

Romans Chapter 3 - John Karmelich

Title "Uphill sledding" or "He's God, deal with it!"

For those who don't know I absorb a bunch of commentaries on whatever I'm teaching each week. My favorite comment on this section of Romans is "Chapters 1-7 is an uphill climb before one can enjoy a wonderful downhill ride from Chapters 8 onward!" Think of being a kid and pulling a sled up a hill! I am not saying it's impossible, just that in life one often must get through the "hard part" to appreciate a great ride after that! Kind of like the great promises of eternity in exchange for dealing with hardships in this life! My point is Chapter 3 is the middle of an uphill climb. The author Paul's explaining there's nothing we can do please God. Paul focused Chapter 1 on people who don't care about God, Chapter 2 dealt with the "holier than thou" crowd. Chapter 3 deals all Jewish people (read it and think in terms of all believers)! His key point is there's nothing we can do or say to prove we deserve to be in heaven. I realize I'm "preaching to the choir"! Even for us veteran Christians it's easy to think, "Hey God look at me, I'm doing this or that right now, aren't You (God) impressed?" No, He's not! To share the classical American Christian joke, it's like standing on the California shoreline and trying to leap to Hawaii! We may be able to jump further than someone else, but we all fall way short of leaping to Hawaii!

The point I'm getting at is the text leading up to Chapter 8 is condemnation all people! I am not saying reading our bible or getting involved in a strong Christian church is a bad thing! I'm just saying none of it makes a difference in terms of our salvation! Here's Chapter 3 in one thought: No one's good enough to please God! So why bother to do good? I'll get to that. What I learned as a Christian is the key issue is "Gratitude, not attitude!" We are to our lives to make a difference for God not to earn credits! We're to make a difference for God out of gratitude for what He's done for us! Chapter 3's also one big lesson on "What about this or that issue?" It even touches upon the cross from God's perspective as in what is in it for Him! Bottom line, we're going to deal with "tough sledding" that is necessary to grasp why the cross is not only necessary but the ONLY option for salvation! Remember a key word for this book is "Justification" (or as I call it, just as if I never sinned in the first place!). Romans is a key book to teach we are justified before God despite our sins and imperfections!

Paul opens his case by asking what advantage is there to be Jewish? After all, if we're all saved by His grace, what difference does being a good person make? He reminds us the Jewish nation was entrusted with God's Word to bring it to the world. The same way we can argue that devout Christians may know our bible better than others, but now we're accountable for that knowledge! That leads to Paul's second issue: In effect Paul's asking, how can God punish people who should have known better? Is He being unfair to us if we're unfaithful? That's why Paul spends time here defending God! He quotes two of the Psalms here! The underlying point's even if we are unfaithful to God, He still has the right to judge us! In other words, He's God and we're not! He makes the rules! A sermon point I love is, if God said I got to stand on my head 30 minutes a day to be saved, I'll do it as He's God, and we're not!" We question if something is fair, but the truth is He's in charge. I've always been fascinated by the fact the Bible never explains God's origin. It starts with assuming God exists and here's the rules to follow to be saved! The bible spends a lot of time showing He's God (all the miracles)! I realize salvation comes from faith, but my point is simply that God makes the rules, and we must accept them!

Paul even argues like his critics to state it's not fair for God to judge us by His standards since our sins make God look good and if we do bad things, it glorifies God by showing He's God and not us! Paul's point is it's a bad argument as it comes back to the issue that if we're to be with God forever, He not us, makes the rules about who can be in heaven! In other words, it's His rules, DEAL WITH IT!

This leads to the question of the purpose of God's laws. One can read them and argue they are best way to live. (Some of them were designed simply to separate the Jewish people as a group!) That's why we as Christians don't for example follow the food laws! My point is laws against stealing and for murder are good rules, and the bible lays out fair ways to deal with such issues. An old Christian joke goes that there are two ways to get into heaven: One's to trust in His complete payment for our sins! The other is to never sin once and tell God to "move over". Obviously, I don't believe #2 is possible if one has basic knowledge of right and wrong, let alone basic knowledge of the Jewish law! Kind of like an old joke of what's an Agnostic Jew? One that knows what the god they doesn't believe in, requires of him! Again, we're coming back to the issue that God never denies His existence but if we want to be with Him, then here is what it takes! But John, isn't it just saved by faith? Yes, but the question is then what? We don't do good works to earn His favor but strictly out of gratitude for what He's done for me!

That leads me back to "the law" besides being His standards for right living, it also proves nobody will be saved by keeping it because it's impossible to keep perfectly. That's why Jesus said in effect how we live has to be superior to the most religious Jewish people! His point is it's impossible without God for guidance (His Spirit living within us) to live as He desires!

This leads me to one of my favorite questions, "Why did God bother?" What's in it for Him? We're all Christians veterans here and we believe we're saved by grace alone. We get that the sacrifices make in the Old Testament point to Jesus just as we look back at that event! When Adam and Eve sinned, God gave them animal skin coverings, which means animal blood was sacrificed for their sins! It is another example of how shedding of blood points to His sacrifice. But again, what's in it for Him? As best that I can figure God decided that He was going to pick people to be the redeemed for eternity. One reason for Satan's rebellion is God choosing people over angels! He insists we must accept that out of our own free will, but most of us get that! My point is God did this "For Himself" as much as for us! As we are aware the only way the price for sin can be fair, is if the price paid is by one who's fully man as well as fully God. I realize that's old news for most of us, but the "Uphill climb" requires us to grasp why all of this is necessary for our salvation. Another view I hold is, the Christian church is in effect a "Wedding gift" for Jesus and that's why He redeems people as part of that church! As far as other people who will be in heaven, think in terms of God being full of love and chose humans to express that love upon!

By the way, Paul's going to spend many more chapters talking about the necessity of the law. The short version is if we didn't know what His requirements are for salvation there's no "fair way" He can judge us in the first place! What Paul's getting at in this section is anyone can be saved and one's background is not relevant. Still, having a Jewish background has advantages as one is more knowledgeable on His requirements for our lives just as a Christian who knows his or her bible well now, is now accountable for what they know! That part always bugged me, but I do realize, living my life as a witness for Jesus is the best way to live! Yes, I realize that's better than doing a "right before death declaration"! It's also Paul's closing point of the chapter that we who believe in Jesus "uphold the law"! It just means we who believe in Jesus believe God's laws are well, His laws! They guide us as to how He desires we live as a witness for Him!

Is all of this confusing? Of course, it is "uphill sledding" so bear with it as it's worth it as we grasp how we are justified as Christians!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading!

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