

# Universal Guilt and the Supreme Court

By David Harrell

Romans 3:9–20

I invite you to take your Bibles and turn to Romans chapter three this morning. I will be speaking to you on the topic of universal guilt and the supreme court. You will understand that as we go through the text here in a few minutes.

While Jesus was on earth he made it clear in Matthew seven that very few would ever enter through the true gate of the gospel of Christ. But many would enter the wide gate of a false gospel that would lead to destruction. And it is fascinating as you read the gospels you discover that despite his miraculous healings the more Jesus preached, the more the crowds diminished, dwindling down to finally just a faithful few.

You see, his message of repentance and the high cost of discipleship was extremely discouraging to people, exposing the sinner's pride and his natural love for himself was very offensive. And then to tell them that they must love him more than their own father and mother and sister and brother and children and so forth, even their own life, well, that was just a hard, hard sell. And it is to this day for many. Asking people to give up their possessions, to deny themselves and take up a cross daily to follow him was simply over the top.

Noticing how few people were entering through the narrow gate by responding to Jesus' preaching, one of his disciples said to him in Luke 13 verse 23, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"<sup>1</sup>

It is fascinating. Jesus didn't even answer that question because number are never the issue. In fact, Luke tells us in Acts 13:48 that all who are appointed to eternal life will believe. You see, the issue is not how many, but how.

So Jesus answered his disciples and said, "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."<sup>2</sup>

The idea of striving does not mean that somehow we do works to earn our salvation, because it is all of grace. But rather it indicates that true conversion will require an intense struggle. It is hard to believe the gospel.

Entrance into the kingdom requires a man to do battle with this love for himself and his sin. You see, we cannot squeeze into the narrow gate of repentance without discarding all of our baggage of sin. We have got to strip away all of our multi layers of pride and religious hypocrisy. Worse yet, we have got to do battle with an evil world system where Satan is constantly trying to block our efforts and understanding, certainly believing the gospel.

So, indeed, only the few, not the man will even find the gate much less enter through it.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 13:23.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 13:24.

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After the resurrection only 120 disciples gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem in Acts one we are told and only around 500 in Galilee. And while many people did believe the gospel after Jesus ascended into heaven, when the Holy Spirit came, we understand that that was because now we see the apostles being empowered by the Holy Spirit more and more people came to Christ, but it was still always the few, never the many.

To be sure, the message of the cross is hard for people to fathom. But, you know, the hardest part of all is for people to somehow come to grips with the reality that they are simply not as good as they think they are. That is the hard part. You have to abandon your whole sense of self worth.

In fact, Jesus says you have to deny yourself. It literally means to renounce yourself, to hate your self, to refuse to associate with your former self. So much for self esteem, right? You want to find real self esteem, you have to be united to Christ.

You see, the message of the cross is a scandalous message. It offends the sensibilities of every man.

It is interesting. The very first sermon Jesus preached was in his hometown, the hometown synagogue. All of his family were there, his friends. They were all excited. Wow, isn't this great? Young Jesus is coming here to preach. Oh, boy, I am sure the place was filled.

They started out all excited. But it is interesting as you read the story. By the time he was finished they were trying to kill him and he had to flee for his life.

Why? Because he exposed the dreadful reality of their spiritual condition, that although they were very religious, although they were very moral, they still nevertheless stood condemned before a holy God.

Today there is a new gospel that is being preached one that is many times called seeker sensitive, one that is easy to believe, one where the offense of the cross has been removed, a gospel of self fulfillment, not one of self denial. No more feeling bad about yourself or getting mad about this diagnosis of your depravity and your inability to save yourself. You see, all of that stuff is now being replaced with a schmoozing kind of gospel that is based upon felt needs, a gospel that somehow addresses your depression and your abusive relationships and your addictions and your marriage and your ambitions and your careers and your hopes and dreams. No more falling on your face like the publican refusing to even look up and beating on your breast and crying out, "Have mercy on me a sinner."

