

**Romans Three<sup>1</sup>**  
Leon L. Combs, Ph.D.  
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Remember that there were no chapters and verses in the original writings of this great book. There were no pauses for bathroom breaks or going to the fridge for some goodies. There is a continuation of thought processes throughout the book and to understand the entire book we cannot take a break either. Remember our discussions at the end of chapter two where we saw that it was not circumcision that made one a real Jew but that the real Jew is the person who is one inwardly by circumcision of the heart by the Spirit, and that we true Christians are also true descendents of Abraham and thus true Jews even though not by physical birth (Gal 3:29). So now we continue the discussion. As before, I am considerably influenced by the writings of Dr. Boice<sup>2</sup>.

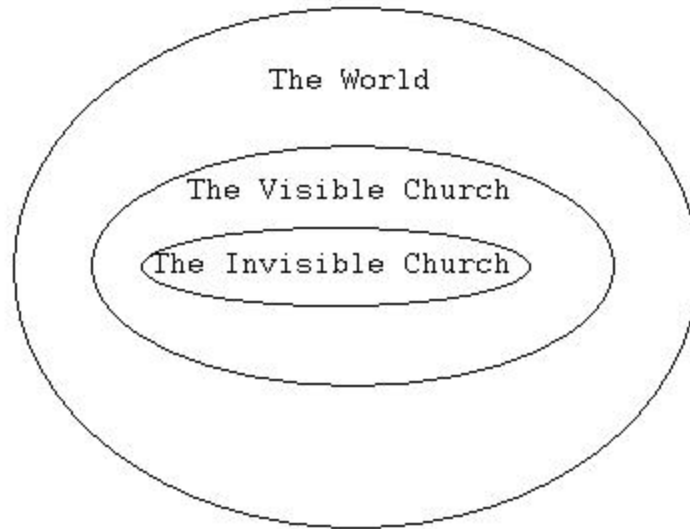
**Rom 3:1 “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?”**

If the really important point is whether or not the Spirit has changed our heart then what benefit is there of being physically a descendent of Abraham? Paul asks this very logical question. He then answers the question.

**Rom 3:2 “Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.”**

Of all of the tribes and nations on earth God choose these people to have His Word. The Egyptians did not have the Law and the Word of God so they had to seek other sources to try to understand the universe and their place in it. Similarly, every other tribe had to search for the truth of meaning outside of God’s source of this truth. In a similar manner, the people who are members of the visible church today have an advantage over the other people in the world. The members of the visible church have the true Word of God read to them at least once a week, if they attend regularly the visible church. Just as every physical Jew was not a true believer of God and many Jews today are not true believers of God, there are many members of the visible church<sup>3</sup> who are not members of the invisible church<sup>4</sup>. Yet the members of the visible church still have a great advantage over the rest of the people of the world for they are within a group that is entrusted with the truth of Jesus Christ. These members are closer to the truth than those people who are not members of a visible church. These people see the grace of God every Sunday as they participate in the Lord’s Supper and Baptism, but the people who are only members of the visible church do not have the grace applied to themselves. Members of the visible church who are not members of the invisible church are like Jews who have been circumcised but who are not truly believers of God. So there is a great advantage to being a Jew just as there is great advantage to being a member of a visible church.

We can visualize this separation of the world, the visible church, and the invisible church somewhat with three circles and we see that the members of the visible church are closer to the truth, but yet outside of the truth.



However, Paul continues to examine this concept.

**Rom 3:3 “What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?”**

**Rom 3:4 May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, “That Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, And mightest prevail when Thou art judged.”**

**Rom 3:5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)**

**Rom 3:6 May it never be! For otherwise how will God judge the world?**

**Rom 3:7 But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?**

**Rom 3:8 And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just.”**

Just as the facts that some Jews are not believers and some Baptists, Presbyterians, etc. are not really Christians does not invalidate the fact that God is faithful to have presented the truth to both groups. His faithfulness is not dependent upon our being faithful. Even if there were not a single person in the world who really believed the truth of God, His truth would still be The Truth.

