

“THE FINAL VERDICT: GUILTY AS CHARGED!”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 3:9-20

Introduction.

We have been using a legal metaphor to describe what Paul is doing in Romans 1 to 3. As the prosecutor in this trial Paul first brought charges against the *Gentiles in Chapter one*. That was easy, their sins were public sins, outward, dirty, well known to everyone.

He cataloged their sins for us, suppressing the truth, idolatry, dishonoring their bodies with dishonorable passions, and maybe worst of all not only doing all these bad things but approving of others who do them.

Then to the shock and surprise of the *Jews, in Chapter two*, Paul turned his prosecution against them for their private and secret sins, the sins of hypocrisy and self-righteousness. They who disapproved of others' bad behavior and sins were just as guilty as they were.

Paul did say the Jews had some advantages over the Gentiles. Chief among them was God's choosing them and entrusting them with His Word.

The bad news for the Jews was, contrary to what they thought, the covenant promises of God didn't exempt them from their responsibility for their sin. They sinned and lost their advantage. Their sin made them accountable to God and under His judgment.

Now we come to the final part of Paul's case. In a legal trial this is called the summation, when the lawyer makes his closing arguments tying together the facts, the evidence, the merits of his case.

Paul gives the final verdict, both the Jews and the Gentiles are guilty as charged, based on irrefutable and undeniable evidence which we drive home by appealing to the highest authority of all, the Word of God. Then he ends saying no one can argue with God because no one is justified by anything they say or do in the sight of God.

Are we better off?

Are we better? That's a game we all play, everyone one of us. Who is better? Who do we look down on? We never stop thinking about our superiority.

Whites look down on blacks, US is better than Canada, Dutch look down on Germans, Reformed look down on Baptist, Bellingham looks down on Lynden, Lynden looks down on Ferndale.

Remember last week I made a joke about the Canadians not looking down on anyone, they are so nice. At ferry terminal on Monday in Canada the guy asked where we were from, I said Washington, and I hope that is OK. He said, oh that's great, but if we were from Alberta, that's different. So it turns out BC feels moral superiority to Alberta.

Ford or Chevy, diesel or hybrid, green tractors or orange or blue, who has the best-looking lawn.

LCS or Lynden. Balcony or main floor. Older siblings, younger siblings.

Now there is a new variation on this game, called virtue signaling, claiming superiority by our social conscience or moral or political correctness, by our positions on various cultural issues.

People with reusable shopping bags who shop at Trader Joes are superior to people who use single use plastic bags and shop at Food Pavilion. People who have stopped drinking Bud Light. Recycling, composting, organic, cage free eggs. We are all so full of pride.

Virtue used to require work, self-sacrifice, self-discipline, not just talking about it.

We all try to establish our moral superiority to everyone else, our pecking order. The sexes, races, nations, skin color, education, career advancement. This is who we are, this is what we do, and we never stop doing this. Every group tries to get one up on every other group.

Paul says stop it, give it up, none of us is better or morally superior to anyone else. We are all of us sinners, every last one of us, and we are all facing the same Judge and the same verdict. What moral advantage are you trying to get over someone else? What good will it do you? Why?

All are under the power of sin.

We are *all* under the power of sin. Everyone, no exceptions.

Not, there are sinners among the Gentiles and the Jews. All, every last one of them is a sinner. Out of all the billions of people who have lived on this planet, you will not find a single one who has not wandered from the right path and gone astray. Except Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Sin, not sins.

It's not we have all done sins, we all sin. We don't just do sins, we are sinful by very nature, conceived in sin. It is part of our DNA. We are not innocent victims. Sin makes us want to do what we ought not to do.

Under the power of sin.

Notice the preposition. Under the power of sin.

We are OK saying we are all sinners. That is easy to say, we are fine with that. What we don't want to say about ourselves is we are under sin. Why under?

Under means under the dominion of sin, under the power of sin. Under sin means to be in bondage to it. We are enslaved to sin, it is our master. Scripture refers to sin as ruling or exercising lordship over us. The porn epidemic is just one of many examples.

We don't want to admit our weakness, our lack of self-control, self-discipline. It is shameful, and it is true.

Sin is master over Jews and Gentiles, over all of us. In Romans 6 Paul says we are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. Those are the only two options.

Why do we suppress the truth? Because we are under sin.

Why do we worship idols? Because we are under sin.

Why do we approve of others' sin? Because we are under sin.

Why do we sit in judgment on the sins of others? Because we are under sin.

We have a moral infection that runs through our entire body. We are radically corrupted to the core of our being. The heart of every good man is still bad.

If sin were the color blue, we would all be shades of blue. Every part of us might not be the deepest, brightest blue, but every part of us would be some shade of blue, there would be no part of us that was not blue at all.

As it is written.

Paul has one more piece of evidence, one more expert witness. Paul saves his best argument for last, his strongest case, the authority above all other authorities, God Himself.

Paul quotes seven Scripture texts from Psalms, Proverbs and Isaiah.

This is what being under sin looks like.

In verses 10-12, being under sin ruins our relationship with God.

In verses 13-17, being under sin ruins our relationship with each other.

In other words, being under sin leads us to break the two great commandments, love God and love our neighbor. This is a depressing description, but it is honest and real.

