



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 9



THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN

^{3:9} What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. ¹⁰ As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. ¹² They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; ¹⁴ "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways; ¹⁷ And the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes." ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:9-20^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. DOES ADVANTAGE MAKE BETTER? (3:9)
- II. THERE IS NONE (3:10-12)
- III. INCAPABLE OF GOOD EXPRESSION (3:13-14)
- IV. SELF-SEEKING (3:15-17)
- V. NO FEAR (3:18)
- VI. THE MINISTRY OF THE LAW (3:19)
- VII. KNOWLEDGE OF SIN, NOT JUSTIFICATION (3:20)

that the provision of all external advantages does not enable man to become righteous. Time will not produce a righteous man, not will information from heaven itself.

If men are prone to philosophize on this matter, the Spirit will now show us that there is not a single righteous man upon earth—not a one that

sought the Lord, or achieved goodness. This is a Divine assessment of our race. It deals with the root of our problem, which is sin. It confirms that sin has defiled the entirety of the natural man, and the totality of humanity.

Men have chosen to so systematize theology that truth has been robbed of its power. Thus, human expressions like "total depravity" and "free will" are debated among men, and sharp divisions formed between those who have embraced the name of the Lord.

The Spirit does not approach the subject of sinfulness and the need for righteousness in that manner. Rather, He shows us the universal result of sin. He does not speak of man's capability, but of his lack of achievement. The fact of universal *guilt* is proclaimed, not general ability. **The Scripture will show that universal guilt confirms spiritual impotence.** Men may affirm that the will is free, and that man is capable of recovering himself. However, such

Because of the great difficulty involved in convincing men of their need of the righteousness of God, the Spirit argues the point extensively. He has proved that man left to himself cannot become righteous. He has also confirmed

affirmations are not made by the Lord. He will show that Divine intervention is an absolute requirement. The need of a Savior, grace, and deliverance is declared. A righteousness from God is also set before us as a necessity. There has never been an age or a people that was above these requirements.

From the very moment sin entered into the world, the need for a Redeemer and a righteousness from God also entered. Adam and Eve, having committed a single transgression, needed a Savior just as much as those in our century. **It is the nature of sin that demands a Savior and a righteousness from God, not the amount of it.**

A NEW GENERATION

The text before us will confirm that everything traced back to Adam is defiled. In fact, the order of Adam has been rejected, totally and without exception. If a Savior is given, He cannot come from Adam's lineage. If an individual is accepted by God, it cannot be in Adam, it must be in another. Because humanity is contaminated at its source (Adam), it is necessary that a "Second Man" man appear, from whom a new "generation" can be developed.

Jesus is that "Second Man," and the "Last Adam" as well (1 Cor 15:45,47). In Him, and as regarding acceptance, Adam's lineage is brought to a conclusion. From Adam to Jesus, the lineage was through the flesh (Lk 3:23-38). But Jesus "was taken away. And who can speak of His descendants? For He was cut off from the

land of the living"^{NIV} (Isa 53:8). Abraham had fleshly offspring, but Jesus did not! This was the very Scripture that intrigued the Ethiopian eunuch. "In His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth"(Acts 8:33). The idea is that His life was "taken" before He could have any offspring.

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Jesus is "Everlasting Father" (Isa 9:6). Through Him, God is begetting another race, pure and righteous. From the fleshly point of view, He appears barren—without progeny. But this is not the case at all. He is the One of whom Isaiah prophesied. "Sing, O barren, You who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, You who have not labored with child! **For more are the children of the desolate Than the children of the married woman,**" says the LORD. Enlarge the place of your tent, And let

them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, And strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left, And your descendants will inherit the nations, And make the desolate cities inhabited" (Isa 54:1-3). These shouts of praise immediately follow the Messianic prophecy of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

This is fundamental doctrine, and will be developed at length in the fifth chapter. It is why the new birth is essential to seeing and entering the Kingdom of God (John 3:3-7). It is the foundation that supports the necessity of becoming a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). It is why God has "begotten us again" to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3).

THE REASON FOR THIS SECTION

This section of Romans is one of the strongest denunciations of humanity that is found in Scripture. Taken from Psalm 14:1-3, and other prophetic expressions, the universal guilt of humanity is firmly corroborated.

The establishment of this truth is necessary to confirm that all men stand in need of a righteousness from God—the righteousness that is announced in the Gospel of Christ (1:16-17). Technically, the passage is not merely to convince men of sin, but of the condition into which sin has thrust them. Through it, the Spirit will show that God is just in rejecting the totality of Adam's race—"all flesh." It will also accentuate His marvelous grace in providing a new Progenitor in Jesus.

DOES ADVANTAGE MAKE BETTER?

8:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin." The Spirit returns to looking at things from a Jewish point of view. He now shows that even though distinct advantages were given to the Jews, yet they actually did no better than the Gentiles. The "we" of this text are the

Jews, and the "they" are the Gentiles. He has stated the Jews have received "much" unquestionable advantage "every way" (3:1-2). Their primary benefit was the "oracles of God," placed as a stewardship into their hands. They were furnished with a precise delineation of sin, and rich promises that should have provided adequate incentive for becoming righteous, were that remotely possible.

But their advantages did not cause truth and righteousness to spring up in them. To the contrary, they were found with the same nature and sinful expressions as the Gentiles, who did not receive the "oracles of God."

ADVANTAGES DO NOT MAKE BETTER

There is a fundamental truth to be

learned here. Advantages do not, of themselves, make men better—even when they are received from God Almighty. **In nature, or in Adam, there are only varying degrees of corruption, not righteousness.** Men cannot be changed from the outside. They cannot be renewed by Law, Divine advantages, environment, or self discipline. Being at Sinai and hearing the voice of the Lord does not make sinners better. Receiving the Law at the disposition of angels does not make a person better. If one is provided the details of when and how to approach God, those details do not make the person better. This is, indeed, a most difficult thing for “*flesh*” to face.

If the Jews were not better for advantages given to them by God Himself, who is the person who will imagine that men are made better today by a religious heritage dating back to the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries? If I have the writings of all of the church fathers, will it give me the advantage? Indeed, if I am not born again, any advantages I may have will yield no fruit. If I am not in Christ Jesus, there is no advantage that can make me better in the eyes of the Lord.

The strength of this argument must not elude us! Remember the remarkable benefits given to the Jews. To them “*belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen*” (Rom 9:4-5). God took them unto Himself, devoted His love toward them, and separated them from the rest of the world. He revealed Himself to them alone. His holy Law was given exclusively to them, as well as a revealed procedure by which they could approach Him. His rich and glorious promises were given to them, and the fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, belonged to them. Even the Lord Jesus Christ came from them, according to the flesh.

How is it possible to receive any more external advantage? What is a mere religious movement compared to that? How does an ancient manuscript, or some

archaeological discovery compare with those advantages? What of a studied discipline or rule of logic? Such things are not worthy of the smallest comparison to the benefits extended to the Jews.

