

The Law of Christ

Good morning. This morning we come to Romans chapter 3, one of the truly great passages of Scripture where Paul is wrapping up the first section of this wonderful letter to the Romans Christians. It's really just the end of the section where he is pointing out that the entire world is guilty of sin, and must have faith in Christ in order to be saved. His charge that all our guilty of sin concludes in the famous verse of Romans 3:23 **For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.** For me personally, this verse is of great importance, as it was one of the first verses that I memorized. It was good for that since it is nice and short, and easy to remember. If you really look at human nature, and how we act, it's pretty obvious that we are all sinners, and we fall far short of the glory of God. Remember how there are basically three categories of people covered in the end of chapter 1 and throughout chapter 2. We have the outright pagan people in chapter one, and the moralist person, who was condemning other people while doing the same things. He basically thought his good would outweigh his bad. And then also in chapter 2, there is the religious person, who thinks his outside appearance, or the religious ceremonies that he does are enough to save him. I would have put myself in the moralist category before I was saved by the Lord. If asked before becoming a Christian I probably would have said that I'm basically a good person so I should be "in". And, if that isn't good enough, well I do go to church every week, I've confessed my sins before, I'm confirmed in the church, basically I've got the bases covered. So, I was the moralist, with religion as a back up. Well, when I read Romans 3:23 that changed. It is clear that none of those things, being basically good, or going to the right church, are good enough. Even if your good does outweigh your bad, you still have bad. And that isn't good enough to get into God's holy heaven. And we know that the Bible is pretty clear that religion does not save people. Jesus's most critical words were saved for the Pharisees who were the most religious people in the Jewish nation certainly, if not the entire world. Religion does not save. Religion does not make a person pure. Psalm 51 is a great place to go to learn this lesson. Verses 16 and 17 say, **For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.** Our religious actions do not make God happy with us, having a broken spirit, and a broken and contrite heart is what pleases God.

Today again we have an academic lesson and a practical lesson. Remember that we are still in the doctrinal section of the book. So we are learning about the doctrine of the Christian faith, which is mainly based on faith in Christ. And, we will conclude the first part of the doctrine section, in which Paul has shown that all people are guilty of sin. We are also going to get a practical lesson about how we can apply the Law to our lives today.

Pray

Academic Section

Advantages for the Jewish People

First we want to look at the overall theme of chapter 3, and see how Paul is making his points in this section. Last time we saw that the world is divided into 3 groups of people basically when it comes to how we relate to God. The first was in chapter 1, and he was the pagan person. He had the knowledge of God, as we saw in verses 19-20 **because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.** But, they did not honor God in spite of their knowledge of Him. Instead they worshipped the creation, and became darkened in their minds, and we saw how their conduct degenerated into absolute debauchery. The second group we saw was the moralists. These people are described in the beginning of chapter 2. They say to themselves, and perhaps others, that they aren't as bad as other people. This is the person who says, "I'm not as bad as so and so, even though he is committing the same sorts of sins." This is an easy trap to fall into. We can look at the world around us and see that it is completely depraved. You don't need to look very hard in the news to see stories of just how far gone this society is. Every sin under the sun is on display; it's a wonder that God has not already judged this nation. So, it is easy to sit back and think that, "I'm not that bad, I don't do what those people are doing, or I've never done that." But, like I said before that is not what God is concerned with, because He is perfect. Therefore, we must be perfect to be in His presence. So, it really doesn't matter if you are better than the worst person in the world. It doesn't matter if you are better than Hitler who murdered six million Jews. Have you ever been angry at your brother? Jesus said that is the same as murder. The moralist person is condemned because he is still a sinner, even if he isn't the worst sinner in the world. As we have already seen this morning, the person relying on his religion is condemned as well, as religion is not what makes us pleasing to the Lord. Doing certain religious acts do not make us pleasing in His sight. Having a right relationship with Him does.

