

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

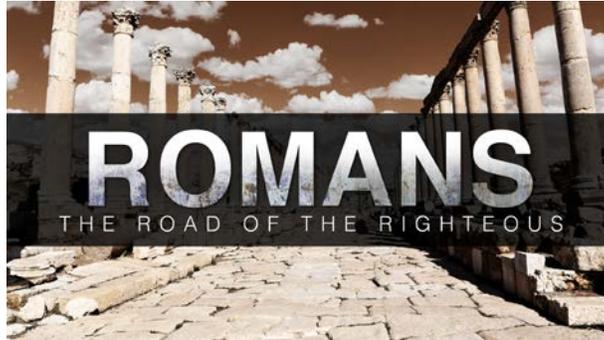
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 3:11-18

Written By

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July 1, 2018



The *Holman New Testament Commentary* on Romans tells an excellent story which powerfully describes man's spiritual condition before God:

Commissioned in 1936, the RMS Queen Mary was the most awe-inspiring ocean-going vessel in the world. She was 1,019 feet long, at 81,237 tons displaced twice the tonnage of the Titanic, had 12 decks (the promenade deck was 724 feet long), and carried 1,957 passengers attended by a crew of 1,174. Transformed from a luxury liner to a troop transport in World War II she carried 765,429 members of the military to and from the European war zones. The Queen Mary was retired from regular passenger service in 1967 after making 1,001 Atlantic Ocean crossings, and is presently harbored in the port of Long Beach, California. Even today, her magnificent and gleaming exterior cuts a beautiful profile against the blue waters of the Long Beach harbor. But when the Queen Mary was retired from active passenger service, it was discovered that part of her gleaming exterior was hiding something far less attractive and substantial.

The Queen Mary's three elliptical smoke stacks are 36 feet long, 23 feet wide, and ranging from 70 down to 62 feet in height-were made of sheets of steel over an inch thick. During her decades of service, at least 30 coats of paint had been applied to the massive smokestacks, forming a shell around the steel interior. But when the smokestacks were removed for maintenance after her decommissioning, it was discovered that they were nothing but shells. When lifted off the liner and placed on the docks, they crumbled! Over the years, the thick steel of which they had been made had turned to rust from long exposure to heat and moisture. The beautiful exteriors of the smokestacks revealed a rusty, crumbly interior that spoke not of beauty and elegance but of deterioration and decay. The external appearance was hiding the internal reality.¹

¹ Max Anders, ed., *Holman New Testament Commentary: Romans* (Nashville: Holman Publishing, 2000), 90-92.

Externally, man may appear fine, especially if his life is painted with good works, faith in a god of his creation, faithful commitment to religious rituals, philanthropic financial sacrifices, zealous commitment to various social causes, and the like. Internally, however, the story is altogether different if he has rejected the Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Behind the thin veneer of manufactured righteousness is nothing but spiritual decay, deception, and death.

Is this a description of you? Do you take great spiritual confidence in your outer moral and/or religious appearance before others? This is what the Jews of Paul's day thought. We learn this truth from his letter to the Gentiles and Jews in Rome. The Jews, in particular, erroneously believed their heredity, coupled with their commitment to the Torah, Jewish rituals, and the rite of circumcision made them members of God's heavenly family and kingdom. In order to wake them up spiritually, Paul peeled back the white paint of their self-made righteousness and showed them that they, along with the Gentiles, were internally riddled through and through with spiritual decay. Why did he do this? Why all the negativity? Paul went down this road in Romans 3, verses 9 through 20, to convince deluded sinners they desperately needed to know the Savior, Jesus.

A simple question, which naturally arises from the context in question, shows Jews and Gentiles their true spiritual condition behind all of the inferior white façade they project to others.

Why Do All People Need The Savior? (Romans 3:9-18)

Like a skilled and seasoned attorney, Paul brings sinners into God's courtroom, as it were, to make sure they definitively understand why they need spiritual salvation. His words, of course, transcend time and are applicable to any non-Christian in any age. The loving, honest attorney's words begin in a logical fashion with . . .

