

## Romans: The Problem, “No One Righteousness” Romans 3:9-20, 11/24/19

Romans 3:9-20

<sup>9</sup> What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. <sup>10</sup> As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.

<sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have altogether become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” <sup>13</sup> “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” <sup>14</sup> “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” <sup>15</sup> “Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup> ruin and misery mark their ways, <sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they do not know.”

<sup>18</sup> “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” <sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Mic drop...**Title Slide** For the sake of anonymity, I happen to know a child...who lives in my house- and I believe there is a pretty good chance he will be a lawyer...well either he will be a lawyer or will need a lawyer. But seriously, he has this ability to anticipate your objections and always comes ready with his answers. Dad can I play video games today? Now, before you say no...I know you are going to say it is a school day and the rule is no video games until the weekend. But, I have been really good all week and we are only 24hrs away from the weekend, it practically is the weekend. And you are going to ask “what about homework?”, but I’ve already finished all my homework and I already asked my teacher and we aren’t getting any homework for the rest of the week...And you know you always talk about grace...getting what we don’t deserve, don’t you want to be like Jesus? OH the Jesus Card- I see. Sometimes I will even say, ahead of time, “Son- nothing you say will change my mind on this, do you still want to give me your reasons?” Answer is always “Yes.” Also- you should know, we bartered a deal so that I could tell that story.

This is essentially what Paul has been doing throughout our study of Romans. Like a good lawyer, as he has built his argument of why **we all need the righteousness of God only available through the Gospel of Jesus Christ**, and he has anticipated all our objections. **Chapter 1- why do the gentiles need the gospel?** Because of their rebellion against God’s rule has corrupted their hearts. **Chapter 2- Why do the Jews need the gospel?** He anticipates an objection from religious people, particularly religious Jews, who say, “Yeah, those Gentiles (pagans) are some messed up people, but not us. We were raised on religion. We’ve got the Word of God, the heroes of the faith, the Temple. We’re different.” So, Paul takes an entire chapter to show that religion doesn’t really solve our problem. In fact, in many ways, it makes the problem worse. Far from fixing the problem of our sinfulness--which at its core is a sense of pride, rebellion and independence from God--religion caters to those things and makes them worse, hiding behind layers of exterior morality.

So in chapter 3:1-8 as Matthew preached last week, Paul anticipates another objection raised by his Jewish readers. "Well then what was the purpose of Law, of our religion if that's the case?" Paul responds that all the things that God gave--the stories, the rituals--they were all designed--not to give you something to master that would earn your place before God--but to bring you to the place where you would cry out, "I have *no hope* of ever being restored to you apart from your grace."

As we get to verse 9 Paul is going to bring part 1 of his argument: The Problem, to a conclusion. *What shall we conclude then?* Paul brings us two conclusions we want to look at today.

### Conclusion #1- Sin makes us equals

Romans 3:9

*What shall we conclude then? Do we (Jews) have any advantage (over the gentiles)? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin.*

Black, white, young, old, sinner, saint, buttoned up or buttonless- The most despicable murderer and your sweet old grandma. This doesn't mean that every person commits the same amount of sin as every other person or that every sin is equal in degree or effect. When Paul says under "Sin" or "Power of Sin"- he is speaking in legal terms. It means that our legal condition before God is the same. We are all still stuck at square 1. We are all lost and there are no degrees of lostness. If you and I both wanted to swim from Hawaii to Japan one of us would probably make it further than the other, but I can guarantee we would both drown...or get eaten by sharks...or drown and then get eaten by sharks. Either way, we are both in the same condition...and I'm not going to be bragging that I'm better, because we are both going to need the same lifeboat.

Let's look into three observations that strengthen Paul's argument that sin makes us equals. 1) Notice in these verses the number of times Paul uses "None and All." 7x No one and 3 Times All. It is clear he is saying how many are righteous, NONE. Who is guilty ALL. Couldn't be clearer.

2<sup>nd</sup> observation is that Paul is bringing an indictment **using OT Scripture** to prove the magnitude of their guilt. Did you notice all the footnotes? This section that I just read is like charges being read in a court of Law. And Paul, like a prosecuting attorney, brings a 14-count indictment against humanity by quoting 14 Old Testament scriptures, the law and the prophets, psalms, why? To show the Jewish audience, "Guys, I'm not the first one to tell you this...weren't you paying attention? God has been saying this throughout the whole Bible!"

3<sup>rd</sup> observation is that these indictments fall into **2 categories. Sin against God and Sin against people.** Paul is saying we are all equals because the nature of all sin is failure to live out the two greatest commandments, love God and love others. Being "under the power of sin" first and foremost is results in a ruined relation with God. Verses 10-18 begin and end with this point. Verse 10-11: "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God." And verse 18: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Everything

in between these verses has to do with the meaning of sin in human relations. Fix this firmly in your mind, sin is mainly a condition of rebellion against God, not mainly a condition of doing bad things to other people. John Piper: "This is why it is so pointless when people argue that they are pretty good people, and so don't need the Gospel. What they mean is that they treat other people decently: they don't steal, kill, lie much, or swear much, and they give to some charities. But that is not the main question. The main question is: Do you love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength? Sin is, first and foremost, a resistance to finding joy and life in God."

There is one central lie that has stuck with us since the Garden of Eden. It's the lie that echoes in the heart of every teenager, every college student, young adult: *I think my way is probably better than God's. When it comes to making decisions for my life, I'm smarter than God.* It's continues to find its voice in the hearts of adults whose hearts pursue career ambition, success, money, reputation, relationships as more important than God...: My way is better than God's.

And this is precisely what Paul means by *No one seeks God*. Because we say, it seems like lots of people are seeking God, trying to find truth, trying to connect spiritually. He is not saying that we aren't intellectually or even are spiritually interested in God but our seeking is self-seeking...it is on our terms, our seeking is for our purposes, not his. No one purely seeks God.