Oh, no, no more of that type of thing. People will fill up stadiums to sign up for this deal. Churches explode with growth with this kind of gospel.

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There is one big problem. That gospel will not save a man from his sins. Jesus never preached a gospel like this. In fact, he said, “I haven’t come to call the righteous. I have come to call sinners to repentance.”

And naturally our Lord’s apostle is preaching the same message and we see this graphically and dramatically articulated in this epistle that he sent to the Romans.

By way of review, since it has been a few weeks since we placed our mind here in this text, may I remind you that in chapter one the apostle Paul tells the people there in Rome that all men are under divine condemnation. They have rejected God’s revelation of himself through creation and through conscience. He exposed their immorality and their idolatry and so forth.

And then in chapter two he exposed the condemnation not just of the Gentile pagans, but also of the self righteous moralist, especially the Jew, his kinsman who thought that because of all of their religious works and their heritage as God’s chosen people that somehow they were better than the pagans and are therefore not subject to God’s condemnation.

And then in chapter three, the first eight verse, Paul continues to deal with the Jewish objections to the gospel exposing the fallacy of somehow believing that they were exempt from condemnation because they were the sons of Abraham, because they possessed the law and because they were circumcised and so forth.

And that brings us now to the text before us this morning, chapter three verses nine through 20. Having exposed the Gentile who may be immoral as well as those that are moral and certainly exposing the Jew and telling them that they are all guilty, that all men are guilty, he summarizes this and once for all articulates the fact that we are all under the sentence of divine condemnation. Again, a far cry from this synthetic wide gate gospel that is so popular today.

With that in mind, let me read to you our text this morning beginning in verse nine of Romans three.

He says:

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING

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AND BITTERNESS"; "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, AND THE PATH OF PEACE HAVE THEY NOT KNOWN." "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.<sup>3</sup>

The setting here is that of a courtroom with almighty God presiding as judge over the accused. And, my friends, we are the accused, every man that has ever lived. It is a supreme court, the most supreme of all courts. And as we look at this text we are going to focus on three things. We are going to see, number one, the universal charge; secondly, the undeniable evidence; and, finally, the uncontested verdict.

To begin with may I remind you that God sees the entire world in basically two categories of people, the Jews and the Gentiles. We see this in verse nine.

He says, "The Jews and Greeks," which is another word for Gentiles. At that time the Greek culture dominated the entire Gentile world so often the word Greek is replaced with Gentile. So the whole world falls under one of these divisions and here the apostle Paul wants the saints in Rome, as well as every person who will ever read this epistle to be able to answer a very simple question, namely, how many Jews and Gentiles are righteous in the eyes of God. How many?

Verse nine we see that all are under sin. This will be the charge and, of course, this is utterly contrary to our biased assessment of ourselves although the evidence of our sinfulness is overwhelming.

As I was thinking about this I was reminded of a time. I believe I was 10 years old. I think I can trace it to that. I was visiting my cousin in Murray, Kentucky and he had a friend who was a little bit older and that friend said, "You know what? Let's sneak into the drive in picture show over here. We know how to get in. There is a place in the fence where you can slip through."

And I remember him even though it was many years ago I remember the idea is that it was a big whole that you could get through and we could sneak to the drive in picture show to see *How the West was Won*.

Well, that was the first actually the first movie I had ever seen, *How the West was Won*. Maybe that dates me a bit. But against my better judgment I agreed that we are going to

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 3:9-20.

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slip in to the drive in picture show. Some of you might not know what that is. That is where they have a great big screen and you would drive up with cars and have a little thing that you would stick in your window and you could hear the show and so forth.

So I followed them through the bushes there that night and we came to a hole in the fence. We squeezed through it and we made our way to a little place where we could sit down and you could hear the sound of the movie and it was this massive picture and suddenly there was a flashlight that shined upon us and a man said to us, “How did you all boys get in here?”

