

EXCUSES...

Romans 2-3:21

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Imagine how you would respond if the President of the United States sent you a message asking you to become involved in something that he was doing. No doubt you would read the message over and over again and follow its instructions to the smallest detail. If the message said go to a certain door at a certain time and ask for a certain person, you surely would not try to gain entrance by going to a different door at a different time and asking for a different person. You cannot gain access to the President that way. To enter his presence and be involved in what he is doing, you must do it his way.

If this is true for the President of the United States, how much more true is it for the Creator and God of the Universe? Why do we discard the common sense way we would approach the President (i.e., by following his instructions) when approaching God? We think we can stroll into His presence and participate in His plan and purpose any way we want. The same common sense that told us this kind of attitude would not work for the President, ought to tell us even more forcefully that it will not work for God.

That is what the Book of Romans is all about. In Romans we learn that God is calling us to be involved in what He is doing today. But we have to do it His way. In Rom. 1:1-17, God announces that He has begun a new plan and purpose through the Apostle Paul. Paul was to take God's good news out to the Gentiles apart from Israel and the law. This was something never spoken of before—it is what Paul will later describe as a Mystery or Secret (16:25). The Old Testament and Gospels spoke of God's blessing going to the Gentiles, but it was always through the nation Israel. Here in Romans, however, God announces a new plan whereby His blessings would go out to the Gentiles apart from Israel, and this had never been spoken of before. This is what God is doing today. This is the program God wants to involve us in.

suppressed His truth. By nature we are rebels and enemies of God. God has handed us over to pursue our own sinful ways, enslaved to the uncontrollable desires of our own evil hearts. In this fallen state of sin, we can do nothing pleasing to God and deserve His wrath not His blessings, His condemnation not His justification. Paul concludes chapter 1 with these words, **“Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death.”**

This is the great conflict that the Book of Romans resolves. God wants to involve us in what He is doing so that we can participate in things of infinite and eternal value, but He can't because of sin. That is the great problem of humanity; that is the great problem Romans solves.

But before giving us the right solution to this problem, God rules out several wrong answers in Romans 2 and 3. God knew that we would try to escape this negative verdict by making excuses. He now rules them out, one-by-one. One excuse that won't hold up in God's court is claiming that since we do some good things, we must be good enough for God. This is called the excuse of *personal righteousness*. A co-worker once told me that she knew she was going to heaven because she sacrificed part of her Saturdays to volunteer at a food pantry. She didn't need the gospel of grace that Paul was bringing because she was already involved in what God was doing. She was OK on her own. But what if the standard is the Lord Jesus Christ, who left the glory of heaven, lived a perfect human life on earth, and then gave His life to save His enemies, to save us sinners.

Another excuse we make is the claim of *relative righteousness*. Here we look around until we find someone worse than ourselves, and then we claim that since we are better than them, we must be acceptable to God. These people are not hard to find—they reside in our neighborhoods and families, they appear on the nightly news and the morning papers. This thinking is similar to the reasoning we use when we get a traffic ticket. You know, you are sitting there stewing about

That is the good news. The bad news is He can't. Rom. 1:18-32, in fact, says we are excluded from God and what He is doing. Mankind as a whole rejected God and

getting caught and then you start grumbling under your breath that certainly this policeman has more important things to do, like chasing murderers and robbers and drug dealers, than lurking on the roadside waiting for me. No wonder the crime rate is so high! But none of this alleviates the fact that *we are* guilty, and *we have fallen* under the wrath of the civil court, and we deserve the punishment meted out to us. This argument will hold up no better in the court of Heaven; God's standard is absolute perfection.

A third way we try to escape God's judgment and wrath is to claim that we keep the Law. This is called *legal righteousness*. We have never murdered anyone! We have never committed adultery! But the problem is that the Law consists of 613 commandments. What about bearing false witness? What about stealing? Coveting? The Law demands perfect obedience. To be justified by the law we must keep the whole law—all 613 commandments. Someone has likened it to hanging off a cliff by a chain of 613 links. How many links need to break for you to fall to your destruction? Just one. Offending in one instance makes the Law prosecuting attorney not a defense attorney. That is the way the Law works—in God's court, it is a prosecutor, who searches out for the slightest breach.

Having stripped us of all defenses—personal, relative, legal righteousness—Paul presents us without excuse before God. No righteousness of our own. No way of pleasing God. Excluded from all that He is doing. Lost in His condemnation and wrath. But just when everything is at its darkest and all seems lost, God steps in and says: **“BUT NOW, the righteousness of God is manifested without the Law”** (Rom. 3:21). But now, God is going to provide the very thing we need most. He makes available His Own gift righteousness to the sinner on the basis of

grace and faith not law and works. But now, God gives freely His Own righteousness to all who believe. And This righteousness was procured by the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for sinners.

FOR WE HAVE BEFORE PROVED BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES, THAT THEY ARE ALL UNDER SIN; AS IT IS WRITTEN, THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE...THERE IS NONE THAT DOETH GOOD, NO, NOT ONE...BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT...(Rom. 3:9-20)