2<sup>nd</sup> category then is that Sin has also equally ruined our **relationships with people. v.13-14 Our Speech**...Image of grave with rotting bodies in it. Sinful words are sign of decay. Humanity has a penchant for using our tongues to lie to protect our own interests, and to damage the interests of others. Maybe not all the time...but under certain conditions and stressors- watch out. **V.15-17 Our Actions**- Swift to shed blood. Sometimes literally, more often in seeking to push down those who get in our way. Why do we become angry with people? They block us from access to what we want most. As long as we have what we want, we're peaceable. But let someone else get what we want--let them get the promotion, or the recognition, or the boyfriend we feel like we deserve; let their kids get the honors we want for our kid, and we don't respond with excitement for them and contentment in the blessings we have and trust in God's good plan for us. We struggle with hating them, even wishing harm on them. Our ears perk up when we hear somebody criticizing them. If it wasn't for God's common grace in restraining the full extent, we would descend into utter chaos and anarchy. And we don't have to look far to see it.

You say, OK- I can agree with these, but the one I'm hung up on is...**v.12 No one does good?** I mean, what about the Marine who is not a Christian and doesn't believe in God but throws himself on a grenade to save his buddy? If that's not a good deed I don't know what is! Or the woman who sacrifices everything to get her kids out of poverty. Aren't those good things?" Yes, of course they are but I believe what Paul is saying is not that no one ever does a good deed. But that no one can keep it up habitually without failing. **God is that which conforms to God's character and comes from a heart committed to honoring God.**, no one does that habitually, and most of our good is tainted with selfish motives. I will do something good because I like the attention I get from it, the reward...most of our good deeds if we are honest are tainted with something selfish or impure.

So in summary, Paul says **Conclusion #1 Sin makes us equals.**

One cultural application to consider- This is why I believe authentic Christianity, not religion, is such a powerful force for equality and inclusion. Many today are saying that religion and beliefs are what bring exclusion and marginalization, but authentic Christianity cannot and will not. What could possibly make Paul, the pharisee, one of the most religiously moral people who ever lived, who looked down his nose at sinners and called them dogs...who would never dream of spending his life serving and living among gentiles...what could make him suddenly transform his perspective, his attitudes, his actions, his heart toward them? His religion? Not on your life. It was this gospel truth- All of us are complete equals gloriously made in the same image of God, but because of sin we are all equally lost without the grace of God. This is why when Peter was being exclusive by only eating with the Jews and not the gentiles, Paul confronted him. He didn't argue law- "The law says you should..." NO, he argued Gospel- This is not keeping in step with the gospel. Friends if you look anywhere in your life, in your attitudes- are you seeing exclusiveness? Are you looking down your noses at a group of people? Check that with the gospel- because it doesn't line up.

**Conclusion #2 Our Sin Problem should bring us to silence.**

*<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

That is a mic drop...Paul says, the conclusion is no amount of cleaning up, fixing up, working ourselves up...will solve our problem so...let me be a bit crass. Paul says, just shut up. But I'm pretty good. Shut up...But I can do better...shut up. Illustration: Cleaned out refrigerator for family member...found a ketchup bottle from the Reagan Administration. You ever see that Tupperware container in the back of the refrigerator... in it is a piece of chicken from a restaurant... and you wonder, "I wonder how long that's been in there?" It's been so long that you can't remember it. So, you take it out and smell it...gag...its growing a colony...Now, how many of you when that happens, you say, "You know, the problem is it doesn't have enough spice. Little barbecue sauce, some siracha...should take care of that. Good! Now I can't smell the rotting meat anymore!" (And right now a couple dozen college guys are saying, "Yeah... and what's the problem with this?"). That's what we're doing when we try to open our mouths and tell God we are good enough, can do better, more deserving.

The only way you will ever be spiritually awakened is if you shut up...Doesn't mean beating yourself up, I'm so horrible and I'm a worm and no one can love me...shut up! Not about feeling sorry for yourself. It is getting over yourself.

John Gerstner- "Because of the Gospel, the way of God is wide open. Nothing stands between you and God but your good works. All you need is need. All you need is nothing, but most people don't have it."

Not just repent of my sins...pharisees do that- I'm sorry, now I will do better. It is repenting of your sins, but repenting of thinking you can do anything about it. Now you are in a position to say, now I need something completely different.

I want to speak to those who may be exploring Christianity. Almost always you come with a preliminary model. We all have a mental framework of how this is going to work. If I'm going to come to God, I'm going to have to do this and that for God, and He will do this and that for me...what are the "this" and "that". Most religions say, there is a good life to live and a bad life... what do I have to start doing and stop doing... "I obey, therefore I'm accepted." But that model is wrong, the gospel flips this on its head. "I'm accepted, therefore I want to obey." You bring nothing but silence. He does the work. **Resource- Tim Keller.**

**Remember when Paul said no one is truly seeking God...that's true, but here's what is also true- When you realize that you aren't seeking him, but he is seeking you, it changes everything.**

Story of Hosea.

See this woman- marry her. OK. He realizes she is unfaithful. She has children. He names one of them- Not mine. Unfaithfulness, she leaves him goes off to multiple men. Eventually she is sold into slavery.

Hosea says why? God says, so you know something about my relationship with you. So Hosea, go to where she is being bid on and purchase her freedom, then you will know what it is like to be me. To her shock she hears her husband's voice bidding on her.

Poor Hosea, had to do that so that I can use this illustration... ruined his life. But worth it.

Hosea had to go to the next city, I have to go from heaven to earth. You weren't seeking me. You just had to reach into your pocket. I had to go to the cross. Suffering and die to pay the penalty.