Being under sin ruins our relationship with God, vss. 10-12

There is none who is righteous, there is none who has any righteousness in him, nothing good. There is not a single person who can stand before the Judge of the universe and claim to have any righteousness that meets the righteous demands of a holy God and His holy law.

Compared to each other we might say one person is more righteous than another, but that's not the standard. Compared to God, compared to the righteousness of Christ, we are not even close.

Sin has turned us not just from God, but against God. We are rebels against all righteousness.

This is natural man, without the benefit of grace. Paul's point he is driving toward, is that without God's righteousness we are utterly without hope.

There is *none who understands*, and the proof of their lack of understanding is there are none who seek God.

Sin makes it impossible to know God and seek Him. All men are naturally ignorant of God and spiritual things, and have no interest in either. The unspiritual cannot understand the things of the Spirit, without the Spirit.

When you separate learning from knowing God and God's will and God's ways, all you have left is ignorance. What does it profit a man to have the world, to learn the world, but lose his soul.

Knowing God is what makes us human and humane. Ignorance of God makes us inhumane, makes us selfish, living for ourselves, seeking just our own interests, loving ourselves while treating others with contempt.

No one seeks God.

Mankind does not search for God or for truth. Chapter one told us we suppress the truth and we worship idols.

No one seeks God without God's grace. We are all self-seeking until God makes us God-seeking. Most either flee far from God, or seek God in the wrong way or in the wrong things.

No one comes to the Father, unless the Father draws Him. So pray for that, pray for God to seek us. Pray for God to open our blind eyes and deaf ears. Pray for the Holy Spirit to quicken our hearts and minds.

None who does good, not even one.

What happens when you remove God and the knowledge of God from our purpose and goal, from our aim in life?

In a word, worthless. Worthless to God, to others and to themselves. Because of sin we cannot fulfill the purpose of our being created in the image of God. We are like fish that can't swim or birds that can't fly, worthless, useless.

Look at the free fall of our culture. The further we move away from God the more we become immoral, corrupt, crass, foul, inhumane, disgusting, violent, lustful, greedy, dishonorable, degrading, rebellious, doing in public what used to be kept in private.

Six times Paul drives home the universality of sin, the radical depravity of our souls.

None is righteous. Not even one. No one understands, no one seeks, no one does good, none, none, none. Being under sin cuts us off and separates us from God.

Being under sin ruins our relationship with each other, vss. 13-17.

Being under sin destroys all our relationships through our throat, tongue, lips, mouth, by turning our mouths into instruments of death, places of poison, full of toxic venom.

Out of the heart the mouth speaks. Out of a bad heart, the mouth spews poison.

The universality of sin is nowhere more evident than in our mouths. We all sin with our tongues every day. Little bits of poison drip from our lips all the time. Our speech has deadly effects, killing, hurting, wounding, biting, cursing, ruining reputations or character. Even nice sounding words can be full of malice, envy, flattery, falsehood.

Psalm 64:3 who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows,

Feet swift to shed blood.

Our sinfulness is not just with our words but with our actions. We sin by our violence, our injustice. History proves how swift humans are to fight, kill, destroy.

People who hate God, destroy everything around them, and then themselves. Then they can't figure out why they are miserable and life is so hard, and they have no peace.

There is no fear of God before their eyes, vs. 18.

Being under sin means there is no fear of God in our hearts.

Paul sums up the primary source of all evil. There is no fear of God. Without a fear of God, there is no restraint from evil. Without respect for authority, there is no restraint from doing whatever we want. When God is cast off, there is only wickedness.

Remember what happened when God is ignored, rejected, exchanged for a lie and for idols. God removes the restraints, God removes the bridle, God hands us over to every dishonorable, degrading passion and debased mind to do depraved things, things worse and worse.

When we are left to ourselves, this is what we become and are. Without the grace of God and the renewing and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit this is what we are.

We see it on the news, we see it in the streets, this is our fallen world in sin and rebellion, without the fear of God, without the knowledge of God.

Vss. 19-20, mouth stopped, mouth shut up.

This is Paul's conclusion, the final guilty verdict. Because we are guilty there is nothing we can say before God. Keep your mouth shut, like Job who said, "I laid my hand on my mouth."

Every excuse is gone, every evasion, every shifting of blame.

Don't try to say it wasn't your fault, don't blame your childhood, your terrible parents, their divorce, the abuse from a relative, your dysfunctional family, lack of knowing, some tragedy, your unfair disadvantages, that you are a victim, you tried your best, you are better than lots of other people. Your problem is the same as every other human being, you are by nature and choice a rebel against God, you have committed treason against your creator.

If a man fulfilled the righteousness of the law, if a man did all that God commanded, he might have something to say before the judgment seat of God, he might be able to answer God.

There is a time in a courtroom for one to make a defense, to clear himself of any accusations. This is not that time. The point of all these quotes from the OT is to shut up every mouth, Jew and Gentile, us included. The whole world is guilty before God.

Habakkuk 2:20 The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.

This is the final conclusion of everything since 1:18.

By works of the law no flesh shall be justified. We contribute absolutely nothing toward it.

If God doesn't provide the righteousness by which we can be justified, then all is lost, we are without hope, and there will be no salvation from sin. Our hearts are desperately wicked, we are without excuse, and without hope except for the grace of God and His righteousness revealed in Christ Jesus.

No man will be justified by any other means. I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His grace alone is the power of God to give us victory over the power of sin. Grace greater than all our sin.