Yet, there are still professed Christians among us to boast of having advantages in their creed, or the movement with which they are identified. Some imagine their expertise in language gives them the real edge, or that their mind is their chief asset. But all of these things are but puffs of smoke in the arena of life. The question is whether or not

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these things have made them better!

A Brief Digression

While much good has come from various religious movements, they have not managed to change sinners into righteous people. I am affiliated with a movement that possesses many noble advantages. They point to the Scriptures, declaring they are thoroughly adequate. With tenacity, they refuse to bear the names of men, saying the name of Jesus is enough. They declare there is no need for a creed if we have Jesus, and that we should restore things as they were in the “New Testament church.” They say they are seeking the unity of all believers in Jesus alone. All of these things are good. Those who adopt such views are surely at an advantage.

But their advantage has not made them any better. They have as many divisions among themselves as others, and even many more. Immorality has not been purged from their ranks, and they are not

noted for being any more godly than others. Their youth go astray like others. They are plagued with a “*form of godliness that denies the power thereof.*” As a group, their position has not transformed them. It has not liberated them from the dominion of sin, nor has it brought to their generally ranks a hunger and a thirst for righteousness.

This movement holds no uniqueness in this regard. The same may be said of any religious movement, however hallowed it may be. Whatever advantages are found in such things, they have not wrought a transformation in the people. They still need a righteousness from God like everyone else.

Do not view me too harshly for saying these things, for this is precisely the point being made in this passage! God looks at results, not positions. It makes no difference what position is held, or what advantage is given, if the person is not made righteous, it is of no avail at all.

ARE WE BETTER THAN THEY?

Let the Jews speak for everyone who has an advantage. Did their advantage make them better? “*No, in no wise,*” or “*Not at all!*” If you were to judge the matter externally, you might come to a different conclusion. At certain times, idolatry was not in the ranks of Jewry. They did have the Temple, God-ordained sacrifices, and a revealed approach to God. They appeared to live on a more acceptable level than many of the heathen. But that was only appearance, and we are not to judge according to appearance (John 7:24).

In their hearts, or at the core of their being, they were no better! Law did not make them better. Worship did not make them better. Sacrifice did not make them better. Observing the feasts did not make them better. Circumcision did not make them better!

Beyond all question, this is one of the most difficult lessons to be learned by humanity. Men continue to think they are made “*better*” by external experiences and privileges. However, it is only when the “*stony heart*” is removed, and we

receive a *"heart of flesh,"* that we become *"better"* (Ezek 11:19; 36:26).

This is not to deny the validity or reality of external experiences and privileges. It is to affirm that they do not change the character of man, or bring the righteousness of God to him.

THEY ARE ALL UNDER SIN

" . . . for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." The expression *"under sin"* means under the power and guilt of sin-dominated by sin. No part of man is excluded from this domination. The sentence of condemnation has been passed upon all men. As it is written, *"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation"* (Rom 5:18).

The proof of reference is found in the first chapters of Romans. There we are summoned into the Divine courtroom. The charge leveled against all humanity is that all are guilty of sin, and stand in need of a righteousness from God. With powerful proofs, the Spirit has convinced us that no person is excluded from the charge. **Not only is humanity under sin, they are "held" there until the Lord releases them.** It is the Law that held us in that state. As it is written, *"But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were HELD BY"* (Rom 7:4a).

It will be helpful to briefly rehearse the strong arguments that have been given to prove men are all under sin.

- ⊗ God has shown His eternal power and Deity to men in the creation. In that creation, these things are *"clearly seen."* Yet men did not glorify Him as God, neither were thankful (1:19-21).
- ⊗ In the very midst of the creation, clearly made by an all powerful God, men began to degenerate, becoming vain in their imaginations (1:22-23).
- ⊗ Men became idolaters, changing the glory of God into images made like men, birds, beasts, and creeping things (1:23).
- ⊗ When delivered over to their own hearts, men rapidly degenerated into corruption, dishonoring their own

bodies (1:24).

- ⊗ Men changed the truth of God into a lie, worshiping what was made rather than the One who made it (1:25).
- ⊗ When God gave them over to their own desires, both men and women resorted to unnatural conduct, becoming sodomites (1:26-27).

was universal. It was not isolated to a section of the world or to a certain people.

There is resounding proof that men need a righteousness from God! No one is acceptable in Adam, or in nature. Nature, or flesh, is a totally *"evil"* or corrupt tree. It is not capable of bringing forth good fruit to God. How appropriate are the words of Jesus. *"Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit"* (Matt 12:33). He further elaborated, *"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire"* (Matt 7:16-19).

The Spirit has shown us an unbecoming display of *"evil fruit."* The list is impressive and unquestionable wicked (1:19-2:24).

01. Unthankful.
02. Vain imaginations.
03. Changed the glory of God.
04. Dishonored their own bodies.
05. Changed the truth of God into a lie.
06. Sodomy.
07. Reprobate mind.
08. Fornication.
09. Wickedness.
10. Covetousness.
11. Maliciousness.
12. Full of envy.
13. Murder.
14. Debate.
15. Deceit.
16. Malignity.
17. Whisperers.
18. Backbiters
19. Haters of God.
20. Despitiful.
21. Proud.
22. Boasters.
23. Inventors of evil things.
24. Disobedient to parents
25. Without understanding.
26. Covenant breakers.
27. Without natural affection.
28. Implacable.

The expression *"under sin"* means under the power and guilt of sin-dominated by sin. No part of man is excluded from this domination. The sentence of condemnation has been passed upon all men.

- ⊗ Because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God delivered them to their own appetites. As a result, men were *"filled with all unrighteousness"* (1:29-31).
- ⊗ Even though they experienced the judgment of God, men continued to prefer sin, and the company of those who also sinned (1:32).
- ⊗ The Jews, having received the holy Law of God, did *"the same"* things as the Gentiles which received not the Law (2:1-5).
- ⊗ The Gentiles unanimously violated their own conscience, excusing their sin (2:14-15).
- ⊗ The Jews knew the will of God, and approved of the Law, acknowledging it was right, yet continued to sin, just as the Gentiles (2:17-25).
- ⊗ The Gentiles received every possible advantage apart from direct revelation. (1) The testimony of nature, and (2) The testimony of their conscience. Yet they continued to sin.
- ⊗ The Jews received all the advantages the Gentiles had, plus the Law and circumcision. They too continued to sin.

The Divine assessment: *"they are ALL under sin!"* The human will was not able to correct the situation. No amount of intelligence, creativity, or productivity could turn the heart away from sin, or cause it to hate iniquity. The situation

- 29. Unmerciful.
- 30. Finding pleasure in sinners.
- 31. Glorifying in being called a "Jew."
- 32. Trusting in the Law.
- 33. Causing blasphemy of God's name.

