

Romans: All Are Under Sin

Romans 3:9-18

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 3, as we continue to work our way through this glorious letter of the apostle Paul to the church in Rome, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to all of us, because all Scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable for all those of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, as we have looked through the first eight verses of Romans, chapter 3, we have come into contact with four objections to what Paul had been saying in Romans, chapter 2. You remember that in Romans 1, he had made it clear that the Gentiles were under condemnation and in need of God's saving grace if they were going to have a real experience of saving relationship with God. In Romans, chapter 2, however, Paul went on to say that so also the Jews were in the same condition. That they were in need of God's saving grace in the gospel if they were going to experience the blessing of eternal fellowship with Him. And he had given several arguments against the things that the Jewish people were depending upon. He had pointed out that their possession of the law was not good enough to assure them a relationship, a saving, eternal relationship with God. He had pointed out that the fact that God had chosen the nation out of all the other nations to be a special people unto himself did not in and of itself guarantee that every Jew was going to experience the blessing of God. He will go out in Romans, chapter 8, 9, 10 and 11 and explain that there is another doctrine that you have to consider as well, and that's the doctrine of the individual election. I won't go into that right now, but the apostle Paul has made it clear that if the Jew is trusting simply in the fact that he happens to be a religious Jew, an ethnic Jew, and in the midst of this people, that he has been chosen uniquely by God amongst all the nations to be a peculiar people unto himself, that that in and of itself, apart from faith in the promises and trust in the promises is not going to guarantee that Jew salvation.

Furthermore, he talks about the Jews divine vocation to be a light to the nations. And he says, "Just because God has called you to be a light to the nations doesn't necessarily mean that you will be a light to the nations." In fact, he makes a very serious charge that the Jewish people have in fact brought darkness to

some because of their blasphemy, and because of their unbelief and disobedience. And finally, he says, "Just because of circumcision, just because you've been given the sign of the covenant doesn't necessarily mean that you know and are enjoying the blessings of the covenant."

So he's made some very strong statements to those who are part of religious and ethnic Israel. And he naturally gets some objections to those, and we've been looking at those objections in Romans, chapter 3, verses 1 through 8. Four objections in particular we have seen in this passage. First of all, we have seen the objection that somebody says, "Well, Paul, if what you're saying is true, then what advantage is it to even have these signs of the covenant?" And we saw Paul respond to say, "Well, there's a tremendous advantage as long as those signs are coupled with faith. As long as one is trusting in the promises, those signs have a tremendous confirming and assuring advantage. But not without faith." And then secondly we saw the objection, "Well, look, if so many of God's people in Israel have rejected the Messiah and fallen away by their own belief, doesn't that call into question God's faithfulness?" And Paul's response to that was, "No, because God can be faithful in two ways." He can be faithful to bless as we embrace His promises, and He can be faithful to judge as Isaiah spoke about in that awesome passage that we read in Isaiah 24. He can be faithful to judge when we reject His promises. We quoted that wonderful phrase of Ralph Davis', 'Great is Thy faithfulness, and it will kill you.' God is faithful to judge when we reject His covenant. And so the apostle Paul says, "No, God's not unfaithful. He is always faithful. It's a question of whether we will know His faithfulness in blessing or in cursing. And then thirdly, we saw that objection last week. Well, if God's justice is magnified through the wickedness of humans, is it really right then for God to go on and pour out His sin on people who are doing things that are already magnifying His righteousness and His greatness and His faithfulness? I mean if their evil is magnifying that, is it really right for Him to turn right around and punish them? And the apostle Paul basically says, "Of course God is just in His judgment. That is self-evidently true. He is judge. You know it, I know it, we know He is judge, that He's going to judge, and it's self-evidently true that His judgment is appropriate and right."

And then finally we saw that objection, "Well, if our lying, if our unfaithfulness, if our unbelief highlights God's truthfulness, why should we be condemned? Why not do evil so that good can come?" And again, Paul's response to that is almost dismissive. He says, "Look, that is self-refuting. The very statement why not do evil that good may come is self-refuting and self-condemning. God's grace, His promises, His faithfulness, His ability to overrule sin in judgment to His glory, none of those things make sin not sin. And none of those things make sin not worthy of judgment. All sin is by definition worthy of judgment." And so the apostle Paul responds to three of four objections to his teachings so far.

