

Romans 3:9-20

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[0:00] Let me invite you to take your copy of God's Word and join me in Romans chapter 3. Our text for today as we continue to make our journey through the book of Romans.

! We find in this morning's text the doctrine of total depravity.

Put simply, this is the teaching that mankind lacks any spiritual good and lacks the ability to do good before God. I haven't stated this doctrine by its name, but in our study of Romans, this has been the driving point that Paul has been making from chapter 1 and verse 18 where he states, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

And it concludes at verse 20 of today's text. He wants to be so clear that anyone, whether of Jewish descent or otherwise, lives under the curse of sin.

He wants us to be clear that this is true of us. Romans chapter 2 and verse 12. There he writes, For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law.

[1:25] And all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. And he's doing all of this because this is the reasonable starting point from which to prove his thesis for the entirety of this book, which we will do throughout the rest of the letter.

And he states that thesis in chapter 1, verse 16 and 17, where there he says, 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.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

Why might we care to pay attention to Paul's writing? He tells us in verse 18 of chapter 1, because of wrath.

He's saying, listen to what I have to say. He's setting up the problem for us, the due penalty for our sin. All of mankind has a huge problem that only finds its remedy in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[2:46] Now, I have a note hanging taped to the wall in my study above my desk that reads, and I picked this up somewhere. I can't tell you where, but I'm not going to take credit for it.

But it says this, When preparing to preach, remember the weary, the wayward, the proud, the lazy, and the lost.

Admittedly, I don't always remember, and when I do remember, I don't always do a good job of applying a text to each of these categories of individuals. So this morning, I want to tackle the task up front, and be sure.

To address each of these categories of people in the hopes of preparing you for today's study. So first, this morning, you might find yourself weary.

Do not allow a text like this to beat you down. If you are weary because you have been laboring to be accepted by our God, be reminded today that you cannot be accepted by God by your works.

[3:56] You are right to be worn out, if that is what you have been up to this past week. But you can be accepted by God through the works of another. Rest today in the truth of the gospel, even as we consider how wicked you once were.

Maybe this morning you are fit in the category of the wayward. Perhaps God is already drawing you back to himself as you find yourself here in my listening.

Maybe you have drifted in your faith. This text should remind you of the folly of sin. It can be so enticing on the front end, but it leads nowhere but to destruction.

Return to your God. He knows how feeble and easily tempted you are, and stands ready to grant you grace in your repentance. Maybe this morning you are proud.

Perhaps you have forgotten who you once were. Be humbled that God saved one such as you. Every one of us identifies with this text, either as who we once were or who we now are.

[5:13] Perhaps you think a text like this has nothing to teach you, that you are so familiar with the doctrine of total depravity that you need not hear it. Be grateful that God has led you into this truth, and rejoice in its declaration, because other people may need to hear it.

Perhaps you find yourself lazy this morning. Ty articulated well for us last week that we are not saved by our works, rather that we are saved by our faith, but that faith is a faith that works.

Do not use God's grace towards you as an excuse for licentious living. If you are in Christ, you should not presently identify with the people described in our text.

They should feel like an other to you if you are in Christ. Labor by grace to live a life that is honorable to our God. And this morning, if you are lost, you have no hope apart from the saving work of Christ.

Your soul is in a desperate state, and you know that eternity somewhere awaits you. You know this because God has put eternity into man's heart.

[6:38] We learn this from Ecclesiastes chapter 3 and verse 11. You know there is a something beyond. You can spend eternity in the loving presence of God because he has made a way for you to be declared innocent and to be declared righteous.

Repent and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ. So our text for today is Romans chapter 3, and I'll begin reading in verse 9.

Before I read, let me remind you, beloved, this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

Paul writes, 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.

[8:05] 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. Now at the end of chapter 2, Paul has stated, verse 28 and 29, For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical, but a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the spirit, not by the letter.

His praise is not for man, but from God. So he's saying that belonging to God's people is a matter of the inner life, not the outer.

It's not about being circumcised. It's not about being of Jewish descent. And he's going to continue to work this argument out throughout the letter. But then he asks a question.

He's meeting objections all the time. He's anticipating them, and meeting them in chapter 3 and verse 1, where he says, Then, what advantage has the Jew?

[9:29] Or, what is the value of circumcision? And the answer is that it is of great value because Israel was the nation to whom came God's word.

That the law itself was of benefit to them. Which leads him to ask the question at the beginning of today's text.

What then, he says? Beginning of verse 9, Are we Jews any better off? And he means any better off in the sense of standing before God.

And we can see that by his answer. He's saying, Yes, yes to the Jews came the oracles of God.

You see this at the beginning of chapter 3. However, in our standing before God, does that change anything?