- *The Charge: Man Is A Sinner* (Rom. 3:9). As Paul states, all mankind is born guilty before God because he is under the dominion and power of sin. It rules and reigns over him supremely (Rom. 6:19ff), and try as he might, he is powerless to free himself from his hopeless condition. His condition, of course, logically points to his need of One who is capable of freeing sinners from the clutches of sin. That One is Jesus and Paul will get to Him in verse 20. But for now, sinners are called to face their true spiritual condition before an absolutely holy God.
- *The Contamination: Man Is Completely Corrupt* (Rom. 3:10-18). Having established the spiritual charge against man, Paul next moves to validate his premise with hard evidence of how man's sinful condition has permeated his entire being. To employ another metaphor . . . as one drop of black India ink in a glass of pristine water pollutes the entire glass, man's first rebellious sin in the Garden (Gen. 3) has colored and not controls every area of his life. As I stated in our last study, "Paul's indictments, which are drawn from various inspired Old Testament texts, can be divided into three quadrants, as various scholars have noted.² First, Paul addresses man's *character* (vv. 10-12). Second, he isolates man's sinful

²John MacArthur, *Romans*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 181; R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 76.

conversation (vv. 13-14). Third, he talks about man's wicked *conduct* (vv. 15-17). All three combined serve to validate his charge that all mankind is under the dominion and power of sin.

For our purposes in this study, we continue our analysis of what I call . . .

The Contamination: Man Is Completely Corrupt (Rom. 3:10-18)

Corruption extends to his *character*. Paul begins by stating that man's character is so decayed, so contaminated by inherent sin he cannot be truly righteous (v. 10). He is incapable of obtaining righteousness on his own because his righteousness is never perfect, which is what the Law of God demands because God is, by definition absolutely holy and righteous. Religiously minded man manufactures a plethora of religious duties he must perform in order to give him righteousness. He recites man-made prayers, he crafts prayer rugs upon which he must pray in a certain geographical direction, he refrains from certain foods because they are divine, he fasts in order to show his devotion to God, he has to kiss certain so-called holy objects, he, well, you fill in the endless blank. This is his solipsistic, narcissistic view of righteousness and he is committed to it with a superstitious, blind zeal. The only problem is it falls woefully short of God's requirement for true righteousness. That, my friend, is nothing short of absolute perfection.

Man's carnal, compromised character has a second issue. Paul, again, minces no words with sinners who think they are quite saintly:

¹¹ There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God . . . (Rom. 3:11).

¹⁰ Καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι δίκαιος οὐδὲ εἷς

¹¹ Οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ συνιῶν, οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ἐκζητῶν τὸν θεόν.

¹² Πάντες ἐξέκλιναν, ἅμα ἠχρειώθησαν οὐκ ἔστι ποιῶν χρηστότητα, οὐκ ἔστιν ἕως ενός.

¹³ Τάφος ἀνεωγμένος ὁ λάρυγξ αὐτῶν· ταῖς γλώσσαις αὐτῶν ἐδολιοῦσαν ἰὸς ἀσπίδων ὑπὸ τὰ χεῖλη αὐτῶν.

¹⁴ Ἦν τὸ στόμα ἀρᾶς καὶ πικρίας γέμει.

¹⁵ Ὅξεῖς οἱ πόδες αὐτῶν ἐκχέαι αἷμα·

¹⁶ Σύντριμμα καὶ ταλαιπωρία ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτῶν·

¹⁷ Καὶ ὁδὸν εἰρήνης οὐκ ἔγνωσαν.

¹⁸ Οὐκ ἔστι φόβος θεοῦ ἀπέναντι τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν.

A couple of grammatical items are noteworthy based on the Greek text of Paul's words. One, Paul's words basically are fired off in rapid fire succession with only one connective "and" in the entire list (v. 17). From a literary perspective, this is called asyndeton, or the use of "no-and's." Bullinger defines this literary technique well when he writes,

When the figure of Asyndeton is used, we are not detained over the separate statements, and asked to consider each in detail, but we are hurried on over the various matters that are mentioned, as though they were of no account, in

comparison with the great climax to which they lead up, and which alone we are thus asked by this figure to emphasize.³

Ostensibly this means Paul wants us to quickly note his points as he guides our thinking to his rhetorical climax centered on the salvific work of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-31).

