



# BE TRANSFORMED

THIS HANDOUT

BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS CHAPTER THREE



FAST FACTS

## ROMANS CHAPTER 3

- Disbelief in God does not detract from His truthfulness.
- Neither Jews nor Gentiles are better than the other group: both are “under sin.”
- According to St. Paul, the purpose of the Law is to create in people knowledge - meaning a real, life-affecting knowledge - of sin.
- The salvation offered by God is a free gift of grace.
- The only way in which we can be freed from this slavery to sin is through Jesus’ redeeming work on the Cross. Because this salvation is a gift from God, no one can boast that he or she earned it through effort and self-discipline.

### ON THE CD

- PROPITIATION
- CHRIST TOOK OUR SINS
- THE LAW
- THE TONGUE
- INTERACTIVE QUIZ
- MUCH MORE!

## ROMANS 3

After examining in chapter two the ways in which some Jews betrayed the gifts God had given them, St. Paul answers an important question: is there any advantage in being a circumcised Jew (Romans 3:1)? He answers, “Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God” (3:20). These oracles - whether they are the Old Testament as a whole, or the Messianic prophecies - were advantageous because they gave the Jews a special understanding of God and His will, the human condition, and God’s salvation through the Messiah.

St. Paul then answers three possible objections to his teaching. First, how can the Holy Scriptures be an advantage to the Jews if they do not believe these Scriptures? Does the unfaithfulness of some Jews mean that God is prevented from being faithful to His promises to them (Romans 3:3)? St. Paul responds that even if all - and not merely some - people disbelieve God, this simply highlights His truthfulness (3:4).

The second objection involves God’s justice: how can God be just in condemning people when their unrighteousness highlights God’s righteousness (Romans 3:5)? St. Paul simply responds that God could not judge - and therefore govern - the world if human unrighteousness limited God’s righteousness (3:6).

The final objection is that, if God is glorified through human sins, perhaps humans should continue sinning and thereby bringing glory to God (Romans 3:7). St. Paul finds such an objection to be ridiculous: of course humans should not sin! As Theodoret, bishop of Cyr (in Syria) in the fifth century, writes, “(The Apostles) demanded that everyone abstain from all manner of wickedness.” St. Paul concludes that God is just in condemning people sinful people (3:8).

In the end, neither Jews nor Gentiles are better than

## CONTROL WHAT YOU SAY

If you think about it, your mouth is probably your most dangerous weapon. What you say can offend and hurt other people; it can even irrevocably destroy their reputations. This may be the reason that, when St. Paul wants to show us that no person is *truly* good, he uses our mouths and words as examples of how evil we can be (Romans 3:13-14).

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, an eighteenth century Russian monk, notes that even otherwise pious people can engage in destructive speech: “[Some] abstemious, devout-living people, give scandal by their action, and spread scandal with their tongue like an incendiary fire.”

It is particularly easy for us to sin through our speech because, while it is difficult to believe that something like taking illegal drugs is a good activity, we can gossip about people or criticize them and convince ourselves that we are actually doing it for a good reason. St. Maximos the Confessor, a seventh century Christian, warns us, “Give no ear to the slanderer’s talk nor let your talk run on in the fault-finder’s hearing, by readily speaking and listening to things against your neighbor; otherwise you will fall from divine charity [love] and be found a foreigner to eternal life.”

You can control your speech by relying on God to empower you to engage in helpful - rather than harmful - speech. First, you should pray, as does the priest during the Divine Liturgy, for God’s forgiveness for all the harmful and evil things you say. St. Symeon Metaphrastes, a tenth century Christian, prays, “Ever protect, preserve, and keep me from every soul-corrupting deed and word.” Second, you can use your mouth to praise God instead of condemning others; remember the hymn you sing after Holy Communion, “Let our mouths be filled with Thy praise, O Lord, that we may sing of Thy glory.”

▼ CONTINUE ▼

the other group: both are “under sin” (Romans 3:9), meaning that they are dominated by the power of sin, and therefore under judgment for being under sin’s power.

In verses 10-18, St. Paul shows that no one is righteous (Romans 3:10-12), that everyone sins by both word and action (3:13-15), and that the lifestyle of unrighteousness is evil and destructive (3:16-18). People engage in such an unrighteous lifestyle because they lack a proper fear of the Lord (3:18).