And in verse 9, he says, No, not at all. Why? Because we have already charged all throughout the past half of chapter 1 and through chapter 2, that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.

[10:42] And this is the point of today's text. Right? All, Jews and Greeks, under sin. This is the doctrine of total depravity.

In fact, if you've been here with us, you know that I've used this text to proof and speak to all that Paul has been trying to say in the last of chapter 1 and into chapter 2.

So for today, as we look at this text, just a brief outline for us. We're going to see first Paul make an accusation and second Paul deliver a verdict.

Paul makes an accusation and Paul delivers a verdict. So we said in the last half of verse 9 in this accusation, we have already charged all.

Jews and Greeks are under sin. And at the beginning of verse 10, we see, As it is written. Paul launches into his accusation of mankind by citing 9 times from the Old Testament.

[11:46] It's a good, proper Bible preacher. So I'm going to tell them to you. You can probably see these in your footnotes. But Psalm 14, verses 1-3. Psalm 53, verses 1-3.

Psalm 5, 9. Jeremiah 5, 16. Psalm 140, verse 3. Psalm 10, verse 7. Proverbs 1, verse 16. Isaiah 59, verses 7 and 8.

And Psalm 36, and verse 1. He's bringing the Bible to bear. Paul understood that the Scripture of his day was inspired by God.

And he's bringing it to bear in the lives of his hearers. And Paul makes 13 charges in the following verses. And he divides these charges into three categories.

So the first charges have to do with the character of fallen mankind. And this is verses 10-12. This is the classic we're all familiar with.

[12:48] 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. Because of their fallen state, mankind is universally evil, spiritually ignorant, misguided, wandering, spiritually useless.

This is where we derive the term totally depraved. And morally corrupt. Altogether in character set against God.

Biblical Christians believe in the doctrine of total depravity. That we have nothing good of ourselves to offer to the equation of our salvation.

But biblical Christians also believe in the doctrine of common grace. This means that people aren't always as bad as they could be because God grants mankind some measure of grace to be loving, gentle, kind, just, honest, and so on.

[14:01] We're not all together in the expression of our sinful nature as terrible as we might be because God is kind even to those who aren't His.

However, no matter how good someone might be, no matter how altruistic one might show themselves, they will never be perfect. and this is righteousness.

We've already proven that we're not perfect. Likely this morning, you and I, whether known or unknown, have proven that we are not perfect.

You and I, by our strongest of labors, cannot even measure up to the standard of perfect law-keeping because, apart from Christ, our very character, our very nature was corrupted.

Jesus says in Matthew 5 and verse 48, you, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. If you do not measure up to the perfection of God, then you cannot be accepted by God.

[15:13] This is bad news. but it's bad news meant to press us to the good news that the Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect law-keeper.

We need an alien righteousness. Chapter 1 and verse 17, the righteousness of God to be granted to us. A second category of charges have to do with mankind's words.

And we see these in verses 13 and 14. There Paul says, 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. Jesus says in Matthew 12 that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

And we are so very expressively wicked in the way that we speak. Paul is presenting that same principle here that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

[16:22] Because of your character, your words are evil and your evil words give evidence of your evil character. It's the fruit that comes out of a corrupted nature.

Fallen man is deceptive. They use their tongues to deceive. Seeds the destruction of, is publicly critical of, and expresses hostility towards others.

The venom of asps, destructive, mouthful of curses and bitterness, critical and hostile towards others.

take a ride with somebody who claims to be a Christian in the car and you'll see some of this come out of them. Ought not be so.

He states at the beginning of verse 13 that their throat is an open grave, which is to say you can look into their mouths and see the dead man inside.

[17:27] Third category. we see in verses 15-17 which is that their actions, their feet are swift to shed blood, in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.

In the same manner that Paul makes charges concerning mankind's words, he also does so with their actions. The things they do, the fruit you can't observe, speaks to who they are.

Once again, Jesus says, Matthew chapter 7, verse 17 and following, so every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and is thrown into the fire. Now, these actions are fairly self-explanatory, swift to shed blood, murderous, and their paths are ruin and misery, injustice, and the way of peace.

Here, I don't think Paul is referring to the sense of peace, or a peace with God, but rather a peace amongst mankind. It categorically fits together. Mankind is inherently violent, destructive, and unjust.

[18:53] Christ. We can access examples from history and from the local news of yesterday. There's just evidence of this everywhere. A quick glimpse at what's going on in France right now, and you could say, oh, look at how swift to shed blood.

Look at the path of ruin and misery, literal paths of ruin and misery and the lack of peace. But let us not allow ourselves off the hook from these charges.

It's very easy to say, well, but not like them. And perhaps, in Jesus in Matthew chapter 5, verse 21, there says, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

If you murder, you will be judged. And Jesus raises the bar and says, but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire.