Well, immediately the older boy began to lie about the whole thing. And I knew that I was in big trouble. He was adamantly denying our sin and suddenly the man said, “Well, then what is that all over you?” And he shined the flashlight and I began to look and see that I had tar all over me because on that metal fence they had put tar so that anybody that slipped through there would be easily identified. And I began to look around and I had tar all over me where I had squeezed through that fence.

It is interesting that he made us depart the same way we entered in.

My point is simply this. Like fools, men deny their guilt and their condemnation that they deserve. They simply refuse to admit it even though the obvious is there. The evidence is overwhelming.

So to make sure that we all see it, the apostle Paul spends these next few verses shining a flashlight of divine exposure on the tar of our sin bringing irrefutable evidence of our guilt.

So first we see the universal charge in this court room.

He says in verse nine, “What then?”

In other words, “In light of all that I have said previously about the idolater, about the immoral Gentile as well as the moral Gentiles and even the Jews, that all of their unrighteousness is obvious, that they stand condemned? What then? What shall we conclude?”

And he says, “Are we better than they?”<sup>4</sup> A rhetorical question. “We” refers to himself as well as the Gentile and the Jewish believers that were sitting around in the little churches there that met in Rome.

You know, often religious people tend to consider themselves better than other people, more deserving somehow of divine favor, because, after all, we have this list in our mind of why we are somehow inherently better than other people and therefore God is what?

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 3:9.

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Obligated to bless us. But nothing could be further from the truth. Sometimes even as believers we live under the delusion that we are not really as bad as most, but our condition, frankly, merits a little bit more of God's love than those other people that do all of those terrible things.

Well, all of this is foolishness. Every man is a sinner by nature and the stains of his sin can be sin everywhere in his character and in his conduct. So the charge is made against all men including the apostle Paul and all who are in the church of Rome.

Verse nine, again.

“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.”<sup>5</sup>

Now what does this previous charge, all under sin, really mean? Notice he is not saying they have all sinned. He is not saying they are all sinners, though this is true and he will elaborate on this in great detail later. But rather he says, “They are all under sin.”

The term “under” in the original language υπο (hoop-o’) was a Greek term used to describe more than something that was just beneath or lower than something, but it also carried with it the idea of that which is subservient or under the rule, under the power, under the jurisdiction of something or someone.

And so the previous charge to which Paul is referring is that we are all under the rule. We are all under the power. We are all under the dominion of a tyrant called sin. Sin is our master. We are slaves to it. We live in its dominion and we cannot escape from it.

2 Corinthians 4:4. Satan is “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel.”<sup>6</sup>

1 John 5:19 we read that the whole world of unregenerate people lies in the power of the evil one.

So regardless how religious or moral a person without Christ may appear to be on the outside, the reality is on the inside he is still a slave to sin. He lives in the dominion of Satan and he will serve his flesh and Satan either wittingly or unwittingly.

As a footnote sometimes people will ask, “Well, what about Christians?”

It is interesting. Later Paul says in Romans chapter six verse six that when a man is

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4.

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united to Christ his “old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”<sup>7</sup>

And in verse 11 he says, “So consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts.”<sup>8</sup>

And in verse 18 he says, “Having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”<sup>9</sup>

You see, although Christians have been freed from sin’s bondage, although we have been transferred, Scripture tells us from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of Christ, although we have been taken out of that dominion we can and often we still do allow certain sins to rule us.

Sometimes we place ourselves yet again back into that dominion and we become slaves of the tyrants that we would hate.

And if you continue to do this, eventually you will become bound by that sin according to Romans six verse 16. In fact Jesus said in John 8:34, “Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.”<sup>10</sup>

And Peter tells us in 2 Peter 2:19 that you become “slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.”<sup>11</sup>

And, frankly, eventually whatever sin you allow yourself to be enslaved by begins to define your very character. God will classify you by the name of the sin that you allow to be your master. For example, you look in the Bible you see that those who give themselves over to habitual overeating is called a glutton. A person who is given over to drunkenness is simply called a drunkard. A person who gives himself over to foolishness is called a fool, who gives himself over to anger is called an angry man. A person who gives himself over to immorality is called an immoral person. A person who gives himself over to lying is called a liar and so forth. And even as Christians free from the power of sin, we can still choose to yield ourselves to certain sins and once again allow ourselves to be enslaved by that sin.