And then in the passage we're going to read today, he moves to his closing argument. So let's hear Paul's words, which are the words of God to us in

Romans, chapter 3, beginning in verse 9:

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God, all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving. The poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it.

Our Lord and our God, this is an awesome word of indictment, and if we really listen to it closely, our hearts tremble. Even the redeemed know the reality of these temptations in our hearts. We thank you that by Your grace you have saved us from them as we trust in Jesus, the Messiah. But help us now as we come to consider them again. Help us not only to consider these words because of their importance for how we share the gospel, but help us to consider these words for ourselves, not looking first at their application to others, but first looking at Your word for our hearts today. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

If you are a political junkie, you have been on overload the last couple of weeks with the conventions. And there are now multiple news channels whereby you can get analysis of all these various speeches and productions at the major conventions. One of the things that you have heard political pundits and analysts doing is analyzing what the speeches have said and how they have been presented how those things might have attracted different groups of people within the nation. Well, he says this and this would be attractive to this group. And he says that. Well, that would be very attractive and appealing to this group. And it's very important for this particular candidate to say such and such in order that he solidifies this part of his base. And it's very important that he say that in order that this particular group will be attracted to his message, and he can get his poll numbers up. And it just goes on and on and on until your head spins, because they have to say it just right in order to get particular groups to go along with their particular platform and plan.

But not only has there been discussion of how they said, what they said would impact some; there has been discussion, in fact, of the platform itself. It's not just what they said. In fact there's been a great deal of discussion of the differences between the platforms and the presentations. For instance, in one convention diversity was stressed. And it has been suggested that that has been something that was not so very well reflected in its platform. And then in another convention

it was amazing how family oriented it was. And it has been suggested that the platform of that particular party is not so family oriented as they might. So there's not only a discussion of how the presentations might have appeal, but how the particular platforms might have appeal.

Well, let me say if the apostle Paul had to go before the convention with this speech, not only would his content appeal to no one, but his platform would appeal to no one. The apostle Paul is not mincing words. Let me just pause and say, if you come today at all skeptical of the gospel, appreciate the fact that Paul is not playing politics with you. He's not in any way telling you what he thinks you want to hear. Paul is brave enough, and Paul is loving enough to tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. The apostle Paul lays out a platform which, on the first glance, looks like it would be appealing to no one. But when considered more closely is, in fact, the most loving possible thing that he could say, because he confronts us with a reality that if we do not deal with, we will end up under the judgment described by Isaiah, in Isaiah 24. If that is really true, if we do not deal with these realities, the realities about which Paul speaks in verses 9 through 18. If it is true that we will fall under the judgment and condemnation of God, then Paul's words take on an entirely different meaning. This is not nearly the harangue of a 'hot gospeler.' This is not the harangue of a street fire and brimstone preacher, who some might think is actually taking delight in the idea of God hailing His judgment upon those who are wicked. These are the words of a man who so deeply cares about the people of the world that he desires them to see themselves as they are; as God sees them, and to respond in faith to His gospel that they might know the blessings of God. And Paul speaks in grotesque detail as he describes us.

So I'd like you to look at this passage with me today as he summarizes what he has been saying. And as he says basically, "Look, everything that I have been saying in Romans, chapter 1, from verse 18 all the way through the end of Romans, chapter 2 and verse 29, and then the things that I have continued to say here in the first verses of Romans, chapter 3, these things are not simply applicable to this group, or that group, or the other group. These things are applicable to everyone. No one is excluded from the strictures that I am bringing. No one is out from under the condemnation that I am bringing. Everyone, every group is under this particular condemnation, and there is only one way of escape from it. So the apostle Paul begins to lay out this particular truth. In fact, you will see three sections to the particular charge that Paul brings. And I believe that before we get to those three sections, he gives a word of introduction. And I think in the very last of those three sections, he gives a kind of a concluding word. And so I'm going to look with you at three or four or five things today. But look at these three sections.

If you look at verse 10 and 11 and 12 you'll see the first section. In that section the apostle Paul is quoting probably from a passage in Ecclesiastes 7 and definitely from a passage in Psalm 14 or in Psalm 53. Then the second section

you'll see beginning in verse 13 and in verse 14 where the focus is on sins of the tongue. Then there's a third section that begins in verse 15 and goes through verse 18, but is really summarized especially, the whole charge is summarized in verse 18.

