

Our Need for Grace

Romans 1:18 – 3:20



Apostle Paul (~ 5 – 67 A.D.)
By Andrei Rublev (1410)

Our Need for Grace Introduction



Our Need for Grace Introduction



*This epistle is ... truly the purest gospel.
... We can never read it or ponder over
it too much; for the more we deal with
it, the more precious it becomes and
the better it tastes.*

– Martin Luther

Our Need for Grace Introduction

- Key concept: God's grace
 - Unmerited favor, freely given to penitent sinners.
 - God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.

Our Need for Grace Introduction

- Key phrase: “the obedience of faith” (1:5, 16:26)
- Faith and obedience are *related* – *not rival* ideas.
- The gospel brings about **faith** which leads to **obedience**.
- This was Christ’s intention for Paul’s apostleship.

Our Need for Grace Introduction

- Paul's goals:
 - To introduce himself to the Roman church in preparation for later mission work.
 - To encourage unity among Jewish and Gentile believers.
 - To thoroughly explain the gospel he preaches as the means to both of the above.

Our Need for Grace Introduction

- Key verses: **Romans 1:16-17** (ESV)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

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Our Plan for Romans:

- ~~1. The Purest Gospel~~ — ~~1:1-18~~
2. Our Need for Grace 1:18 – 3:20
3. God's Gift of Grace 3:21 – 8:39
4. God's Gracious Plan 9:1 – 11:36
5. Life Lived by Grace 12:1 – 15:13
 - Part 5 will consist of 7 messages.

Our Need for Grace Introduction

Our Topic Today:

1. Gentile Guilt 1:18-32
2. Jewish Guilt 2:1 – 3:8
3. Collective Guilt 3:9-20

Our Need for Grace Introduction



Paul ... knows that we cannot appreciate the good news until we thoroughly understand the bad news. Only when we have really come to grips with the extent of the human dilemma will we be able to respond as we should to the answer to that dilemma found in the good news about Jesus.

*– Douglas Moo,
Wheaton Graduate School*

1. Gentile Guilt 1:18-32

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- Paul's description sounds much like the parallel Jewish accounts of Gentile guilt in his era.
- The ancient world was notoriously free with respect to sexual practices.
- Paul, following biblical ideals, condemns these practices in the strongest terms.

1. Gentile Guilt 1:18-32

- Continuous rejection of God's natural revelation leads to less understanding and less and less moral awareness.
- Right and wrong become harder to see in a culture that has rejected God.

1. Gentile Guilt 1:18-32

- God would have it this way when people give up their knowledge of him.
- “God gave them up” is repeated in 1:24, 26 and 28.
- Societies that reject God can get to the place where people no longer know the difference between right and wrong.

1. Gentile Guilt 1:18-32

Because of pagan idolatry, God has given up Gentiles to the ethical consequences of their actions—to unclean and degrading behavior. Bad theology or worship, in a morally structured universe, leads to bad ethics. God's wrath is seen not so much in what he does, but in what he allows to happen.

*– Ben Witherington III,
Asbury Theological Seminary*



1. Gentile Guilt 1:18-32

- **Judges 17:6** and **21:5** (ESV)

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

- **Proverbs 12:15** (ESV)

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

1. Gentile Guilt 1:18-32

- **Isaiah 5:20** (ESV)

Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!

1. Gentile Guilt 1:18-32

The truth is that God exists and that he requires people to worship and to obey him, but wickedness leads people to suppress the truth whenever it reveals their sinfulness (1:18b). Sinfulness, wickedness and suppression of truth are not the result of ignorance but of a deliberate attempt to dishonour God.

*– David M. Kasali, Bilingual Christian
University of the Congo*



1. Gentile Guilt 1:18-32

The end result of idolatry becomes obvious.

- When we worship the gods of power, we end up in strife, envy and war – an endless struggle.
- When we worship the gods of wealth, we end up with severe inequality, stock market crashes and endless greed.
- When we worship the gods of sex, we end up with STDs, broken relationships, dead babies and uncared-for children.

2. Jewish Guilt 2:1 – 3:8

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- 2:1-11 might easily refer to self-righteous Gentiles.
- These people would have been influenced by Judaism's stricter standards, yet not fully lived up to them.

2. Jewish Guilt 2:1 – 3:8

- 2:12-16 God's judgment is impartial.
- With or without the law revealed in the Bible, he will judge each person with a perfect fairness.

2. Jewish Guilt 2:1 – 3:8

- **2:17-29** Even those who have the law (like the Jews in Paul's day), do not live up to it.
- This makes the person who clearly knows right from wrong more guilty than the person who doesn't.