I see it in the Church. I see it in this church. In fact, as I was thinking about it the sins that I see many of us enslaved by are selfishness, pride, jealousy, strife, gossip, a general lack of love, discontentment, spiritual apathy and idolatry.

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<sup>7</sup> Romans 6:6.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 6:11.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 6:18.

<sup>10</sup> John 8:34.

<sup>11</sup> 2 Peter 2:19.

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So, indeed, this is the universal charge. All men are under sin. They are under that power, under that sway, under that tyrant. And he moves from there to the undeniable evidence in verses 10 through 18.

Notice in verse 10 he says, “As it is written...”

In other words Paul now is building his case not based on human conjecture or reasoning, but upon the absolute authority of divine revelation that has been written in the Old Testament Scriptures. And these passages are taken from the Old Testament.

And here the apostle goes through a 14 count indictment that is really divided into three separate categories each containing a very unique domain of sin that is obvious to God and should be as obvious to us as the tar was on my little white shirt and all over my face and legs and arms.

Those three categories that he points out with respect to the evidence is seen in our nature, our speech and our behavior.

Notice, first of all, he begins with our nature. Verse 10.

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE.”<sup>12</sup>

Verse 11.

THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”<sup>13</sup>

What an abysmal reality. He says none are righteous.

Think about it. Although all men, even the most wicked person can do some good deeds, none are righteous in terms of the biblical concept, δικαιοσύνη (dik'-ah-yos) it means to be perfectly obedient to the commands of God, to be absolutely innocent, to be faultless before God, to be guiltless, to be perfectly acceptable to God.

None of us can live up to that, only Jesus of Nazareth met that standard. I ask you. Where is the man that meets perfectly the standards of a holy God? Yet Jesus said, “You are to be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Paul continues. He says, “THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Romans 3:10.

<sup>13</sup> Romans 3:11-12.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 3:11.



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The term in the original language means to put together, *sunihmi* (soon-ee'-ay-mee). It means to put together. It means to comprehend.

In other words he is saying, “No one has the ability to somehow have the knowledge of those things which pertain to salvation.”

If I can put it this way, because of man's nature, man is spiritual retarded. He simply cannot grasp the depths of his sins, the holiness of God. Therefore he cannot understand the gospel. He cannot understand how that he needs the imputed righteousness of Christ in order to be justified in order to be reconciled to a holy God.

1 Corinthians two verse 14 says, “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him.”<sup>15</sup>

The vast majority of the world would hear me today and say, “This man is a lunatic. What he is preaching is ridiculous.”

The text goes on to say, “He cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”<sup>16</sup>

Appraised in the original language is *anakrinetai* (an-ak-ree'-no-tai) it is a judicial term. It means that this is a person who is incapable of rendering a decision because they cannot recognize the facts. They cannot discern. They cannot examine. They cannot understand.

Ephesians four and verse 17 Paul describes the unsaved man as those who “walk, in the futility of their mind.”<sup>17</sup>

Their ability to rationally, intellectually process spiritual and moral issues is futile is what he is saying. It is vain. It is useless. You talk to them about spiritual things and two plus two is always five. I don't care how you count it. It is always five.

He goes on to say that they are “darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.”<sup>18</sup>

I don't know if you saw it the other night, but Franklin Graham explained the gospel rather clearly to Bill O'Reilly and Bill O'Reilly is one of the most intelligent men that I know of on television and he simply did not get it. He could not grasp the sinfulness of man and the holiness of God. He had a high view of man and a very low view of God.

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 4:17.

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 4:18.

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You see, biblically we understand that man is a spiritual cadaver. He is dead in his trespasses and sins. He is double blinded by his nature and by Satan.

