

Romans

Answering Arguments Against God

November 23, 2014

I. Early Christian Apologetics

- A. In Romans 2, Paul made it clear that God impartially judges everyone according to their deeds. Paul also made it clear that God justifies and gives the gift of salvation to those who live according to the truth they have – be it the whole Bible, or no Bible at all. Finally, Paul affirms in Romans 2 that the wrath of God will come against all who unrepentantly practice sin, regardless of their nationality, religious affiliation, their claim of faith in Jesus Christ, or having been baptized.

- B. In Romans 3:1-20, Paul continues to lay the foundation needed to properly understand his teaching about justification by faith. In verses 1-18, Paul is defending the gospel’s foundational truths against Israel’s misinformed doctrinal beliefs – and especially their beliefs concerning the covenant relationship between God and Israel. And to further prepare us for the apologetics in Romans 3:1-18, I want to give you some history regarding Israel’s misinformed doctrinal beliefs.
 1. We know from Jesus’ public condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees – who were Israel’s strictest and most religious groups – that He did not speak to them as if they had good, God-pleasing intentions. Rather, Jesus spoke to them as if their intentions were, primarily, self-serving and prideful.
 - a. We have only to read the “woes,” spoken by Jesus against Israel’s religious leaders and recorded in Matthew 23 and Luke 11, to know this is true.
 - b. In addition to the “woes,” Jesus accused them of being hypocrites who tithed mint and dill and cummin, yet neglected the weightier provisions of the law, such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness – things they should have done without neglecting the others. And Jesus went to call them blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel (Matthew 23:23-24).
 - c. And finally, Jesus said that if our righteousness does not surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).
 - d. In other words, the vast majority of religious Jews were ungodly because they were unrepentant hypocrites – keeping only parts of the Law while knowingly and repeatedly breaking other parts.

2. And yet these same religious Jews, according to history, held the doctrinal belief that their Jewish nationality, their religion – which included having God’s Law given through Moses, and their covenant relationship with God – which was sealed by the sign of circumcision, protected them from being judged and condemned like the Gentiles, regardless of how righteous or unrighteous they were.
 - a. An affirmation of this historical view of Israel comes from Justin Martyr (*2nd century*), who is reported to have said of the Jews of his day: “They suppose that to them universally, who are of the seed of Abraham, [that] no matter how sinful and disobedient to God they may be, the eternal kingdom shall be given.”
 - b. And Abarbanel, a Jewish rabbi and scholar in the 15th Century, wrote, “If a Jew commit all manner of sins, he is indeed of the number of sinning Israelites, and will be punished according to his sins; but he has, notwithstanding, a portion in eternal life.”
3. Obviously, the gospel of Jesus Christ, as taught by the disciples and Paul, contradicted the popular Jewish beliefs about who God justifies and to whom God gives the gift of eternal life, and they fought back. Romans 3:1-18 contains the Jews’ arguments against Paul’s gospel, and Paul’s response to those arguments.

C. Prayer

II. Christian Apologetics – Defending the truth about God and His ways

- A. Romans 3:1-2 . . . Then what advantage has the Jew (*descendant of Abraham*)? Or what is the benefit of circumcision (*the seal verifying one is in a covenant relationship with God*)? [2] Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.
 1. ARGUMENT AGAINST: If God is going to judge us according to our deeds so that being an OT Jew or a NT Christian does not guarantee justification and the gift of eternal life, than what is the advantage of being a Jew or becoming a Christian?
 2. DEFENSE: True, being an OT Jew or NT Christian holds no special advantage when it comes to being judged by our deeds. However, it does hold a great advantage in that:
 - a. First, we have direct access to the revealed word of God, be it the Law as given through Moses or the entire Bible given by the Holy Spirit through those whom God used to write it.
 - b. Second, we have prophets and preachers, the Holy Spirit, the community of believers, prayer, and religious ceremonies which

remind us of who God is, how great God is, how we are to relate to Him, and how we are to live as His children.

3. In other words, because of the benefits given to the OT Jews and the NT Christians, we have a significant advantage in that we know what God requires of us to be in good standing with Him, to be justified by Him, and to receive His gracious gift of eternal life.

