

GOSPEL HOPE FOR DEFILED HEARTS

Sovereign Grace Overcomes the Sinner's Guilt

Romans Series
PBC 2025

Text: Romans 3:9-20

Two significant things are happening this morning as we return to our study through the book of Romans.

1. We are wrapping up the first major section of Romans, where Paul has been helping his readers understand why the entire world is under the just, righteous, and fierce anger of God (1:18-3:20).

Romans Outline – *Five Major Sections/Five Helpful Words to put over each section in the book, designed to help us capture Romans and cultivate a culture of grace in our lives and in our church.*

a. ***Euangelion***/Introduction (1:1-17)

b. ***Condemnation*** (1:18-3:20)

c. ***Salvation*** (3:21-8:39)

- Justification (3:21-5:21)
- Sanctification (6-7)
- Glorification (8)

In this life – no condemnation!

In the life to come – no separation!

d. ***Confirmation***/Consummation (9-11)

e. ***Application*** (12-16)

2. We are finishing our Summer Series on Spiritual Heart Health taken from Romans 1:18-3:20.
 - Pagan Heart (1:18-32)
 - Presumptuous Heart (2:1-11)

- Hypocritical Heart (2:12-29)
- Defiant Heart (3:1-8)
- Depraved Heart (3:9-20)

For many weeks, we have been walking with Paul through this first major section called “Condemnation.” And it has been very weighty. But think about how such a section must have felt to Paul’s original listeners, many of whom were religious, outwardly righteous Jews who were committed to keeping the commandments and observing the requirements of the Law God had given to them through the Old Testament Scriptures.

If this has been heavy for us, it must have been extremely burdensome and even deeply offensive to many who heard Paul speak at the synagogues in cities across the Roman Empire.

Such a listener would have initially agreed with Paul that God will (and indeed must) justly condemn the pagan people around them for their idolatry, immorality, and iniquity – as Paul has stated in 1:18-32.

However, they would have been deeply offended by Paul’s statement that Jews, who possess the Law of Moses and have been diligently observing its religious, civil, and moral commandments, are also unrighteous and therefore equally under God’s just condemnation—even though He has made great promises to them, given them significant gifts like the Law of Moses and the Old Testament Scriptures, and granted them the status of His chosen people. The idea that they too were under condemnation was unthinkable to a self-righteous, law-keeping Jew!

And that is why this section opens with a question Paul must have faced in almost every synagogue throughout the Roman Empire: ***“What are we to conclude by all of this? Are we Jews any better off than the Gentiles?” And Paul’s answer was shocking – “No, not at all!”***

I. The Charge (3:9)

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,

Paul's opponent might have objected – *“Paul, how can you say that? Given the promises God has made to us, the Scriptures we possess, the temple and the sacrificial system in which we have been instructed, and the status we enjoy as His chosen people, how is it possible that we are no better off than the pagan gentiles who worship idols and have none of these spiritual privileges and benefits?”* ***It is inconceivable that we are under the same condemnation they are under!***

Paul's response to that objection – *“As I have already charged (made the accusation), everyone, both Jew and Greek, is under sin!”*

- What does Paul mean when he describes the entire human race as being “under sin?” He means much more than just that we commit sins from time to time.
- “Under Sin” is a political or military analogy—we are all under the command and subject to the control of Sin (as a reigning power). Sin is the dominating rule in this realm; it guides and controls our thoughts, speech, and actions. We are enslaved to its desires because of our fallen nature (the flesh). And not only are we powerless to escape, but we also do not truly want to escape from the pleasurable sins with which it tempts us (Rom 8:1-8).
- Paul explains the concept of “being under sin” in three important ways in chapter 6, where he describes three major realities about sin that impact all of us this morning!

A. Sin reigns over the whole realm in which we live! (5:21; 6:12)

Romans 5:20-21 *Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,²¹ so that, as **sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Rom 6:12 *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.*

- Sin is the operating power that drives and influences everything that happens in the world around us.
- This is what Paul meant in Ephesians 2 when he reminded us that when we were dead in our trespasses and sins (sin reigns through death) – we followed the “course of this world” that was being energized by Satan himself (Eph 2:1-3).
- This explains why the diabolical ideology of a man like Adolf Hitler can sway and influence the population of entire countries.
- This explains why an entire culture can believe it is morally right and socially beneficial to abort unwanted infants, embrace alternative sexual identities, or adopt immoral sexual practices not just as acceptable but as desirable for people.
- *In the same verse, Paul reminds us that even though sin reigns over this realm through death, **there is another reigning power that has arrived on the scene—Grace!** And Grace reigns through a righteousness provided by God through faith that leads to life!*

B. Sin has Dominion over all Sinners who live in this realm! (6:14)

*Rom 6:14 For sin will have no **dominion** over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

*Rom 6:12 Let **not sin therefore reign** in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.*

- Sin rules (has dominion) over the desires, motives, words, and actions of fallen humanity.
- Sin is universal in its scope (every one of us) and total in its pervasiveness (every part of us).

