



The Book of  
**ROMANS**

**Small Group Study 1: Romans 1-3**

# Week Five: (Romans 3:1–20)

## Key Verses

“There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.” - Romans 3:10–11 (CSB)

## Key Principles

- We are faithless, but God is faithful.
- God’s judgment on the unrighteous is completely just.
- We are equally unrighteous in God’s eyes.
- Paul makes it overwhelmingly clear that everyone is unrighteous apart from faith in Christ.
- God’s righteousness shines all the more clearly amidst the rampant unrighteousness of humankind.
- May our own unrighteousness and sinfulness drive us to God, to cling to him as the only righteous person in the universe.

## Read

In Romans 3:1–20, Paul finally addresses two points that he has been leading up to in the previous chapters: 1) the Jews had an advantage in their familiarity with the law and circumcision (3:1–2), but 2) when it comes to righteousness, the Jews are no better off (3:9).

Paul wants the readers to know that, without a shadow of doubt, "... both Jews and Gentiles are under sin, as it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one" (3:9–10). Using a litany of quotations from the Old Testament, Paul makes it overwhelmingly clear that everyone is unrighteous apart from faith in Christ. We are told through the Psalms that everyone—even David—is sinful (Romans 3:4), David's enemies are evil (3:13), God's people are unjust (3:10–14), and the irreligious who deny God are fools (3:10–14). And the book of Isaiah tells us that God's people have no righteousness and justice was found nowhere in Israel (3:15).

Establishing that humankind is unrighteous is a necessary part of Paul's argument throughout Romans 1:18–3:20, but it is not Paul's main point in the whole book. Paul's larger goal in Romans is to explain God's righteousness. In Romans 3:1–20, Paul says that God's righteousness shines all the more clearly amidst the rampant unrighteousness of humankind. Humankind has been unfaithful, but God has remained steadfast in his faithfulness. It's simply a part of his righteous character: Faithful is who our God is.

Sadly, even with God's faithfulness and righteousness clearly on display against the unrighteousness of humankind, some of Paul's audience still didn't

understand. In Romans 3:5–8, Paul responds to two common questions. First, some were asking, Does God’s wrath make him un- righteous (3:5)? As we have already seen in this study, God’s righteousness warrants his wrath and judgment against all unrighteousness. Second, others were asking, Should we commit more unrighteousness and sin in order to let God’s righteousness shine more clearly (8:8)? Paul responds to both questions with brief exclamations, such as “Absolutely not!” in Romans 3:6.

We might be quick to dismiss or overlook these questions as irrelevant for us today, but the truth is, many of us live in these ways, too. We question the necessity of God’s wrath and judgment. And how many times do we run toward sin, even as believers? How often do we take God’s righteousness for granted? We might profess with our mouths that such notions are absurd, but we all have done similar things—we all have chosen the pleasures of sin and taken God’s righteousness for granted. Paul corrects this wrong thinking and puts the focus back on God’s righteousness, where it belongs, instead of our self-absorbed excuses for our unrighteousness. The real question in Romans 3 has nothing to do with our opinions. Rather, Paul asks, *How can this righteous God bring salvation to an unrighteous world?*

Paul explains God’s plan of salvation for the world by turning to the Old Testament. Everything Paul learned about God’s righteousness and man’s sinfulness comes from the Old Testament. The Psalms and other passages are intentionally chosen for Romans 3:1–20 develop a significant theology of God’s righteousness. They declare that God is righteous:

- In his judgments against the wicked (Psalm 10; 14; 53; 143).

- In his concern and justice for the poor (Psalm 10; 140).
- In his establishment of righteous words and decrees (Psalm 119).
- In his forgiveness to sinners (Psalm 51).

Conversely, people in these Psalms are, at many times, wicked and harmful to their fellow man. No one is righteous, but there is hope, forgiveness, and refuge for some. Who gets this refuge?

- Those who praise God (Psalm 5).
- Those who draw near to God (Psalm 143).
- Those who dwell in his presence and call on his name (Psalm 63).
- Those who get God's Spirit on them and who receive God's forgiveness (Proverbs 1:23; Psalm 51; Isaiah 59).
- Those who cling to God and are satisfied in him (Psalm 36; 63).