How is it that the presence of such things was universal, with no place or

person excluded? **Because the tree was corrupt!** Human nature was defiled! Men may argue about whether or not the corruption was total, but Jesus will shout at our hearts that a good tree cannot produce such results. Only a bad tree can do that. The tree **MUST** be made good, or **ONLY** bad fruit will be produced.

What is more, only God can "make the tree good." The Lord has already revealed that "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire"^{NKJV} (Matt 7:19). **Men do need a righteousness from God!** None are excluded from this need, for "all have sinned and come short" of God's glory.

THERE IS NONE!

"⁴⁰ As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one;'¹¹ There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.¹² They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.'"

Because of the importance of this matter, the Spirit now appeals to the Scripture to support everything that has been said. He does this to confirm that we are not dealing with a unique circumstance. The universality of sin is not something that has occurred in recent centuries. It has existed from the very moment Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree. Observation and reasoning are valid in determining the truth of sins dominion over mankind. However, understanding must ultimately be anchored in the Word of God by which we live (Matt 4:4; Lk 4:4). God has spoken concerning the centrality of His Word. "For You have magnified Your word above all Your name"^{NKJV} (Psa 138:2). It is fitting, therefore, that the reality of man's sinfulness be confirmed by Scripture.

NONE RIGHTEOUS

"There is none righteous, no, not one." The Spirit gives the sense of the Scripture rather than a direct quotation. This is a summation of what will follow. The state of unrighteousness is pronounced upon humanity in the fourteenth Psalm. "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all

gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psa 14:2-3). Solomon also said, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl 7:20).

In the following verses, the lack of righteousness will be expounded. The traits that are enumerated are fruits or effects of unrighteousness. There are no exceptions to the declaration, "no, not

The lack of understanding, or knowing God, is a condition from which men must be saved. The nations that are without God are said to not know Him (1 Thess 4:5). What is more, when the Lord Jesus comes again, He will come "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God"

one." The Lord "looked from heaven," and did not find a single person who had not been defiled, or who was not sinning.

"Righteousness" is a condition enabling the individual to stand before God faultless and uncondemned. It is a state of "no condemnation," where the person is approved by God. After searching the entirety of Adam's race, the Lord could find no such person—"no not one." **Men need a righteousness from God!**

NONE WHO UNDERSTAND

"There is none who understands." The understanding that is lacking is "spiritual understanding," or the knowledge of God. The fourteenth Psalm declares that God looked "to see if there were any that did understand," concluding that there was none (14:2). The fifty-third Psalm gives the same conclusion (53:2). Of the most privileged people in the world, the Lord said, "For My people are foolish, They have not known Me. They are silly children, And they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, But to do good they have no knowledge" (Jer 4:22). This lack of knowledge is what brings destruction upon the people (Hos 4:6). There can be no spirituality apart from this knowledge.

From another viewpoint, those who lack "understanding" are characterized by a fundamental ignorance of God. Although this is not generally considered to be a serious condition, the lack of the knowledge of God constitutes a state of lostness and alienation. This it is written, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4:17-18). Alienation from God is, then, caused by an ignorance of Him—or by having "no understanding." The gravity of such a condition can scarcely be overstated. Describing the situation in another way, Colossians 1:21 reads, "And you, who once were

alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled." In this text, "wicked works" are seen as the result of not knowing God—not understanding Him.

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God Wants to be Understood

Behind this declaration is the truth that God WANTS to be known and understood. He has structured the entire universe to make portions of His Person known (Rom 1:19-20). He has determined when and where all peoples are placed in order that they might seek and find Him (Acts 17:26-27).

This aspect of God was revealed through Jeremiah in a most wonderful way. "Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, THAT HE UNDERSTANDS AND KNOWS ME, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the LORD"^{NKJV} (Jer 9:23-24). Not only in irreligious men, but in religious ones, there is an undeniable tendency to glory in human wisdom, might, and riches. All of this is vanity. Only those who understand and know the Lord have grounds for boasting—and then, it is not of themselves (Eph 2:8).

Knowing God IS Eternal Life

The importance of knowing and understanding the Lord is confirmed by its association with eternal life. Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And **this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only**

true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"^{NKJV} (John 17:2-3).

Through John the beloved, the Spirit declares this to be one of the primary ministries of the Lord Jesus: i.e., coming to know and understand God. "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an **understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life**" (1

There would be no need to give us such an understanding if there was any way for us to possess it on our own. But we did NOT have such understanding, as our text states. In fact, it took the ministry of the Lord from heaven for us to obtain it.

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I want to emphasize that a universal Savior postulates a universal need. If there was a solitary individual in the world who knew God through natural abilities, Christ would not have come. Apart from His coming into the world, offering a satisfactory atonement, and ascending to the right hand of God to be the Author and Finisher of our faith, there was simply no possible way of coming to know or understand God. Sin created a gulf between God and man that man himself could not span.

If Adam, with only a signal transgression, could not remain in the presence of God, what of his progeny, whose imaginations are ONLY evil from

their youth? God is greatly to be praised for not leaving us in this situation. It is His desire for us to know Him that has driven the completion of a great salvation.

NONE WHO SEEKS GOD

"**There is none who seeks after God.**" Although I have already stated this, it bears repetition. God has ordered the affairs of men in a most precise way, in order that they might "seek the Lord." "From one single principle [man] He not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but He decreed the times and limits of their habitation. And He did this so that they might seek the Deity and, by feeling their way towards Him, succeed in finding Him; and indeed He is not far from any of us" ^{New Jerusalem Bible} (Acts 17:26-27).

In addition to strategically placing all peoples in both time and area, He placed them in His own creation, which declared His glory in every corner of the earth (Psa 19:1-4; Rom 1:19-20). If any vestige of moral ability remained in man, these advantages should have compelled him to seek the Lord UNTIL he found Him. After all, He "is not far from every one of us." However, even given all of these advantages, "none" could be found that sought after God.

Such notables as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and David were all visited by the Lord PRIOR to an effective quest for Him. Our text is precise in every sense of the word, and perfectly describes the entire race of Adam apart from Christ. **Men need a righteousness from God!**

ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE

"**They have all turned aside.**" With absolute consistency, apart from Divine intervention, "ALL" men turned aside from the revelation that was given to them, whether from nature, conscience, or Law. Every aspect of man's nature was defiled by sin. He became ungodlike—"none righteous." His mind was corrupted—"none that understands." The will was polluted—"none who seeks after God." Now we see the contamination of his works—"all turned aside." Man has become thoroughly corrupted.

Just as Adam and Eve turned from the commandment given to them, so all men, by nature, have turned from every common appeal. The KJV reads, *“They have all gone out of the way,”* emphasizing that the departure has ALREADY taken place. By nature, they have elected the *“broad road”* that leads to destruction. They have heard the harmonious voice of nature, and have *“turned aside.”* They have felt the stinging goad of the conscience, and have *“gone out of the way.”* They have heard the thundering words of the Law and *“have turned every one to his own way”* (Isa 53:6). This is not a mere liability, but is a cosmopolitan condition!