Further, I have highlighted the negatives of the passage, *ouk* (οὐκ) because of their rhetorical impact for Paul's argument. For one, by starting several of these clauses with this particular negative Paul has employed the use of a figure of speech called *anaphora*. Anaphora is the repetition of the same word at the beginning of successive clauses for the sake of emphasis.⁴ Obviously, Paul desired to really underscore the spiritual content and reality of each of these verses to make sure his readers understood his point. For another, the fact Paul begins and ends by using negatives we have another figure of speech called *inclusio*. This rhetorical device merely ties the whole passage/argument together in order to underscore how man is nowhere near God's standards of holiness and righteousness. I wonder if Paul got anyone's attention by using these literary devices? Has he got your attention?

With verse 11, Paul emphasizes that no non-Christian understands by quoting from Psalm 14, verse 2 and/or 53, verse 3. The Greek word for *understand* is *synion* (συνίω), and it is a present tense participle denoting a perpetual, uninterrupted condition. According to Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, the verb means to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges one's thinking or practice, understand, comprehend.⁵ Understand what? Spiritual truth from God. Spiritual truth escapes him first because his thinking is darkened by his sinful condition (Eph. 4:18). In addition, the non-believer willfully chooses to reject God's truths because he views them as utter intellectual foolishness. Regarding this, Paul makes this observation in 1 Corinthians chapter 2:

¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. ¹⁶ For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2).

He cognitively understands what the biblical words are saying but views them with disdain because they run contrary to his godless, selfish, and "educated" thinking. He fails, however, to really understand their spiritual value for he lacks the Spirit of God in his life to be His teacher and instructor (1 John 2:20-27).

Is this a picture of your life? Are you feeling this during this study? Do you struggle with what your Christian wife, mother, husband, friend, co-worker has been telling you? Do you view the Christian message and the Bible as absolutely incongruous and illogical? Your problem is not that you need more information, you need transformation at the feet of Jesus. Only by coming to

³E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 137.

⁴Ibid., 199.

⁵ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 972.

Him in repentant faith are you divinely given the ability to truly understand what God has said in His Word. John talks about this reality in his first epistle:

²⁰ And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life (1 Jn. 5).

Without Christ in your life one thing is for sure: you do not understand the things of God. And if you are sucked into a non-Christian religion, be what it may, you will really be hard-pressed to come to terms with the Bible's message of sin, judgment, grace, mercy and salvation. Again, I ask, Is this your situation? It is the situation of all those who don't know Jesus. Every single man and woman on the planet who does not know and walk with Jesus does not understand His teachings which lead to eternal life, joy, peace, and happiness. They remain a locked vault to them because their character is tainted by the inability to understand the spiritual.

A third area of contamination of man's character surfaces in the latter half of verse 11:

¹¹ There is none who seeks for God; (Rom. 3).

Think about this logically. If a person does not understand God, but wants to understand everything which runs counter to God, it follows he will not seek God. Why would he want to because God would disturb and challenge his pursuit of everything evil and questionable? Interestingly enough, the Greek word for seek, viz., *ekzeton* (ἐκζητῶν), is highly emphatic because a preposition is wedded to a verb. It, therefore, readily denotes an intense search for something. Peter's usage of this word in his first epistle reveals this particular lexical nuance:

¹⁰ As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful search and inquiry . . . (1 Pet. 1).

Applied to non-Christians it means they, by nature, do not intently seek after knowledge of God. They seek everything else but God, so they are not impacted by Him. And even when they seek God through non-Christian religions, be what they may, they are not really seeking God at all but a watered down and false view of the true, living God. To seek God, on the contrary, "in the biblical sense means that God is the centre of our thinking, and it is the supreme object of our lives to know Him and to love Him, and to live to His glory."⁶ This the godless do not do. They willfully suppress the truth of God, as Paul says in Romans 1, verse 18, so they can have their own god, gods, and unhinged lifestyles.

