

---

*“Every Mouth Stopped”*

ROMANS 3:9-20

JANUARY 15, 2023

PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

---

## BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

Think you’re a pretty good person? Paul doesn’t think so! In this week’s passage in Romans, Paul issues the death knell to any hope you or I might have of standing before God on our own virtue. This is so necessary because unless we understand the severity of our disease, we won’t accept the cure. Watch as we unpack Romans 3:9-20.

## INTRODUCTION

I had a sobering experience this week when I visited a local retirement home. After a sweet visit with our people there I stepped over to a man waiting to talk with me. I’ve never met him but I happily engaged in conversation with him, grieving with him over the recent loss of his wife. After connecting with him for some time, I asked him, “What do you believe about Jesus?” He stammered a little and then began to tell me how lucky he was in this life, how blessed, how he felt he had already hit the jackpot. Then he told me that he had been a coach and invested so much in those young people’s lives, who still call him today.

This encounter demonstrates that if you ask a person why God should allow them to spend eternity with Him in Heaven, almost everyone will appeal to some sort of works-based righteousness. They’d talk about their contribution to society through their job in public service, or as a businessman their innovations that made life better for others, or their charitable giving.

They’d say they tried to be a good parent. Or they’d talk about how they love their country. Or maybe they’d just say, I hope God sees that I’ve tried to do more good than bad. Despite all of this, they’ll be condemned in their sin.

As we near the end of our first major section in Romans, Paul is going to deliver the death blow to any aspirations of standing justified before God by our own virtue. No one is going to be able to utter a word in self-defense when the truth of their lives is exposed.

This is so necessary because no one wants the cure unless they realize the severity of their disease. Let’s read what Paul wrote in Romans 3:9-20.

## 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: “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.

### ARE WE ANY BETTER OFF?

In **verse 9** Paul asks, **What then?** What do we make of this? We have the great advantage of receiving the “oracles of God” but in the end most Jews rejected the Gospel and Jesus as Messiah. They stand condemned. So, **Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all.**

In Romans 1:18-2:29 Paul laid out the indictments. Now he tells us that his point was to establish the charge that everyone is lost in sin, bar none. **We have already charged that all...**the whole world is hopelessly lost, exchanging the truth of God for a lie. They’ll receive the wrath of God.

The Jews who had the great advantage of receiving the Word of God, also deserve the wrath of God. They have hard hearts, and their religion is superficial. They’re **no better off** than the pagan world.

Romans 1-3 summarized: Everyone is condemned. Everyone is lost. Everyone is subject to God’s wrath, because **all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.**

### NONE IS RIGHTEOUS

As if he had not already solidified the charge, next he unloads from scripture: in **verse 10 as it is written: “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.”** Eight different ways Paul repeats how universally corrupt and worthless mankind is.

I can just see him pacing the room as he speaks aloud, carried along by the Holy Spirit. He’s spitting fire as his mind scrolls through the rolodex of scripture and what it says about the human condition. He begins with Psalm 53:1-3.

*“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand who seek after God. They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.” Psalm 53:1-3*

At what point did this assessment get turned into the idea that man is generally good? Upon what basis does anyone have to imagine that they’re basically good? Paul continues...

<sup>13</sup> **“Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.”** Everything they say is death and deception. *For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue. Psalm 5:9*

**“The venom of asps is under their lips.”** (Psalm 140:3) Their words are poisonous, speaking death rather than life. They tear down, rather than build up.

<sup>14</sup> **“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”** (Psalm 10:7) They only criticize, complain, and bicker.

<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.”** All they want to do is seek whatever puts them ahead at whatever cost. They’ll go to war, they’ll destroy anyone who gets in their way. They leave a trail of tears and blood. Ruthless, lawless, & selfish.

*“Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways. The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace.” Isaiah 59:7-8*

No wonder Jesus called the religious leaders a brood of vipers! Snakes that they were.

<sup>18</sup> **“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”** They are gods in their own minds. They do not care what God says in His Word. They will decide what is right and what is wrong. *“Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.” Psalm 36:1*

This comes from a place deep down inside us. At our very core we are wicked. I think this is where Paul speaks from when he asked the rhetorical question in *Romans 7:24, Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

### THIS IS WRITTEN FOR YOU!

<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.**

Paul is like, “Don’t get this twisted, these verses are for you, the offspring of Abraham. The Law was written to you.” Remember Romans 3:1-8? That’s the great advantage of the Jews, they received the oracles of God. It’s a great advantage, if you heed it. But you don’t and never have and never could.

Don’t think that these things written in **the Law**, scriptures, only apply to the world out there. It’s written for **those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped** – that there would be no excuse uttered before God.

You presume that the Word of God condemns only those outside the walls of your community. The people who disagree with you. The ones who value different things than you. The ones who speak, act, & live differently than you.