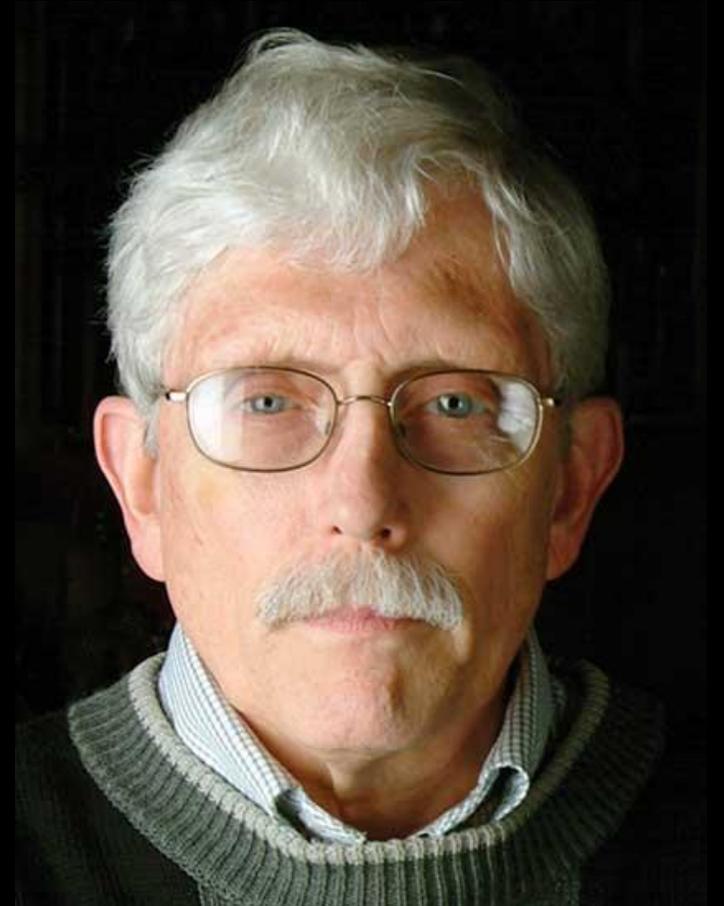
2. Jewish Guilt 2:1 – 3:8

- 2:17-29 We tend to lean toward an interpretation of right and wrong that makes us look good.

2. Jewish Guilt 2:1 – 3:8

It is human nature to think we are somehow better than others ... For the Jews it was their family tree. They thought that being the recipients of the law placed them above others and gave them a special status before God.

*– Grant Osborne,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*



2. Jewish Guilt 2:1 – 3:8

- **3:1-8** The Jews really do have a privileged place.
- As we saw in **Romans 1**, everyone has access to **natural revelation**, but the nations rejected this knowledge of God.

2. Jewish Guilt 2:1 – 3:8

- **3:1-8** The Jews really do have a privileged place.
- The Jewish people were entrusted with **special revelation**.
- God spoke directly to them and gave them his word.
- They are God's people by covenant and no other nation can claim that kind of relationship.

3. Collective Guilt 3:9-20

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- Now we see Paul's summary of the problem.
- It is not simply that people sin, but that everyone is under sin's power.
- We cannot get out from under that power by ourselves.

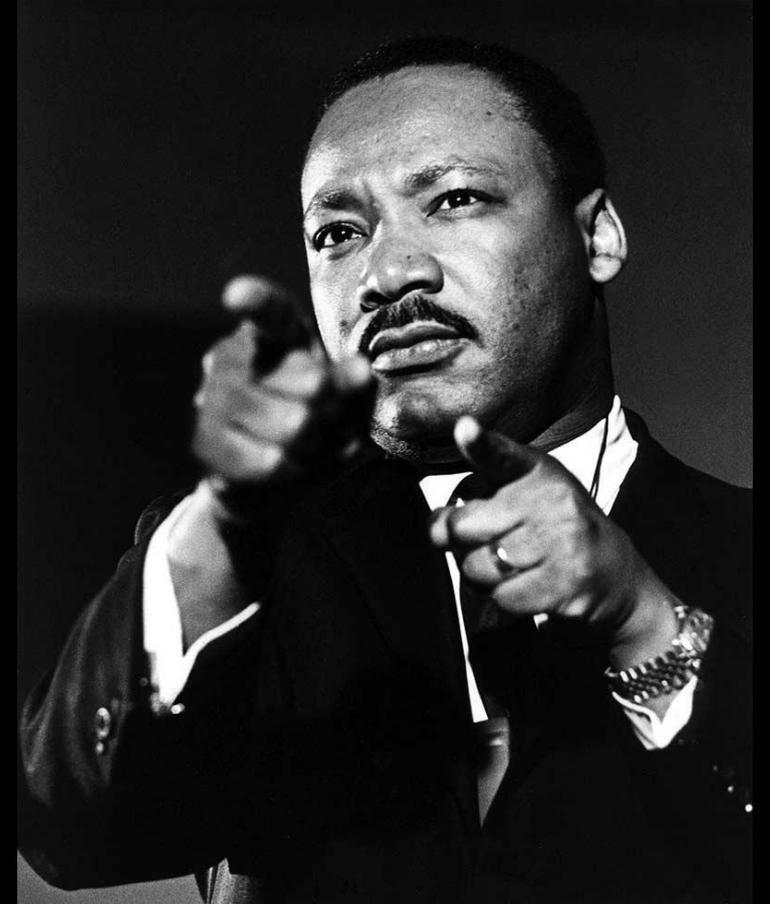
3. Collective Guilt 3:9-20

- Paul draws from several different **Psalms** as well as **Proverbs**, **Ecclesiastes** and **Isaiah** to make his case.
- This is why we need Jesus.
- This is what we mean by “our need for grace.”

