
Sin's Universal Condemnation

Romans 3:8-20⁴

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No one talks about sin today...

Indirect language even for the current crop of unsurprising revelations in our capital...

Unwillingness to say, "This is evil..." except over a very few things...

Inability to understand why people would put all their success in jeopardy...

Paul has no such difficulty. At the heart of his understanding of the gospel is his declaration of the human condition...

¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Why do we need the gospel? Because all have sinned and are condemned by God.

Why are pagans who have never heard condemned?

Why are moral people who live good lives condemned?

Why are Jewish people who keep the Law condemned?

These questions have all been addressed. They have shown that all have enough knowledge so that they are without excuse.

The Apostle Paul, on behalf of God, has brought charges against mankind that warrant the death penalty. In our section of text today. We have the final pronouncement of universal damnation.

We are familiar with trials and attorneys and legal loopholes. We watch many such shows on TV or in movies. We often watch a clever turn by an attorney get their client off. Or we watch as a prosecuting attorney gives a dramatic and passionate plea for the law or for justice. At the end of a trial, the lawyers bring what are called *The Closing Arguments*. Here they do their best

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to clinch the case. This is what we have here. The prosecuting attorney now makes his closing argument and closes the case.

Its Summary Charge

(v.9)

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,

A Special Group?

This is the problem with religious people. Jews and modern cultural Christians think that they should be treated special. They have privileges as a result of being near the Word, around the faith, with God's people and maybe having some work of the Spirit in the lives. But these special privileges only increase their liability, the accountability.

The Jews thought that their status as a nation automatically applied to them as individuals. In other words, they were born as Israelites and so they were God's people. And they had been circumcised as infants, so of course, they were connected to Abraham. And they were keeping the Law as best as they good. So, what was supposed to be the evidences of faith were substituted for faith itself. Thus, the unbelieving Jews did not hear the gospel with faith. And some believing Jews still thought that they were a special class among Christians.

Many cultural Christians today think the same, just in a modern way. Many think that since they were born in a Christian family, have been brought up to know the Word, have had many religious experiences, maybe even have had some work of the Spirit that they are saved. Some of you may be in this group. Some of you have been near to the faith and to Christians. This does not mean you are a Christian. You hear the gospel then with a sense of familiarity. Since you know the gospel you think you have believed and bowed to Jesus.

The gathering of God's people in the Old and the New Testaments were filled with people who believed they were special, privileged, connected, for real. But they weren't. Are there advantages? Yes. Is there salvation? No. Being a part of a church like being a Jew doesn't mean you are saved. Under Paul's indictment, you have no special pleading.

An Inclusive Indictment

Everyone is under the cruel and crushing weight of sin. We are all in bondage to it and enslaved under it and subject to its just penalty. None of us are exempt. We are all, by natural birth, under sin. As Paul has proven in the texts that have gone before, all, Jew and Gentile are under sin. Sin here is something all are born under. No one is exempt. There is much evidence to this fact in the world and in your life. But that evidence is subjective and not conclusive.

Its Scriptural Proof

(v.10-18)

There is conclusive proof in the Scripture...

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."

Since the gospel is promised and prophesied in the Old Testament, we should expect that the final pronouncement should rest solidly on a text of Scripture. And it does. Paul brings to the fore one of the longest Old Testament quotes in the New Testament. He does so by knitting together a fabric of description and denunciations calculated to close his case.

These quotes are taken from Psalm 14:1-3

¹ The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;
there is none who does good.

² The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man,
to see if there are any who understand,
who seek after God.

³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt;
there is none who does good, not even one.

and Psalm 53:1-3

¹ The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."
They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity;
there is none who does good.

² God looks down from heaven
on the children of man
to see if there are any who understand,
who seek after God.

³ They have all fallen away;
together they have become corrupt;
there is none who does good, not even one.

And further from Psalm 5:9

⁹ For there is no truth in their mouth;
their inmost self is destruction;

their throat is an open grave;
they flatter with their tongue.

With Psalm 140:2-3

² who plan evil things in their heart
and stir up wars continually.

³ They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's,
and under their lips is the venom of asps. *Selah*

And a portion of Psalm 10:4-7

⁴ In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him;
all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

⁵ His ways prosper at all times;
your judgments are on high, out of his sight;
as for all his foes, he puffs at them.

