

# **Romans: The Good News of God**

## **None Is Righteous**

*Romans 3:9-20*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

September 16, 2007

# None Is Righteous

## Scripture

Let's read Romans 3:9-20:

<sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> as it is written:

<sup>9</sup> “None is righteous, no, not one;

<sup>11</sup> no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

<sup>12</sup> All have turned aside;

together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one.”

<sup>13</sup> “Their throat is an open grave;

they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

<sup>14</sup> “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

<sup>15</sup> “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

<sup>16</sup> in their paths are ruin and misery,

<sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they have not known.”

<sup>18</sup> “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:9-20)

## Introduction

Several years ago a new product called “Disposable Guilt Bags” appeared in the supermarkets. It consisted of a set of ten or-

dinary brown bags on which were printed the following instructions: “Place the bag securely over your mouth, take a deep breath and blow all your guilt out, then dispose of the bag immediately.” The amazing thing about this is that the *Associated Press* reported that 2,500 kits had been quickly sold at \$2.50 per kit.

Wouldn't it be great if we could dispose of our guilt so easily? Unfortunately, though, there is nothing on this earth powerful enough in itself to dispose of our guilt. We cannot fix ourselves, which is what many are trying to do.

We do not like to admit that our sinfulness and rebellion are at the heart of our problems. We're much more comfortable discussing imperfections, weaknesses, mistakes, peccadilloes, and errors in judgment. These terms are socially acceptable, and almost everyone identifies with them. But an outright acknowledgment of guilt before a holy God, a 100% acceptance of responsibility for wrongdoing, runs against the grain. Yet this kind of honesty is the first step to the freedom from sin and guilt that God has provided in the death of Christ.

The Apostle Paul was well aware of our disposition to deny our sinfulness and rebellion. Therefore, from creation, from history, from reason and logic, and from conscience, Paul has already presented powerful testimony of man's sinfulness and rebellion. He has already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. Now he presents the ultimate evidence, the evidence of Scripture itself. Beginning with verse 10 and continuing through verse 18, Paul introduces before the court, as it were, the evidence of God's own Word as revealed in the Old Testament.

### **Lesson**

Romans 3:9-20 summarizes God's divine and perfect view of man. I want you to picture a courtroom as the Apostle Paul continues with a trial motif: the charge (3:9), the evidence (3:10-17), the motive (3:18), and the verdict (3:19-20).

## I. The Charge (3:9)

Paul has already shown how all people—both religious and non-religious—are under the just condemnation and wrath of God.

Anticipating what some of his readers might be thinking, he asks: **“What then? Are we Jews any better off?”** (3:9a).

Now, it is not exactly clear to whom **“we”** refers. Some commentators believe that Paul is speaking of his fellow Jews. But Paul has already dealt with the position of the Jews, especially in Romans 3:1-8, where he answers the questions that most Jews would have asked.

More likely, it seems better to take this **“we”** to refer to himself and his fellow believers in Rome, which consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. And so, basically, what Paul means is this: “Are we Christians, in ourselves, better than other groups of people already shown to be condemned before God? Are we intrinsically superior to those other people? Are we saved because our basic human nature is on a higher plane than theirs?”

Immediately answering his own questions, Paul unequivocally asserts: **“No, not at all.”** In other words: “No! We are not in ourselves any better than other people.”

As I mentioned, Paul has already pointed out in the first two and a half chapters of Romans that everyone, from the most reprobate, vice-ridden pagan to the most outwardly moral and religious person is under the just condemnation and wrath of Almighty God. The entire human race, with absolutely no exceptions, is charged before God’s court of justice, as Paul says: **“For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin”** (3:9b). Every human being, every person on the face of the planet earth, whether religious or non-religious, is completely under the power, authority and control of sin. That is Paul’s charge.

Now such an idea—that they were under the power, authority and control of sin—was preposterous to most Jews. If a Jew was poverty stricken, handicapped, or in some way seriously afflicted, it was assumed that either he or his parents had committed some

unusually heinous sin, for which, for a generation or so, they forfeited their normally high standing before God.

That belief is reflected in the story of the blind man whom Jesus and the disciples passed just outside the Temple. Noticing the man's condition, the disciples asked the Lord, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2).

After Jesus corrected the disciples' wrong assumption, he restored the man's sight. When the man was talking with the Pharisees a short while later, they vehemently voiced the same wrong assumption that the Twelve had expressed. When the man said to them of Jesus, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing," the Pharisees were greatly offended and replied, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" (John 9:33-34).

People who are religious tend to think of themselves as being inherently better than others and favored by God because of their religious commitment. Even Christians are sometimes tempted to think that God saved us because we are somehow more deserving of salvation than others.

