

Romans 3

Introduction:

In this week's news:

Stephen Morgan came from a large churchgoing family and a privileged upbringing in one of Boston's nicer suburbs. He graduated from an elite Roman Catholic high school for boys before completing an unblemished four-year stint in the Navy.

Shortly before midnight on Tuesday, Stephen left his family's home in Marblehead, Mass., saying goodbye to his father, who thought that his son was moving to Rhode Island to start life anew.

By morning, he was in Middletown, Conn., jotting down a new journal entry in a composition book he carried. ... "I think it's okay to kill Jews, and go on a killing spree at this school," his journal reads, and then: "Kill Johanna. She must die." (Read complete NY Times article [here](#).)

And so, this past Wednesday, Stephen Morgan walked into the Connecticut bookstore where Johanna, who was part Jewish, worked and killed her. He evidently thought that was OK. But Stephen was wrong. He was indulging in a type of mental-emotional distortion we all engage in, which is *self-justification*.

Self-justification:

*Our minds are wired to select and interpret evidence sustaining the essential belief "I'm OK". A variety of mechanisms: conscious, unconscious, and social direct our attention to ignore the bad and highlight the good to reduce our anxiety. We work hard to retain the belief that "I'm OK" **Self-justification** is deeply ingrained in each of us. Mental schema make it easier for us to perceive information that supports what we already know or believe. Unfortunately we often get it wrong. (from [EmotionalCompetency.com](#))*

We often get it wrong. Stephen got it wrong on Wednesday. It's wasn't OK to kill Jews or kill Johanna. But we all indulge to some extent in the delusion of self-justification. It may not lead to outright murder, but it's not beneficial either. At the very least, self-justification gets in the way of healthy relationships and prevents our personal growth. It also does something worse: It keeps us from understanding why we need Jesus so badly. It can, therefore, allow us to go on in our sin, whatever that sin is, and allow our lives to remain unchanged by the love of Jesus Christ.

The chapter we read today, Romans 3, hammers away at this important thought:

The more clearly we see our sin, the more deeply we'll know our need for Jesus.

We'll start by looking at our sin, then we'll see how Jesus meets our need.

- I. The Bible reveals that God is extremely holy and will judge us. 3:1-8
- II. The Bible reveals the awful reality of our sin. 3:9-20
- III. The blood of Christ allows a holy God to justify us despite our sin. 3:21-26
- IV. The blood of Christ allows a holy God to justify us by faith alone. 3:27-31

I. The Bible reveals that God is extremely holy and will judge us. 3:1-8

A. The advantage of the Jew? The Scriptures! 3:1-2

- i. Paul asks this question because in the last chapter he explained that the high moral standards of the Jew did not make him righteous in God's sight.
- ii. The primary way we learn about God is through the Scriptures, which we received from the Jewish people.

B. Some attributes of God:

- i. God is faithful. (v.3) in contrast to human unfaithfulness
- ii. God is true (v.4) in contrast to human falsehood.
- iii. God is righteous (v.5) in contrast to human unrighteousness.
- iv. God is just. (v. 5) despite what some people say.
- v. God will judge us. (vv. 5-7) despite what some believe.

C. Just because God is forgiving doesn't mean we have a license to sin – in fact those who say this is true are condemning themselves by falsely accusing both us and God. (v.8)

II. The Bible reveals the awful reality of our sin. 3:9-20

A. This section paints the biblical portrait of fallen humanity, whether Jewish or not.

- i. In 3:10-18 Paul is quoting nothing but Scripture, mostly the Psalms.

B. 3:20 After murdering Johanna, Stephen Morgan cannot be declared innocent by promising never to murder anyone else. In the same way, obeying the law of God *for the most part* or *from now on* will never justify us. Why? Because the law also reveals what exactly we've done wrong already – and all of us have done our fair share of wrong.

By the law is the knowledge of sin.

- The law quantifies the difference between God's holiness and our pathetic fallen state. It identifies our sin and makes it measurable.
- One point that needs to be firmly grasped about biblical Christianity is that even though, as Christians, we are confident of God's favor, we actually believe we are no better than anyone else. We are every bit as guilty as the rest of this fallen world.

