

## The Universal Guilt of Man

**Lesson Scope:** [Romans 1:18 to 3:20](#)

### Lesson Focus

The previous lesson introduced the theme of the Book of Romans. In chapter 1 verses 16 and 17 briefly state the whole argument of the epistle and declare the Gospel to be "the power of God unto salvation." God has provided a way for unrighteous man to be righteous.

In this lesson Paul explains why the Gentiles are accountable for their sin and why God is justified in pouring out judgment upon them. He also explains why the Jews deserved judgment in spite of their past privileges. The apostle clinches his point with the words of Psalm 14:3, "There is none that doeth good, no, not one."

Paul, being a devout Jew, understood the prejudice and hypocrisy of the unbelieving Jews of his day. He also saw the expressions of corruption, idolatry, and depravity among the Gentiles. Even though the sinfulness of the Jews and Gentiles was expressed differently, the cause and the cure were the same.

God has revealed Himself to all mankind, but men have largely rejected that revelation. The Gentile world ignored the witness of the conscience and nature, and the Jewish world wrested the witness of the Law.

This lesson is a good reminder that the children of Mennonite homes are just as much in need of salvation as any other children. Referring to those who came into the church from non-Mennonite backgrounds as converts is misleading. No one can be a Christian without being converted. However, it is important to acknowledge that those who grow up in Christian homes have an "advantage" (Romans 3:1-2). Tradition is a valuable tool in passing on the faith.

Also consider the difficulty that the Jews faced because of the dispensational change. The emphasis had changed from the Law to the Gospel. They were exchanging the types and shadows for the fulfillment and cause, but that change was not easy!

The Jews and the Gentiles were now on the same level and needed to

embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ by faith.

**Lesson Aim:** To prove "all the world ... guilty before God."

**Theme Verses**" [Psalm 53:2, 3](#). God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

## Lessons Text

### The Unrighteousness of the Gentiles

[Romans 1:18-23](#) <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; <sup>19</sup> Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. <sup>20</sup> For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: <sup>21</sup> Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

[Romans 1:28](#) <sup>28</sup> And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

[Romans 1:32](#) <sup>32</sup> Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

### The Self-righteousness of the Jews

[Romans 2:1-6](#) <sup>1</sup> Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. <sup>2</sup> But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. <sup>3</sup> And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup> Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and

longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? <sup>5</sup> But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; <sup>6</sup> Who will render to every man according to his deeds:

**Romans 2:17** <sup>17</sup> Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,

**Romans 2:21-23** <sup>21</sup> Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? <sup>22</sup> Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? <sup>23</sup> Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?

### **The Condemnation of All Men**

**Romans 3:9-19** <sup>9</sup> What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; <sup>10</sup> As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: <sup>11</sup> There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. <sup>12</sup> They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. <sup>13</sup> Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips: <sup>14</sup> Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness: <sup>15</sup> Their feet *are* swift to shed blood: <sup>16</sup> Destruction and misery *are* in their ways: <sup>17</sup> And the way of peace have they not known: <sup>18</sup> There is no fear of God before their eyes. <sup>19</sup> Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **The Unrighteousness of the Gentiles**

1. Why are the heathen declared guilty even if they have never heard the Gospel?
2. How could we become guilty of holding the truth in unrighteousness?

#### **The Self-righteousness of the Jews**

3. List principles that govern God's judgment of man.
4. Name some delusions that accompany self-righteousness.

## **The Condemnation of All Men**

5. How does the truth of Romans 3:9-10 apply to us?
6. Explain the statement "There is none that seeketh after God."
7. What purpose did the Law serve?

### **Analyzing the Passage**

Romans 1:18-23 explains the guilt of the Gentile people. Paul declares that the heathen are not without a witness to the truth. They have an inner consciousness that is placed there by God, and they have the evidence of nature.

To "hold the truth in unrighteousness" is to hold down or hinder its progress. When men's unrighteous deeds contradict their religious profession, they suppress or stifle the truth. By doing so, they make it difficult for themselves and for others to see their true condition before God.

Verses 21 to 23 and verse 28 portray a step-by-step course away from God. Man does not reach a deeply corrupted state suddenly. It is the result of spurning better knowledge at various points along the way.

In chapter 2, Paul makes a subtle switch to the fallen state of the Jews. He condemns them for passing judgment upon the Gentile, when they were guilty of the same sins. Their knowledge of God went beyond the witness of nature. They had received the Law and were professing a knowledge that qualified them to be teachers. But they were breaking their own laws and were therefore guilty of rank hypocrisy.

"As it is written" (Romans 3:10) introduces a list of at least seven different quotations from Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah that the apostle Paul uses to verify the universal guilt of man (Romans 3:10-18).

## **Principles and Applications**

### **The Unrighteousness of the Gentiles**

1. Divine wrath rests upon all unrighteousness (Romans 1:18).

No one, regardless of race, wealth, or position, has a valid reason to think that God will overlook or excuse his sin. God hates sin; He cannot overlook it and still be God. As children of God, we must not presume upon His grace by willful sinning. The Gospel makes victory over sin possible, and God requires holiness.

2. The creation stands as a witness to all men of God's existence and supernatural power (Romans 1:19-20).

The psalmist stated it well: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.... There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19:1-3). Anyone with an open mind must conclude that this complex universe most certainly required a Creator. Men only reveal their depravity when they go to great lengths to formulate and defend the theory of evolution as an explanation for the origin of the natural world.

3. Failure to respond to revealed truth begins a downward spiral into idolatry (Romans 1:21-23,28,32).

What begins as minor deviation from better knowledge can quickly accelerate into self-confident rejection of God and His claim on one's life. An anti-authority mindset, ingratitude, lack of spiritual discernment, and covetousness are earmarks of persons traveling the downward road. Knowing about God is not enough; we must allow Him to direct the way we live.

