

Redemption in Romans ***All Have Sinned***

Lesson #3 for July 17, 2010

Scriptures: Romans 1:16,17;22-32; 2:1-10,17-23; 3:1,2,10-18,23.

1. The focus of this lesson is on the sinfulness of human beings as presented in Romans 1:1-3:23. Two main types of sinners are described and discussed. The Gentiles, or pagans, have done almost everything they can to exclude God from their lives. The results as presented in Romans 1:18-32 are almost unspeakable—seemingly the worst list of sins in the entire Bible.
2. The second group are former Jews who are described as those who claim to be righteous and, as a result, condemn the first group which they see as terrible sinners. Because of the judgmental attitude of the former Jews as described in Romans 2, God regards them as being even more sinful than the Gentiles or pagans.
3. The Scriptures have always described the human condition as sinful. (Genesis 6:5-7; 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Psalm 5:9; 10:7; 14:1-3; 36:1; 53:1-3; Isaiah 59:2,7,8; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:10-23; 1 John 1:8,10)
4. Ellen G. White described this condition as follows:

Let no one take the limited, narrow position that any of the works of man can help in the least possible way to liquidate the debt of his transgression. This is a fatal deception. If you would understand it, you must cease haggling over your pet ideas, and with humble hearts survey the atonement.

This matter is so dimly comprehended that thousands upon thousands claiming to be sons of God are children of the wicked one, because they will depend on their own works. God always demanded good works, the law demands it, but because man placed himself in sin where his good works were valueless, Jesus' righteousness alone can avail. Christ is able to save to the uttermost because He ever liveth to make intercession for us.(Romans 8:34)—Ellen G. White comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1071.

5. But, God has not left us in a hopeless condition. After 15 verses of introduction in Romans 1, Paul went immediately to his main subject—the gospel. See Romans 1:16,17, *RSV*. Few verses have resulted in more variations of opinion in translation than have these verses. Three key words are very important in our understanding of this passage.
 - 1) *Gospel*. The word *gospel* is a translation of the Greek word *euangellion* which means good news. If something is not good news, it cannot be described as gospel.
 - 2) *Righteousness*. Since man is described as wholly sinful, he has no righteousness of his own. Thus, we are left with two other possibilities:
 - a) This righteousness is a righteousness from God which is legally transferred to our account through a process called justification, or
 - b) It is God's own righteousness; and that is the clear meaning of the simple reading of Romans 1:16,17. But, who would dare to question God's righteousness? Satan did! In heaven!
 - 3) *Faith*. The Greek word *pistis* is variously translated in the New Testament as *faith*, *belief*, *confidence*, or *trust*. What does God need to do to restore a trusting relationship with His children? Can God be trusted? How can we be sure?
6. But very few of God's children have seen this "great controversy" over God's character and government. Martin Luther, reading Romans 1:16,17, said:

This righteousness however is not that according to which God Himself is righteous as God, but that by which we are justified by Him through faith and the gospel. It is called the righteousness of God in counter-distinction to man's righteousness which comes from works.

7. So, why do some of us think this verse should read just as it says simply—that “God’s righteousness needs to be revealed”? **When and where did the sin problem arise?** If you turn first to Genesis 3 describing Adam and Eve’s transgression in the garden, then it seems that the sin problem is one that primarily affects human beings, and the solution will be God’s way of setting us right again.
8. By contrast, if you take all of Scripture and begin with the earliest event mentioned in Scripture, (Revelation 12:7-12) you will recognize that sin began in heaven in the throne room of God before human beings had been created. Lucifer, the highest created being, became jealous of God’s power and creative ability and thus, started a rebellion against God, hoping to force God to share those powers with Lucifer and the other angels. He wanted to rise to be equal to, or even superior to, God Himself! (Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28) War broke out in heaven, (Revelation 12:7) and Satan and those who chose to join with him were cast down to this earth. Thus, sin began when Satan accused God of not being fair, of being untrustworthy, and of selfishly not being willing to share His powers. God has always taken the loving, unselfish approach toward His children. He has been willing to share as much as He can of Himself. Lucifer/Satan took the selfish approach, trying to demand a higher position for himself. **Thus, the first sin began when questions and accusations were made against God and the way He runs His universe.**
9. Down through the centuries, Satan has added to his accusations against God. He first told Adam and Eve that God had lied to them about death being the result of sin and further that God was withholding important information from them. (Genesis 3:1-5) He wanted them to join him in making accusations against God. Over time, Satan has accused God of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. He has claimed that God is just waiting to destroy His children if they have committed even one unconfessed sin. He has claimed that God is responsible for an ever-burning hell, just to mention a couple examples. In actual fact, these characteristics are descriptive of Satan himself, but he accuses God of being like that. If God were, in fact, like that, would you want to live with Him forever? Do you believe God or Satan?
10. So, what did Paul think was the essence of the gospel? Read Romans 1:18. If the essence of the gospel is how God saves you and me, why did Paul turn immediately to discussing God’s wrath? Is God’s wrath the first thing you think of when someone mentions the gospel? If the gospel is primarily about how God saves you and me, then God’s wrath is a somewhat peripheral issue. **But, if the gospel is about the righteousness of God and whether or not God can be trusted, then the truth about God’s wrath is actually core to our understanding.**
11. **And notice what sin it is that stirs up God’s wrath!** It is not breaking one of the Ten Commandments. It is not murder or rape. **It is suppressing or twisting the truth about God!** That is exactly what Satan was doing in heaven. Do we ever misrepresent God to our children, our colleagues, or our friends?
12. The *Bible Study Guide*, focusing on the sinfulness of human beings, skips over this description of God’s wrath. But, **this is one of the most important points found in Romans 1.** So, what is God’s wrath? What does God do to His enemies? If Satan is correct in His accusations against God, then God’s wrath would be revealed by His torturing His enemies in everlasting flames. **But Romans 1:24,26,28 say that God’s wrath is simply His handing over sinners**

