

Romans 3:9-20
**The Need of the Gospel for
Guilty, Condemned Sinners**

⁹ 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, ¹⁰ as it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands;
no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one."

¹³ "Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive."

"The venom of asps is under their lips."

¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."

¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known."

¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

We have a problem; a very big problem. It is between God and us. He is holy, he is sinless, but we are unholy and we are sinful. The problem is so serious that nothing short of a mighty act of mercy and restoration on God's part can ever rescue a sinner, can ever change a sinner, can ever make a sinner acceptable and welcomed before the holy God.

Prayer:

Lord God, your Word tells us the plain truth. We have all sinned from the inner core of our thoughts and meditations to the outer expression of sin in our actions. All of us are lost and undone in your sight. There is no soundness in our souls. Unless you come and rescue us from ourselves, from our sinful nature and sinful inclinations, there is no hope

for us. Show us, O Lord, how sinful we are; how condemned we are in heaven's court, and what our only hope is, that is, in the gospel, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

As we approach Reformation Sunday...

(The following from "Romans and the Reformation" by Dr. Phillip Scheepers, Vox Reformata, 2018, p. 52ff

From Augustine:

No man can say that it is by merit of his own works, or by merit of his own prayers, or by merit of his own faith, that God's grace has been conferred upon him; nor suppose that the doctrine is true which those heretics hold, that the grace of God is given in proportion to our own merit.⁴⁹

Just about every Reformer of note spent significant amounts of time immersed in Paul's theological masterwork. This can be seen in the fact that Romans was the subject of major commentaries by some of the major Reformers: p. 66:

This was, however, obviously far from the only layer of society to be impacted by the message of Romans.⁵⁹ In fact, it can be stated that wherever this book was preached it fundamentally challenged the 'certainties' about salvation of many within the medieval church. P. 67-68

Here is an example of how this happened in the Italian context:

...a certain carpenter named Antonio was an outspoken advocate of Protestant reform, engaging his neighbor's in discussion about faith. He and his followers— among them a notary, a tailor, a tutor, a poulterer, an egg-vendor, a knife grinder, an instrument maker, a weaver, a number of silk merchants, and a friar"— gave their attention to Saint Paul. In due time they denied the doctrine of purgatory, sacerdotal confession, rosaries, and other sacramentals that on the basis of Scripture they regarded as merely superstitious. They also denied the role of meritorious works as a basis for one's salvation.⁶

Calvin:

... when any one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.⁷⁰

Our passage today in the Book of Romans, 3:9-20 show us how serious and deeply embedded this sin is in us. In the first 3 chapters of Romans the apostle Paul shows us that all the peoples of the earth, not only the Jews, his own people, but also the Gentiles, the various people groups of the nations – all of them, all of us are guilty of terrible sin

against the holy, righteous, and good God. There are four points I want to bring out in this passage:

I. The Jews need the Gospel as badly as the Gentiles.

The Jews liked to think that they were better than the Gentiles. By Gentiles the Bible means the various people groups of the world, all the ethnic and cultural and linguistic groups who are not Jews.

The Jewish people knew that God had chosen them out of all the nations on the earth to be his special people. Originally, he had revealed himself to Abraham who had been a pagan, an idol worshipper, but God revealed his nature and will to Abraham and called him to be his follower and worshipper and promised to bless all the other nations of the world through him and his offspring.

Later God would rescue Abraham's descendants from their slavery in Egypt, reveal his Law to them through Moses, and bring them into the promised Land.

The Law that God gave them through Moses governed their whole lives, to what they could eat and what he could wear and what they could touch. But most importantly, it provided a way for them to have their sins at least temporarily forgiven through the elaborate system of animal sacrifices. Their sacrifices for sin foreshadowed the coming of the true Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Anointed One, who would truly and completely and finally take away sin.

The pagan nations had none of these advantages.

Chapter 1 of Romans beginning at verse 18, reveals the fact that the presence and existence of God, is revealed to all people so that they are without excuse. No one can say that he is unaware of the existence of God. This is just as true for the Jew as the Gentile.

The Gentiles were not the only ones who worshipped idols and engage in all sorts of immoral sexual practices. Even right after their deliverance from Egypt they made a golden calf and called it Yahweh and danced around it in what appears to be some sort of orgy.

The Jews throughout their history had fallen into adopting the pagan gods of those around them and worshipping their idols and engaging in their sexual sins.

Chapter 2 of Romans Paul points out that the Jews who criticized the Gentiles for their sins were guilty of committing the same sins. *For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.(2:1)*

Paul points out that the Law that the Jews had received from God did them no good if they didn't obey it. And they did not. They repeatedly broke God's law.

They could not keep it because they had sinful, rebellious hearts. The Law of God actually just revealed God's righteous standards and his holy character and it revealed to them their weakness and inability to keep it.