### **The Self-righteousness of the Jews**

4. The self-righteous find it easy to be judgmental of others (Romans 2:1).

The Jews were guilty of the same sins as the Gentiles, yet they were condemning the Gentiles while excusing themselves. Behind a critical and judgmental attitude is a failure to love. It is very easy to overlook one's own faults while pointing out the failure of others. Genuine love fulfills the Law.

5. God's judgment will be according to truth (Romans 2:2-3, 6).

God has revealed His will through the Scriptures, and they will be the basis upon which all justice will be meted out. Man's reasoning and his twisting of the Scriptures will avail nothing. A mere profession will fall short, because every man will be judged according to his works (Revelation 2:23). Those who disobey will find no way to escape.

6. Spurning God's goodness and mercy makes a person guilty (Romans 2:4-5).

The goodness of God leads men to repentance. Repentance was the keynote in the preaching of both John the Baptist and Jesus. They cried out against the hypocrisy of the Jews. On the day of Pentecost, "Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you" (Acts 2:38). Repentance is yet essential for salvation.

7. Inconsistent living brings reproach upon the cause of Christ (Romans

2:21-23).

The Jews, God's people, were causing His Name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles by their disobedience to the Law. People of the world are watching, and they notice how we live. To disappoint them is to fail in our witness for Christ.

### **The Condemnation of All Men**

8. Sin makes a person guilty before God (Romans 3:9-11, 19).

All men are guilty because all have sinned. This is expressly stated in 3:23: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The author substantiates this conclusion by quoting from Psalm 14:1-3 and 53:1-3. Both of these psalms include the exclamation "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!" This desire has been fulfilled in Christ Jesus. We likewise cry out, "Oh that men would look to Jesus for salvation from sin!"

9. Shameless wickedness marks those who lack a fear of God (Romans 3:13-18).

When there is no fear of God, man follows the dictates of his fallen nature. These verses paint a horrible picture of a life that is under Satan's domination. In contrast, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Godly fear causes one to seek a knowledge of God's will through the Scriptures and then to walk in obedience to that light.

### **Important Teachings**

1. Divine wrath rests upon all unrighteousness (Romans 1:18).

2. The creation stands as a witness to all men of God's existence and supernatural power (Romans 1:19-20).

3. Failure to respond to revealed truth begins a downward spiral into idolatry (1:21-23, 28, 32).

4. The self-righteous find it easy to be judgmental of others (Romans 2:1).

5. God's judgment will be according to truth (Romans 2:2-3, 6).

6. Spurning God's goodness and mercy makes a person guilty (Romans 2:4-5).

7. Inconsistent living brings reproach upon the cause of Christ (Romans 2:21-23).

8. Sin makes a person guilty before God (Romans 3:9-11, 19).

9. Shameless wickedness marks those who lack a fear of God (Romans 3:13-18).

### **Answers to Questions**

*1. Why are the heathen declared guilty even if they have never heard the Gospel?*

Through the voice of God's handiwork in creation, God has revealed Himself to all men. And through this knowledge, they have an inner consciousness that there is a God to whom they are accountable. Furthermore, when they knew God, they turned away from what they knew, and corrupted themselves. Thus they turned to idols and worshiped the creation instead of the Creator. So God gave them over to a reprobate mind. He left them with the result of their own choices.

*2. How could we become guilty of holding the truth in unrighteousness?*

We hinder the progress of truth when we fail to live up to what we know. It has been said that sometimes the world knows better how Christians should live than Christians do. We must be true to principle and live obediently. To contend for the faith contentiously is to deny the faith. We hold the truth in unrighteousness when we fail to live by the higher law of love.

*3. List principles that govern God's judgment of man.*

God judges according to truth (Romans 2:2). We will be judged on the basis of what the Bible says. God judges according to a man's deeds (Romans 2:6). "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). God judges without respect of persons (Romans 2:11).

*4. Name some delusions that accompany self-righteousness.*

The self-righteous are deluded in thinking that they are better than others. They are blind to their own sinfulness. They erroneously believe that they have God's approval and therefore do not need God's long-suffering and forgiveness.

*5. How does the truth of Romans 3:9-10 apply to us?*

As Christian people, we have no special claims on God's mercy and grace. We were all born with a sinful nature and carnal desires. We need to repent and believe the Gospel to be saved. We have no merits of our own; we claim the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. This does not discredit the advantages of being raised in a Christian home.

6. Explain the statement "There is none that seeketh after God."

This statement is understood in the light of John 6:44 and 12:32. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." "And I, if I be lifted up.... will draw all men unto me." These two Scriptures put the whole picture in a right perspective. When left to himself, man does not seek after God.

### *7. What purpose did the Law serve?*

The Law was given to stop all murmuring and excuse making concerning what is right or wrong. In the light of the Law, all men became guilty because in some way all were found to be violators. In this sense the Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, who provided the way for us to be reconciled to God.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). All includes everyone without exception. The Gospel is the good news of hope through faith in Jesus Christ. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter 2:24-25).

### **Research Guide**

1. Use a concordance or another translation to see that to "hold the truth" in Romans 1:18 refers not to having it but to hindering it.
2. Read Psalm 19 and note the explicit description of nature's ability to communicate. Also notice the progression from speaking of nature to speaking of the law and statutes of the Lord.
3. In regard to judging, compare Romans 14:4; Luke 6:37-42; and Matthew 7:1-5.
4. Romans 3:10 begins a series of quotations from the Old Testament. Use a chain reference Bible to find these passages.