I. Is there anyone who is "off the hook" by nature? Not at all!

So let's begin in verse 9 where the apostle Paul again opens a new section of his epistle with a question. You remember how, as he goes through each of the questions in verses 1 through 8, he gives an answer to the question. Well, it's interesting that he starts again in verse 9 of Romans, chapter 3 with a question. "What then, are we better than they?" And there have been all sorts of discussions about who the 'we' is. Is Paul again speaking of himself as a Jew and asking the question, "Okay, given all this, are we, the Jews, any better off than the Gentiles." And then he gives an answer to that. Or is he's speaking as a Christian and saying, "Okay, are we, as Christians, any better than they?" And there are various learned discussions of that particular question.

But let me say it doesn't matter how you answer that question. Paul's basic point is very clear. His basic point is seen in the second phrase. Look at it in verse 9. We have already charged both Jews and Greeks are all under sin. That's Paul's point in verse 9. All, guilt wise, all are under sin. That's the first point that he makes in his concluding remarks. Everyone, Jew and Greek, slave and free, everyone is under sin. Everyone is under guilt.

In other words when you ask a question, is there anyone who is off the hook with regard to sin? Is there anyone who can say oh, I don't have to worry about that. Paul's answer is, "No." By nature no one can say, "Well, I don't have to worry about sin separating me from God. That's not a problem for me. That may be a problem for other people, but it's not a problem for me. Paul says there's nobody in that condition. Everyone, in fact, is sinful, and everyone is under the power of sin. What does it mean then to be under sin? We really could spend a long time just meditating on that.

But let me suggest at least three things for you to think about that it means to be under sin. First of all, to be under sin means to be under the guilt of sin. Sin is inherently worthy of judgment. Even when penalty is spared, sin inherently deserves judgment. And, therefore, when we say that we are under the guilt of sin, we are saying that objectively we are guilty. Objectively, we have committed deeds that are worthy of judgment. Now that's very important for us to think about, because normally when we hear the word "guilt," we think subjectively. When we hear the word guilt of sin, normally we are thinking well, I feel guilty about sinning. Well, that may be true, and that may be a consequence of the objective guilt of sin. But when Paul speaks of the guilt of sin primarily, he is pointing not to that subjective feeling that we have of guilt, but the fact of the

matter is sometimes you meet people who are guilty who don't feel guilty, and other times you meet people who aren't guilty, but who do feel guilty. And so the subjective feeling of guilt is not always a sure guide to the objective state of that person. But the apostle Paul is saying here, "Objectively, we are all guilty. We are all deserving of judgment."

Secondly, to be under the power of sin means to be under the penalty. We are not only deserving of judgment, but when we are under sin, we are under the apprehension of God visiting the penalty which is deserved. We are under the punitive measures of God's holiness. God's holiness must punish sin. It's very interesting isn't it that when Paul thinks about the gospel in Romans, chapter 1, and then as he comes back to it again in Romans, chapter 3, at the end of this great passage that we are in, he revels in the fact that God has done an amazing thing. He has shown grace without sacrificing His righteousness. He has shown grace without sacrificing His holiness. He has shown grace without sacrificing His justice. How has He done that? By visiting the punitive measures of His justice upon His own Son. And so the apostle Paul, when he talks about us being under sin, he's reminding us we're not only under it's guilt, its deserving of judgment; but while we're under sin apart from the grace which is in Jesus Christ, apart from faith in Christ, we are under the punitive measures of God's wrath. That's a horrible place to be. Would you want to be before God's wrath unmitigated? That's where Paul says you are if you are apart from Jesus Christ. And finally, you are under the power of sin. The power of sin means that the whole of your being is worked in the wrong direction from the center out, from the desires out, we're pointed in the wrong direction. We don't see the good things that God offers for what they are because we don't thank Him. We don't desire the good things that God made us for. We desire to go after our own way. Paul will even use that phrase from the Old Testament. We go after our own way. We turn aside. We do what we want to do, not what God has made us to want to do.