C. Sin has Enslaved every one of us to its desires. (6:6, 16-18, 20)

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

- Paul describes every person as being a slave to one of two masters: either a slave of sin or a slave of God. If we are slaves to sin, **then sin causes us to use our bodies** to fulfill the sinful

passions (lusts) of our flesh. **Rom 6:12** *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.*

- The master you serve is revealed by what flows from your heart (your inner being), shaping everything about you: your beliefs, values, motives, meditations, speech, and conduct (Prov 4:23).
- This is Paul's point in Romans 6:20-23: *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.* ²¹ *But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.* ²² *But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.* ²³ *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
- ***And the point Paul makes in 3:9 is that everyone, whether pagan Gentile or self-righteous law-keeping Jew, is a slave to the wrong master—sin.*** And when they stand before God, they will receive the just recompense for using the life God gave them in service to the wrong master, and the ultimate punishment for that is condemnation to eternal death (6:23)!

Objection – “Paul, how can this be true?”

- *“If I understand you correctly, you are putting the entire human race in the same boat, no matter who they are or what they have done!! And I just can’t accept that thinking!”*
- *“I am a moral, upright, law-abiding Jew. Maybe, as you have said, I am not perfect . . . but I do work hard to follow the commandments and observe the requirements God gave us through Moses. And while I sometimes miss the mark and sin, my sins are nowhere near the sins of the pagan Gentile world in both type and number! In fact, I am much better than some of the sinful, wicked Jews who have at times ruined it for the rest of us by bringing judgment down on everyone. Surely, God will not lump me in the same boat with all the other sinners who are justly under His condemnation.”*

Illustration: Pirate fleet with two kinds of boats/crews

II. The Evidence (3:10-18)

as it is written: *"None is righteous, no, not one;*

- **"Just as it is written" – appeal to OT Law and prophets**
- Paul quotes from seven OT passages to prove two major points:

1. The ***Universality of Sin*** (everyone is under sin's power) – *"No one is righteous; all have gone astray."*
 - Note the number of times Paul refers to *"there is no one"* 4x and then 2x *"not even one!"*
2. The ***Pervasiveness of Sin*** (total depravity means sin has pervaded every part of humanity and infected every aspect of our lives) – *"They have become worthless; no one does good, not even one!"*

- **And he proves these two points in three ways:**

A. Their Character – hearts that turn away from God (3:10-12)

¹⁰ as it is written: *"None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."*

- No one is righteous, no not one! (Ecc. 7:20)
- No one understands (spiritually darkened, morally defiled, mentally debased mind). (Ps. 14:2; 53:2)
- No one seeks after God (no one is doing what Moses commanded and what God promised in Dt. 4:29) – everyone is avoiding God and intentionally turning away from His righteous commands. (Ps 14:2; 53:2)
- ***Deuteronomy 4:29*** *But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.*
- We are all willfully disobedient and wayward – all have turned aside (Ps 14:3; 53:3; Is. 53:6).
- We are all morally corrupt and spiritually bankrupt – we are all worthless (Ps. 14:3; 53:3).
- No one is doing what is right and good; not even one! (Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3).

B. Their Conversation – mouths that speak defilement, deception, death, and bitterness (3:13-14)

¹³ "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."

- "Their throat is an open grave" refers to something that devours someone with defilement and death. (Ps. 5:9)
- Their tongues deceive with smooth, flattering speech designed to lead people into disobedience (Ps. 5:9). **Illustration:** Think of the persuasive advice given to women encouraging them to abort their children. Think of the deceptive flattery that causes people to believe they can choose their own god or religion and everything will be fine. Think of the deceptively kind words that encourage people to embrace immorality and celebrate the wickedness for which God sends people to hell (1:31-32).
- The venom of a spitting cobra is hidden beneath their tongue (Ps. 140:3) – when they open their mouth and release it, it kills anyone it contacts! **Illustration:** Think of poisonous speech that has ruined a marriage, destroyed a child, wrecked a ministry, broken a friendship, falsely tarnished a reputation, or derailed a career because someone spat out venom from their mouth.
- Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness (Ps. 10:7)! **Illustration:** Think of people who want to ensure you know all the bad things about someone or a situation so you'll have a negative opinion about them or it. The result is the destruction of relationships, the disruption of peace, the removal of someone from something good or valuable, and so on.