Some said that by our acts of sinfulness we were shining a light on the absolute righteousness of God, so why not act more sinful to further demonstrate the righteousness of God? This is such a distorted question that it hardly deserves an answer and understandable Paul says emphatically “May it never be!” If God needed our unrighteousness to demonstrate His righteousness then how could He judge the world? It is very difficult to imagine anyone saying that he should practice sinfulness so that righteousness may come. Judas certainly did evil that was used by God to bring about the ultimate righteousness of every chosen person but Judas can not claim a reward from

God for his actions. Evil is evil and righteousness is righteousness. God uses acts of unrighteous people to accomplish His righteous acts, but the evil people are certainly not part of God's Kingdom. God used the evil acts of the Pharaoh, the Babylonians, and many others to accomplish His righteous goals but they do not receive the rewards of God.

Paul goes on to further demonstrate that, apart from the acts of God, there are no righteous people at all.

**Rom 3:9 "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;**

**Rom 3:10 as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one;**

**Rom 3:11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God;**

**Rom 3:12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one. ""**

Now this is perfectly clear and does not need any elaboration by me! Including the Jews and Greeks includes every person on earth. Nobody is righteous on their own, nobody understands the truth about the universe on their own, nobody seeks for the true God, nobody does any good in the sight of God, and even if they were to have a vast cooperation they would be totally useless in the sight of God. This is a total condemnation on all of mankind! And if we perhaps did not understand what he just said, he goes on to elaborate!

**Rom 3:13 "Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving,"  
"The poison of asps is under their lips";**

**Rom 3:14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness";**

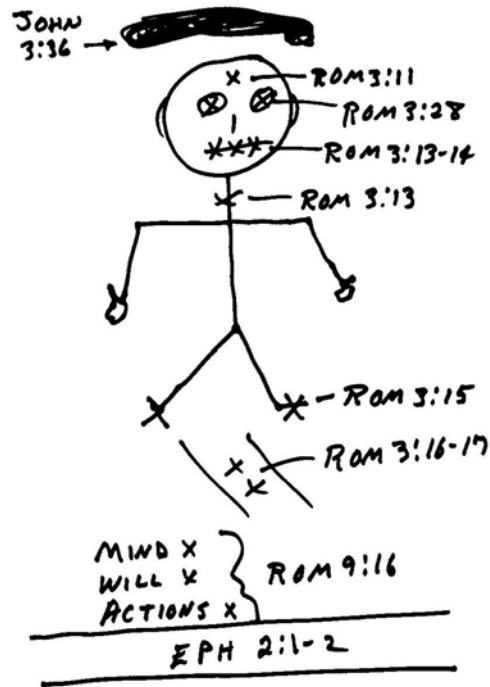
**Rom 3:15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood,**

**Rom 3:16 Destruction and misery are in their paths,**

**Rom 3:17 And the path of peace have they not known. "**

**Rom 3:18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."**

I elaborated on these verses in my discussion of the book of Ephesians but I will repeat the picture and discussion here.



Except for our opposing thumbs, there is nothing in this representation that allows anyone to have any sense of pride; and we did not have anything to do with having thumbs! A dead person cannot do anything in the sphere of existence in which he/she is dead. We were **spiritually dead**! A spiritually dead person cannot understand anything that is of a spiritual nature. Now today we need to be careful about the use of the word “spiritual”. We have to ask, “How do you define spiritual?” A former Vice President of the United States and his wife have written a book with the title “The Spiritual Family”, but how do they define “spiritual”? Remember on page six of “Ephesians One”, we quoted from a “Spiritual Wellness” advertisement:

“This course offers a number of exercises and activities that address the spiritual dimension of wellness. Based on the National Wellness Institute's spiritual dimension of wellness, the activities will focus on seeking meaning and purpose, and peace in human existence. The NWI model encourages seeking answers to philosophical questions such as: "Why am I here?" and "What is life all about?" Although for some, organized religion provides answers, the exercises provided will focus on spirituality as opposed to religion. The course will be interactive, and participants will engage in application of the exercises. (Course part of the Holistic Wellness Certificate)”

They say that they are focusing on “spirituality as opposed to religion”. What sort of religion does not focus on spirituality? So we go back to the dictionary and find that spirituality is defined as “The state, quality, or fact of being spiritual”. So we look up spiritual and find it is defined as “Of, relating to, consisting of, or having the nature of spirit; not tangible or material; Of, concerned with, or affecting the soul; Of, from, or pertaining to God; Of or belonging to a church or religion; pertaining to or having the nature of spirits or supernatural”. We then look up spiritual and find “That which is traditionally believed to be the vital principle or animating force within living beings; that

which constitutes one's unseen, intangible being; the essential and activating principle of a person or the will".