But, chapter 3 begins by saying that the Jewish people did have a great advantage because of their religion. **1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3 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.** Paul, in fact, says that they had great advantage. First of all, and most importantly, they were entrusted with the oracles of God. What exactly does that mean, the oracles of God? These are the very words of God. This word for oracles is in the NT two other times. Once by Stephen in the book of Acts when he says that they Jews rejected the oracles of God that came through Moses, and again in Hebrews, where the author says that the readers of his letter needed to be taught the oracles of God again on an elementary level when they should have been teachers of them by this time. Here Paul is making the point that the Jews were chosen by God to be given His words, which would include all the Scriptures. Notice that this is the advantage of the Jewish people; they were given the very words of God. This shows

the importance of the Word of God, which should be self-evident. His are the words of life, the words that will give us a more abundant life, the words that can change our lives, the very words of truth. God gave them every advantage over the rest of the world for being a saved people. They had His presence, they had His men to lead them, and they had His very words. But, notice the implication of verse 3. Some of them did not believe. Even though they were chosen, even though they had the presence of God, even though they words of God, they did not all believe. It seems hard to believe that they could be given such an enormous advantage and still not get it, but it shows that salvation is a matter of the heart, not the exterior, as we have been learning throughout this study. The heart must change, it must be conformed to God's standard, by God, in order for us to be saved, and He does this when we place our faith in Him. Our good works cannot change our hearts. Our hearts are still black with sin, even if we try to cover them up with good works. The only way for them to be cleaned is by placing our faith in Christ. Paul says that even though some of them did not believe, God's perfect righteousness is not affected. He is still perfect no matter what our reaction to Him is. We cannot change God, only He can change us. The tendency of mankind is to change what God has given into a manmade religion. This has happened throughout history. As we saw, the pagans had knowledge of God, but they worshipped the creation instead. The Jews were given the very words of God, but they changed God's words into a system whereby the people needed to rely on sacrifices in order to have their sins forgiven. The church was corrupted also, shortly after Christ ascended into heaven. Christ, Himself, warned of false teachers who would come after He left. And, Paul had to deal with false teachers throughout his time on the earth, particularly with the Galatians. The church became corrupted by false teachers and developed into a manmade religion also, that depended on priests, and all sorts of false ideas in addition to faith.

Paul then goes on to show again how all people are condemned before God. The NASB is really good in one respect, in that it shows all quotes from the OT in all capital letters. It makes it very easy to see these quotes when it isn't clear from the text that it is a quote. Here in verses 10-18 it is obvious that these are quotes from the OT since it says, "as it is written." All of these verses but one come from the Psalms, with verses 15 and 16 being the exception, which come from Isaiah. The verses in Isaiah deal specifically with the Jewish nation, and the verses from the Psalms deal with David's enemies who were both Jews and Gentiles at different times. It is interesting that Paul would chose these particular verses in that when you read them in context they show how Israel's enemies and Israel itself are the people being referred to in them. **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.** We won't take the time to go through each one of these, but just realize that in the OT Scriptures the doctrine that all people are guilty of sin is clearly

taught, including God's chosen people the Jews. All people need faith in God in order to be saved. Notice also that several parts of the body are involved in this sin. The mouth, the feet and the eyes are all involved. James chapter 3 talks about how difficult it is to control the tongue, and just how wicked the tongue is. Through the tongue our whole bodies are defiled, as it says in James, and also the Lord referred to this when He said that our mouths say what is truly in our hearts in Matthew 15. Verses 15 and 16 say **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.** The pathway on which people walk also is involved in their sin. We talked about that last time in the section about the pathway of the person with the clean heart. A person who has been saved by God should desire to do the good works that God has before him. But, we see these people are on the broad path that leads to destruction. They are out for the destruction of other people. Finally we see that the fear of God is not before their eyes. Verse 18 says **There is no fear of God before their eyes.** The eyes are the gateway to the mind. This is why we need to be so careful with what is put in front of our eyes. These people did not have the fear of God before their eyes, and according to David in Psalm 36; they are the ungodly. Do not be like the ungodly here who have no fear of God before their eyes. We should always have the fear of God before us, knowing that His eyes are always upon us, even when we think we are alone, He sees us. This is part of His omniscience, and His omnipresence. It is a comfort to know that He is always there if we need His help, but when we are tempted to sin, we need to remember that He is watching then as well.