The Psalmist said of this situation, *“Every one of them is gone back”* (Psa 53:3). Other versions read *“fallen away”* RSV, NRSV. This involves more than leaving an appointed path. It includes the idea of retrogression, or going backward. Apart from Jesus Christ, the entire human race is in a state of regression, plummeting downward, further and further from God. That is the meaning of the phrase, *“all have sinned and COME SHORT of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23).

By nature, men have *“turned away”* from God’s appointment for them, which is to *“seek the Lord.”* Even in their religion, they have *“come short,”* gravitating to idolatry or other forms of lifeless religion. Settle it in your heart that this is not a description of the worst of our race, but of the whole of it.

Nowhere is the corruption of men more clearly seen than in their will! Turning aside was a choice—a deliberate choice. Men **willed** to NOT seek the Lord. They **willed** to choose their own way. While I do not wish to make a big issue out of this here, it is interesting that men have chosen to vaunt the human will. This is done in spite of the fact that it is the very thing that has placed man at a distance from God. It was so in the Garden, and it is so today. **Men need a righteousness from God!**

ALL HAVE BECOME UNPROFITABLE
“They have together become unprofitable.” The NASB reads, *“They have become USELESS.”* The NIV and

NRSV read, *“They have become WORTHLESS.”* For whatever it is worth, the Greek word used here is *ἡρειώθησαν*, which means *totally wrong, depraved, and morally worthless.* Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary Strong’s Dictionary defines it as *unprofitable, useless, and unserviceable.* The Basic Bible English version reads, *“there is no profit in any of them.”* John Gill, an insightful preacher who lived in the 1700’s, said this of the passage before us: *“ . . . for so men being corrupted by sin, are of no use, service, and advantage to God, to men, or to themselves, but on the contrary, nauseous to God . . . and hurtful to themselves and others.”* Gill’s Commentary on Romans In his commentary, Barnes says of this verse, *“This word in Hebrew means to become ‘putrid’ and ‘offensive,’ like fruit that is spoiled. In Arabic, it is applied to ‘milk’ that becomes sour. Applied to moral subjects, it means to become corrupt and useless. They are of no value in regard to works of righteousness.”*

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While I do not ordinarily share the writings of others on these texts, I did want to show that students of Scripture have been consistent in their perception of this passage. I am not espousing something that is strange, or newly developed. While my own view was not formed by these men, I have found general agreement among those of honest heart on this matter.

Sin has rendered humanity useless to God. The whole of the Adamic order has been rejected by Him, thereby necessitating the new birth. That is something that can ONLY be effected by God. He begets us through the Gospel

because of Christ’s sufficient death, *“once for all.”* In our new birth, we become qualified to receive God’s righteousness. Then, and only then, can we be profitably used by God and live in anticipation of the glory to come.

If sin has made *“all unprofitable,”* then all need a righteousness from God!

NONE WHO DOES GOOD
“There is none who does good, no, not one.” The blistering assessment of humanity continues, gaining strength. The Spirit is considering men apart from Christ, unforgiven and unregenerated. In that state, there is no one that *“does good, no, not one.”* By *“good,”* the Spirit means *“good”* in the eyes of the Lord, which is the only real *“good.”* Because the natural man is not good, nothing that he does is good. All of his works are tainted with his defiled nature, rendering them unacceptable to God. Rather than doing good, the Lord says of fallen man, *“They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; There is none who does good”* †NKJV (Psa 53:1). By nature, all of man’s *“righteousnesses are as filthy rags,”* to be discarded because they are defiled (Isa 64:6). As it is written, *“ . . . but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled”* (Tit 1:15).

To *“do good”* is to conduct ourselves in harmony with God, who alone is good. As Jesus said to the rich young ruler, *“Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God”* (Matt 19:17). In this statement, Jesus was not saying He Himself was not good. He is altogether good. However, the young man who asked concerning eternal life did not see Jesus as the Son of God, but only as a *“teacher.”*

NONE RIGHTEOUS! NOT ONE!
Thus, the Divine assessment of humanity is being confirmed. There really is *“none righteous, no not one.”* Apart from identity with Jesus, no one, to a person, understands God or is seeking after Him. Everyone is in a state of regression, having chosen to turn away from the Lord. Of themselves, no one is useful to God, as they all have become worthless. As God counts things, no one is

doing good—no not one. At some point, our hearts must be brought into agreement with this Divine assessment.

If that seems too strong, it is only because of spiritual blindness and hardness of heart. This is a matter of revelation, and it is to be received. It confirms that God was right in providing a righteousness for man, for man had none of his own. It also substantiates the

absolute need for that righteousness, and the worthiness of condemnation to all who reject it.

One of the appalling effects of cold theology is that it robs the heart of these things, leading people to imagine there is some vestige of good in man, even though God says there is not. Man does not do good because he is NOT good. He does not seek God because he does not want God.

He does not understand, because he is alienated in his mind. He is unprofitable because sin has utterly defiled him.

As though this were not enough, the Spirit will take the matter even further. He will confirm to us that our defilement is not a surface matter, but reaches into every heart of our persons. Regardless what aspect of man who consider, he is corrupt from beginning to end.

INCAPABLE OF GOOD EXPRESSION

⁴³ ‘Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit’; ‘The poison of asps is under their lips’; ¹⁴ ‘Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.’” Again, an appeal is made to the Scriptures. Sin has not made men lazy, it has made them corrupt. Their expressions reflect their condition. While there are varying degrees of wicked expressions, they all possess the same characteristics. Apart from regeneration, there is an obnoxiousness about all human expression. Although it may not appear to be the case to mortals, that is the way is really is. Remember, this is God’s assessment of men who do not have His righteousness—all of them.

THEIR THROATS IS AN OPEN TOMB

The quotation is taken from Psalm 5:9. What a vivid picture! An open tomb is one in which a rotting corpse lies. It emits a noxious odor that repels all who are near to it. Knowing this is the case, tombs and graves are always covered well in order to hide the corruption within them. But men do not do the same with their corrupt natures. Their throats become a passage for the expression of spiritual death—dead views. The odor of alienation is upon them, and they are tainted with aloofness from God.

A sensitive heart detects this condition and is offended by it. Some of these defiling expressions come in the name of scholarship, social interests, and

psychological profiles. But they all have this in common. They are emitting from the tomb of nature, defiling everything they touch. When men attempt to dignify them by assigning sincerity to the speakers, they are trying to throw a new suit of clothes upon a dead corpse.

THEIR TONGUES PRACTICE DECEIT

The tongue of the unregenerate conflicts with the Word of the Lord, and thus is said to *“practice deceit.”* When it comes to actual utterance, anything and everything spoken in contradiction of the truth of God is a lie. The Word of the Lord is, *“let God be true, but every man a liar”* (Rom 3:4).

saith the LORD. Take ye heed every one of his neighbor, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbor, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity” (Jer 9:3-4).

