

Open Wide

Romans 3:9-20

June 15th, 2008



This passage of Scripture concludes the section where Paul indicts the whole world as sinners. He is doing this to clearly show the need of all to hear the gospel and come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Scripture

“What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

There are many shows on television about the law. There is always a judge and jury and someone has been accused, either rightly or falsely. There is a defense attorney and a prosecuting attorney. The entire show unfolds in

a court room. Sometimes the whole verdict hinges on what is called the closing arguments of the attorneys. Sometimes you feel like the scales are tipped a certain way, and then in the closing arguments, a lawyer will masterfully arrange and present the evidence afresh, and the verdict is sealed in the other direction.

The Courtroom of God's Law

When we read verses 9-20, we cannot get around the law court imagery that Paul is using to frame his remarks. The chapters, from 1:18 to 3:20, are framed in law court vocabulary. Beginning with verse 9, it appears to me that the Apostle Paul, serving as the prosecuting attorney for God to the Romans, brings his closing arguments in his indictment against all of humanity.

Remember, Paul said that God will always be faithful to His covenant people and somehow uses the sinfulness of man to ultimately bring honor and glory to Himself. Yet, in no way does this make God unrighteous. But, in sharing how the Jews had an advantage over the Gentiles through the light of special revelation, Paul said that if Jews do not come to faith in the Messiah, are they any better off than a Gentile who only has the light of natural revelation? The answer is no. The principle is that people who have special revelation, (Jews and the Church) have a great advantage over those who only have the light of natural revelation. We have the opportunity to come to Christ by faith. But if we reject that light and stand outside of Christ on the Day of Judgment, even though we had the Word of God as a testimony about His plan of salvation, God will judge us impartially. We will be judged based on our works. Therefore, will we have an advantage because we were in the Church? Will we have an advantage because we had the Bible on our coffee table? The answer is an emphatic no, not at all! Then he is going to remind us of the charge that is against all people outside of Christ.



Paul's Indictment

As the teacher, I must remind you that Paul is not speaking of the Church or Christians in chapter 1:18-3:20. He is only speaking of people outside of Christ, Jew or Gentile. He concludes that all, not Christians, not saved people, not saints, but all people outside of Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are under sin. In chapters 1 and 2, he feels like he has clearly demonstrated the principle that all are sinners.

This phrase, "*under sin*", was used in the ancient world to talk about someone who had been taken captive. They were being held in prison, in a cell, or in shackles. In other words, they are not in control of themselves. They are under the control of another. Paul reminds us in his closing argument that all outside of Christ, either Jew or Gentile, are sinners and are enslaved to sin. Whether the person is our neighbor, or family member, or someone who lives on a remote island in the Pacific; all people outside of Christ are enslaved to sin. They are sinners and are in danger of standing before God on the Day of Judgment outside of grace. There are no exceptions anywhere. All are charged of being sinners.

❖ Stringing Pearls

According to the speaking style of the Jewish rabbis in verses 10-18, Paul lists fourteen indictments from Scriptures to clearly reveal the charge. He is going to draw from the Old Testament Scriptures, both the Psalms and the prophets. Without commentary, he will list Scripture after Scripture. This was called "stringing pearls" in the Jewish world. The Jews were like the Baptists in that they considered themselves a people of the Book. The Jews referred to the Old Testament, and Baptists refer to the Old and New Testament. We are not saying that other denominations are not people of the Book, but we are saying we, as Baptists, are. The Jews were the same way. So to drive home a point, the rabbis would many times quote Scripture after Scripture after Scripture. Scripture had nuggets of truth and those nuggets were considered pearls, thus it was like stringing a set of

pearls. This is what Paul does here. In stringing together these pearls, he is going to indict man with these fourteen indictments that will paint his true picture outside of Christ before God.