Do you think like this? Do you think that God will save you because there is something in you that makes you worth saving? My friend, the charge that Paul makes against every single individual is that we are all **under sin**. If you or I are ever to be saved, we must first acknowledge that we are under the power, authority and control of sin. Unless you acknowledge that the charge against you is true, namely, that *you* are **under sin**, you will never experience the grace, mercy and forgiveness of God.

## II. The Evidence (3:10-17)

Paul now presents several pieces of evidence against sinful men and women. The evidence to support Paul's charge that we are all under sin comes directly from Scripture itself. He quotes six Old Testament passages to provide evidence that we are all under sin.

The evidence falls into three categories—the first concerning the *character* of the accused (3:10-12), the second concerning the *conversation* of the accused (3:13-14), and the third concerning the *conduct* of the accused (3:15-17).

A. *The Character of the Accused (3:10-12)*

The first category of evidence has to do with the *character* of the accused. Paul says in verses 10-12: **“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”**

The character of the accused is that **none is righteous**. In verses 10-12, Paul uses the terms **none**, **no one**, and **not even one** six times in referring to our utter lack of righteousness before God.

Righteousness is a major theme in the book of Romans, appearing in one form or another more than thirty times. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first piece of evidence that Paul makes to support his charge that we are all under sin is that of our unrighteousness.

Paul is using the term **righteous** in its most basic sense of being right before God. Obviously, people are able to do many things that are morally right. Even the vilest person may occasionally do something commendable. But the Apostle Paul is not speaking here of specific acts or even general patterns of behavior, but of a person’s inner character. Paul’s point is that there is not a single person who has ever lived, apart from the sinless Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21), whose innermost being could be characterized as righteous by God’s standard. To prevent anyone from thinking that there might be exceptions, Paul stresses, **not even one**.

Our situation is actually even worse. Not only is there no one who is righteous, Paul says that **all have turned aside** from God. We want to have nothing to do with God at all. **Together we have become worthless**.

Toward the end of my basic training in the South African Air Force we were getting ready for our various assignments to different parts of the Air Force. One of our fellow troops did not want to do anything in the Air Force, and so he had a friend smash his hand by kicking it against a step. That way he became worthless to any unit in the Air Force.

That is a picture of our relationship to God as sinful and rebellious creatures. We have turned away from God and **together we have become worthless**. We smash our hands again and again by our sin. Our sin is not only an affront to God and damaging at times to others, but it hurts us because we are basically unrighteous.

*B. The Conversation of the Accused (3:13-14)*

The second category of evidence has to do with the *conversation* of the accused. Paul says in verses 13-14: **“Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”**

This area of evidence has to do with our speech. Jesus once said in Matthew 15:18: “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.” Basically, our speech reveals what is in our heart.

Before I became a Christian I really struggled with a foul mouth. I was in the South African Air Force at the time, and I swore as badly as the worst. I remember trying various times not to swear at all. But to no avail for me. Then one day I became a Christian. And one of the clearest evidences to me that I was a Christian was that God cleaned up my mouth.

Now, I know that there are many non-Christians who do not swear. I am not saying that if you don't swear, then you must be a Christian. What I am saying, however, is that our language does reflect what is in our heart. And our speech is evidence that we are under the power, authority and control of sin.

C. *The Conduct of the Accused (3:15-17)*

The third category of evidence has to do with the *conduct* of the accused. Paul says in verses 15-17: **“Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.”**

The conduct of those living under sin is basically wicked. It shows itself in many ways: in bloodshed, in ruin, in misery, in peacelessness, and so on.

Before I was a Christian I did many things that were wrong. I knew that they were wrong and I had no desire to change because I was enjoying my sin. I remember coming home late one night when I was in the Air Force with a few friends. We had had too much to drink and we wanted something to eat. Close to the base was a convenience store, and we stole some fruit and candy. That kind of conduct was typical in my pre-Christian days. And habitually wrong, sinful behavior is typical of non-Christians.

The evidence that we are all under sin shows itself in our character, in our conversation, and in our conduct. Examine yourself. Do you see a lack of righteousness? Do you see speech that is reflective of that lack of righteousness? And do you see conduct that is wicked? These are all evidences that we are under sin.

### III. **The Motive (3:18)**

Now, what is the motive for the charge that we are all under sin? Why is every person in the world under the power, authority and control of sin? The motive is our built-in godlessness. Our basic sinfulness and rebellion against God is because, as Paul puts it in verse 18, **“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”** Because our ears are tuned to the lies of sin rather than to the truth of righteousness, we have an inadequate concern about and **no fear of God.**

The **fear of God** has both positive and negative elements.