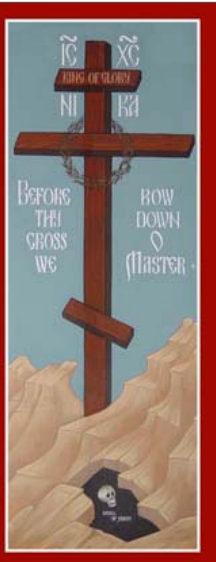
According to St. Paul, the purpose of the Law is to create in people knowledge - meaning a real, life-affecting knowledge - of sin (Romans 3:20). Because of this purpose, people cannot use simply knowing the Law and being circumcised as a way of avoiding God’s judgment (3:19).

In verses 21-26 St. Paul provides what many commentators call the “heart of the Epistle,” because in this passage he describes the way in which God provides salvation to people under the bondage of sin.

St. Paul tells his readers that the righteousness of God is revealed apart from the Law (Romans 3:21). Simply understanding the Law, and fulfilling its requirements without any real reference to God, is inadequate to save a person from God’s judgment; instead, a person must faithfully relate to the righteous God to whom the Law points. The righteousness of God must therefore be revealed apart from the Law to prevent people from believing that they have attained righteousness without a relationship with God. At the same time, as we noted when we mentioned that the Law points to God, the Law and prophets are witnesses to the revelation of the righteousness of God (3:21).

Verse 24 gives an important detail about the salvation offered by God: it is a free gift of grace. Humans therefore cannot save themselves from the power of sin and from God’s judgment: the source of salvation is “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). The way Jesus accomplished this redemption is through His death on the Cross (3:25). Christ’s death on the Cross took away the sins of the world and reconciled humanity to God. Christians receive this sacrifice, and its saving effects, by faith (3:25). This sacrifice is an act of God’s forbearance: St. Paul earlier remarked that God is forbearing long-suffering so that people can come to repentance (2:4); here he reminds us that God’s forbearance currently gives people time to accept the gift offered through Christ (3:26).

Because this salvation is a gift from God, no one can boast that he or she earned it through effort and self-discipline (Romans 3:27). Furthermore, God does not show favoritism by offering this gift only to a small group of people: God will justify people from all ethnic groups through faith (3:29-30).



## DO I BOAST?

Some Orthodox Christians unfortunately believe that they are better than the non-Orthodox, and spend a great deal of time proclaiming their alleged superiority. In the words of St. Paul, such people “boast in appearance and not in heart” (2 Corinthians 5:12).

We should be pleased to be Orthodox Christians, and glad to be members of the Orthodox Church. St. Cosmas Aitolos, an eighteenth century Christian, proudly proclaims, “All that is of our Church is good holy, both in soul and body.” At the same time, you must remember that your life, your membership in the Church, and the mysteries you receive in the Church, are all gifts from God. You are incapable of creating these things yourself, and you could never “earn the right” to receive these things on your own. You are a Christian, and receive the mysteries of God in His Church, solely because He is so generous that He accepts you and works within you.

Telling others that you are superior to them because you are an Orthodox Christian is therefore not merely irritating: it is dishonest. You would be lying, not only about yourself and your personal holiness, but also about God, because you would be claiming personal credit for something that He graciously gives to you.

St. Paul tells us, “Where is boasting then? It is excluded” (Romans 3:27). St. John Chrysostom therefore says, “See how great faith is, in that it has removed us from the former things (i.e., our reliance upon our observance of God’s laws) and does not even allow us to boast of them.” When you feel inclined to boast about yourself, remember St. Paul’s words to the Galatians, “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14).



## RELIANCE UPON GOD

St. Peter of Damascus explains that we are completely reliant upon God, and that all good things are given to us by His grace:

*We have never achieved anything good on our own, but all good things are ours from God by grace, and come as it were from nothingness into being. For ‘what do you have which you did not receive?’ asks St. Paul - receive, that is, freely from God; ‘and if you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it’ (1 Corinthians 4:7), but had achieved it by yourself? Yet by yourself you cannot achieve anything, for the Lord has said: ‘Without Me, you can do nothing’ (John 15:5).*