⁶ He says in his heart, "I shall not be moved;
throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity."

⁷ His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;
under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.

And he draws from Isaiah 59:6-8

⁶ Their webs will not serve as clothing;
men will not cover themselves with what they make.

Their works are works of iniquity,
and deeds of violence are in their hands.

⁷ Their feet run to evil,
and they are swift to shed innocent blood;
their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;
desolation and destruction are in their highways.

⁸ The way of peace they do not know,
and there is no justice in their paths;
they have made their roads crooked;
no one who treads on them knows peace.

And finally, from Psalm 36:1

¹ Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart;
there is no fear of God before his eyes.

Stott points out that these Scriptures paint a grim picture of sin. It declares the ungodliness of sin. That is, the sinner tries to declare or live as though God does not exist. It demonstrates the pervasiveness of sin. Sin reaches into every part of man. And it teaches the universality of sin. All sin. All are born under sin. All born sinners. All sin in thoughts, wants and deeds. It shows that sin has made man unable to please, seek or obey God. This is what we mean when we talk about total depravity.

Verses 10-12 describe the total inability of man, the extent and power of his depravity. Sin renders us unable to rescue or redeem ourselves. We are so infected with sin in our whole beings that we are sinners, through and through. Our thoughts and deeds reflect a “No God” way of living. Our soul and our body is infected with sin so that all our impulses even to moral good are corrupted by it.

That inability is universal. No one... over and over again. No matter what words you use to describe sin, it is applied to all. Whether in the womb or in the nursery, in the school or university, in the family or business or old folks home wherever you find people you find sinners. Not just some of them. All of them, every single one. This is our desperate and dreadful condition.

Verses 13-17 illustrate the corruption of man, the examples and patterns of his depravity. This is how our sin thinks and acts. This is how it behaves. Here are its impurities, immoralities, and intrigues. Eyes, to throat to mouth to hands to feet - all bent to do the sin the heart and mind contemplate. Here is the decay, destruction and deadliness of our sin.

Verse 18 concludes with the underlying cause and effect: man does not fear God. We see this in the Psalm. The fool tries to declare and tries to live as though there is not God. This leads to ever increasing wickedness and depravity. The culminating, condemning accusation? They have no respect, no reverence for God. Where there is no respect, there will be no submission. Where there is no submission, sin rules and reigns.

Its Concluding Purpose

(v.19-20)

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.

This final paragraph serves to conclude the charge. It points to the purpose of this long section and the function of the Scripture in that charge.

At the end of the day, the weight of the argument is meant to silence the sinner. There is nothing left to say. That is because everyone is being made accountable to God. It is not man’s standard of righteousness and justice that is condemning, but it is God’s righteous standard. And that standard is found in the Law. The Law was not given to save. The Law was given to expose sin. The works of Law are futile for salvation, yet is revelatory of our sin.

We stand charged before God and silenced before His righteous wrath. And the law cannot bring us forgiveness, it can only pronounce God’s judgment. O, what will we do? How will we have a righteousness before God that He accepts and thus accepts us?

“Now a righteousness apart from the Law appears, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe.” (Romans 3:21-22, Abridged)

Reflect and Respond

It seems to me that there are two appropriate responses to this terrible denunciation on man's horrific, sinful plight.

We must cry out for mercy. We must see ourselves in all our sinfulness. It may be the sinfulness of a depraved pagan society. Or it may be the sinfulness of a critical moralist. Or it may be the sinfulness of a self-righteous religious legalist (whether Jew or Gentile). But we are all subject to the wrath of God. Every one of us. All are under sin. All are under judgment. All are subject to wrath. Your good works cannot save you. Your religion cannot save you. And frankly, having a personal relationship with God (whatever that means) cannot save you. Only having a right standing with God by believing in Jesus, our Redeemer and Ruler, can we be saved from the wrath to come. So repent and believe, today. Now.

We must carry the gospel to the lost. If every one you meet, if your nice neighbor who borrows your sugar and cooks out with you; if your family - father, mother, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents; if the waitress at your favorite restaurant, the person in the cubicle by you or on the machine beside you; if the person who sits next to you on the plane, or even at church are all doomed under the wrath of God, then we must take them the gospel. Why? Because God is glorified when sinners bow and believe when saints proclaim and witness. Let all mouths be stopped before God and opened before men.