And that's what it means to be under sin. Therefore, it's so important for you to see this, there is nothing in us to commend reconciliation with God. If this is the way we are. If we are under sin, it's guilt, its penalty and its power, then we have nothing that we can offer to bring about reconciliation with God. The idea that we could do some work, whatever of those works, whatever they were. The idea that we could do some things that would bring us back to reconciliation with God is self-evidently ridiculous if we are the problem. And that's where Paul starts off.

Now in each of those three sections, in verses 10 through 12, in verses 13 and 14 and in verses 15 through 17, Paul elaborates on that basic point. He's begun his closing statement by saying we are all under sin, and he goes on to say three things about that. Let me pause and say there are multiple applications of this great truth, even for Christians who know the reconciling grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are things that are directly applicable about us because as Satan uses the things that Paul is about to talk about, or the things that Paul will talk about in this passage to blind unbelievers from the truth, so often there are

believers with these same truths or with these same tricks. He will take these particular tacks, and he will use them against believers as well as unbelievers. So there are applications for believers as well as unbelievers in this passage.

II. Our condition is manifest in our heart-disposition.

Look at the first thing that he says in verses in 10 through 12: "Our condition," he shows us here, "is manifest in our heart disposition. The fact that we are under sin is seen clearly in our heart disposition." "All," he says in verses 10 through 12, "are without righteousness, without understanding, without a real true desire to worship God, without true goodness." Paul knows that he's speaking to religious people primarily. He's not only speaking firsthand to the Roman Christians, he's speaking secondhand as it were to the Jewish community. And he knows this is a religious community. And if he had begun to give evidences that we were all under sin that were like the evidence that he gave of Gentile sin at the end of Romans, chapter 1, what would they have done immediately? They would have done just what you and I would do, and say, "Well, I've never done that. I've never murdered anybody. I've never participated in that particular sexual perversion. I've never done that. I'm immune from that particular charge."

So to buttress Paul's argument, he goes right for the heart in verses 10 through 12. He speaks about things that all of us can relate to, and he does it by appealing as we said to Ecclesiastes 7:20 and to Psalm 14, verses 2 and 3, or, you remember the first four verses of Psalm 14 get repeated again in Psalm 53, maybe he's referring to that particular passage. But I want you to note Paul's refrain in this passage. Notice. Look at these words. "None, not even one. None, all, none, not even one," walk through the passage. Wonder what Paul's getting at here? Paul's point is that there is no one who is righteous. If there is anybody out there who is saying, "Okay, that applies to everybody but me." Here's what Paul has to say to you. "None, not even one. None, all, none, none, no one." Everybody comes under this particular charge. And he points to dispositions of the heart. Notice how he says it. We're not righteous. We don't understand. We don't seek for God. We all turn aside. We have become useless. We do not do good. Not even one.

And all of us can hear our own hearts making claims to have done those things. I'm basically a pretty good person. God will accept me. And Paul is saying, "Think about that. Really think about that. You know who you are. You know who you are when you look in the mirror and nobody else is around. Now, do you really want to say that you're really okay, and God will accept you?" Paul is asking you to look into your heart. There's nobody else around to impress. It's just you looking at your heart. And he's saying, "If you will look there for any amount of time, you will see that what I say is true."

III. Our condition is manifest in our speech.

Secondly, he goes on, if you look at verses 13 and 14, to go to our tongue. It starts with the heart, verses 10 through 12. Now he goes to the tongue or to the speech. He says, "Let me show that this condition of being under sin is also manifested in our speech. Our condition is evidenced by our speech. Our speech condemns us." And again he points to those inescapably present sins of the tongue. And again he quotes from the Psalms. He quotes from Psalm 5:9, and he quotes from Psalm 140, verse 3. And he quotes from Psalm 10, verse 7. All of which have to do with sins of the tongue. And all of which have to do with condemnation brought against people who are part of Israel who had sinned with the tongue. And he says, "Notice again. Here is an evidence of the real condition of your heart."