So these people are separating spirituality from religion and therefore from God. They then believe that every human being has this "vital principle or animating force" and it is that force that they are attempting to manipulate toward some sort of "peace in human existence". We often hear people talk about "spiritual wellness" and that state is characterized by some high spiritual significance, but remember that this is apart from anyone's understanding of God or from any religion at all. So what is the standard that these people have for spiritual wellness? What are the guiding principles for obtaining this spiritual wellness? Whose meaning and purpose are they striving to obtain and whose definition of peace are they using? Without any external standard, the searching will be without any guidance except each individual's "feelings". And when will the searching be declared successful? Since these same people reject any absolute standards or any absolute truths, the searching is totally individual and thus it has an infinite number of possible answers, different for each person. This sounds like chaos to me, and certainly any peace that these people obtain will be short-lived as some other life event occurs to perturb them from their "peace" and the search starts over. From the above definitions, the searching can involve spirits so they can include astrology in their searching processes or perhaps some sort of "natural drugs" as some groups have used. They must go through life precariously perched upon a moving standard that is not based upon any absolute truth.

To us Christians, we will choose the definition "Of, from, or pertaining to God". We then have an external, fixed standard of spiritual wellness and that standard is a life totally at harmony with the revealed nature of the Creator of all that is, the God of the Bible. Our concept of life is that people were originally created in the image of God meaning being a trinity or having a body, soul, and spirit:

*Gen 1:27 "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."*

Original sin resulted in spiritual death and all people born after this time were of the image of Adam meaning being a duality or having a body and a soul:

*Gen 5:3 "When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth."*

This state of being is why Jesus said that we must be born again:

*John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

The second birth is the birth of our spirit so that then we can respond to things spiritual, meaning those things pertaining to God.

So when each of us was physically born, we possessed a body and a soul but we had no spiritual component so we could not understand anything spiritual. We behaved as people of this world under the leadership of Satan (“the prince of the power of the air”). Notice that Paul also said that Satan is “the spirit that is **now** working in the sons of disobedience”. I bolded the word “now” for emphasis because some people think that Satan’s defeat at the cross and resurrection was total for all time beginning then. There certainly is a sense in which it is true that Satan certainly was defeated then and forever, however this fact is still not yet worked out in the world as we can easily see by reading the daily newspaper or watching TV. Remember Jesus taught us to pray partly:

*Matt 6:10 “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.”*

Obviously the kingdom is not totally here yet. Certainly God’s will is always done for He is sovereign, however the kingdom is only here spiritually. The total working out of the physical establishment of God’s kingdom on earth is still a future event for which we are commanded to pray. Satan is still roaming about:

We began our life walking according to “the course of this world”. Course means “Onward movement in a particular direction; the direction or path taken by something that moves, as a stream”. The natural movement of the world is that taken according to the direction given by Satan as Paul told us. When we are regenerated, we are now moving “up stream” so to speak. Have you ever tried to swim against the current? It is very difficult to try to move in a direction counter to the natural movement of the world. The unregenerate think we look very foolish working so hard to move in this unnatural direction when we could just relax and let the current carry us toward destruction. Of course, they don’t know that they are being led toward destruction. This worldly mindset says, “If it feels good, do it” and “live life to its fullest, for you only have one trip here”. These people have no true spiritual life so they can’t answer the deep philosophical questions such as “Who am I”, “What am I doing here”, and “Where am I going”. To the regenerate person these questions have easy answers: “I am a child of God”, “I am here to glorify God”, and “I am going to live forever with God”. All of our philosophy is God-centered, and thus of eternal meaning. The world’s philosophy changes as mankind drifts further and further away from God, seeking spiritual wholeness but without knowing the meaning of what they are seeking. They are blind people with no reference point, no means of determining a preferred direction in life, they are without hope. And we were once just like them!

**Rom 3:19 “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God;**

**Rom 3:20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”**

One purpose of the Law is to show us that we have no defense before God, that we are all guilty and accountable to God. The Law only shows us how depraved we are and that there is no chance for us.