C. The main reason that we need to come to grips with our sin is this:

The more clearly we see our sin, the more deeply we'll know our need for Jesus.

Major Shift: From the Wrath of God to the Grace of God

III. The blood of Christ allows a holy God to justify us despite our sin. 3:21-26

- A. This section gives us a very clear explanation of the gospel – how Jesus meets our need.
- B. 3:23 All have sinned. There it is again. And since God's glory is the standard, we all fall way short. (Some can jump higher than others, but none of us can reach the moon.)

Galatians 3:22 (NKJV) But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

- C. 3:24 This is not the delusion of self-justification. This is God justifying us freely by His grace through the redemption (rescue, deliverance, repurchase) that is in Christ Jesus.
- D. 3:25 **propitiation** (from Webster):
 1. The act of appeasing the wrath and conciliating the favor of an offended person...
 2. (Theol.) ... atonement or atoning sacrifice; specifically, the influence or effects of the death of Christ in appeasing the divine justice, and conciliating the divine favor.

1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV) ¹My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ²And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

- i. By His blood This takes us back to the OT sacrifices

Leviticus 17:11 (NKJV) For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.

E. 3:26 **just and the justifier**

- i. God is totally just in that He did not allow our sin or our guilt to go unpunished. A price was paid for our sin when Jesus went to the cross. No one can accuse God of being lax on sin and letting the guilty go free. He is a holy God with very high standards.
- ii. God is the justifier in that He is the one that now declares us free of guilt. We no longer have any need for self-justification.
- iii. Of the one who has faith in Jesus. Only the person who puts his or her faith in Christ is justified. Without faith in Christ there is **no atoning sacrifice, no propitiation** for sin, because He is the propitiation that God has provided.
 - a) Since God is totally just, if a person does not accept by faith the sacrifice of Christ, then that person is required to pay for his or her own sin. The penalty for sin is death. By rejecting Christ a person excludes him or herself from the eternal life that God offers.

IV. The blood of Christ allows a holy God to justify us by faith alone. 3:27-31

A. Most definitions of spirituality involve a ton of human effort or personal performance in order to reach some acceptable standard. In a sense they are all grand schemes constructed so that we can learn very pious or intelligent-sounding ways to justify ourselves.

B. Christianity is unique in that it begins God initiating a relationship with us.

C. It means our performance is based on our relationship with God – rather than our relationship with God being based on our performance.

- Faith eliminates all pride of human achievement, because faith is not something we achieve.
- Faith puts the focus on what God has done rather than what we can do.
- Faith admits that we can't keep the law or attain God's standard – we need His help.
- Faith is based, not our **performance for** God, but on our **relationship with** God.

Conclusions:

Earlier we said: **The more clearly we see our sin, the more deeply we'll know our need for Jesus.**

1. Coming to grips with the reality of our own sin:

- How many of us still suffer from the delusion that we're somehow better than others?
- Have you ever thought, "I'm really not so bad?"
- Are you ready to admit or "confess" that you are totally corrupted by sin? The New Testament word for confession means "to say the same thing". When we confess our sins we are agreeing with God – saying the same thing about us that He does.
- In a way, Stephen Morgan, the murderer, has a lot in common with me. We're both totally corrupted by sin and desperately in need of the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

2. Understanding our deep need for Jesus:

- Because of the sacrificial system, the Israelites were generally aware that sin costs and that they themselves were sinful. We, on the other hand, may take Christ's work on the cross for granted. We may not appreciate how costly it was for Jesus to secure our forgiveness—it cost him his life. His death on the cross was for our benefit.
- There is only one way to be declared not guilty – by trusting Jesus Christ to take away our sins. Trusting Jesus means putting our confidence in him, and him alone, to forgive our sins, to make us right with God, and to empower us to live the way he taught us. God's solution is available to all of us regardless of our background or past behavior.

1 Peter 1:18-19 (NKJV) ¹⁸knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

The more clearly we see our sin, the more deeply we'll know our need for Jesus.