And all of us experience this. If you're parents, you know. It's amazing. You don't have to send your children to lying school. They inherently know how to do it. Suddenly, not long after they can speak, they master it. And sometimes it's innocuous and we laugh, and sometimes we go good grief, how did a child so young learn how to be so insidious. It is natural to us. So even as parents we are confronted with the reality of deception in our children, even very, very little children. Without provocation and without really any reason will show us the problem of sin in the hearts through lying. But much more seriously, we know in relationships the destructive points of speech. Deception in a relationship can spell its death. When one party in a relationship will not be honest, that party will continue to pledge, oh, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do this, and it never, ever is done. Or, I'm going to stop doing this; I'm going to stop doing this. And it's never, ever done. Or there's the hiding of some secret part of a life from the other in that relationships. And relationships are destroyed that way, through speech; or maybe it's through abusive language. And we know in relationships and marital relationships and other relationships the power of speech. And Paul says, "You don't think you need reconciliation with God? Look at your speech a little bit. It's an evidence that there's a problem deep down inside."

IV. Our condition is manifest in our actions.

And he goes on to say in verses 15 through 17 that the actual deeds – and notice he goes from heart to tongue to feet. Feet he uses there in 15 through 17. And he's using that to express the active working out of things. The deeds that we do that flow from our hearts. Their feet are swift to shed blood. So what he is saying is the condition is manifest in our actions. Our deeds condemn us. So our heart condemns us, our speech condemns us, our deeds condemn us. Paul is simply reapplying Isaiah's criticism of Israel because verses 15 through 17 comes right out of Isaiah 59:7. He's applying it to all of us, to everyone in general. It's not that he's saying everyone commits murder, literally, that you take an axe in hand and

go out and do that. What he is saying is that our hearts manifest a disinterest in real peace and reconciliation. Think about this. There are many, I think, in this room that can recognize this problem in their own experience. There are so many of us who have serious breaches in relationship with another person, and we are a major contributor to that serious breach of relationship. And in some of those relationships the pain of that breach has become so strong that we stop trying. Now the apostle Paul is saying when that happens, you are simply seeing an indication of what the heart is capable of. And, in fact, you're seeing an indication that the unredeemed heart really isn't interested in peace and reconciliation. It's more interested in its own safety. Okay? The apostle Paul takes us from heart to speech to deeds to show us our needs, to manifest our condition.

V. Our condition is manifest in our impiety.

And then he concludes, look at verse 18, by saying this: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." You know that the fear of God is the sum of Biblical religion. The Old Testament teaches us that the beginning of the knowledge of the Lord is the fear of God. There is no knowledge of the Lord apart from the fear of God. To fear God is to have God as your prime goal, as your prime end, for God to be the conscious arena of your experience, for God to be the one that you care about more than anybody else in the world, for God's approval to be the approval that you really want, for God's will to be the will done that you really want to have done, to have God at the very center of your thoughts, the center of your actions, the center of your desires, and the apostle Paul says, "Everybody is in this condition. You are ungodly. Everybody is in the condition of not having God at the conscious center of our experience and our goals." Our condition, in other words, is manifest. Our need for grace is manifest in our impiety, in our ungodliness.

One great example of this is the fact that ministers, I speak from experience, can even go about their duties without reference to God. You can find yourself doing your Christian duty and your ministry without thinking about God; without desiring to please God; without God as the conscious goal of your experience. In fact, isn't it interesting that the big charge that God brought against the religious leaders of Israel was that they were man fearers, not God fearers. In other words, they had man at the center of what they were doing religiously, not God. Now if that can happen to ministers who are supposedly ministering God to people, it can happen to anyone. And the apostle Paul is saying, "That is exactly the situation that we are in."

So having demonstrated from our impiety, from our deeds, from our words and from our hearts our need of sin, Paul has set us up to embrace the only way out of this mess. Now unbelievers today, those of you who have never really embraced Jesus Christ, the great message that you need to get out of Paul's words is "You are in trouble; and that trouble can only be answered by the

Savior, the one Savior, Jesus Christ."

For those of us who are believers there are many messages that we get. We are reminded of what we have been saved from, we are reminded of what we are apart from Christ. But we are also reminded of how Satan can insidiously drag us back into old patterns of thinking and living and behaving and speaking, even as God has renewed us in Christ. And so this word is a word for us all today. Because this word establishes why we need the good news. And the good news is that there is a righteousness that reconciles you to God that comes from outside of you. You don't produce it, you don't contribute to it, you didn't create it, all you do is receive it and rest on it by faith. If this is true, that is the greatest news ever heard. May God enable you to embrace it.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for this hard, but faithful word from Paul. Help us all to receive it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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