So, verse 10, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS.”<sup>19</sup>

So naturally he goes on to say, “THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD.”<sup>20</sup>

Recently I talked with a couple of what I would call self appointed entrepreneurial pastors. One of the things I found interesting that in our conversation he... the one guy said, “We have targeted the new generation of God seekers.”

Well, immediately this text came to my mind and I said, “Boy, that must be rather discouraging because Paul tells us in Romans three that there is none who seeks for God.”

And he said, “Oh, no, no, no, no. No, we are growing like crazy.”

And he went on to describe all of that. And I very kindly went ahead to basically say, “Has it ever occurred to you that perhaps you are offering them a god of their own liking, that they are running from the true God in exchange for a false god?”

And I talked about that for a little bit and I could tell that was horribly offensive and I wanted to be kind and so the subject quickly changed.

Dear friends, biblically we are commanded to preach the gospel to all men, not to our favorite zip code where the demographics somehow match our cultural bent and everybody affirms you and shares your values. And then to understand according to John 6:37 that all that, “All that the Father gives Me,” Jesus said, “shall come to Me.”<sup>21</sup>

The initiative is from the Father. And then the Father will draw them unto himself and Jesus said, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him.”<sup>22</sup>

See, it has nothing to do, once again, with marketing or targeting zip codes or the technique of the sower. You go to the parable of the sower, Jesus didn't say you have got to wear a certain wardrobe, you have got to have a certain hairstyle. You have got to have a certain technique here. You have got to have a musical show and some light extravaganza, et cetera, et cetera. He didn't say any of that. We are not to develop some hybrid gospel seed that is going to grow in every soil regardless.

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<sup>19</sup> Romans 3:10-11.

<sup>20</sup> Romans 3:11.

<sup>21</sup> John 6:37.

<sup>22</sup> John 6:44.

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You see, friends, it is the message, not the message. I am sorry, the methods that is important. Is the message, not the methods that is important. What the Lord wants us to do is unleash the gospel.

Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.”<sup>23</sup>

And then God will draw those who would never seek him on their own. And it is amazing to hear the stories of how God has done that with so many of you, so many of the people that are listening to me right now on the internet.

In verse 12 he goes on and he says, “ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE.”<sup>24</sup>

In other words, they have all deviated from the right way to go through the wrong way. You see, again, Scripture tells us, “There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death,”<sup>25</sup> Proverbs 14:1 and 16:25.

And man, because of his nature will always choose the broad way where all of the herd is going that leads to destruction, not the narrow way that leads to life.

He goes on and he says, “TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS.”<sup>26</sup>

The Greek word here that is used translates a Word that speaks of spoiled milk, sour milk, that you have to throw away. This is the way may has become. He is useless. He is worthless, that which is unprofitable and needs to be discarded or burned like a dead tree that is unable to produce its fruit, the unregenerate man is of no use to God.

He goes on. He says, “HERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD.”<sup>27</sup> And “good” here is a term that speaks of the course of a man’s life that is characterized by moral integrity and consistently living according to the perfect standard of God’s goodness. No one does this. He reinforces it and says, “THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”<sup>28</sup>

So the evidence substantiating the charge that all men are under sin is here presented beginning with God’s testimony of man’s very nature.

But then notice how his charge is further corroborated by the undeniable evidence in our speech beginning in verse 13.

He says, “THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Romans 1:16.

<sup>24</sup> Romans 3:12.

<sup>25</sup> Proverbs 14:12; 16:25.

<sup>26</sup> Romans 3:12.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Romans 3:13.

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Now, friends, this adds new meaning to bad breath. Jesus made it clear that the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, Matthew 15:18.

And Isaiah, you will recall, stood in the presence of a holy God and he says, “Woe is me! for I am undone;”<sup>30</sup> Literally I am disintegrating. “[For] I am a man of unclean lips.”<sup>31</sup>

Now why would he say that? Because he knows that he is the presence of a holy God and that which is in his heart will come forth from his lip.