to reap the natural consequences of their own destructive behavior. But this idea is not new in Romans 1! It is all through the Old Testament. (Judges 2, 3; Hosea 11) Paul showed that he understood this clearly by quoting six passages from the Old Testament. See above.

13. So, what is it that God wants from us? Romans 2:4 says that God has shown His goodness and kindness to us to lead us to repentance—that is, to change our minds about Him. He does not want to have to hand us over to the consequences of our own sins. How does God feel about handing over His children to reap the consequences of their sins? Hosea 11:1-8 describe how He weeps when He must do that and how He did that to Sodom and Gomorrah!
14. After pointing out the terrible sinfulness of the Gentile pagans and also the terrible sinfulness of the judgmental Jews, Paul proceeded to Romans 3.
15. Read Romans 3:1-4.

^{3b}Does this mean that God will not be faithful [or trustworthy]? ⁴Certainly not! God must be true, even though every human being is a liar. As the Scripture says, “You must be shown to be right when you speak; you must win your case when you are being tried.” (GNB)

If the gospel is only about how God saves you and me, these verses are puzzling. However, if, as we have suggested, sin began in the courts of heaven with accusations against God and questions about His trustworthiness, then there is every reason in the world to say that God must win His case in court.

16. But, few Christians seem to be concerned at all about God’s reputation! Human beings have become so egocentric and selfish that all we can think about is what will happen to us. We do not want to admit our sinfulness. We want to earn our way to heaven. Those who take the larger, broader, deeper, wider approach to understanding the great controversy recognize that if God cannot be trusted, then salvation would be meaningless! **So, the first issue that must be resolved is whether or not God can be trusted.**
17. Are we—like Paul—proud of the gospel? Or, are we—like Jonah—embarrassed by it? (Jonah 4)
18. Another issue in understanding the book of Romans is the use of long Latin terms for the various processes involved. What is the correct meaning of *justification*? *Sanctification*? Even *salvation*? *Justification* was originally a Latin word derived from the Greek word *dikaioo*. The basic meaning of *dikaioo* is “to set right.” But modern theologians have twisted this and turned it rather into a statement “to declare righteous or legally right” even though no actual change has taken place in the person. *Sanctification* comes from a Greek word *hagioo* which means literally “to make holy” or “to set apart for holy purposes.” The whole process of how God saves human beings is summed up by the word *salvation* which again is a Latin word which means “to heal” or “to save” someone. It comes from the Greek word *sozo* also meaning “to heal” or “to save.”
19. So, once again we see the dilemma showing up. What is necessary for God to save human beings? Is it a legal process whereby He corrects our legal records in heaven—perhaps even erasing the evidence against us? Does the blood of Christ cover over our sins in some legal way? All of that could take place without any real change happening in us. Or, by contrast, is the process a process of healing whereby we are actually changed? If we are “truly saved” in the original sense of the word, we must be “fully healed.” What would it take for us to be healed? Don’t we need to understand the truth about God and His character? If we understood that truth, would it help us to take a different attitude toward Him? If trust could be restored between God and His children, and if it was safe for Him to trust us, and if we could learn to trust Him once again, would that solve the sin problem?
20. Is God concerned primarily about clearing up our records—about forgiving us—or about healing

and restoring us and making us safe to live in His kingdom and in His glorious presence?

21. Do we have any evidence that the life and death of Jesus was necessary not only to save and heal us but also to answer questions even in the minds of the onlooking universe?

1 Corinthians 4:9 (GNB): For it seems to me that God has given the very last place to us apostles, like people condemned to die in public **as a spectacle for the whole world of angels and of humanity.**

Ephesians 1:7-10 (GNB): ⁷For by the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God, ⁸which he gave to us in such large measure!

In all his wisdom and insight ⁹God did what he had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. ¹⁰**This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.**

Ephesians 3:9b-10 (GNB): ^{9b}God, who is the Creator of all things, kept his secret hidden through all the past ages, ¹⁰in order that at the present time, by means of the church, **the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms.**

Colossians 1:20 (GNB): Through the Son, then, God decided **to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood [His sacrificial death] on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.**

Ellen White puts it this way:

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but **it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe.** To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31,32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68,69 (1890); *Reflecting Christ* 60 (1985)

22. In our study of Romans, we will attempt to look beyond our human dilemma to the broader higher, deeper, universe-wide controversy that has involved all of the intelligent beings in God's universe. By doing this, we can read the book of Romans just as it was intended to be read—in its simplest, straightforward meaning—and avoid stretching and straining the translation to make it fit what we want it to say. It will be an exciting journey.

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