Sin has made man basically self-centered. Therefore, he speaks with his own interests being primary. When that occurs—and it always does in the natural man—the tongue practices deceit, clouding the truth, and turning attention to human opinion. There are differing measures of this tendency, but they all come under the canopy of *“deceit.”* Deceit seeks to substantiate human views and justify men in their conduct. It is the opposite of having speech *“alway with grace, seasoned with salt,”* that it might edify and minister grace to the hearer (Col 4:6; Eph 4:29).

Let it be clear, if men do not receive a righteous from God, this is the kind of speaking that will come from them. It may be socially cultured and politically correct, but it will be deceitful!

obnoxiousness about all human expression. Although it may not appear to be the case to mortals, that is the way is really is. Remember, this is God’s assessment of men who do not have His righteousness—all of them.

POISON UNDER THEIR LIPS

The reference is to an expression found in Psalm 140:3. *“They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders’ poison is under their lips.”* The idea is that their lips are harmful and infectious, spewing forth poison and

Through Jeremiah, the Lord indicted His people for speaking corruptly. *“And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me,*

contamination among the sons of men. Such were the words of Hymenaeus and Philetus, which “spread like cancer.”^{NKJV} (2 Tim 2:17). These were also the kind of words the unbelieving spies spoke to Israel, convincing them they could not possess the promised land as God commanded them. It is said of their words, “We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight. And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night” (Num 13:31-14:1). The poison of asps was under their lips, infecting the minds of the people.

Very little time will pass until the truth of this text is confirmed to your heart. You will be subjected to poisonous words that must be expelled from your mind, lest your own thoughts become corrupt. Men sorely stand in need of a righteousness from God.

MOUTHS FILLED WITH CURSING AND BITTERNESS

Again, an appeal is made to the Word of the Lord. “His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity” (Psa 10:7). Again, it is written, “For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride: and for cursing and lying which they speak” (Psa 59:12). James said of believers who were following the “old man” instead of the “new man,” “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing” (James 3:10).

The cursing of reference is the cursing of God: blaspheming His holy name, and speaking against His judgments. In the mind of the speaker, such diatribes may not be considered to be

against God, but they are. It is much like Israel murmuring against Moses. “And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” (Ex 15:24). “And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Ex 16:2). “And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” (Ex 17:3).

A religion that allows for the expression of the flesh kills the soul. If human nature is fallen, it must not be given respect or ascendancy among the people of God. Fleshly credentials are not to be honored as though they came from God. Natural abilities are not to be viewed as though they were the superior ones. Our acquaintance with one another is not to be “after the flesh”

None of this was innocent. That is why the people were judged for speaking as they did. Their mouths were “filled with cursing and bitterness” because they did not perceive their condition as being advantageous. In our day, such speaking is dignified by people saying they are angry with God, and God is able to deal with such anger. But this is a foolish imagination. There is not so much as a speck of truth in it. Solemnly we are told, “Neither murmur ye, as some of them

also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer” (1 Cor 10:10). Outbursts of cursing and bitterness are signs of depravity, not mere misunderstanding.

EXPRESSIONS OF THE FLESH

Because of the elevation of human knowledge and rights, even religious men have come to believe they have a right to express their opinion about the truth of God. In recent months, I have heard serious misrepresentations of the truth of God dignified by saying every one has a right to their opinion. Let it be clear to all of us. When God has spoken, the only right man has to believe and heartily embrace that truth.

What we are reading about is the nature of “the flesh,” or “the natural man.” There is nothing good or salvageable about the flesh. In it, there is “no good thing” (Rom 7:18). Jesus said, “the flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63). If those in Christ give heed to their flesh, rather than crucifying it, it will react precisely as our text has indicated. You should be sufficiently acquainted with your own nature to know this is the case. The part of us that is traced back to Adam is called our “members that are upon the earth.” They are to be “mortified,” or put to death, not given expression (Col 3:5). In fact, “those who are Christ’s **HAVE** crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”^{NKJV} (Gal 5:24).

Fleshly Religion

A religion that allows for the expression of the flesh kills the soul. If human nature is fallen, it must not be given respect or ascendancy among the people of God. Fleshly credentials are not to be honored as though they came from God. Natural abilities are not to be viewed as though they were the superior ones. Our acquaintance with one another is not to be “after the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16). Worldly views, fads, and preferences, are to have no place among the people of God.

In Christ, we die to the fleshly order, and are therefore urged to separate from it. The Colossians were exhorted on

this very matter. *“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh”* (Col 2:20-23). The absolute corruption of the flesh forbids the formation of religion around it. The truest form of religion is not found in external disciplines and the regimentation of the body. Rather, it is found in *“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 14:17). These are spiritual expressions, not fleshly ones.

THE ULTIMATE FLESHLY EXPRESSIONS

Flesh becomes more prominent as it is exposed to the glory of God. This is seen in the reaction of the world to Jesus. In particular, in the reaction of the Jews. If we doubt the depravity of the flesh, let us behold how it conducts itself toward God

“manifest in the flesh.”

The passage we have just reviewed speaks of speech, words, or verbal expressions. Ponder how those in the flesh spoke to Jesus. *“Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him”* ^{NKJV} (Lk 16:14). *“Then the Jews answered and said to Him, ‘Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?’”* (John 8:48). *“And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, ‘This Man blasphemes!’”* (Matt 9:3). *“And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.’ The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, ‘If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself’”* (Lk 23:35-37). *“They answered and said to him (Pilate), ‘If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you’”* (John 18:30).

What constrained these people to speak so derisively of the Lord of glory?

Their throats were certainly an open tomb, and the poison of asps was under their lips. They spoke in the energy of the flesh. That is the manner in which flesh speaks. In the presence of the Lord, their flesh erupted because it could not abide the Savior. It spoke heartlessly, and with defamation, insult, and injury.

Not Merely A Law

The incentive for avoiding the dominancy of the flesh is not mere Law. It is rather a matter of survival. It is clearly stated, and is to be heartily embraced, *“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”* (Rom 8:13). Take that word seriously, for your soul is in the balance. If we follow the dictates of the flesh, we will find it erupting in our manners, just as described in our text. Such conduct is evidence of spiritual death, and is to be resolved with swift dispatch. The *“great salvation”* God has provided precisely addresses this situation. Through it, men are extricated from a hopeless situation, and granted a righteousness that God approves.

SELF SEEKING

“¹⁵ Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways; ¹⁷ And the way of peace they have not known.” Once again, I want to emphasize that the Spirit is describing the nature of the flesh. While its expressions may take various forms, and be characterized by differing levels of wickedness, yet they all proceed from the same defiled well. Because people imagine these things are not in them by nature, is no proof they are absent. They are resident in the flesh, and will remain so. Scripture says it this way, *“Mortify therefore YOUR MEMBERS which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye*

lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds”

Once again, I want to emphasize that the Spirit is describing the nature of the flesh. While its expressions may take various forms, and be characterized by differing levels of wickedness, yet they all proceed from the same defiled well.