Then we have a great teaching about the Law that was given to the Jews, and its purpose. **Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight;** Notice that that is all one sentence. So, the Law speaks to those who are under the Law, which of course refers to the Jews. But, it also says that every mouth may be closed and all the world will become accountable to God. So, by giving the Law to the Jews, God made His perfect standard known to everyone. So, if everyone knows the standard, then everyone is accountable to God, since we all fall so far short of the standard. We also see that no one is justified by the works of the law in God's sight. All our works are as filthy rags to the Lord according to Isaiah 64. This, as we noted before, is because even if we do good works, we still have bad works. Our flesh is corrupted by our sin natures, so we are unacceptable to the Lord, no matter what we do to try to please Him. So, then the question becomes, what is the purpose for the Law? Did God give this standard just to condemn people knowing that they cannot live up to it? Did He give us a bunch of rules to follow so that He could be a taskmaster? Was it only to show the Jews that they were His chosen people? Fortunately, Paul gives us the answer to this important question in the second half of verse 20, **for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.** The Law tells us what sin is. When we look at the Law we should realize that we cannot keep it all, and as James said if we offend the Law in one point we are guilty of all. If we have knowledge of what sin is, then we are held accountable for breaking the Law. I'm sure if we had a policeman here he could tell us that a common excuse people use when they are pulled over is that they, "didn't know what the speed limit was." Or they didn't know that the street was a one way. In their case ignorance of the law is no excuse, but God

wanted us to know what the standard was. He wanted us to know that we were accountable to His standard. Christ laid out just how stringent the standard is in the Sermon on the Mount also. He told His Jewish audience that the standard was much more than what they read at face value. If you have been angry with someone, it is the same as murdering him. If you have looked at a woman inappropriately, it is the same as committing adultery. This standard was given to the people in order to do something in their hearts. It was given to make them realize that they could not attain the standard, and therefore must rely on faith in order to have salvation.

Practical Section

Law of Faith

So, this brings us to the practical part of the message today. Once again, we've seen that the Jewish people had a great advantage in that they were chosen by Him and were given the Word of God. They also were given the distinction of circumcision, which showed the world physically that they were His people. These things alone did not save them though, as we saw that all people, Jews and Greeks alike are guilty of sin. Then we saw that the purpose of the Law was so that people would know what sin is. That brings us to what we should do with this knowledge of the purpose of the Law. I thought of three basic questions in light of this purpose of the Law. Clearly there is more to it than just knowing what sin is. Having this knowledge should spur us to some sort of action. The three questions are; how should we react to this standard? How should we then live in light of this standard? And, how should we view the future? The answer to each of those questions is just one word. How should we react to this standard? With faith. How should we then live in light of this standard? With love. How should we view the future? With hope. Faith, love and hope. That is a little out of order with 1 Corinthians 13:13, but for our purposes today, and chronologically, this works out a little better. So, we have the Law of Faith, the Law of Love, and the Law of Hope.

We see the Law of faith here in Romans 3:21 through the end of the chapter. Here Paul is explaining how since the purpose of the Law is to show us what sin is, this knowledge should drive us to faith, since that is the only answer. We cannot be justified by the works of the Law, so our only option is to have faith in Christ as the substitute for our sins. The first thing we see about this law of faith is that it was talked about in the Law and the prophets. **But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.** That means that the OT talked about this Law of faith as well. We will see much more about that in the next chapter, but that was the entire point of the story of Abraham. He was justified by faith. He was not justified because he was a Jew, or because he followed a set of rules. He was justified because he had faith that God would do the things He said He would do. The law of faith is throughout the OT with the Psalms of David, and throughout the prophets. All of these testify that people must have faith in God for salvation. You shouldn't miss that verse 21 through the first half of verse 25 is all one sentence. Sometimes it is easy to overlook these things in the word, and miss the overall meaning. Reading the word takes a lot of concentration, and I find myself having to reread passages several times to really