You could sum that up to say, if you do these things, you also are guilty of murder. Quick to shed blood in the way that we act.

[20:15] After lobbing all these charges and making his accusation, Paul tells us the motive of it all. Verse 18, there is no fear of God before their eyes.

They do not fear God. Robert Haldane, a Scottish theologian, wrote a really wonderful commentary on the book of Romans called Exposition of Romans.

He wrote this, it is astonishing that men, while they acknowledge that there is a God, should act without any fear of his displeasure.

Yet this is their character. They fear a worm of the dust like themselves, but disregard the most high. They are more afraid of man than of God, of his anger, his contempt, or ridicule.

The fear of man prevents them from doing many things from which they are not restrained by the fear of God. They love not his character, not rendering to it veneration, which is due.

[21:27] They respect not his authority. Such is the state of human nature while the heart is unchanged. There is the bad news, right?

By very nature turned away from a fear of God. And this is a puzzling thing. Beloved, we have been created.

Chapter 1, Paul says that it's evidenced that this is the case. There is a God who has created, and yet the unrighteousness of man suppresses that truth, and God gives mankind over to that foolishness.

What a tragic thing. And if you're in Christ this morning, it's who you once were. And so we have such reason to praise God for the gospel of Jesus. If you are not now in Christ, it's who you are. I pray that you would listen to the words of Paul. So Paul brings this accusation, and then he delivers a verdict.

[22:35] Second point. First he says, now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped.

So he's talking again to Jewish people specifically, and I'm always tempted, it's probably proper to draw it to our context, for people who mostly grew up in church, mostly grew up being taught God's word.

Not every one of us I know, but for the most part we have. So what purpose does it serve us? We would know that we're sinful, right?

Every mouth would be stopped, and the whole world, last part of verse 19, 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.

To be justified before God is to be declared righteous. To be declared righteous. And there are two parts to the equation of our justification.

[23:46] Firstly, our sin must be forgiven. If you were to stand before a judge and he would declare you justified, he would have to first forgive your sin, your sin expunged from the record.

But for God to maintain his justice as a judge, he can't simply dismiss it altogether. He must punish it. If he's going to be a perfect judge, it must be punished.

And this is why the Lord Jesus Christ came and died to bear our punishment on our behalf. But if we stop there, we are only brought up to neutral.

The record has been canceled, but now we stand with nothing. We need something credited to our account in order to be declared righteous, to be justified.

What do we need? We need perfect law keeping. We need righteousness. A thing that's clearly being established that we cannot do. If you have any doubt of that, go back to the beginning of chapter 1 and read through the end of verse 20 of chapter 3.

[25:01] Paul is being so very clear. You cannot do it. You have failed and you will always fail under your own power to live up to the demands of the law.

And so, by faith, not only does Christ take our punishment from us, but he also gives to us his righteousness. The doctrine is called double imputation.

He takes away, it's given to him our sin, he gives to us his righteousness. this will not happen by the works of the law.

And the whole world will stand before God in judgment. There he says, the whole world will be held accountable to God.

Remember back in chapter 1 in verse 18, Paul says, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

[26:01] On that great day of judgment, you will not be able to stand before God and make an appeal to your attempt to keep his law. It would be a waste of breath.

I believe that when you stand before him on that day, you won't try to make an appeal to your attempt to keep his law. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight.

The law makes us aware of our failure, of our sinfulness. That's the bad news. On that great day of judgment, the law will only serve to show you guilty for your failure to keep it perfectly.

So we must make our appeal elsewhere. And this is the good news of the gospel. And we will be unpacking this at length in the coming months, beginning next week.

But we can't just in there. Can we? What is the appeal I've mentioned already? It's the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will say, look, I am forgiven and clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

[27:14] Jesus will stand there in approval of such a claim if we are in fact found in him. And so let's look just briefly at the next two verses beyond today's text.

Paul has completed this stage in his argument and he's moving on. Remember, still unpacking this idea of the gospel being the righteousness of God for us.

A thing that we should be proud of, right? That the righteous might live by faith. A faith that's given to us as a gift in Christ. So he says in verse 21, but now the righteousness of God, it's God's righteousness, has been manifested apart from the law.

The righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law. He is referring to Jesus Christ's perfect law keeping. It has been made manifested.

It has been shown in Christ. Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. The law and the prophets, the whole New Testament, point us to Christ and His righteousness, the righteousness of God.

[28:37] The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. And this is the cost of justification that we would merely turn from our sin and place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That we would understand that yes, apart from Him, I am altogether unworthy. I am totally depraved apart from Christ.

I do not seek good. I am part of the no one that Paul here is talking about. But yet, through faith in Christ, I can be declared righteous before God, accepted into His loving arms forever.

Let's pray together.