(Col 3:5-9).

It is not possible to *“put off”* something you do not possess. The things that are mentioned are said to be in our *“members”*. The NIV reads, *“whatever belongs to your earthly nature.”* The NASB reads, *“members of your earthly body.”* All of these things are resident in the part of us that is traced back to Adam. The potential to express them is resident in every person remaining in the body. The fact that we are in Christ has not removed them from our earthly nature. They were not washed away when we were baptized into Christ. Even when we are *“risen with Christ,”* they seek for expression. Therefore, they are to be *“put off,” “mortified,”* and *“denied.”*

When this truth registers upon the conscience, a major thrust forward has taken place.

In the first part of this passage, the sins of the heart are emphasized: *“None that understand,” “none that seeks God,”* going *“out of the way,”* and becoming *“unprofitable.”* The second part deals with sins of the mouth. The throat is an *“open tomb,”* tongues *“use deceit,”* *“poison”* is *“under the lips,”* and the mouth is *“full of cursing and bitterness.”*

Now we come to sins of action, when men will go to any means to justify themselves and gratify their own desires. Again, this is the unchangeable nature of the flesh.

FEET SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD

The reference is to Proverbs 1:16. *“For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.”* The sixth chapter of Proverbs lists seven things that God hates, which are an abomination to Him. Among them is *“An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief”* (v 18). Isaiah speaks even more directly to the matter. *“Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood”* (Isa 59:7). Again, this is the manner of the flesh. It will go to any length to justify itself—even to the shedding of blood.

Here the taking of innocent life is done creatively and with dispatch. Their *“feet run to evil”* swiftly, and *“make haste to shed blood.”* Given enough liberty, this IS what the flesh will do! Isaiah’s reference to this trait was given during the reign of Manasseh, during which so much innocent blood was shed.

How frequently this tendency has surfaced in our race. Cain’s feet were swift to shed blood when his brother’s sacrifice was accepted by God, and his own was not (Gen 4:8). Lamech lamented that he had killed a man because he was wounded by him (Gen 4:23). In an outbreak of rage, Simeon and Levi killed men who had defiled their sister (Gen 34:25). Heartlessly, Pharaoh ordered the death of newborn Jewish males because he thought they were becoming too numerous (Ex 1:16). Ahab and Jezebel had Naboth killed because they wanted his vineyard (1 Kgs 21:7-10). Athaliah,

mother of Ahaziah, had all the royal heirs killed (2 Kgs 11:1). Herod commanded that *“all the children”* under two years of age be killed, because he was threatened by the birth of Jesus (Matt 2:16).

There is no extent to which flesh will go to seek its own gain. The ultimate murder, of course, was that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well did Stephen say of the corrupt religious leaders of his day, *“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers”* (Acts 7:52). Their feet were *“swift to shed blood.”*

When believers are among the unregenerate, there is a certain destruction and misery that are experienced. The spirit is eroded and often torn down as the flesh sets itself against the redeemed soul.

And what can be said of our own time, when more than a million abortions occur annually in our own country? And for what reason? For self interests! See, this is the nature of flesh. Those who choose to live in the flesh are descending into a moral arena that is a bottomless pit! The senseless mass killings that have exploded in the last few years are nothing more than fleshly eruptions. Those who committed these dastardly crimes refused the truth and salvation of God. Because of this, their flesh soon gained dominancy over them.

DESTRUCTION AND MISERY IN THEIR WAYS

This is also taken from Isaiah 59:7. This describes a dreadful tendency in the flesh that leaves a path of destruction. Given expression, the flesh tears down what is good, and leaves misery in its wake. Whether it is holocaust of Pharaoh, Herod, or Hitler, those dominated by

nature think nothing of making others miserable, whether by insults, plundering, or physical harm.

It is a glad day when a person comes into Christ and experiences the circumcision of the body of the sins of the flesh (Col 2:11-12). The words of the prophet Isaiah are then fulfilled. *“Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.”* (Isa 60:18). While flesh tears down, the renewed spirit builds up and edifies.

When believers are among the unregenerate, there is a certain destruction and misery that are experienced. The spirit is eroded and often torn down as the flesh sets itself against the redeemed soul. It is no marvel that Jesus *“ofttimes resorted”* to Gethsemane with His disciples for spiritual renewal (John 18:2).

THE WAY OF PEACE NOT KNOWN

Peace is a fruit of the Spirit, but is completely unknown by the flesh. As the Lord has said, *“There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked”* (Isa 57:21). Specifically, the reference is to Isaiah 59:8. *“The way of peace they know not.”*

If men are to find peace, it must come in and through Jesus Christ. It cannot come through the flesh, or from Adam’s resources. When the *“Dayspring from on high”* visited us, it was in order to *“To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”* (Lk 1:79).

Notice, the text says *“THE WAY of peace they have not known.”* By nature, men do not know HOW to obtain or come into peace. This is particularly true of *“peace with God,”* which is realized in Christ Jesus (Rom 5:1). This *“way of peace”* is beyond the reach of flesh. It cannot be discovered through mental disciplines or much study.

Those outside of Christ—all of them—have no peace of mind, and do not

know how to obtain it. Their conscience is not at peace, and no amount of religious activity can procure it for them. Sin has robbed all men! Although peace is aggressively sought by men, outside of

Christ they always come short of it. They do not know *“the way of peace,”* and thus stumble in moral and spiritual darkness.

There should be no doubt of the

need for a righteousness from God. All of the things that have been mentioned are the direct result of LACKING the righteousness of God. They are the consequence of transgression.

NO FEAR

⁴⁸ ***“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*** On one occasion, sensitive Abraham observed of the realm of Abimelech, *“Surely the fear of God is not in this place”* (Gen 20:11). Indeed, there are places where such an absence is very apparent. However, our text says that in a state of nature, this condition is ALWAYS present. The quotation is taken from Psalm 36:1, where David observed of the wicked, *“There is no fear of God*

Lord, here is the answer. *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* It is not that they DO NOT think of their ways in association with God. Rather, it is because they do not WILL to think in this manner. It is not in them to do so.

By saying the fear of God is *“not before their eyes,”* the Spirit means it is not evident to them, and is not perceived as necessary. Like Balaam, they stumble

cannot do so. Because fear is not *“before their eyes,”* we must place it before them with strong spiritual arguments and solid Scriptural statements. In so doing, we call for the Holy Spirit to come in convicting power. Working through the *“sword of the Spirit,”* He has been commissioned to *“convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”* (John 16:8-11). If it were not true that *“there is no fear of God before their eyes,”* the ministry of conviction would not be necessary.

Some have taken upon themselves to teach men to fear God through various forms of thought. The Word of God points out the futility of such an effort. Of wayward Israel He said, *“Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men”* (Isa 29:13). The utter uselessness of such an approach is found in the incapacity of the fallen, or fleshly, nature. It has no ability to fear God. That is why it does not do so. By nature, men do NOT think of God, or consider His ways. That is why His fear is not before their eyes, or the focus of their attention. That is why they do not seek Him, and why they continue to sin. They are in the grip of nature.