comprehend the meaning. **But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.** Any person who believes will receive the righteousness of God, Jew or Greek, it does not matter. This is to say that belief is the requirement to receive this gift from God. It is not a matter of race or creed or gender, but only belief, faith. Belief in Jesus Christ as the substitute for your sins is the requirement for reception of the gift of salvation. This word “propitiation” is a very interesting word. The Greek word is “hilasterion”, and it means mercy seat. It is only in the NT two times, once here and once in Hebrews chapter 9. In the Hebrews passage it is translated as mercy seat, and here of course it is translated as propitiation. This is such a deep word that I don’t want you to just breeze over it. The mercy seat was the covering for the ark of the covenant, and upon it, once a year the high priest sprinkled the blood of a sacrifice, for the atonement of sins. So, Paul is saying here that God made Christ a covering for our sins, and He shed His own blood for the sins of the people. Hebrews 9 tells us how much better this sacrifice is than the annual sacrifices that the priests were required to do. Hebrews 9:13-14 says **For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?** There are so many key verses in this section that we could be here all day just talking about each one. For the sake of time, I’ll keep it moving. In verse 27 we see that boasting is excluded because all the work is done by the Lord. He gave Himself for our sins, He died and was buried, He rose from the dead, and He regenerates us based on our faith. So we have nothing to boast about. Verse 28 clearly says we are not justified by our works, but by our faith. We need to stop on verse 31 for a bit though, because it is the key to our understanding of this law of faith. Paul asks **Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.** How do we establish the law by faith? Paul says that we do not nullify the law by our faith, in fact we establish the law. In other words, we give the law its true purpose through faith. The Law was given to teach us what sin is, and thereby drive us to faith because we should realize what kind of sinful people we truly are. We should realize that we have no hope outside of faith because we are incapable of keeping the law, and in fact, as Paul says, no one is justified by the works of the Law. So our reaction to the standard should be one of faith. But, as James said, faith without works is dead. So, how should we live our lives in light of this faith? This brings us to the Law of Love.

Law of Love

When you see “the Law” in the Bible it refers to different things at different times. It can mean specifically the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, or sometimes it is the first five books written by Moses, it can mean the Ten Commandments, or sometimes it can even mean the entire OT. Most times it doesn’t change the meaning of the sentence, but

this is just something to keep in mind. In Matthew 22 Jesus has a confrontation with the Sadducees and the Pharisees. We have talked about these two groups before, but they were basically the two groups who made up the leadership within the Jewish religion. The Sadducees were the liberals of the day, they did not believe in the resurrection, or even life after death, as is pointed out here in Matthew 22. And, the Pharisees were the religious conservatives of the day. They of course, adhered to a very strict religion, with zealous adherence to the Law, even adding to the Law to ensure that they did not break it. We see here both groups trying to trip up Jesus by asking Him tricky questions about religion. And, we see that their questions are tied to their mistakes in theology. The Sadducees ask a question about the resurrection, and the Pharisees send up one of their best lawyers against Jesus and ask Him a question about the Law. We find this in Matthew 22:34. The Sadducees had just asked Jesus about who a woman would be married to in the resurrection after marrying a succession of brothers who all died while on the earth. Jesus, of course, knew that they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, or life after death, so he knew that they were not being genuine in asking this question. They had no response to His answer, when He said that people are not married in the resurrection, but the clincher came when He told them that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God of the living not the dead, implying that the patriarchs are alive now, and not dead. So, then the Pharisees, who were not friendly with the Sadducees, think that they can trip up Jesus after that. So, they send a lawyer to ask what is the greatest commandment. This was a much-disputed question among the pious Jews. Here is the conversation in Matthew 22. **But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And He said to him, “ ‘ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. ’ 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, ‘ You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ’ 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.** The Pharisees are basically stunned into silence at His answer. They probably expected Him to answer with one of the Ten Commandments, like having no false gods, or keeping the Sabbath holy. Instead, he combined two verses of Scripture that the Jews had never done before, and He encapsulated all of the Law in them. The first, **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind** comes from Deuteronomy 6:5. This was part of the Shema, which the Jews quoted in their daily prayers. The second was from Leviticus 19:18, **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** So, here Jesus combines two verses of Scripture that the Pharisees were not expecting. But, in them, He encapsulated all of the Ten Commandments, which is what they were really asking about. This is similar to His response to the Sadducees, in that, they asked about the resurrection, and He answered that question, stating that yes there is a resurrection, and also, there is life after death because God is the God of the living not the dead. Jesus gets right to the heart of the matter in both instances. He answers the question that they really needed answered, not necessarily the one that they asked. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to answer with one of the Ten Commandments so that they could argue with Him, instead He answered with all of the Ten Commandments. Loving God is the first four commandments, and loving your neighbor is the last six commandments. So, basically Jesus says that the greatest

commandment is all ten of them, or the entire Law. And, this is how we should live our lives. We should live them loving God and loving others, not loving ourselves.