In a positive way, every true Christian has a reverential **fear of God**. We think of Proverbs 1:7, which says that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,” which indicates the proper reverential fear of the true Christian. The **fear of God** is an awesome awareness of his glory, his holiness, and his sovereignty. Proper worship of God, for example, always includes a reverential **fear of God**.

The negative aspect of the **fear of God** has to do with dread and terror. Even Christians should have a measure of that kind of fear, which acts as a protection against sinning. The writer of Proverbs observed in Proverbs 16:6 that “by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.”

Non-Christians should have a **fear of God** in its most intense and terrifying sense. The Old Testament is full of stories of the Lord working destruction and death as punishment for all kinds of sin. He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their indescribable immorality and turned Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt for simply looking back disobediently on that horrifying scene. Because of its unrelenting wickedness, God destroyed the whole human race through the Flood, saving only eight people. He drowned the entire Egyptian army when they tried to follow the Israelites through the Red Sea.

Why do people not fear God? It all goes back to the Fall. In the Garden of Eden, Satan told Eve that when she ate from the fruit of the tree she would not die; in fact, he said, “You will be like God” (Genesis 3:5). And ever since then, we have thought of ourselves as being equal to God. We have gone around with highly elevated views of ourselves and dangerously diminished views of God. And because there is **no fear of God before our eyes** we have fallen under the power, authority and control of sin.

If you are not a Christian here today, what I am saying may not even be making sense to you. You are sitting there wondering what in the world I am talking about.

But if you are a Christian, especially if you became a Christian later in life, do you remember how your attitude to God

changed just before your conversion? I remember that I did not particularly think much about God at all. I was the center of my world. I had an elevated view of myself. I thought of God as virtually my equal. But then, when the Holy Spirit began to convict me of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8), I was utterly humbled. I began to see God as high and exalted, and myself as low and created. I suddenly began to have a **fear of God** as I saw properly who God is, and who I am before him. And it was in that context that God saved me.

If you have no proper **fear of God**, then you are living under sin. The first step in coming into a right relationship with God is to have a proper **fear of God**.

“Well,” you say, “what is a proper **fear of God**?”

A proper **fear of God** is when you have a high view of God and a humble view of yourself.

It is when you recognize that the Bible’s description of God is unquestionably true—that he alone is supremely sovereign, and that if you are to come into a right relationship with God, it must be on his terms—and his terms alone.

A proper **fear of God** is when you recognize that the Bible’s description about you is unquestionably true—that you are a creature created by God, that you have sinned and rebelled against God and that, apart from the grace and mercy of God, you deserve God’s righteous wrath.

#### **IV. The Verdict (3:19-20)**

Finally, that brings us to the verdict. Paul now declares God’s verdict on sinful and rebellious men and women. He says that **“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”** (3:19).

That declaration allows no exceptions. Every unsaved person, whether religious or non-religious, is **under the law** of God and **accountable to God**.

No one is capable of fully obeying God's law. And so Paul's verdict is given in verse 20: **“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God's] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”**

The bottom line is this: every single one of us is guilty before God in the courtroom of heaven. **No human being will be justified in his sight.** Every one of us is guilty.

### Conclusion

But! But—there is good news!

On our own we are guilty before God. Recognizing our predicament, God in his grace has made a way of escape for us. Because we are guilty before God, the penalty for breaking his law must be paid. That penalty is death. That penalty is eternal separation from God in the fires of hell for all eternity. God sent Jesus into this world to pay the penalty for sin.

In order to escape the penalty, we must accept God's terms. We must *affirm* that we are sinners, that we have broken God's law, that we are under sin.

We must *believe* that only Jesus' righteousness is acceptable to God. We must *believe* that Jesus paid the penalty for our sin.

And then, we must *confess* our sin to God. We must repent and turn from our sin. We must place our trust in Jesus Christ alone.

This, dear friends, is the only way to escape the just wrath and condemnation of God. And, I pray, that if you have never done so, you will affirm that you are a sinner, believe that only Jesus' righteousness is acceptable to God, and confess your sin to God, so that you might become a forgiven child of God today. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributor\\_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz)

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

## Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

**PRAYER:**

O Lord our God, your Word clearly shows us that none is righteous. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All of us have turned aside. Together we have become worthless. No one does good, not even one.

O Lord our God, we stand condemned before you. We have broken your law. We are guilty sinners, every one of us.

How we thank you for the good news of God. How we thank you for the good news of the gospel.

O Lord our God, enable each one of us to affirm that we are sinners, to believe that only Jesus' righteousness is acceptable to you, and to confess our sin to you. Please forgive us. Grant us the gift of eternal life today.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.