You see, the stench of a rotting corpse in an open grave is perhaps the most vile of all odors. And the imagery here is that even as an open grave reveals the rancid contents within, so, too, the throat reveals the rottenness of an unregenerate heart, a heart that is so wretched, so vile, so filled with loathsome thoughts that it can be likened to a decomposing corpse.

The speech of the wicked, you might say, makes God gag.

Cursing, slander, gossip, foolishness, flattery, deceit, immorality, on and on it goes. Fools deny God, Scripture tells us. They blaspheme God. They mock sin.

Proverbs 10:14. “The mouth of the foolish is near destruction.”<sup>32</sup>

Verse 32. “The mouth of the wicked... is perverted.”<sup>33</sup>

Proverbs 18 verse seven. “A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.”<sup>34</sup>

So Paul goes on in verse 13. He says, “WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,”<sup>35</sup> *doliov* (dol-ee-o’-o) in the original language. It is an interesting term. It carries the idea of a decoy, like a hunter would use to bring in ducks or whatever or luring prey with a baited trap or a baited hook.

And the imperfect tense of the verb here tells us that this is a constant, continual, habitual action of those without Christ.

You see, the natural man is a habitual liar. He is a habitual fraud. He is an habitual deceiver. He will act most of the time in his best interest. You might say that by nature

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<sup>30</sup> Isaiah 6:5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Proverbs 10:14.

<sup>33</sup> Proverbs 10:32.

<sup>34</sup> Proverbs 18:7.

<sup>35</sup> Romans 3:13.

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we are all used car salesmen or, worse yet, politicians. Or if you want to go to the very bottom of the rung, think of prosperity preachers, people who deceive others.

You see, we naturally lie to others because we lie to ourselves.

Verse 13. He goes on. He says, “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS.”<sup>36</sup>

If you know anything about poisonous snakes you know that they have a sack of poison under their lips so that when their fangs are extended outward the fangs literally cause this sack to squirt deadly venom into the hollow fangs and into the victim. I have been bitten on the boot several times by poisonous snakes and seen just a little slight hole there and seen the venom running down the boot. It makes you appreciate boots at those times.

But, friends, the most deadly bite any of us will ever experience is that of another human being, those who speak harm against us, those who would lie and deceive especially false religionists.

He goes on verse 14. He says, “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS.”<sup>37</sup>

Cursing speaks of malediction or slander or extreme defamation with intent to publicly destroy a person. We see this all the time on television. Some of you have experienced that. I have experienced that. Some of the emails that I get from people speak loudly of this. Not only cursing but bitterness which carries the idea of extreme hatred with the intent of doing wickedness to somebody.

You see, as we look at this, it is fascinating that it is not so much what a man does as what he is.

Notice it says, “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS.”<sup>38</sup>

Think of it. Though a person may seldom speak, his mouth is full of this, of cursing and bitterness. And the point is, given the right context this is the stuff that is going to spew forth.

Psalm 64 verse two David was well acquainted with this kind of person and he asked the Lord to hide him from, quote:

...those who do iniquity, Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword.  
They aimed bitter speech as their arrow, To shoot from concealment at the

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<sup>36</sup> Romans 3:13.

<sup>37</sup> Romans 3:14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

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blameless; Suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear. They hold fast to themselves an evil purpose; They talk of laying snares secretly.<sup>39</sup>

Who among us has not been the victim of this kind of an attack? And who among us has not been such an attacker? So he speaks of our nature as well as our speech. And then, thirdly, our behavior.

Verse 15. “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD.”<sup>40</sup>

This speaks of a man’s predisposition to murder. Think about it. Unlike any other species on the planet, a human child can get so violently angry that he would kill his parent if he could. Sometimes later on they actually do.

Human history is filled with the savagery of human beings, humans torturing one another, committing unimaginable violence from wars to domestic violence, acts so heinous, so gruesome as to defy explanation.

You realize abortions occur at the rate of 1.6 million every year? There are four infants killed every minute, one every 15 seconds. Abortion kills the equivalent of the population of the city of Houston or the state of Nebraska every year.