Selfishness and pride cause so much sin in our world. Our flesh, our sin natures have an insatiable desire to be satisfied, which will lead to sin. We need to shut down our flesh and make no provision for it, and we do this by seeking after God and loving Him, and serving and loving others. Romans 13:14 is a good verse to memorize in this regard.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. Jesus went on to say that the entire Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. So, basically, the entire OT is focused around these two ideas. Just like this letter to the Romans is based on justification by faith, the OT is based on loving God, and loving your neighbor. The Jews had corrupted that idea, and had turned their religion into one of duties and following rules. Basically, it had become one of legalism, which is doing things in order to be acceptable to God. Jesus here says that they missed the entire point. They were blessed with receiving the oracles of God, as Paul said. But instead of driving them to love God and their neighbor, they have turned the oracles of God into a set of rules to be followed. For the sake of time I'll just refer you to 1 Corinthians 13 for your lesson on love. Another great place is 1 John, as it speaks much of the importance of love. 1 John 4:20-21 sums it up well. **If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.**

Law of Hope

This brings us to the law of hope. To me, thinking about the love of God, and how far short of His standard that I fall makes me long for the day when we will cast off these mortal bodies and spend eternity with the Lord. 1 Corinthians 13:13 says **But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.** Love is the greatest because it is the only one that is eternal. When we are with Christ for eternity, we will not need faith or hope because we will see Him face to face. We won't have to have faith anymore, because we'll be able to see Him. We won't need hope because our hope will be accomplished. But, we are not there yet. Obviously, thankfully, this is not eternity, so we still need hope. When we consider all that God has done for us in providing for our salvation, and how sinful we are in return, and how far short of His standard we fall, we should hope for our deliverance from these bodies like Paul did in his letter to the Philippians. Chapter 1 verse 21-24 says, **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.** He longed to be with the Lord, and to be rid of his sinful flesh. This should be our hope as well. We should long to be rid of this world and what it has to offer. Our eyes should be on the Lord and His things, not the things of the world. 1 John 2 is a great place to go for that. **Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The**

world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. So, if we are to not love the world, then we are to love the Lord and the things that are not of this world. This should cause us to hope for the day we are delivered from this world. According to Paul we should be hoping for our deliverance from this world of sin. He talks about it in several places, like 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, and 2 Thessalonians to name a few. The Lord Himself mentioned this also in John 14.

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. I know there is much debate about when all this will happen, but regardless of when you think it will happen, we should hope for the day that we are with the Lord for eternity. We should long to be rid of these mortal bodies and put on our immortal bodies to spend eternity with the Lord. You can just sense Paul's expectation in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says, **Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"** So, let us all hope for the day when death is swallowed up in victory.

Conclusion

We've seen a lot today, and covered a lot of ground. We saw that the purpose of the Law was to show people what sin is, and since we are told what sin is; we are accountable to God for our sin. Then, since we know what the sin is, we are supposed to be driven to faith in Christ because we cannot attain to the level of perfection that is required by God's law. And we saw how faith does not nullify the Law; rather it establishes it, because that was the original intent of the Law. It was intended to drive people to faith. This was the Law of faith. Then we saw how our response to faith should be love; love of God and love of our neighbors. Jesus Christ was the ultimate example of this, of course. He loved God perfectly, and He loved us so much, even while we were His enemies that He died for us. And just as Romans 12 says, we should be conformed to His image, we should live like He did, loving God, and loving our neighbor. Finally, we saw how we should hope for the day that we will be delivered from this evil world and our sinful flesh, to live with the Lord for eternity. I pray that our faith in Christ would be strengthened each day, that as a result of that our love of God and one another would grow, and that our hope in Him would be renewed.