God looks on the hearts of people. The Jews were proud that their males were all circumcised – showing that they were God’s covenant people. Yet their hearts remained uncircumcised. The power of sin in their lives could not be corralled by the sign in their flesh. Paul says in 2:29: ²⁹ *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 from man but from God.*

The secret is the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit – this is what the Jews did not have and their “foolish hearts remained darkened.”

So the second point, related to the first point, is that...

// Both Jews and Gentiles need the gospel because they are guilty of grievous sin from the inside out.

He says in 3: 9 that both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) are under sin and he begins to quote several passages from the OT, primarily from the Psalms, which buttress, back up, his point:

The end of verse 10 says of both Jew and Gentile that none are righteous, no not one. The great king David who loved Yahweh and composed songs of worship to him was overcome by lust and committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged to have her husband killed on the battlefield. The great King David, great as he was as a leader and military commander and even a leader in worship, was still a sinner. His own son Solomon, a man endowed with great wisdom, also had a weakness, it seems, for women and took hundreds of wives, even to the point of being influenced religiously toward their idols. Oh, how the great ones fell. Oh, the power of indwelling sin. Oh, the wickedness of the human heart – without the presence of God’s Spirit – it is so easily led astray. And even with the indwelling Spirit, warfare continually goes on between the flesh and the Spirit.

The pagan kings were notorious in their cruelty and barbaric practices. Genghis Khan is said to have impregnated hundreds of women in an effort to populate Asia with his own descendants.

This whole passage, 3:8-20 makes absolutely no difference in the indictments, the charges brought against both groups. The Jews have no advantage.

Paul says in v.10 that not one person among all the Jews and Gentiles that ever lived is righteous. Not even the great Greek philosophers Aristotle and Socrates, nor Confucius in China, nor Buddha in India, nor Mahatma Ghandi, the great Indian Philosopher and political activist, nor Martin Luther King in America – none of these Gentile people in the history of the world are righteous before God. Not among the Jews can one be found. Even among the good and Godly kings like Hezekiah there was sin.

None of these people, no one listed in the census of the human race, understood the holiness of God, understood how righteous he is, understood that his glory was the supreme end and goal among his creatures. All were more interested in their own glory.

Not one sought God, sought the face of God, with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. This is the great commandment that Jesus talked about. No one in the history of the world has done this except our Lord Jesus himself.

Verse 13 speaks of how humans use their tongues, their mouths to devour their fellow humans, to slander them, to kill their reputation with malicious words.

And no one speaks honestly. They are always trying to deceive others to gain the advantage over others. The Pharisees would sometimes begin a conversation with Jesus by complimenting him but they were trying to get him in a trap and make him look bad. Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and wasn't tricked by them.

The last sentence in verse 13 says the venom of asps is under their lips. An asp is a poisonous snake, especially the Egyptian cobra and the horned viper, native to N. Africa.

And so the litany continues in verse 14ff, the chorus of description of both Gentile and Jew does not let up. Their speech doesn't glorify God or praise him, but is full of curses and bitterness.

Not only their mouths, but their very actions become very stark and shocking. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Jesus said if you hate your brother you are guilty before God of murder.

V. 18 is the capstone of their spiritual problem – they have no fear of God before their eyes. Their eyes are fixed on the things of this world, the living God is not in the equation of what matters most to them.

Look at our own culture – people run after material goods, entertainment, politics, alcohol, drugs, sex, influence, popularity. They wake up and never think about God. They do not live under the sovereignty and Lordship of God. Christians are not immune from the powerful influence of our surrounding culture. But we can live under the fear of God.

III. *The Gospel is needed by both Jews and Gentiles because the Works of the law cannot justify a sinner.*

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight,,,,,since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

IV. *The Gospel is needed by both Jews and Gentiles because the Law only brings the knowledge of sin.*

The Gospel was needed in Paul's day and needed in the medieval period and in 1517:

That was, in fact the day in the year 1517 when a German monk named Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses, that is, points of debate regarding some abuses that were happening in the Roman Catholic Church – that's when he nailed those points of debate and discussion on the church door of the cathedral in Wittenberg Germany.

There was a need for serious talk because over the centuries the church of Jesus Christ had evolved into a massive organization that was not only religious, but it was political, and it sought to influence and control all the people under its dominion, including the kings and princes of the nations of Europe. It was well equipped to do because most of the common people, as well as the rulers, were also members of the Roman Catholic Church and subject to its sway and influence over their lives. The Church, according to its teachings, had the power to cut off a person from eternal life – to excommunicate them from the Church and from Christ himself.

The supreme leader of the Roman Catholic church was known as the pope and he was looked upon as Christ's representative on earth whose directives and commands were as authoritative as Christ himself.