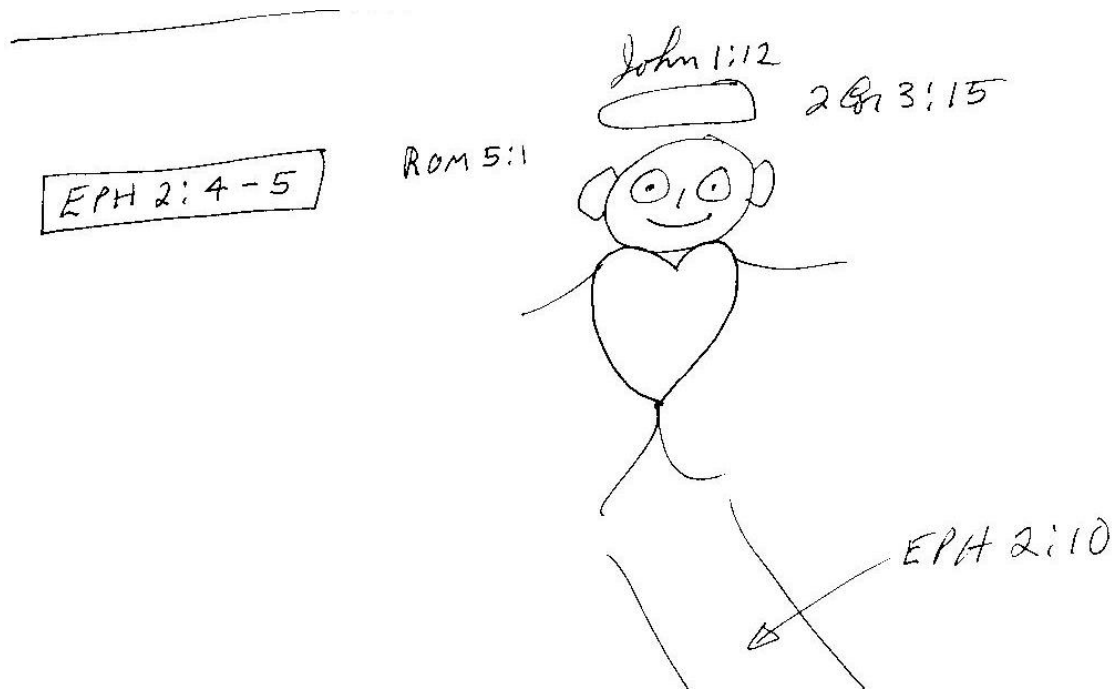
So is it possible that some people have enough deficiency of depravity that they can still choose to come to God? Read what Jesus said:

John 6:44 *“No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”*

This word “draw” is a forceful word that would also be used in talking about drawing water from the well. We have to be dragged by the Father to the Son. None of us has any innate desire to choose God. Only God can cause a person to be born again with a new heart and with eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mind that can comprehend the things of God. The drawing below pictures the person after regeneration by God. This person is now capable of choosing God.

Paul now gets to “the meat of the matter”. Everyone has sinned. Nobody can be justified before the Holy God by any of his actions. The only way to be justified in the sight of God is by the means that He made possible and that is by faith (given by God) in Jesus Christ as our justifier.

**Rom 3:21 “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,  
Rom 3:22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;  
Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,  
Rom 3:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;  
Rom 3:25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;  
Rom 3:26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”**



God effected a wonderful double imputation in the lives of His chosen people. He put the sins of these people on Jesus Christ so that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. He then imputed the righteousness of Jesus Christ to our account so that now, before God, we have no sin and only righteousness. Praise God!

**Rom 3:27** “Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

**Rom 3:28** For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

**Rom 3:29** Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,

**Rom 3:30** since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

**Rom 3:31** Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.”

Now we understand that we can boast of nothing on our own behalf. God has worked a wonderful act in the lives of His chosen people, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. We also see that since God has imputed to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ then we who are His chosen children are in total obedience to the Law in the sight of God. The Law was given first to the Jew and then passed on to the entire world. Nobody could obey the Law but Jesus Christ, God Himself. God then arranged for Jesus Christ to take His wrath upon the sins of all of His chosen children throughout all ages and to impart to those same people the righteousness of Jesus Christ. In a sense, the Book is closed!!! At least for those who are His children certainly the loop is now closed. Now we are all working out our salvation in fear and trembling as we await our final glorification.

Praise God! Amen!

### **References**

1. All Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Moody Press, 1975.
2. James Montgomery Boice, "Romans, Volume I, Justification by Faith, Romans 1-4, Baker Book House, 1991
3. The visible church is any organized group of people who claim to be Christians such as Baptist, Presbyterian, etc. This group is made up of people who are not really Christians and those who really are Christians. Of course only God and the person really know the true state of their being.
4. The invisible church is the true people of God, the ones who have truly accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and have been reborn spiritually by the Holy Spirit of God.