So, indeed, “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD.”<sup>41</sup>

He goes on to say, “DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS.”<sup>42</sup>

The term “destruction” in the original language, *suntrimma* (soon-trim’-mah) is a term that speaks of that which is broken or shattered, that which is fractured, some great calamity, something that causes complete ruin or destruction. Think of it like the category five tornado that came through Birmingham this past week. Only think about that relationally.

Not only destruction, but he says misery, a term that means hardship, a term that speaks of great trouble, again, great calamity.

Think about this. Think of the utter destruction and the misery that most people of the world live in because of the deception of false religious systems. Think of, for example, the women who live under tyranny of Islam who are treated worse than dogs.

Think of the utter destruction and misery brought about by sexual abuse here just in the United States, spousal abuse, human trafficking of women for sex slaves, et cetera.

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<sup>39</sup> Psalm 64:2-5.

<sup>40</sup> Romans 3:15.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Romans 3:16.

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You see, as we read here in this text, people without Christ have within them the seeds of all manner of wretchedness, so much so that they leave a trail of destruction and misery in the paths of their lives.

Think of all of the shattered marriages. Some of you are from those, broken homes, devastated lives from alcohol and drug abuse. Think of the scourge of terrorism. And here the last few years we hear the scourge of pirates of the coast of Africa that hold innocent people for ransom.

Statistics abound indicating that we have more murders committed in any one of our major cities than soldiers who are being killed in our wars. Millions of women around the world are raped, millions and millions of women are abandoned by their husbands, left with children that they can't feed or protect resulting in generations of poverty, pain and disease. Hundreds of millions of people are killed in wars.

I was reading the other day that 66 million approximately died in World War II and when I was in Russia I went to the war museum. It is a huge place there in Moscow and in one place they had a hall that was almost the length of a football field, almost that size. And there were literally millions of dog tags hanging down from that. They said that they lost 20 million people in World War II alone.

Verse 17. “AND THE PATH OF PEACE HAVE THEY NOT KNOWN.”<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, dear friends, there will never be an peace until the Prince of Peace comes and establishes it when he returns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

An unknown author wrote one of the most compelling and powerful descriptions of sin that I have ever read. It was written in 1877. It goes like this.

Quote, “It is a debt, a burden, a thief, a sickness, a leprosy, a plague, a poison, a serpent, a sting. Everything that man hates it is. A load of curses and calamities beneath whose crushing most intolerable pressure the whole creation groaneth.”

The writer went on to say, “Who is this hoary sexton that digs man a grave? Who is the painted temptress that steals his virtue? Who is the murderess that destroys his life? Who is this sorceress that first deceives and then damns his soul? Sin, who with icy breath blights the fair blossoms of youth. Who breaks the hearts of parents? Who brings old men's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave? Sin. Who by a more hideous metamorphosis than Ovid even fancied, changes gentle children into vipers, tender mothers into monsters and their fathers into worse than Herods, the murderers of their own innocence? Sin. Who casts the apple of discord on household hearts? Who likes the torch of war and bears it blazing over trembling lands? Who by divisions in the Church rends Christ seamless robe? Sin. Who is this Delilah that sings the Nazarite asleep and delivers up the

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<sup>43</sup> Romans 3:17.

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strength of God into the hands of the uncircumcised? Who with winning smiles on her face, honey flattery on her tongue stands in the door to offer the sacred rites of hospitality and when suspicion sleeps, treacherously pierces our temples with a nail? What fair siren is this who seated on a rock by the deadly pool smiles to deceive, sings to lure, kisses to betray and flings her arm around our neck to leap with us into perdition? Sin. Who turns the soft and gentlest heart to stone? Who hurls reason from her lofty throne and impels sinners, mad as Gadarene swine down the precipice into a lake of fire? Sin,” end quote.

And why all of this?

Paul answers it in verse 18. Because, “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”<sup>44</sup>

Scripture tells us that, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,”<sup>45</sup> but that fools despise this.