B. Romans 3:3-4 . . . What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? [4] May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, "That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged."

1. ARGUMENT AGAINST: Okay, lets say I agree that the OT Jews and now the NT Christians have the advantage of God's direct revelation on how to be in good standing with Him. What if some of them do not believe all that God says so that they willfully disobey God, and as a result are condemned along with everyone else who willfully practices sin? Won't their unbelief, that is, their unrepented disobedience nullify (*render useless*) the faithfulness of God? And won't their condemnation mean God is being unfaithful to the covenant promises He made with them?
 - a. If we put this argument in NT terms, it would go like this: If as a Christian I believe in God, put my faith in Jesus for eternal salvation, get baptized, and agree that the Bible contains God's standard on how to live, then if God withholds justification and the gift of eternal life because of my unrepentant practice of sin, doesn't that mean He has broken His promise about my salvation being eternally secure?
 - b. And there is a less obvious inference in this argument which goes like this: If God is all-powerful and sovereign, shouldn't He make sure those of us who believe in Him live according to His revealed standards. And if He doesn't and we unrepentantly continue in sin, then doesn't that mean His failure is the cause of our failure.
2. DEFENSE: There is no truth in the inference that our failure to live according to God's covenant is God's fault. And there is no truth to the implication that once we become a child of God, our sin no longer matters to Him – especially any unrepented practice of sin.
 - a. Here is where the truth lies – God is perfectly holy, His ways are perfectly just, His word is perfectly true, He justifies and imputes righteousness to those who, by faith, live righteously, and He

condemns those who, through the unrepented practice of sin, live unrighteously.

- b. In other words, God is perfectly just and completely faithful to His covenant even when He is condemning His own children for their unrepentant practice of sin.
 - c. As David said of God in Psalm 51:4 . . . “Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.”
 - d. Paul quotes only the second half of this verse, but the point is that God’s condemnation for sins committed is deserved and therefore justified, and that God’s justice is blameless so that no one can find any fault with it.
 - e. Finally, Paul is affirming that our unbelief in no way affects the faithfulness of God. As he said in 2 Timothy 2:13 . . . “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”
3. Before moving on, I want to say just a little bit about blaming. Generally speaking, we are so committed to blaming others for our faults and failures that sometimes we even blame God.
- a. Adam was the first to do this. In answering the question of why he disobeyed God, he said: “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate” (Genesis 3:12).
 - b. The reason I am bringing this up is because when we blame God for our failure to do what we know is right, we are saying that His failure is the cause of our failure. This is arrogance and the dishonest refusal to take responsibility for our sinful choices and behavior. And so I urge us to guard against such pride and dishonesty.

C. Romans 3:5-6 . . . But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) [6] May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

1. ARGUMENT AGAINST: If our unrepented practice of sin verifies and magnifies God’s holiness, and if this verification and magnification benefits Him by making Him look good, wouldn’t that mean He is being unjust when He condemns us for our sin?
2. DEFENSE:
 - a. First of all, both OT Jews and NT Christians believe God will condemn unbelievers on that final judgment day, and cast them into the Lake of Fire along with the devil and his co-workers.

- b. However, the arrogance of the OT Jews was such that they reveled in the fact that God will condemn unbelievers to eternal damnation while justifying and giving eternal life to His chosen people – even if they practice sin like unbelievers.
 - c. And here is where this logic breaks down. If those who deem themselves Christians believe it is wrong for God to condemn His people for their practice of sin, then He would be equally wrong to condemn unbelievers, because their sin also brings Him honor and glory. In other words, if God shows favoritism to some, then to be a just judge, He must show this same favoritism to all.

