

**Subject: Total Depravity**  
**Scripture: Romans 3:1-18**

It is often said that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. That is true. Something else is true. The ground at the foot of the cross is like quicksand. We are all sinking down by the weight of our sin and guilt and we are without hope unless we look to Jesus by faith. This weight of sin and guilt comes from what we say and do, but it is even deeper than that. Our sin and guilt come from who we are. We are sinners by nature, by choice, and by practice. We sin in word and deed. We sin in act and thought. This is called the depravity of man or the doctrine of total depravity. In the book of Romans Paul is like a lawyer building his case.

Rom. 1:18-32	The immoral heathen are guilty
Rom. 2:1-16	The moral hypocrites are guilty
Rom. 2:17-29	The self-righteous Jews are guilty
Rom. 3:1-19	All people in the world are guilty

### **THE UNIQUE PRIVILEGE OF THE JEWS (3:1-8)**

In chapter 2 Paul has just shown that being a Jew is something more than name, heritage, profession, or the physical sign of circumcision. Being a true Jew is something much more. It is internal, not external. It is for the praise of God and not the praise of men.

Paul anticipates the objection that people may raise in 3:1, “What is the advantage (benefit) of being a Jew?” Then in verse 2, he says there are many advantages, but the main one is this...the Jews have the very words of God (the Holy Scriptures). See Romans 9:1-5.

**Deuteronomy 4:1-2** <sup>1</sup> Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. <sup>2</sup> Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

**Deuteronomy 4:8** And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

**Psalms 147:19-20** <sup>19</sup> He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. <sup>20</sup> He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD.

The Jews were blessed above all other people because they had the Scriptures which contained the truth about God, man, sin, and salvation.

**John 5:39** Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

**2 Timothy 3:15** And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

In verses 3-8 Paul shows that the Jews’ unbelief and sin was their fault, not God’s fault. Even though some Jews did not believe God, He was still faithful to them. Every man may be a liar, but God is still true. He gave them the truth because He cannot lie.

Even though people are unrighteous, God is still righteous and must punish our sin. Our unrighteousness actually highlights and reveals the righteousness of God. In verses 7-8 Paul addresses people who would try to condone their sin by their own depraved thinking. Here is a paraphrase of what Paul says in verses 7-8, “But some might still argue, how can God judge and condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory? If you follow that kind of thinking, however, you might as well say that the more we sin the better it is! Those who say such things deserve to be condemned, yet some slander me by saying this is what I preach!”

John MacArthur comments on verse 8: “Paul’s gospel message of salvation by grace through faith alone had been perverted by his opponents who argued it provided not only a license to sin, but outright encouragement to do so.” Paul deals with this again in chapter 6.

So the point in Romans 3:1-8 is that in spite of God’s special blessing for the Jews, many of them still did not believe. The blame was theirs, not God’s. And even though their unbelief highlighted God’s faithfulness and their unrighteousness actually brought glory to the righteous God in judging them, they cannot blame God or condone their sin. In spite of every advantage the Jews sinned against God and therefore their guilt was worse than others.

### **THE UNIVERSAL PROBLEM OF MANKIND (3:9-18)**

All men (Jews and Gentiles alike) stand guilty and condemned before God. Jews are not superior to others. All people are “under sin” (vs. 9), completely enslaved and dominated by sin. In verses 10-17 Paul puts together a group of OT scriptures to prove that all people are sinners. He quotes from Psalm 14 and Psalm 53. Nine times he uses words like “none” and “all” to show that sin has affected all people on earth. This is a description of human depravity, sometimes called “total depravity” because it affects all people, and sometimes called “radical depravity” because it stems from the root or heart of every person. All people sin and they sin because they are sinners at heart.

Total depravity does not mean that people are as bad as they could be, but they are as bad off as they can be. Total depravity does not mean that there is no good in man, but there is no good in man that can satisfy God. Think of it like this. Imagine that you are sitting in a restaurant enjoying a good salad and you’re thinking man, this is so good. What you don’t know is that one of the cooks took a break and went out back to work on his truck. While he was out back he took out the garbage and had to reach down and pick up some really nasty stuff that fell out of the can. He comes back from break without washing and walks over to your table to greet you: “I hope you like your salad; I just made it fresh with my own hands.” Paul reveals four things about human depravity:

#### 1) Sinful character (vs. 10-12)

Verse 10 is a summary statement. No one is righteous, no not one. No one understands God and no one seeks after God. Man cannot understand the truth of God or comprehend His standard of righteousness. Man does not seek God. False religion is man’s attempt to escape the true God, not to seek and find Him. Man seeks his own things, not the things of God. He seeks his own ways and his own interests. Man’s only hope is for God to seek him, and that’s exactly what God does. Jesus said that he came to seek and to save that which was lost. This is the fallacy of the seeker-sensitive church movement. It is an attempt to make the church worldly enough so lost people will seek it and enjoy it and eventually come to know God.

Only God can seek us and overcome our resistance and rebellion and pride. We have all turned aside (leaning in the wrong direction) and we are unprofitable.

***Isaiah 53:6*** *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

2) Sinful speech (vs. 13-14)

When you are sick and go to the doctor for a check up he usually tells you to stick out your tongue and he looks down your throat. Paul does the work of a good doctor to show us the serious problem of human sin and depravity. It affects what we say.

Tombs were sealed not only to show respect for the dead, but to seal off the sight of decay and the stench of death. The words we say show the corruption inside our heart. Our words are like the venom of a poisonous snake.

***James 3:6-8*** <sup>6</sup> *And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.* <sup>7</sup> *For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:* <sup>8</sup> *But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

3) Sinful actions (vs. 15-17)

Men hurt and destroy one another. Human history is the story of crime and war, destruction and misery.

4) Sinful attitude (vs. 18)

After Paul describes the fruit of sin or the evidence we can see, he then reveals the root or the source of all depravity. Man has no fear of God. People do not submit to God and have no reverence for God. They don't respect God and they don't care what He thinks or says.

Paul's indictment is devastating. We are all guilty and condemned. The only hope for guilty sinners is God's grace. *'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved.*