I have to say this because we are going to be in a dilemma. If we truly believe what the Bible teaches about man outside of Christ, we will have to change our terminology; our hospital terminology, and our funeral theology, and our casual conversation at dinner. I have said this before, but I do not believe I have ever been to a funeral of a bad person in Western Kentucky. I do not know what it is about Western Kentucky, but everyone is in. Every funeral I have been to; they are all good people. You really cannot tell the difference between the Church people and the non-Church people when you go to a funeral. Yet the Bible paints a picture of man outside of Christ that will cut us to the core, and we will face a dilemma. We will either believe what the Bible says or we are going to go on believing what we believe. But I am afraid many of us are giving false hope to our neighbors, family members, or people who live in places where the gospel is not preached because we do not have the right view of man in sin.

In his commentary on Romans, John McArthur tells about an old man who was in a park in Scotland. He was holding a case, and he came across some youth who thought there must be a camera in the case. So the youth asked the old man if he would take their picture, and he said, "I already have your picture." They were perplexed. He opened up the case, and instead of a camera, it had a small New Testament in it. He opened it to Romans 3:10-18 and read about who they were, and then told them about Christ.

- **No One Righteous**

I do not like having my picture made. I like to really imagine how good I look. I still like to imagine I weigh the same as I did when I first got married. I like to think my hair is still the color I was born with. There are just a lot of things I like to think, and then I see a picture and whoa! That

is not me; that is not what I look like! Sometimes, when I see myself in a photograph, I think I am as wide as I am tall. I cannot believe that to be true, but it is. You are not going to believe this picture. It says about man outside of Christ that "*there is none righteous, no not one.*" Outside of Christ, there is not a person anywhere on this planet who is in a right relationship with God. Do you know what that does to the masses of humanity who are living on the planet at this very moment? It damns them to eternal hell. The prophets said that any right behavior that we can bring before God to make us right with Him, to undo what we have done wrong, is as a filthy rag. The word in the Hebrew for **filthy rag** is the word that denotes the "menstrual rag" of a lady. That is how God views our attempt to bring anything righteous before Him.

- **No One Understands**

There is "*no one who understands.*" But Paul knows the person outside of Christ does not get it. 1 Corinthians 2:10-16 teaches that he cannot get it. Outside of the divine aid of the Holy Spirit, he cannot get it because the natural man cannot receive the things of God. We talk all the time about unbelievers starting to get it. No, the Bible says spiritual things and the things of God can only be discerned by the Spirit.

- **No One Seeks God**

There "*is none that seeks after God.*" How many times have you said that someone is seeking God? Yet the Bible says no one seeks God. Somehow we have painted this picture that there is a divine hide and seek game going on between man and God. God is hiding and man is seeking Him. Many of us thought that those in the pagan forest or on the desert island, in their attempt to be religious, were seeking God. But we have learned in Romans that by their paganism they are actually running from God. The Bible teaches that man in sin hides from God, and God, who is holy, seeks man. This is how it happened in the beginning with the first man. Adam sinned and he ran to God and confessed what he did wrong and God forgave him. No...what happened? Adam hid. He was fine as long as God

did not come walking in the cool of the day. He was enjoying his little world and all of a sudden, when God came walking into the cool of the day, he dove into the bushes! God did not just go on by. He asked Adam where he was. Can you just see that? Adam over there in the bushes hiding and then telling God he was hiding! God asked him why he was hiding. Adam told Him it was because he was naked. God asked him how he knew he was naked. Then (and I love this, in a bad way) Adam said, *Well it was that woman you gave me!* Did you catch that? Instead of just admitting he blew it, he first tried to blame his wife, and then indirectly blame God. The reason is because man hides. Man would still be hiding in the bushes trying to hide our nakedness before God if it were not for God confronting us with our sin! The Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas said it best when he said, "When we see people seeking God, they are really seeking peace, joy, and happiness." In other words, they are seeking the benefit of God but they are not seeking God. They want joy and happiness, and when their circumstances change, they come to church.

- **All Turned Aside**

"*All have turned aside*" is a term that was used in the military to talk about an army advancing, and all of a sudden, a soldier turns and goes in the opposite direction. Except in our analogy here, all are not walking in the path toward God; all have turned and went their own way, doing their own thing.