As we see in Romans 3:1–20, the blueprints for faith and salvation were already in the Old Testament. Paul used that rich tradition to show that God has been steadfastly righteous through- out all generations, and God's salvation through Jesus will be the ultimate declaration of his righteousness. So, may our acknowledgments of our own unrighteousness and sinfulness drive us to God, to cling to him as the only righteous person in the universe. It is in his arms that we will find refuge from the wickedness of our enemies, the brokenness of the world, and mostly from our own sinful hearts.

## Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God's righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



**Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul's major points. Then, read Romans 3:1–20 in preparation for this week's study.**

## Highlight

1. Read Isaiah 59. When God found a lack of righteousness in Israel, how did he respond? How does the end of this passage remind us of passages we read in Week Four, such as Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31?
2. What do we learn about God's judgment and righteousness from Romans 3:1–20?
3. Notice all the questions that Paul asks in Romans 3:1–8 and Romans 3:1–20. How do they help us follow his argument? How do these questions address common objections to the Christian faith?

4. What key words stand out to you in Romans 3:1–20? Are there any words that you feel like you might know their meaning, but wonder if the Bible has more to say about them?

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## Explain

5. In Romans 3:1–20, why is it important that Paul establishes that all people are unrighteous?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. How does the unrighteousness of humankind fit into the good news of the gospel?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. A common position in our culture believes some people to be more or less sinful than others. Based on our understanding of the gospel and the end of Romans 3:9, is it worth our time to debate who among us is more or less sinful? Why or why not?

8. What is Paul's main message to his audience from Romans 3:1-20?

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## Apply

9. The news that no one is righteous can be unsettling to hear at first. How have you come to accept your own unrighteousness apart from Christ?

10. Where do you see the effects of unrighteousness? These effects might be from your own sin or the sin of others in your community. Discuss your observations and reflections with your small group.

11. Briefly review Romans 1:18–3:20. Think about the implications of this passage for how we explain Christianity to others in our communities. How would you explain the unrighteousness of the world to someone that does not believe in God or his standards of righteousness?

12. Many in Paul's audience had a great degree of misplaced confidence when it came to their relationships with God. How have you been tempted to trust in things other than the gospel when it comes to your relationship with God?

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# Respond in Prayer

In Romans 1–3, Paul references specific psalms in order to grow our understanding of God’s righteousness. Each week of this Study Guide will include a recommended psalm that helps us focus on the righteousness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected psalm and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this psalm on your own at home and together with your small group. And for those looking for more passages to pray, feel free to return to Romans 1–3 and pray through those passages as well.

## **This Week’s Prayer Passage: Psalm 51**

Read Psalm 51.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **Adoration:** Praise God for the following characteristics that we see in Psalm 51:
  - He is a God of faithful love and his compassion is abundant (51:1).
  - His judgments are blameless (51:4).
  - He is the teacher of wisdom (51:6).
  - He restores, sustains, and gives joy (51:12).
  - He is the God of our salvation (14).



- **Confession:** Let us ask God to bring to mind an awareness of our sin, that we might say along with verse 3, "For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me." Confess your specific examples out loud as displeasing in the sight of God. Ask God to bring awareness to the devastating effects of sin. Acknowledge with your own words the harmful work your sins have done to yourself, to others, and to God himself.
- **Thanksgiving:** As surely as God is the one to provide awareness for our sin, he alone provides restoration and renewal through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Raise your voice and express your confidence to God in the words of verse 7, in his willingness to purge us and make us clean and his ability to wash us whiter than snow. Thank God that he deals with our sin directly and also offers us forgiveness. Praise God for his grace and mercy toward his people.
- **Supplication:** Ask that God would grant you the grace to experience verse 8, "Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice." No matter how dark and deep the circumstances of your sin may be, ask God to restore to you the joy of your salvation. Verse 18 makes a request from the Lord, "In your good pleasure, cause Zion to prosper; build the walls of Jerusalem." Pray for the work that God is doing in and through your local church in your community. Ask him to provide care for his people and ask him to rebuild what sin has destroyed. Ask God to do good in your city.