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By saying the fear of God is *“not before their eyes,”* the Spirit means it is not evident to them, and is not perceived as necessary. Like Balaam, they stumble on in their own ways, oblivious to the destruction that looms before them.

before his eyes.” This is the kind of fear that is wholesome, provoking men to *“to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth”* (Prov 8:13). Such fear compels those possessing it to *“depart from evil”* (Prov 16:6).

on in their own ways, oblivious to the destruction that looms before them.

One might ponder, “How, then, can we *‘save with fear’* those who are out of the way (Jude 23)? First, we do not do so by appealing to earthly reasoning. We already know their minds do not think in this manner. Telling them of the natural consequences of sin, like disease and sorrow, will have no lasting effect. Flesh not only does not think in that way, it

But such fear is not in men by nature, confirming they do need a righteousness from God. If you are ever prone to wonder why men continue in their sin and rebellion, not turning to the

THE MINISTRY OF THE LAW

⁴⁹ ***Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”***

Having proved that all men stand in need of a righteousness from God, the

Spirit now turns to the Divinely appointed means of persuading men of that truth. He particularly addresses this to the Jews, although not exclusively to them, because they made their boast in possessing the Law. However, there is a strong tendency in the flesh to trust in Law. It has no objection to following a rigorous routine,

just as long as death to the desires of the flesh is not required.

The truth of the matter is that all men are far worse by nature than they think. The extent of the fall of humanity is far greater than flesh thinks, or wants to think. A disposition remains in man

that leads him to think more highly of himself than he ought to think. The Lord has made provision to convince him of the depth of his sin.

We will now address things that cannot be learned from nature. While the things that are made testify to the “*eternal power and Deity*” of God, they cannot convince the soul of sin. That is a work reserved for a more proficient minister.

WHAT IS “THE LAW”?

The word “*Law*” does not refer to any law of nature, or of civil authorities. This is “*the Law*” that was “*given by Moses*” (John 1:17). It is summarized in the Ten Commandments, which were “*the words of the covenant*” given to Israel (Ex 34:28). “*The Law*” also included the elaborations of the Ten Commandments, together with its blessings and curses.

Although the Law was given to Israel as a covenant (Rom 9:4), its ministry was not limited to them, as this text will affirm. It served a higher purpose than that of a covenant to Israel.

There is a strain of theology that affirms the Law has been totally abrogated—much like being erased. This particular persuasion presents God as repromulgating certain of the ten commandments, which are perceived as relevant to life in Christ. Our text will show this is not the case. The Law has been terminated as a means to righteousness, as taught in Romans 10:4. It has not, however, been obliterated.

THE LAW DOES SPEAK

Here the Law is pictured as though it were a person, speaking to humanity. There is a message that it is delivering—an essential message. There is a certain *tone* to the Law that can be discerned by the sensitive heart. It speaks, and to certain people.

If the Law had been abrogated, or annulled, it would speak no longer. There are, however, certain people who still need to hear the testimony of the Law.

THOSE UNDER THE LAW

Whatever the Law says, it says to those who are under its dominion, and are responsible to it. While this was primarily the Jews, it was not only the Jews. One particular reason for this dissertation was the tendency of the Jews to apply the Law to everyone but themselves.

What follows is common knowledge—something that is evident: “*we know.*” The law is not speculative, nor

However, the law begins that ministry now, in this world. With powerful arguments, it convinces men they have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It removes their excuses and explanations from their minds, proving they have willingly and repeatedly broken God’s Law.

does it deal with vain philosophies. It brings an essential message.

The Galatian brethren were Gentiles, and yet the Law is said to be their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ (Gal 3:24-25). Before they were in Christ, they were responsible to the Law, even though it was not given as a covenant to them.

Notice, the text does not say “whatever the Law SAID,” but “whatever the Law SAYS.” Its ministry is still going on. In the strictest sense of the Word, those “under the Law” are those whose conduct is wayward—who must be held in check because of the dominance of sin. From this vantage point the Spirit says, “*Knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any*

other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust” (1 Tim 1:9-11). Unless lawless people only existed among the Jews, therefore, the work of the Law was not confined to them.

Notice that this perspective of the Law is “*according to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.*” More precisely, the passage reads, “*and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.*”²⁴ The idea is that the Law speaks to those whose lives contradict the truth of the Gospel, which came 1,500 years after the Law was given. The Law, therefore, is still at work.

EVERY MOUTH STOPPED

The assignment given to the Law is to silence the boastful and alibiing mouths of all men. It is to convince them that they are guilty before God and without excuse. When this occurs, men will emulate Job, who said, “*Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth*” (Job 40:4). The Law speaks with strong tones to all men, “*Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth*” (Judges 18:19).

God has decreed that “*no flesh will glory in His presence*” (1 Cor 1:29). That will ultimately be the case when we all “*appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*” (2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10). At that time, every mouth will be silenced before the Lord of glory. Like the man with no wedding garment, transgressors will be “*speechless*” (Matt 22:12).

However, the law begins that ministry now, in this world. With powerful arguments, it convinces men they have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It removes their excuses and explanations from their minds, proving they have willingly and repeatedly broken God’s Law.

Paul provides a vivid portrayal of the Law's ministry. In the seven chapter of Romans, he recounts his former persuasion that he was righteous of himself. Before being in Christ, the "motions of sin," or "sinful passions" were at work "in our members, to bring forth death" (Rom 7:5). That was the fact of the case, yet Paul confesses this knowledge had escaped him. Outwardly, Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, was impeccably righteous. According to his own testimony, "concerning the righteousness which is in the law," he was "blameless" (Phil 3:6). Even when he was persecuting the church, he thought he was doing what was right. Living in all good conscience, he said, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 23:1; 26:9).

Now the Law enters. It comes to "stop" Paul's mouth. Here is his testimony. "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came,

sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me" (Rom 7:7-11). Once it came home to Paul's heart that sin was an inward matter, "sin,

Let it be clear that the "guilt" of reference did not begin when the Law came home in power. The Law convinces the sinner that he is already guilty, and that his guilt was a matter of corrupted choice.

seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead."^{NIV} The sinful nature was there all along, but was hidden under the facade of religious flesh. But when the commandment broke through to his conscience, his flesh rose up in rebellion, filling his mind with "coveting of every kind."^{NASB}

The Law was not wicked in doing

this, but brought out that wickedness was in Saul of Tarsus. Effectively, it stopped his mouth, and brought him to Jesus for cleansing, renewal, and commissioning. That is the ministry of the Law.

ALL THE WORLD BECOMES GUILTY

Here the Spirit devastates the notion that the Law was ONLY for the Jew. The text reads, "and all the world may become guilty before God." The NASB, NIV, NRSV, and RSV read "become," or "held accountable to God." In my judgment, this is a very weak rendering of the text. The word translated "guilty" comes from ὑπόδικος, which means liable to punishment. In this case "accountable" carries the idea of "condemned already," and not that of a trial set forth to establish guilt.