How does the one contaminated by sin at this level come to seek God and become a believer? The Spirit has to be doing his work on the person's life, as Jesus says in the Gospel of John,

⁸ And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; ¹¹ and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. (Jn. 16).

⁶D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapters 2:1-3:20* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 205.

Concerning these all-important words, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* correctly states,

16:8. One of the Spirit's new ministries was to **convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment**. Conviction is not the same as conversion but is necessary to it. The words "convict ... of guilt" translate the one word *elenxei*, "to present or expose facts, to convince of the truth." The Spirit works on the minds of the unsaved to show them the truth of God for what it is. Normally this process includes human aid (cf. 15:26–27).

16:9. **Sin** is rebellion against God and this rebellion reached its climax in the crucifixion of Jesus. Today the greatest sin is the failure to **believe in Jesus** (cf. 3:18; 15:22, 24). Most people do not readily admit to being guilty of sin. They will admit to failures or vices or even crimes. However, sin is against God, and people have suppressed the truth of God (cf. Rom. 1:18, 21, 25, 28). The mighty working of the Holy Spirit is necessary to convince and convict people of their desperate plight.

16:10. In crucifying Jesus, the Jewish people showed that they thought He was unrighteous, that only a wicked person would be hanged on a tree and thus be under God's curse (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). But the Resurrection and the Ascension vindicated Jesus as God's righteous Servant (Acts 3:14–15; Isa. 53:11). The Spirit convicts men of their faulty views of Jesus when the gospel with its stress on the Resurrection is proclaimed (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

16:11. The third area of the Holy Spirit's convicting work concerns **judgment**. The death and resurrection of Jesus were a condemnation of Satan (12:31; Col. 2:15), **the prince of this world** (cf. John 14:30). By Jesus' death, He defeated the devil, who held "the power of death" (Heb. 2:14). (Though defeated at the Cross, Satan is still active [1 Peter 5:8]. But, like a condemned criminal, his "execution" is coming [Rev. 20:2, 7–10].)

People in rebellion should take note of Satan's defeat and fear the Lord who holds the power to judge. As the fact of coming judgment (both Satan's and man's) is proclaimed, the Spirit convicts people and prepares them for salvation (cf. Acts 17:30–31).⁷

As the Spirit convicts, the Father seeks and draws out the sinner:

⁴⁴ No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him upon the last day (John 6).

And at some point the lost sinner sees his sin, repents of his sin, and turns to the Savior in saving faith (Rom. 10:9–10). But prior to this he seeks everything but a viable, intimate relationship with the living God. Is this you? If so, your situation is spiritually bleak, but there is hope for you in the person and work of Jesus, as Paul will demonstrate in the closing verses of this powerful chapter (Rom. 3:21ff).

With verse 12, Paul introduces us to three more areas where sin pollutes man's character:

⁷ Edwin A. Blum, *John*, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 328.

¹² All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one (Rom. 3).

“Turn aside” is another intensive Greek word built on a preposition wedded to a verb, *exeklinan* (ἐξέκλιναν). Lexically, the word means to “put to flight in a radical fashion.” A couple of years ago I buried a friend of mine in California. He had been the vice principle of high school in the progressive Bay Area, so I was not shocked when hundreds of progressive non-Christians showed up to pay tribute to Larry’s life. For one man, however, the discussion about the gospel of Jesus was just too much. He got up from his chair and stormed out of the gym, making sure the door closed loudly behind him. There was just no way he was going to listen to one more word of the gospel of Jesus so he “turned aside” in a radical fashion.

Perhaps you are doing this right now. You are not alone because our entire culture is turning aside from God at breakneck speed. Just a couple of weeks ago *Vimeo* barred my preaching/teaching videos on transgenderism because they are classified as hate speech. Interesting, isn’t it? They will turn and embrace any and all forms of sexuality, they will not call any type of sexual behavior perverse or abnormal, but they will hatefully react against anyone who’d dare stand for sexuality and morality per God’s design and definition.