- D. Romans 3:7-8 . . . But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? [8] And why not say (*as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say*), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.
 - 1. Paul has now gone on the offensive, and in so doing, he presents an argument against the reasoning of those who are arguing against his gospel. And in these two verses, he makes two points.
 - a. First, he says: "You say my gospel is an outright lie, and your doctrine – that God justifies and gives eternal life to OT Jews and NT Christians regardless of how they live – is true. If you are correct, then since I am a Jew – and also a Christian – why are you judging me as a sinner for preaching something different than you teach? To have integrity with your beliefs, you must overlook my sin just like you believe God is overlooking yours?"
 - b. Then, Paul states the natural conclusion to their doctrinal belief to show its absurdity. And so he says: "If God overlooks your unrepentant practice of sin because of your heritage and your seal of circumcision, then that means God's mercy rises to the level of your unrepented practice of sin – no matter how great it is. Therefore, if God's mercy rises to the level of our unrepentant practice of sin, why not teach that the more sin we practice the more we will experience the marvelous mercy of God?"
 - 2. Finally, Paul shows how false and dishonoring to God their doctrinal beliefs are by telling his opponents that God's condemnation of their unrepentant practice of sin and their misleading teaching, is just!
 - 3. Which brings us to Paul's last argument and response.

- E. Romans 3:9-18 . . . What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

[10] as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one; [11] there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; [12] all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.” [13] “Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving,” “the poison of asps is under their lips;” [14] “whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness;” [15] “their feet are swift to shed blood, [16] destruction and misery are in their paths, [17] and the path of peace they have not known.” [18] “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

1. ARGUMENT AGAINST: One of the arguments of OT Jews and some NT Christians is that by birth (*Jews*) or re-birth (*Christians*), and by religious practices (*Jews*) or doctrinal beliefs (*Christians*), they are spiritually superior to everyone outside their group.
 - a. And it is their spiritual superiority that gives them the confident assurance that they are in good standing with God – in spite of the presence of ongoing, unrepented sin in their lives.
 - b. In other words, there are those who believe that their affiliation with a certain religious group, and that that groups teaching about God and His ways, puts them in a spiritually superior condition that results in God being gracious when dealing with their unrepented practice of sin, while dealing with everyone else’s unrepented practice of sin with wrath. This is a classic double-standard.
2. DEFENSE: Paul responds by saying this misperception is totally false, because, as he has already shown, both Jews and Greeks are under the curse of sin, both are ruled by the power of sin, and both have practiced sin. In other words, as Paul says in the simplest terms possible, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).
3. Then Paul appeals to scripture (OT) to support his teaching that Jews are no better than Greeks, and Christians are no better than non-Christians when it comes to the darkness of evil in the human heart and the reality of mankind’s participation in the unrepentant practice of sin. We read this in –
4. Romans 3:10-18 . . . “There is none righteous, not even one; [11] there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; [12] all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one” (Psalm 14:1-3). [13] “Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving” (Psalm 5:9), “the poison of asps is under their lips” (Psalm 140:3);

[14] “whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Psalm 10:7); [15] “their feet are swift to shed blood, [16] destruction and misery are in their paths, [17] and the path of peace they have not known” (Isaiah 59:7-14). [18] “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Psalm 36:1).

5. Truly, this is a gloomy picture of humanity. But it is not the only picture, nor does it have to be the final picture. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, and Paul moves on from here to make that clear.

III. Conclusion

- A. I am aware that my final comments have nothing little to do with what has been taught today. However, what I am about to say has much to do with modern theology, and maybe even your theology. Romans 3:10-18 is used by some to support the belief that mankind cannot do good, that we are incapable of being righteous, and we are by birth and nature, totally corrupt. In other words, this doctrinal understanding of scripture teaches that there is absolutely nothing good in us, and any good we might do is corrupted by our selfish and sinful intentions.
- B. Now because Romans 3:10-18 is included by those who hold this doctrine, I want to point out three things about these verses.
 1. First, the Psalm Paul quotes first begins with the qualifying phrase: “The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God,”” which means the accompanying statements in that Psalm are about fools, not everyone universally.
 2. Second, Paul never infers or directly includes the word “can’t” in his quotations from the Psalms. He doesn’t say no one can be righteous, but rather no one is righteous.
 3. Third, Paul is addressing the universality of sinfulness (Romans 3:23), not the universal inability to do what is right. If in these verses he is saying no one can do what is right, then his words about Gentiles doing what is right without having the Law make no sense, and are a contradiction of what he says here.
 4. Therefore, I am reminding you that in our effort to properly understand each individual part of Romans, we must understand it within its immediate context, and seek to understand the immediate context within the larger context of Romans and the largest context of other scriptures speaking to the same topic.