

## How Bad Are We, Really?

Romans 3:9-20

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*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. - Romans 3:9-10, ESV*

G.K. Chesterton famously quipped that the doctrine of original sin is the single Christian doctrine most supported by empirical evidence, seen clearly in over 3,000 years of recorded human history. But most people are just not so sure. We'd all readily agree that nobody's perfect, but that's different than believing that we're all born morally and spiritually bankrupt, corrupt to the core.

So far in Romans, Paul has declared that God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all human unrighteousness and ungodliness. He has asserted that people suppress the truth of God and replace God with idolatrous substitutes. He has said that even religiously moral people are condemned because they do not actually practice what they preach. People who have God's law are condemned by God's law, while people who do not have God's written law are condemned by their consciences, which show the moral law written on their hearts.

I can just hear a reader of Romans thinking, "Well, yeah, nobody's perfect, Sure. We all know that. But God doesn't realistically expect perfection, does He?" Well, God not only expects perfection, but He requires it. How can one who is perfect in holiness and who dwells in perfection allow or accept anything less than moral and spiritual perfection without compromising Himself?

Even more, Paul wants us to see that we are so much worse than "not perfect." It's not as if we are honestly and earnestly striving after perfection but falling just short of the goal. No, the reality is much worse.

Using a series of quotes from Scripture, Paul demonstrates how bad every human being is, in vv. 10-12 -

1. We are without righteousness.
2. We are without understanding.
3. We are without the desire to pursue God.
4. We are without real spiritual worth in our actions.
5. We are without goodness.

Then, he stops and assures us that this is a universal condition: "*no, not one . . . not even one.*"

So, what do we have? According to vv. 13-16 -

1. We have deadly, lying tongues.
2. We have venomous, poisonous, cursing, bitter mouths.
3. We have a tendency to vengeful violence.
4. We have destructive patterns of living.
5. We leave behind us a trail of ruin and misery, from our words and actions.

This really is a miserable and hopeless assessment, and it is what God says is true of every human being.

What's the end result? A guilty accountability before the penetrating judgment of God:

*"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."*

Paul has one over-arching goal in this sweeping condemnation: He wants to strip us of all self-righteousness so that we will know our need for the grace of God. Most people think, on some level, that if they try hard enough, they can be good enough for God to accept them for who they are. This is just another way of saying that they are trying to be justified by the law. Whatever shape of law we embrace - the Ten Commandments, the Law of Love, Karma, the Golden Rule, etc. - we cannot justify ourselves in the eyes of God through law-keeping.

We need the grace of God. We need to be saved from ourselves. Yes, we are really **that** bad.