

Romans 3:9-20

Introduction

Atheistic philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), famously suggested that the concept of sin was something that the church invented to hold man in check, to keep him demoralized and under the thumb of the church. Within Nietzsche's thought is the idea of the inherent goodness of man. His views are still popular today.

Paul would beg to differ with popular opinion today. He makes explicitly clear in our text this morning what he has been already saying in the book of Romans.

Summary

In Romans 3:9-20, Paul demonstrates the universal sinfulness of all humanity, Jew and Gentile alike.

1. Universal Sinfulness and Guilt vv. 3-20

Since the Fall, man has always sought to avoid responsibility for his sin. Fully aware of this tendency, Paul makes his point abundantly clear (**Rom 3:9**). All people, whether Jew or Gentile, are guilty of sin and therefore liable to God's judgment.

Paul refers to Psalm 14:1-3 as he continues to expand on this universal charge in Rom 3:10-12. Paul then adds further authoritative testimony from the Old Testament (**Rom 3:13-14**). Paul focuses on the mouth and lips because they are a window into the soul (cf. **Mark 7:6**).

This is in stark contrast to what we are supposed to do with our own lips (**Heb. 18:15**). Far from such praise, which reflects a heart positively disposed to loving and fearing God, Paul demonstrates that unbelieving man is totally sinful.

If sinful humanity has the aroma of death rising from its mouth and the caustic poison of serpents under its lips, then it should be no surprise that violence also marks fallen man (**Rom 3:15-17**; cf. Prov 1:16; Isa 59:7-8).

Quoting Psalm 36:1, Paul summarizes the chief problem of sinful humanity:

Rom. 3:18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Paul then dismissed his witness from the stand and offers his closing argument, summarizing Romans 3:9-18 as well as the entirety of Rom 1:18-3:18 in **Rom 3:19**. Given this twofold testimony from the books of nature and Scripture, Paul confidently concludes that everyone is under God's law, and given humanity's sinful condition, all people stand accountable before the divine bar of God's court.

Sinful people might think they can somehow curry God's favor through their own good works, and therefore Paul informs his readers this is not so (**Rom. 3:20**).

2. Abiding Relevance

Even though Paul wrote this almost two thousand years ago, people still try to claim that humanity is inherently good. Yet, despite all the progress, we also look back on the twentieth century in which millions of people died as a result of war; the bloodiest century in all of human history.

What are we to conclude from all of this?

First, We are, all by nature, Slaves to Sin.

This passage clearly teaches that fallen man left to himself cannot and will not seek God; ever: **Rom 3:11** no one seeks for God (cf 2LBCF 9.3).

Our tendency is to look at how awful the world is and shake our heads in disapproval of its wickedness. Yet we should recognize that this is a portrait not only of the world's wickedness but also of our own.

Secondly, we should look at ourselves

This is an all-too-gruesome reminder of who we were before we were saved.

The only reason we are not like Paul's description is because God the Father sent Christ the Son to pay the penalty for our wickedness and sent God the Holy Spirit to replace our sin-hardened hearts of stone with Spirit-wrought hearts of flesh.

Thirdly, we need to trust in the Authority and Power of the Word

This passage should also serve as a model to ministers of the Word.

Paul could have simply stood on the platform of his own apostolic authority to support his claims but ultimately he relied solely on the authority and power of God's Word

If we truly believe that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation then we will seek no other instrument by which to convict people of their sin

This passage should be a reminder to us that man is and always will be wicked apart from the saving grace of God.

It should also be a reminder that it is a portrait of ourselves prior to our conversion. The fact that we have been delivered from spiritual death should give us great reason to praise our triune Lord (**1 John 3:1**).