A logical result of turn from God and God’s ways is illustrated in the fifth area of contamination of man’s character: “together they have become useless.” The verb here, *echreothesan* (ἠχρηώθησαν), is from the root word *archreioo* which literally speaks of a bunch of damaged sticks. While in seminary I worked for the commercial division of Allied Van Lines. One day I waited on the thirtieth floor of a building to receive expensive mahogany credenzas in the freight elevator. When they arrived, I helped move and position them in an open area so they could be placed in various office cubicles. While I waited for the next delivery, I noticed someone had taken a tape gun and wrapped it all around the circumference of the draws of each credenza to keep the doors from coming open in the elevator. As I pulled on the tape you can imagine what happened. The beautiful finish came off as well. Those credenzas were beautiful but worthless.

This is what *echreothesan* means in Romans 3, verse 12, but it is specifically related to morals. According to Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, *echreothesan* speaks of someone who is morally depraved because they live counter to standards of true morality. Again, you don’t need to look far in our Christless culture to see this word in action. We are surrounded by people who call moral darkness, moral light and who not only choose to live counter to lofty morals, but who teach and educate others to do the same. In fact, nothing will draw the morally degenerate together faster than other degenerates so they can collectively feel good about their degeneracy they do not think is that big of a deal. As such they are useless . . . useless to God because they reject Him and useless to moral people because they live to diminish and destroy morals. See any of this in your life? Know anyone like this? It represents the fifth area of character contamination for all non-Christians to some degree.

The sixth area of character contamination appears at the end of verse 12:

¹² All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, there is not even one (Rom. 3).

This verse must be understood in relation to God’s goodness and man’s goodness. Man’s goodness is like a flexible tape measure a woman might use for sewing. It is good for measuring a size, and you might even be able to get a somewhat straight line from it, but it will never be completely

straight because the given measure is not straight, but slightly off because it is not rigid. This is a crude picture of man's goodness. It's only good to a point, but since man is evil in his heart his goodness is always going to be far from God's perfect laser-like goodness. And even when man is good in a way God would approve he cannot ever be always good because his character prohibits this activity. In fact, one moment he'll give money to a good cause, and in the next moment he'll be fudging on his time card to better provide for his family.

Paul is right on target. All mankind needs a Savior because his entire character is contaminated by sin. In addition to this, the Apostle turns in verses and demonstrates how inherited sin also pollutes man's *conversation* (vv. 13-14).

¹³ Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; ¹⁴ Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness (Rom. 30).

Here is Paul's seventh charge. Stick around a person who doesn't love God long enough and their conversation will demonstrate they don't know, love, or respect God. As Paul says from his recollection of Psalm 5:9, their throat, which is a metonymy of cause to denote speech, is like the stench of an open grave. I've played and worked with these people before in the secular world. Vile jokes just keep coming. Everything anyone says is turned into a sexual double entendre to generate laughs. The "f-bomb" is something akin to a punctuation marker. And they use the name Jesus more than I, as a pastor, do, but their usage is bathed in disrespect.

In addition, their tongues, or their speech, which comprises Paul's eight charge, is also all about deception. They don't like to tell the truth. On the other hand, they like to shave the truth to their own ends so they can get what they want. When I went to purchase my first used car, I asked a godly elder at our church if he had any advice since he was a successful businessman. I'll never forget his reply, "Marty, in relation to the salesman remember this one thing: If their mouth is moving, they are lying." That is funny, but there is much truth to it. Someone selling you a used car is typically going to keep certain facts from you in order to close the deal. Such is the way of those who don't know God. When I sold boats in college I made it a habit to tell the truth about all the used boats we had in our side lot. I also told the truth about the new boats in our showroom. I have numerous run-ins with older salesmen who wanted me to be deceptive to close more deals. I didn't budge and God rewarded me with a good amount of sales. Believe me, I learned firsthand how smooth are the words of the lost. They say one thing and mean another. Deception is the name of their game so they can get ahead of you and get what they want. Is it your game? If so, you probably don't know God, but you need to so he can deal with your contamination and rejuvenate your sin-stained soul.

Paul's ninth charge of contamination is most graphic:

¹³ Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; ¹⁴ Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness (Rom. 30).