Had the supreme ruler of the Catholic Church been our Lord Jesus Christ himself, there would have been no problem whatsoever. The church would have had the perfect Man, in fact the God-Man himself, fully God and fully man, in one person, to oversee and govern and lead the church. Whatever he said, whatever he may have decreed, would have been the perfect will of God and all those who listened and submitted to his righteous rule would have found peace and joy and 'heaven on earth,' a paradise of the physical environment but also a paradise of fellowship with the living God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, the holy one of God whom the Father send to reveal himself, reveal his teachings, and even more, God sent his Son Jesus Christ to bear the punishment for sin which all God's people deserved. We deserved, we merited, we earned God's wrath against our sin, but the Son of God stepped in and held up his hand, and said, "No, Father, not them, but me. I will take the harsh punishment that they deserve; I will be the substitute. Pour out your wrath against their sin on me. Crush me will your righteous anger. I will do it because this is your will for me. And I will do it because this is the only way your people can be forgiven of their sins."

And so Christ did for us what we could not do for ourselves, we could not pay for our sins. We had nothing to offer God for our sins, we could devise no payment, nothing to assuage, to alleviate God's wrath. We were unholy and sinful; only Christ was the holy one, the sinless one.

He had to step in and bear not only the punishment for our sins, but he offered, he, in fact, applied his own perfect righteousness to our account so that when God looks at us his people, he does not see our manifold sins, but he only sees Christ's righteousness. We shed the dirty rags of our own sins and put on the spotless robe of Christ's holiness. There never was a more

complete transaction. The angels of heaven, I am sure, remain astounded at the action God which he did in order to rescue his people. The just man was offered up for the unjust men and women and boys and girls so that God would no longer see their sin, but see only Christ's righteousness. Oh, blessed exchange, blessed trade. How can God be so gracious as to take away our sin and give us, instead, Christ's righteousness? What kind of God is this? We have never heard of such kindness, mercy, and giftedness among the religions of humankind.

But the problem in the medieval church of the 1500's, the Roman Catholic Church, was that this great reality of how God rescues sinners from their own sin was hidden and obscured from the people. The light of this glorious gospel of Christ was hidden under the blanket of men's traditions and men's teachings which had become embedded in the Church's traditions and teachings which substituted the religious works of people as they were directed by the Roman Catholic Church – this became the road to heaven instead of focusing all hope for forgiveness and eternal life in the divine, perfect work of Christ himself in his cross and resurrection.

The simple truth is that people cannot save themselves; no amount of human effort or good religious works can save a person with a sinful heart. A sinful heart is not a temporary condition; it is a permanent condition. A sinful heart produces sinful thoughts, sinful words, and sinful actions. Humans are born with sinful hearts. They are not born as sweet, sinless little angels. They are born with a corrupt nature. As they grow up this corrupt nature begins to manifest itself in all kinds of sins. In the book of Romans, 2:21, Paul is describing humanity throughout the world, from the beginning of human history down to the present hour, he says that they rejected the plain revelation of God's eternal majesty and power and "their foolish hearts became darkened." What a terrible indictment that God would pronounce on the human race: "their foolish hearts were darkened." Anyone who rejects the clear evidence of God's existence revealed everywhere in his creation is a "fool," says God. And when they reject God, their hearts become darkened. The Scriptures here are describing every human being who ever lived. People with foolish, darkened hearts.

God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 John 3:19 declares, And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

The bottom line is that the Roma Catholic Church had covered over the light of the Gospel of Christ and instead put forth its own Gospel, its own teaching, about how a person can receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This was not something that happened over night, but this gradual substitution of the teachings of men slowly pushed out the teachings of the bible on such crucial subjects as to how a sinner can receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life, how a guilty sinner can be acquitted of his sins before holy and righteous Judge of the universe.

The Roman church taught, for example, that there were two levels of sin, one not so serious, everyday sins, and another level of sins that was deadly serious, this sin could send a person to hell.

The Church taught that a person can never know if they've been accepted by God or not. To be accepted by God a person had to actually become righteous – that is total free from all sin – a state of perfection. But this is impossible and is not taught in the Bible. The Bible teaches us that when God saves a person, he imputes to him or her righteousness, that is justification, he is accounted or considered righteous in the eyes of God because of Christ' righteousness that is applied to his account. A key passage here is 2 Cor. 5:21: ²¹ *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

A great substitution took place: Christ took the sins of his people on himself and he credited to us his righteousness. This is a sovereign, gracious act of God, not dependent on our good works, but only on God's mercy.

To summarize our passage today:

I. The Jews need the Gospel as badly as the Gentiles.

II. Both Jews and Gentiles need the gospel because they are guilty of grievous sin from the inside out.

III. The Gospel is needed by both Jews and Gentiles because the Works of the law cannot justify a sinner

IV. The Gospel is needed by both Jews and Gentiles because Knowledge of the law only brings knowledge of sin

Closing Prayer

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