3. Collective Guilt 3:9-20

The humanist's hope is ... based on too great an optimism concerning the inherent goodness of human nature ... But so many of these dedicated people, having no one but themselves to save themselves, end up disillusioned ... They are disillusioned because they started out with a great illusion. For them there is no sinner or no sin ...

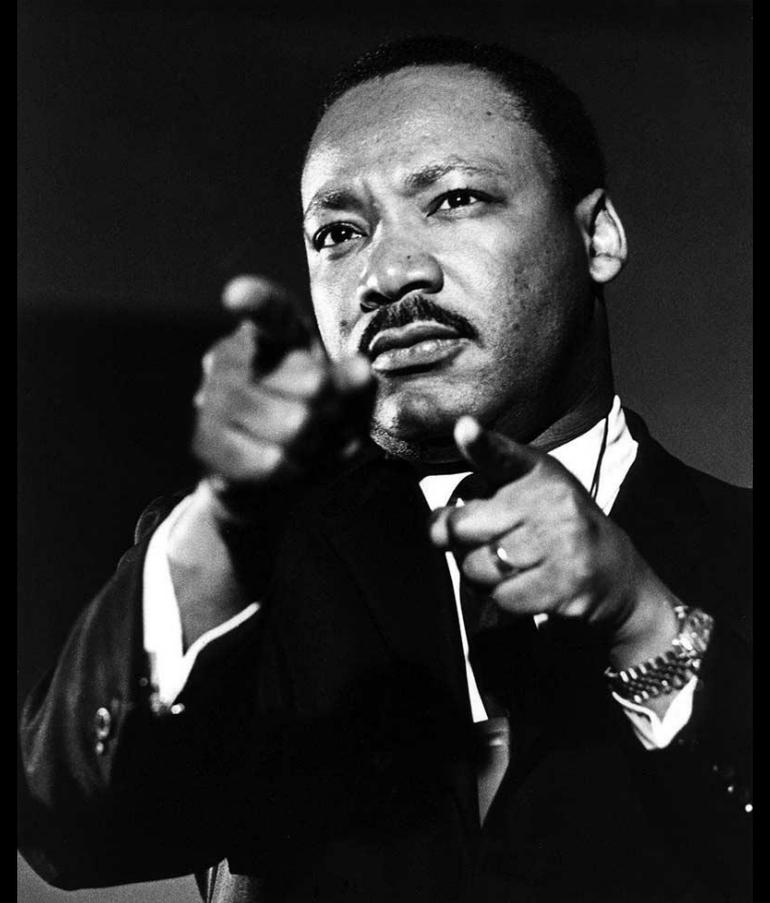
– Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929 – 1968)



3. Collective Guilt 3:9-20

Human nature is essentially good, and the only evil is found in systems and institutions; just enlighten people and free them from the crippling yoke of poverty, and they will save themselves. All of this sounds wonderful and soothingly pleasant. But it is an illusion wrapped in superficiality.

– Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929 – 1968)



3. Collective Guilt 3:9-20

- God's unmerited favor is the only way to address the guilt of our very real sin within our unrighteous hearts.

Our Need for Grace **Conclusions**



Our Need for Grace **Conclusions**



At the very center of every person, where the knowledge of God, if it is to have any positive effects, must be embraced, there has settled a darkness— a darkness that only the light of the gospel can penetrate.

*– Douglas Moo,
Wheaton Graduate School*

Our Need for Grace **Conclusions**

- Paul has shown us:
 - The guilt of the Gentile nations.
 - The guilt of the Jews who had God's covenant and his law.
 - The guilt of the whole human race collectively.

Our Need for Grace **Conclusions**

- The fact that we were all born under sin need not keep us from establishing a relationship with God.
- God himself has loved us and made a way.

Our Need for Grace **Conclusions**

- We may not feel the Jew-Gentile division they way they did in the Roman church in those days.
- We have our own cultural, ethnic, religious and racial divisions to work through.
- But the ground is still level at the foot of the cross.

Our Need for Grace **Conclusions**

Salvation is available to all; the only obstacle is lack of willingness to receive the message. All who do receive it, whether they are Greeks or Jews, benefit equally. At the foot of the cross of Jesus, the ground is level; tribes meet; races embrace; humanity finds unity.

*– David M. Kasali, Bilingual Christian
University of the Congo*



Our Need for Grace **Conclusions**

- Key verses: **Romans 1:16-17** (ESV)

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