promises to Israel guaranteed every single Jew throughout history the promise of eternal life regardless of their obedience to God.

But God never promised any individual Jew eternal life apart from repentance and personal faith in God evidenced by obedience from the heart.

Rom 9:6 "It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel."

Heb 4:2 "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."

1. God is **true** – men are liars

Num 23:19 "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"

2. God is **right** when He speaks

Deut 32:4 “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.”

3. God **prevails** when He judges

Ps 51:4 “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.”

C. If our unrighteousness highlights God’s righteousness, is God unjust for judging us in His wrath?

The question rephrased is: "If my unrighteous behavior makes God's righteousness that much more wonderful by comparison, then doesn't my unrighteousness have value? And if this is the case, why am I going to be punished for my sin that has apparently produced something good? Wouldn't this make God unjust?" NO!

1. Otherwise God could not judge the world

Ps 11:5-7 “The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates. On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.”

D. If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness, why am I still condemned as a sinner?

1. “Let us do **evil** that good may come about.”

For the Jews, whose entire standing before God was based on their performance in keeping the Law, it is quite understandable why they would conclude that the doctrine of justification apart from 'works of the law' could be perceived as undermining God's law and their belief in salvation through works and gave people an unrestrained license to sin.

Rom 6:1-2 “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”

a. Such questions are human in origin

Job 40:8 “Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?”

b. They will reap a deserved condemnation

Jude 1:4 "For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

II Paul's Conclusions Regarding Man

A. Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin

Under sin = Under the power of, and completely subservient to, the bondage of sin.

This accusation was flabbergasting to the Jews. They were convinced that their nationality and special relationship with God gave them a secure standing of righteousness before God. On the other hand, Jews believed that Gentiles, by virtue of their nationality, were naturally sinful and stood condemned.

We have in the following verse the most damning description of mankind in all of the Bible. Paul strings together a series of 6 OT passages in 13 powerful indictments that describe the total depravity of man apart from Christ.

1. There is no one **righteous**, not even one

Righteous = "Having a perfect and holy standing before God"

A person who fails to meet God's standard of perfection is unacceptable to God.

Jesus said that we are to be perfect, even as our Father is perfect (Matt 5:48).

And there are no degrees of righteousness as far as salvation is concerned. You are either perfectly righteous in Christ or perfectly sinful apart from Christ.

Illustration: Jumping to Oahu

Some may not manage to jump more than a few feet -- barely wetting their toes.

Others might manage to jump into waves breaking on the beach

Some might even manage to jump past the beach break

Compared to one another, their degree of success is measurably different.

But when compared with the goal of reaching Oahu, none came close!

Rom 3:23 "... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

2. There is no one who understands

Using the same illustration of jumping to Oahu, these jumpers not only can't make the distance, they don't even know where Oahu is!

Jer 4:22 "My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good."

By the way: I Jn 5:20 tells us that one of the reasons "that the Son of God came what to give us understanding, so that we may know him who is true."

3. There is no one who seeks God

The word *seek* means "to seek out", implying a determined search. But mankind, by nature, does not search for God or the truth. Rather, as Paul noted in Romans 2, we suppress it and ultimately turn to some form of idolatry.

Illustration: Many have the appearance of seeking God -- through meditation, or through worshipping idols, or through the burning of incense -- but they are not seeking the God of the Bible. They are seeking a god of their own vain imaginations. Because Paul says, "No one seeks God."

God has promised us in Jer 29:13 that anyone who seeks Him with a genuine heart will find Him.

Isa 55:6-7 "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

4. All have **turned** away

Turned = "To deviate from or reject the right path"

Isa 53:6 "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."

4. All have become worthless

Worthless = "Spoiled" [milk, meat, etc.]

They have failed to fulfill their purposes as image-bearers of Jesus Christ.

Philemon 1:11 "Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me."

5. There is no one who does **good**, not even one

Ps 14:1-3 "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good."

B. Jews and Gentiles alike bear the fruit of sin

1. Their **words** are sinful

A person's character will be evidenced in his speech.

Matt 12:34-37 "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him."

a. Their throats are open graves

The spiritual odor of someone without God is like the smell of a rotting corpse.

Ps 5:9 “Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave.”

Matt 23:27-28 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.”

b. Their tongues practice deceit

For the natural man, lying and deceit are a natural and habitual part of life.

Ps 52:2-4 “Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!”

c. The poison of vipers in on their lips

Jesus & John the Baptist referred to the Jewish leaders as vipers (Matt 3:7; 12:34)

Ps 140:1-3 “Rescue me, O LORD, from evil men; They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips. Selah”

d. Their mouths are full of cursing & bitterness

Cursing = "Profane communication with the intent to harm"

Bitterness = "Openly expressed emotional hostility"

Ps 50:16-21 "But to the wicked, God says: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. ... You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother's son. These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face."

Application: James 3:9-10 “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.”

2. Their **actions** are sinful

a. Their feet are swift to shed blood

Man's depravity has born the predictable fruit of violence and bloodshed.

In the 3,421 years of recorded history, we have only seen 268 years without war.

Prov 6:16-19 “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”

- b. Ruin and misery mark their ways
Ruin = "Destruction or utter brokenness"
Misery = "Wretchedness or calamity"

Isa 59:7 Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways."

- c. They don't know the way of peace
Peace = "Quietness and rest" [Inner peace or relational peace]

Isa 59:8 "The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace."

3. Their hearts are sinful

Matt 15:18-19 "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."

- a. They have no fear of God
There are two aspects of godly fear:
 1. An awe or reverence for God
 2. A holy dread of displeasing Him

Ps 36:1-4 "Concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong."

III Paul's Conclusions Regarding The Law

A. The limitations of the Law

1. It affects only those who are under it
Rom 2:12 "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law."
2. No one will be declared righteous by observing it
Righteous = Justified = "As though a person had never sinned."

Gal 2:15-16 "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ ... [for] by observing the law no one will be justified."

B. The purpose of the Law

1. To silence every mouth before God

Gal 3:21-24 “For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”

2. To make the whole world accountable to God

Gal 3:10 “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”

3. To bring about in man a consciousness of sin

Consciousness = “The intimate, personal acknowledgement of sin”

Rom 7:7 “What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.””

The Good News is that although the law can produce nothing but frustration and death, God has made it possible for us to have a perfectly righteous standing before God through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. As Paul sated in Phil 3:8-9, “... not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

Conclusion

The world proclaims we that we are robed in the finest of clothing, when we are not.

God's Word shouts above the world's lies and our own self-deception and declares that we are *not* okay. We are naked.

We say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But God says, “you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”

And what is God's remedy?

Rev 3:18 “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.”

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