- **They Became Worthless**

"*They have become worthless.*" This word, **worthless**, was used to talk about milk that had spoiled. Have you ever went to the refrigerator and turned the milk jug up and got a mouthful of spoiled milk? Whew! Because the opening was so small, it hit your taste bud before it hit your nose, and you turned and spewed as quickly as you could! This word was used to talk about a housewife who started to cook and found the meat or fruit was

rotten. Rotten fruit, meat, and spoiled milk are worthless. Humanity before a God who is holy is absolutely corrupt; they are rotten.

- **None Do Good**

We talk about our neighbor who is not a Christian as being a good man, and yet the Bible says, "*...no one does good, not even one.*" Do you realize the false hope you give your wife and kids when you talk about their granddaddy or other family member being a good person? Liar, liar, liar! Do you realize when we talk to our neighbor about another neighbor and how good he is outside of Christ that there is no incentive for that neighbor to tell him about Christ? Honestly, isn't that the reason we are not talking to other people about Jesus? It is because not only has their situation not dawned on them, it has not really dawned on us. We see people through the snapshot we have taken of them instead of seeing them as God sees them.

- **Throat is an Open Grave**

Every time you go to the doctor, it does not matter what hurts, the first thing they will say is open wide. They are going to stick something in your mouth and hold your tongue down and look down your throat. It is amazing to me that Paul says (before the mouth, the lips, or the tongue) "*their throat.*" When Paul tells us, morally, to open wide and God looks down the throat of an unbeliever, He sees "*an open grave.*" Yuck! There is a reason we close caskets and put dirt over the grave. It is not only for sight, but for smell. We do not want to witness, through our eyes or nose, the decaying process of a body that has been in the ground for weeks and months. When God looks at people outside of Christ, and looks down their spiritual throat into their heart, He sees death, decay, and disease. It stinks.

- **Deceiving Tongues**

Paul continues, "...*they use their tongues to deceive.*" It is amazing that a person can use their tongue and paint a false picture of something.

- **Venomous Lips**

"*The venom of the asps is under their lips.*" A poisonous snake has a sac under his fangs that contains venom. When the snake gets ready to bite, he lifts up his fangs and the pressure pushes the venom out of the sac into the victim. Have you ever had someone sink their lips into you and release their venom?

- **Cursing and Bitter Mouth**
- **Feet Swift to Shed Blood**
 - **Path of Ruin and Misery**
 - **Unknown Way of Peace**
- **Eyes do not Fear God**

"Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their path is ruin and misery, and the way of peace is not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." We are living in a society that is now beginning to manifest that there is no fear of God anymore. You do not have to debate whether this "*fear*" means holy awe, or reverence, or outright fright; there is none of those in our society outside of Christ anymore. When you take this picture and formulate your doctrine of a sinner, I think you will see that man is not ok. I think you will discover that man is not even sick. I think you will discover that neither is he drowning. I think you will finally see man as the Bible presents him, which is that he is dead; spiritually separated from God.

Lake of Life

I do not want to send a wrong impression, because I believe sometimes the things I heard in church I have probably misinterpreted. I probably did not listen as well as I should have. But growing up in the Church, I never got the picture of man being as bad as what I now believe the Bible says

man is, outside of Christ. As a matter of fact, with the evangelistic preaching that we had in our Church, I kind of grew up with the idea that if life was like a lake, the Church is the lifeboat, and the gospel is the life preserver. All of those people that lived around us were in the lake and they were drowning. If we would just look, we would see them frantically crying out for help. If we would just toss them the gospel, they would grab hold of it and we could draw them into the Church before it was eternally too late. That was my picture. Then I started reading my Bible and discovered that nowhere in the Bible do I find a picture of man outside of Christ drowning in a sea of sin. Nowhere did I find man frantically trying to wave his arms to the Church to let us know that he was there. It is not what you find. You find a picture of deadness. You are trying to rescue people who are lying face down, somewhere between the top of the water and the bottom. What you really need is a scuba outfit. You have to somehow get to where they are and take them some air; air that cannot just fill their lungs, but air that can resurrect them back to life. And have I good news for you; that is what the gospel does. The gospel does not save a man spiritually before he goes under; it resurrects a man, who is spiritually dead, back to new life in Christ!