You see, unregenerate man fears all manner of things. He fears embarrassment. He fears conflict. He fears poverty, rejection and so forth. But the one thing he does not fear is God. He cares nothing about what God requires nor does he even in his heart really believe that God will ever judge him. He suppresses the truth in unrighteousness, we are told. He thinks highly of himself. He loves his sin more than the truth. In fact, the full, quote, from Psalm 36:1, that Paul here quotes reads this way.

“Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart.”<sup>46</sup> But it goes on to say, But “There is no fear of God before his eyes.”<sup>47</sup>

I might add that fearing God really includes three things. It first of all includes sheer terror. Were you not terrified of the judgment of God when you came to a saving knowledge of Christ, when you realized that you truly had violated God’s law and that you were worthy of the wrath of God and that unless you repented, you would spend an eternity in hell? Absolutely. That is sheer terror.

But the fear of God is also includes a submissive fear for the believer, a fear of divine chastening. Doesn’t that motivate you to obedience? It does to me.

In Proverbs 16 verse six we read, “By the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil.”<sup>48</sup>

I want to divide or to avoid divine chastening at all costs. I hope you do as well.

Why? Because I fear God’s discipline in my life.

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<sup>44</sup> Romans 3:18.

<sup>45</sup> Psalms 11;10; Proverbs 9:10.

<sup>46</sup> Psalm 36:1.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Proverbs 16:6.



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But there is a third kind of fear and that is a reverential awe kind of fear.

You see, that is at the heart of worship. For we are just absolutely speechless before the attributes of our holy and glorious God who has provided for us a way to be reconciled to himself through Christ.

So the evidence is in. Whether you look at our nature, our speech, our behavior, every area of human life is contaminated by sin. That tar is undeniable. It is all over us. We are guilty. Therefore Paul will say, “All are under sin.”

Well, having presented the universal charge and the undeniable evidence, Paul closes with, thirdly, the uncontested verdict. Notice in verse 19.

“Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God.”<sup>49</sup>

You see, here he is saying that every human being is under the authority of his Creator. He is saying that every man is accountable to God and that God has rendered his verdict. We the accused stand guilty.

And will you notice that the verdict is uncontested? The accused stands in silence. The text says, “That every mouth may be closed.”<sup>50</sup>

Why?

Verse 20.

“Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”<sup>51</sup>

In other words, man cannot meet the demands of the law.

Can we love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves? No, we cannot do that the way he would have us do that. You see, our nature will not allow us to do that. We see it in our speech. We see it in our behavior. Whether it is in secret or in public, the things that we do are an abomination to God. Therefore, man is utterly doomed. He is condemned. He is in desperate need of a righteousness that is not his own, a righteousness from God that Paul will now begin to unveil. So all of the dark and gloomy things of our condemnation and our sin will now move into the glorious reality that there is hope. There is hope in Christ.

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<sup>49</sup> Romans 3:19.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Romans 3:20.

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And so I hope that you will continue to go with me through this study rather than feeling that we always have to be so overwhelmed by these difficult truths. But, again, the more you are amazed at your sin, the more you will be amazed by God's grace.

Dear friend, I hope you will examine your heart. May I ask you? Do you fear God? If so, then you will trust in Christ as Savior and he will save you from the dreadful consequence of your sin. Oh, my dreadful sin and shame, my guilt I will confess. But Christ has gladly bore my blame and granted me his righteousness. Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Let's pray together.

*Father, even though these are difficult words and certainly before you opened our eyes to the truth of our own sinfulness, they were words that caused us to hate you. But, Lord, we recognize them as true. The verdict is in. Indeed, we are guilty. But, Lord, we rejoice that we have trusted in your provision for salvation. So now because of the righteousness of Christ, we have been cleansed. We have been cleansed by his blood and you no longer see our sin, but his righteousness. Oh, God, how I pray that by your convicting work you will speak to every heart that may be within the sound of my voice this day and convict them of their sin that they might run to the cross and be saved. And experience the miracle of the new birth, the righteousness of Christ. For it is in his name that we pray. Amen.*

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