

LESSON 3

NOT GUILTY!

ROMANS 2:17—3:31



1 At a time when you were accused of some wrongdoing, how did you feel? How did you try to deal with your feelings of guilt or shame?



Read Romans 2:17—3:31 and the following notes:

☐ 2:17ff ☐ 2:21–27 ☐ 2:21, 22 ☐ 2:24 ☐ 3:1ff ☐ 3:5–8 ☐ 3:10–18
☐ 3:19 ☐ 3:21–29 ☐ 3:23 ☐ 3:24 ☐ 3:27, 28 ☐ 3:28

2 Why do you think Paul addressed the Jews specifically at this point in the letter? Why wasn't his earlier condemnation enough to convince them of their sin?

3 If there is not a single righteous person, what difference does it make that some are less sinful than others?

4 What does it mean to be freely justified by God's grace?

5 How does Paul explain faith and how it works (see the chart entitled “Faith” near 1:17)? How does his concept differ from other common interpretations?

6 What are some advantages of growing up in a religious home? What are some disadvantages?

Advantages

Disadvantages



7 Paul presents the idea of the “true Jew,” that is a person “whose heart is right with God.” How does this idea apply to Christians?

Like the Jews to whom Paul was addressing his stinging criticism, Christians are often guilty of trying to please God by good works. Independence, self-sufficiency, hard-earned security, and personal control over one’s life are cherished values today; it can be difficult to accept that there is no way to earn our way into heaven or to gain God’s favor. We think that surely we deserve consideration for our efforts. We must accept, however, that even at our best we fall far short of God’s perfect standard of righteous living. All our attempts to justify and excuse our actions count for nothing. The only way our sins can be forgiven is for us to accept God’s gift. Through Christ, we are declared *not guilty*. We can never do enough either to deserve that gift or to repay God for his great mercy—we can only accept it.

8 Paul accused the Jews of relying on the law to save them. In what ways do Christians get caught up in the externals of religious practice and lose sight of the need for complete dependence on God’s grace for salvation?



9 How have you tried to earn God's approval or repay him for forgiving your sins?

10 Evaluate these possible barriers to your accepting God's forgiveness by faith.

Not a barrier

A slight barrier

A big barrier

Suspicion of free offers (There must be a catch.) 1 2 3 4 5

Extreme guilt over past sins (I'm not sure I can be forgiven.) 1 2 3 4 5

Doing good in order to be worthy, or to repay God for his gift. 1 2 3 4 5

Pride in being better than others 1 2 3 4 5

Taking God's grace for granted (A loving God *has* to forgive.) 1 2 3 4 5

Relying on externals (acts of service, rituals, church membership, correct doctrines, etc.) 1 2 3 4 5

Taking salvation for granted (I've been a Christian all my life, so I guess I'm safe.) 1 2 3 4 5

Justifying actions, making excuses, or blaming others (It's really not my fault.) 1 2 3 4 5

Minimizing personal sinfulness (What's wrong with doing this? Everybody does it.) 1 2 3 4 5

Not fearing God (I think the Bible exaggerates about God's anger and the severity of his judgment.) 1 2 3 4 5

11 How should the truth of being made right with God through faith affect Christians?

12 What do your words and actions communicate to non-Christians about the nature of your faith?

13 What words or actions of yours might communicate a holier-than-thou attitude to nonbelievers? What reactions would you expect this to produce in them?

14 What difference should it make in your day-to-day actions to know that you cannot earn your way into heaven? Why isn't this like having a license to sin?

15 Do you try to earn God's approval? Do you have a holier-than-thou attitude or make excuses for your mistakes? Do you rely on externals instead of on Christ's redemption? Do you take God's grace for granted and forget to thank him for his precious gift? How should you change your thoughts and actions today?



A If keeping the law cannot save a Jew, what purpose does it serve? How does Christ's death affect the law? What is the role of the law in the context of grace?

B What are the modern parallels to the Jewish rite of circumcision? How might there be similar dangers involved?

C If Paul were writing Romans 2:17–24 to the Christian church today, how do you think he would change his message? How would his accusations apply to us?

D Think about each of the word pictures in Romans 3:11–18. What do these Old Testament quotations teach about our thoughts, direction, speech, and pursuits? What is the answer to this terrible picture?

E What ways of righteousness do people try? Why are these attempts futile?

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