It does condemn them. But the reality is it condemns you, too.

They are accountable because God’s invisible attributes are manifest in the creation. (Romans 1:20) You are accountable because you have received the oracles of God; you have been told what is right and you’ve rejected it. **The whole world will be held accountable to God.**

### THE LAW REVEALS SIN

**Verse 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.**

The Law reveals sin, not goodness. What is at our core is depravity, not virtue. Receiving and reading and learning the Law shows us how far we are from God, not how lucky God is to have us near. If there were good in us, the Word would expose it. Instead, it exposes our darkness.

And if we allow it to expose our darkness, then we will see it clearly. And when we see it clearly, we can respond faithfully. And the faithful response is not to justify ourselves by doing better and trying to be good. We are not good. There is nothing good in us. Rather, it is just as I concluded last week: looking to Jesus who is good. He gives us His righteousness and we *“are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Romans 3:24*

### EVERY MOUTH STOPPED

Paul’s final concern before he launched into the grace of God in verse 21 is **that every mouth...be stopped.**

To stop the mouths of the objectors and the self-righteous and the moralists and the “yeah-but-I’s” of the religious world. To stop the mouths of the people who would open them in self-defense.

Who would rebut every assault on their character, defending it with trite cliques and anecdotes of their best intentions and charitable highlights.

To stop the mouths of the would-be judges of the world who look out upon the dying and lost people around them with planks of condemnation in their eyes. Who cheer when the sins of others are exposed and hiss and recoil violently when it is theirs in the spotlight.

To stop the mouths of people who stand proudly before God and thank Him that they are not like the sinners of the world.

To stop the mouths of the brother who stayed at home while the prodigal son went and spent 1/3 of the estate on reckless living. The brother who complained to his father and sulked outside the home while his father threw his lost, now found brother a great feast. To stop the mouth from uttering their complaints to God for His graciousness to others.

To stop the mouths of the those whose lips honor God while their hearts are far from Him.

To stop the mouths of the rock-yielding accusers of the set-up adulterous woman.

To stop the mouths of everyone who thinks they're entitled to anything from God except just condemnation.

Every mouth stopped, the end of all self-justification. Silence in the courtroom. You have been exposed. The evidence speaks for itself: **none is righteous, no not one.** Not even you.

Every mouth stopped...to hear. To hear grace. Grace for you. To hear life...life eternal and life abundant.

To hear love, unconditional...and mercy, unending.

To hear redemption unfailing.

To hear reconciliation with God. To hear the savingly powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To hear the Father's heart for you. The call of our Heavenly Father to return to the God who formed you in the womb. The call of the rescuer searching for His lost sheep. Stilling the storms, calming the winds, setting the demoniac in his right mind, restoring sight to the blind, the lame leaping, the wounded bound up, the dead raised and rising, Himself, from the dead.

Behold the Savior, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Repent and be forgiven of all your sin. Let Jesus make you clean. Hear His call to come.

Having heard, having come, to speak. To speak words of life to others, kind words like honey, gracious words seasoned with salt. To speak the gospel to sinners who are as hopelessly lost as you were.

To beat the hedges and go into the highways and bi-ways and invite the guests into the banquet of our God, that His house may be filled with the least and the lowly, the undeserving and the unexpected, the broken-hearted and the hard-headed.

And speaking, to hope. To hope that you, of all people, wretched man or woman that you once were, could be used to do anything good at all.

To hope in the Lord who allows you to carry the treasure of the gospel in your vessel of clay. To hope that what Satan took from God, you are being used to take back...to the glory of God!

To hope that Heaven will be populated by people because you, the once no-good-non-seeker-of-God-grave-throated-no-fear-of-God rebel, would have the blessed capacity

to use your mouth which once uttered curses and bitterness, with venom under your lips, to speak a message that brings a human being to peace with God and eternal life.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bruce, F. F. (2008). *Romans: An introduction and commentary*. Inter-Varsity Press.
- Doriani, D. M. (2021). *Romans*. P&R Publishing.
- Hughes, Kent R. (1991). *Romans – Righteousness from Heaven*. Crossway.
- Kruse, Colin G. (2012). *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Longenecker, Richard N. (2016). *The Epistle to the Romans*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- MacArthur, John. (1991). *Romans 1-8*. Moody Publishers.
- MacArthur, John. (1991). *Romans 9-16*. Moody Publishers.
- Moo, Douglas J. (2018). *The Letter to the Romans, Second Edition*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Mounce, Robert. (1995). *Romans*. B&H Publishing.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. (2018). *Romans, Second Edition*. Baker Publishing Group.
- Sproul, R. C. (2019). *The Righteous Shall Live By Faith – Romans*. Ligonier Ministries