The guilt is "before God," not merely in the conscience. Such a sentence requires the need of a Savior, and of a just acquittal upon the basis of another.

Thus, the soul is prepared for a Redeemer, having been convinced of its need for One. What a marvelous work has been assigned to the Law, and how faithfully it does its work.

KNOWLEDGE OF SIN, NOT JUSTIFICATION

²⁰ **Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.** With spiritual skill, and under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle has shown the absolute need of a righteousness from God. He has left no stone unturned, devastating every argument against the need for righteousness. His words are like those mentioned by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:11. "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd." Indeed they are! Who has not felt the weight of these powerful arguments. Have they not confirmed our need of a Savior and the

righteousness of God? Now, the Spirit will draw some further conclusions, showing us that we cannot seek justification by the Law. It was given to make all the world "guilty before God," not to enable them to become righteous by keeping a set of commandments. In fact, men had no propensity or ability to keep God's commandments, until they were reconciled by the death of God's Son.

THE DEEDS OF THE LAW

Precisely what are "the deeds of the Law?" The "deeds of the law" and the "works of the Law" are the same thing. They are the "deeds prescribed by the law."^{NRSV} The NIV reads, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight

by observing the law." And why is this so? Is not the Law good, and holy, and just? Is it not right to do the law? To fulfill the demands of the Law? Did not the Law promise life to those who kept it? As it is written, "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them" (Rom 10:5; Lev 18:5; Gal 3:12)? How is it, then, that man cannot be justified, or made righteous, by fulfilling the deeds of the Law?

The key here is the word "Therefore." The previous verses (1:19-3:18) have declared and proved that all are guilty of sin. Human nature has been so corrupted, that it cannot do what God

requires in the Law. Therefore, rather than applauding men for their good deeds, the Law condemns them for their sin. The demands of the law upon a sinner are much like the demands of a marathon race upon a person in the intensive care unit of a hospital. They extend beyond the ability of fallen man. Blessed day when that truth comes home to the heart.

Jesus revealed another aspect of this to His disciples. He posed a hypothetical situation, confirming how far men had fallen from the glory of God. *“But which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat’? But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and afterward you will eat and drink’? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done’”* (Lk 17:7-20).

The Lord knows that no mortal has ever done everything God commanded to be done. Yet, He poses this situation to make a point. There is no merit before God for simply doing what you have been told to do. That is an obligation for which no reward is due—particularly eternal life. Thus, should we imagine that we have actually done *“ALL the things which were commanded”* us, we would still be required to say. *“We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.”* By the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified. The Law deals ONLY with obligations. It does not address men as those who have been freed to move into the presence of the Lord, but as those who are enslaved to sin, requiring sacrifices and offerings for sin.

NOT JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT

While men may tend to overstate their own accomplishments in this world, they will not be able to stand before God and boast. No person will be *“justified in the sight of God”* because of what they have done! If the Lord Jesus were

removed from the scenario, there would not be a solitary soul inducted into the tabernacle of the Most High.

Later in Romans, the Spirit takes up this argument again, pointing to Abraham, who is the *“father of us all”* (Rom 4:16). *“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; **BUT NOT BEFORE GOD.** For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”* (Rom 4:1-3).

There is a solid reason for this situation. Men have been universally convicted of sin. There is no one who is righteous, understands, seeks God, or does good. That is the Divine assessment, and is beyond all controversy. In that context, the very notion of being justified by the deeds of the Law becomes absurd. These two things—To be justified by the works of the Law, and to be guilty of sin—cannot be blended together. They are an admixture. If man is guilty, as our text affirms, then he CANNOT be justified by his own doing. **It is his doing that condemns him, and therefore it cannot justify him.** That is the argument of our text.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN

One might suppose that, given this situation, the Law is useless. God forbid! Rather than being impractical and without value, it brings *“the knowledge of sin.”* Those who view the Scriptures as a manual of conduct do well to consider this verse. This passage has taught us that human conduct is not the issue. That is because every man is convicted of unacceptable conduct—*“all have sinned.”* The issue is being righteous before God, and the Spirit has shown us that, by nature, every mortal is without that righteousness. *“There is none righteous, no not one.”*

The Law puts a handle, so to speak, upon sin. It identifies it for us, so we can perceive it and be persuaded of its dominance over us by nature. **Its primary work is not to show us what sin is so that we can avoid it, but to convince us we have committed it!** It identifies deviate demeanor.

In identifying sin, the Law strips man of any hope of saving himself. It powerfully convinces the individual that the heart is *“deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”* (Jer 17:9). Thanks be unto God for deliverance from the condemning Law! It offered us no strength and no newness of life. It only

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pointed at is and said, **“GUILTY!”** O, the bitter goad of a conscience that experiences the bludgeon of the Law! It is a precious deliverance when confidence floods the heart instead of condemnation.

The Law stopped our mouths, not allowing us to boast before God. But the Savior of mankind has stopped the mouth of the Law, not allowing it to condemn those who have died and been raised with Him. Blessed, indeed, is the soul who knows these things! *“Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.”* (Psa 107:2). After you have let the Law do its work, then let the comforting Spirit do His work in you as well!

CONCLUSION

There are few areas of thought that are as productive as the one with which we are dealing. As a rule, the people of God have been deprived of the type of reasoning that has been presented in these chapters. The universal need for righteousness, when seen, is a great equalizer among the sons of men. It removes boasting, and uncovers a well of thanksgiving for the Lord Jesus Christ.

For some time, I have sensed the general dulness of professed Christians concerning these things. There appears to be a preoccupation with religious organization, career building, and other things related to these twin monsters.

Associated with these conditions is an unacceptable level of spiritual understanding and a deplorable lack of confidence toward God. The Lord Jesus is somewhere in the background of religious thought, and the power of godliness is denied more than any of us wish to admit. There is also an alarming level of immorality and spiritual ignorance in the professed church. Scriptural illiteracy is also at a totally unacceptable level.

What is the cause of these things? I am going to lay the responsibility for these conditions at the feet of church leaders. The very things that are so strongly espoused in the book of Romans

are hardly known by the masses. They are not being declared, but have been supplanted by other matters deemed more practical. The results have been devastating. Far too many believers are admittedly not ready to meet the Lord.

The answer to this situation is a return to the powerful proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. In it the righteousness of God is revealed "from faith to faith," which is why it is "the power of God unto salvation." Let there also be a return to the strong presentation of the universal need for the righteousness of God. Such preaching will move men away from reliance in the flesh.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 5/19/2000. Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 3:21-26, "RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH." Here we begin the great doctrinal treatise of justification by faith. This is a hallmark doctrine, and is established with great power in Romans. You will find unparalleled comfort and encouragement in the exposition of this truth. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God.

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