Total Depravity

This is painting the picture of an old doctrine that used to be popular in the Church years ago, but it is losing its appeal today because we live in such a modern, educated culture. There used to be a doctrine called *total depravity* taught in the Church. It is the first tenant of a grace-based Church. If man is not totally depraved, there is no need of grace. But because man is totally depraved in sin, grace is man's only hope. Total depravity does not mean, and never has meant, that man is as sinful as he could be. Yes, Romans 1 teaches that God allows man to become as sinful as he wants to be. But understand that no matter how sinful man becomes, there is always another step lower. Total depravity means that every moral faculty of man was affected by the fall. There is not a part of you that was not radically affected by the fall. This means that man in sin

is corrupt in his very core. So when we say he is totally depraved, we are talking about him in his totality. The Bible says there is none righteous, none who understand, which is the mind. There is none who seeks God, which is the will, or the heart. They have all turned astray; they have all become rotten, which is corruptness. All is corrupt, their throat, their mouth, their lips, their tongue, their feet, and their eyes. When Paul strung these pearls of the Old Testament together, he painted a picture of man outside of Christ before God, and he is totally depraved! He is dead.

Accountable to God

When you come to verse 19, Paul will say that all who are under the Law "*are under the Law, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world be accountable (or guilty) before God.*" The picture is you standing before God on the Day of Judgment outside of Christ and He brings these fourteen indictments from the Old Testament against you. What are you going to say, because there is always an opportunity for defense? Everyone gets a defense attorney. What are you going to say? Can you picture all of humanity standing before God on the Day of Judgment, and when the charge is made, there is absolute, total silence? The reason for the silence is because every charge is true. The whole world is guilty right now before God if they are outside of Christ!

"For by the works of law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." Do not attribute this to just the Law of Moses. In Romans 1 and 2, we have seen Paul masterfully show that all men have law, either the law of their conscience, or the Law of God. Both the conscience and the Law reveal to every person that they are a sinner. There is no hope of them doing anything to earn a right relationship with God. If we are going to be a people of the Book, we have to come to the conclusion that there is no hope for people outside of Christ. Not even one will get in, absolutely none.

Now, because my citizenship is in heaven, I will not settle down here. Some of us cannot go on a two week mission trip because of our yard, or

dogs, or our children. And yet the world is going to hell without Christ. We have shackled ourselves with so much debt that we cannot even support missions because we are making such a home here. And the world is going to hell without even hearing about Christ because the Church will not get out of our chairs and go anywhere, not even next door! We will not even talk to the guy we work with. We have been the coach of the same kids for ten years, and we have never told any of those families about Christ. How can that be? It's because we don't want to think that they are not ok.

Could you really sleep at night if you really knew your mom or dad, or son, or daughter is going to hell? So what have we done? We have adopted a false theology that if we will just change what we are doing at Church, we can get them to come to Church. They do not want to come to Church! To be truthful, if I was not a Christian, I would not want to go to Church either. I would rather stay home and watch sports on TV. So we want to go from hymns to contemporary songs. We want to change our music so it sounds like bar music. We want to dumb our preaching down from 45 minutes to 15 minutes, and then we do not want to talk about doctrine, we just want to tell stories. I am sorry folks, the world is not going to seek us, and if they do seek us, we are doing something wrong. Are you listening? Is that not why God told us to go to them? I do not really believe it is them living among us that is supposed to convert them; it is us living among them that is supposed to convert them. This means that if a man had a lost sheep, he would leave the ninety-nine and go find the one. If a woman had a lost coin, she would sweep the house until she found it. Where is that fervor in our lives? We have lost it because we have lost the doctrine of total depravity. We want to believe that our snapshot of our family and neighbors are real rather than seeing the snapshot of God. There is no hope for man outside of Christ! This thing becomes practical by sharing the gospel with those who do not know Him.