C. Their Conduct – actions that bring destruction, ruin, and misery to human relationships in utter defiance of God (3:15-18)

¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

- Malicious in intent – "swift to shed blood"
- Violent in Effect – "ruin and misery"
- Chaotic in Consequence – "the way of peace they do not know"
- Defiant in retrospect – "no fear of God before their eyes" (Ps. 36:1)

At the very top of the spiritual hierarchy of people Paul was addressing in his time were Scribes (keepers of the Scripture);

Pharisees (teachers of righteousness through the Law); and Sadducees (guardians of the temple). All of them encountered Jesus, recognized He was telling the truth, and willfully rejected Him. Jesus rebuked them as “a brood of vipers” whose lips were bent on spreading poisonous words about him that eventually led to his rejection and murder (Matt. 23:33).

Because of their defiance – they killed the Author of Life!

Acts 3:12–15 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ **But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,** ¹⁵ **and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.**

This is what happens to even self-righteous, law-keeping religious people like the Jews when sin has dominion over them and they become its slaves!

III. The Verdict (3:19)

¹⁹ 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.

- **“Now we know that whatever the law says”** – This is a settled, indisputable conclusion that comes from the mouth of God and is recorded in the Old Testament Scripture.
- ***It speaks to those who are under the Law*** – Paul is continuing to address the same Jewish opponent he has been arguing with in 3:1-8, who is part of God's chosen people and under the Law of Moses contained in the Torah.
- **“So that”** – when the Scripture is brought to bear on the life of the most privileged people on earth, it results in two things:
A. Guilty Silence before God

“So that every mouth may be stopped” – When we are judged according to the truth (2:2) and according to our deeds (2:6), there are no arguments that will exonerate; no reasons that will mitigate; no explanations that will ameliorate; nor excuses that will change the fact that we are guilty before an all-knowing God who judges righteously.

B. Just Recompense from God

- *“And the whole world”* – If the most privileged people on earth are guilty before God, then what hope do the rest of the nations have?
- *“May be held accountable before God”* – will be brought to justice by the righteous Judge of the Universe!
- And the just recompense for such people is death (6:23a)!
- ***But what about the law-keepers? Are they guilty too? If so, what’s the point of having the law at all?***

IV. The Confirmation (3:20)

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

A. The Limitation of the Law

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight,

- The Law was never given as a means by which a man might be justified before God.
- If people look to “works of the Law” as the means of their justification before God, the Law will never justify them.
- And this is precisely what the Jews in Paul’s day were doing – and it may be what some of you are doing. Listen to Paul’s words of warning:

Romans 9:30–33 *What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,³³ as it is written,*

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

- ***So what was the whole point of having the Law?***

B. The Purpose of the Law

... since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

- The point of the Law was never to make us righteous but to reveal our sinfulness! ***To confront us with our sinfulness!***
- The Law reveals God’s righteous standard to me.
- The Law exposes unrighteous conduct in me.
- It was meant to bring us to this point – guilty silence before God with no human help and no human hope to escape the righteous wrath of God on the day we are called to stand before Him to be judged according to truth (what is really true about us) and according to our deeds (what we have actually done) in His sight. ***So, where is the hope in all of this?***

Conclusion: Gospel Hope for Guilty, Silent Sinners

The law (OT Scripture) that forced me to recognize and admit my sinfulness and guilt **before a perfectly righteous God** now directs me to the mercy offered **by a profoundly gracious God** who justifies ungodly people like Abraham and David, not based on their works but on their faith in Jesus Christ! (Romans 3:26; 4:5)

After two chapters that lead all of humanity to the judgment bar of God and place everyone under condemnation, a word of hope breaks in and changes everything! ***“BUT NOW!”*** Instead of condemnation, there is another word from God: “the righteousness of God has been made manifest from heaven and is available to anyone who will come by faith (not works) in Jesus Christ! (3:21-22)