Just like a snake's fangs are retracted in its mouth, only to rapidly descend when it is ready to fill them with venom and sink them into a prey's body, so, too, it is with those who don't know God. Their speech, on the one hand, sounds so nice and flattering to your face, but then the next think you know the fangs come out and you have their verbal venom flowing through your veins. Have you seen anyone like this lately? To your face they are nice and friendly, but behind your back

they are vicious, or perhaps they are prone to be vicious at the drop of the proverbial hat to your face. Either way they behave verbally like a venomous snake.

Paul's ninth charge easily devolves into the tenth charge:

¹³ Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; ¹⁴ Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness (Rom. 30).

"Cursing" pretty much says it all. When they talk they just cannot help but using all the verboten words. In fact, if you cut all the vile words from their sentences, they wouldn't be really saying a whole lot. Also, it logically follows that a person whose mouth would make a sailor blush is typically known for being very bitter toward life and everyone in life. Jesus was right when he said,

³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ³⁵ The good man out of *his* good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of *his* evil treasure brings forth what is evil (Matt. 12).

If a man's heart is spiritually dark, then out of it will come forth speech which has the stench of death about it. Once more, the solution to his spiritual death is the life which only Jesus can offer him. More on that in a moment.

The third and final area where man is spiritually contaminate is his *conduct* (vv. 15-17).

¹⁵ Their feet are swift to shed blood, ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their paths, ¹⁷ And the path of peace they have not known.

Various Old Testament texts speak about the sinner's desire to eliminate innocent people (Prov. 1:16; Isa. 59:7). We do not need to be reminded how readily this verse applies to our dangerous day. Religious fanatics kill the innocent in the name of their god, and crazed drug dealers spray their opponents with gunfire with no regard for innocent bystanders. While doing a prison service at the local youth prison at my last church in California, I spoke with a fifteen-year-old boy who serving time for murder. He wasn't even shaving yet, but he had killed someone. I asked him the logical question, "How did you get to the point where you took another person's life?" Without even blinking and with a cold, expressionless look he replied, "Well, it's simple. I was cutting a drug deal with a guy. I had the drugs he wanted and when he questioned me regarding whether I really had the drugs or not, I pulled out my pistol and shot him dead." "Why did you do that," I queried in astonishment. I'll never forget his hair-raising reply, "Hey, man, nobody asks *me* questions."

Paul couldn't have been more on target.

When darkness resides in the heart then destruction and misery are soon to follow. On another occasion, I spoke to a group of gang members who had just been arrested. After my Bible study I said, "Say, why did you guys all get arrested at the same time?" With smiles on their faces they glowing recounted how they drove to a nice residential area of town and jumped out of their cars and beat people up at random and then just drove off. Some of them bumped fists and high fived each other as their recounted their brutal exploits. The scary thing was they were arrested in MY NIEGHBORHOOD. Obviously, anyone who loves destruction and misery could care less

about peace. Again, Paul had a keen awareness of the heart of those who reject God. They are polluted in their character, conversation, and conduct, and this charge is why they desperately need to know Christ for only He can forgive them and give them new lives (2 Cor. 5:17).

Like a good prosecutor Paul closes out these exact charges by isolating the main force behind them:

¹⁸ THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES (Rom. 3).

Paul's quote here is from Psalm 36, verse 1. What does this mean? Fearing God can be a positive thing, as when a believer reverences who God is (Prov. 1:7). Fearing God can also be a negative thing as when you are afraid of the one who can through your godless soul into hell (Matt. 10:28). Those who don't know God do not reverence Him, and they are certainly not afraid of what He might potentially do to them in the next life. Because of these two things, they live lives of moral and ethical compromise thinking this life all there is. Unfortunately, on Judgment Day they will find out likewise, but then it will be too late. But for now they are in need of salvation through Jesus because they are completely contaminated, as Paul has shown.

Let me take you back to my illustration of the black India ink in a glass of water. It completely contaminates it; however, if I take a picture of fresh, pure water and begin to pour it in that, eventually, the polluted water is replaced with the unpolluted, pristine water. Is this not what Jesus talked about to the spiritually contaminated woman at the well in John 4? Indeed.

¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life (Jn. 4).

Should your glass be black and contaminated right now, Jesus is ready and willing to send His life-giving water through your soul like a mighty cleansing river of life.