

Romans (3:9-20)

Under Sin

Part 10 - September 5, 2004

SUMMING UP SIN

When we left off, Paul was making sure that the Jews knew that he believed that there were several advantages to being Jewish. Today Paul is going to conclude *every* position he has taken up to this point in the letter. This is Paul's summation on sin.

And what's genius about it, is that he's done so by stringing together (back-to-back) several O.T. scriptures ... keep an eye on all of the quotation marks. Paul pounds his point with a sledge hammer. Notice his five uses of the phrase: NO ONE!

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. - Romans 3:9-20 NIV

Out of the gate, Paul wants the Jews to know that their privileges and advantages don't make them *superior* to others.

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. - Romans 3:9 NIV

Paul doesn't say that they *commit* sin. This is clever; he says they're "under sin". This is well-known slave/master terminology. Paul pictures sin as a ruthless taskmaster that *owns* us.

IMMORAL COMPASS

Slaves aren't rescued by a moral example, a philosophy, or a teacher. They need liberation! A slave's freedom must be purchased. The reason we're enslaved is because sin has caused us to lose our internal, spiritual gyroscope.

- Our moral compass has become an *immoral* compass.

[Paul quotes Ecc. 7:20] As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one ..." - Romans 3:10 NIV

- Our sense of righteousness has been knocked off-kilter.

Q: Ever watch a movie and find yourself rooting for someone fleeing the police to *get away*; or the crook to *get* the money?

In "*The Godfather*," the Corleone family is corrupt, but so are the other mafia families, the police, even the judges. And the others stab each other in the back. But the Corleones are *loyal*. We identify them as the *good* bad guys, and we think: if I was in a mafia family, I'd want to be a Corleone! And we *root* for them!

In "*Silence of the Lambs*" Hannibal Lecter is intelligent, witty, charming, and calm. Whereas, his psychiatrist is an egotistical sadist; his guards are dimwits; and the F.B.I. lies to him. Soon we're rationalizing: "So he eats people. There are worse things. Off-hand I can't think what; but, if I were a cannibalistic psychopath, I'd want to be just like Lecter!"

- It is in our nature to rationalize unrighteous behavior

Writers capitalize on our "ability" to justify and excuse unholy behavior even when our reason tells us it's not reasonable.

AGAINST OUR CREATOR

Paul gives three negative Navigations our immoral compass causes.

1. We're guided against our creator

[Ps. 14:2-3; 53:1-3] "... there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away ..." - Romans 3:11-12a NIV

Let's face it; nobody really seeks God (without the work of His Spirit maturing us). At best we begin by seeking His byproducts: The relief from guilt, grief, pain, and adversity; and the reward of Heaven, health, peace, and prosperity.

Q: Ever heard the expression: "I've *found* the Lord." That saying must come from the parable of the lost shepherd!

Jesus didn't say He came to be *found*. He said He came: "To seek and to save that which was lost" (*Luke 19:10*). We're the *sheep*: fairly dumb animals with no inclination to seek their shepherd when they've strayed. It is God who has taken all of the initiative!

- He's given us His Word, His Son, & His Spirit.
- And still, most people look at it and go: Baa!

People will argue that they're *good enough* (apart from Christ) to get into Heaven ... but that's really beside the point. The question isn't: Are you good enough? The question is: What we're you *seeking*? Heaven and Hell were created to evenhandedly fulfill our quest:

- A. The elation of an eternity centered on my creator.
- B. Or, the anguish of an eternity centered on myself.

AGAINST OURSELVES

2. And so, we're guided against our Creator, but what's really strange is that: We're directed against ourselves

[Ps. 14:2-3; 53:1-3 cont'd] "... they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." - Romans 3:12 NIV

The term "worthless" doesn't mean "lacking value", it means "corrupted". We're corrupted and bent on self-destruction.

Q: Why is it so hard to eat wholesome, and so easy to eat junk?

Q: Why do I avoid exercising when I know it makes me healthier?

Q: Why do I say and do the very things that I *know* I'll regret?

I don't know if you'll relate to this, but in a crowd this big maybe someone will. Any of you ever had a computer problem?

Q: When the computer crashes, we say the system has become, what?

A: Corrupted (it can't do me any good ... it's *worthless*).

Q: Therefore, its system needs to be, what?

A: *Restored*.

Once the hard drive is wiped clean, and given a new operating system, it has the capacity to function as it was created to. I can take the analogy farther: XP is the Greek abbreviation for Christ. It must *receive* the XP disk into its hard heart/disk.

AGAINST OUR NEIGHBOR

3. Not only are we pointed away from our Creator and ourselves: We're turned against our neighbor

Paul gives us the two major symptoms of this corrupted condition:

A. Our wicked *words*

[Ps 5:9] "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." [Ps 140:3] "The poison of vipers is on their lips." [Ps 10:7] "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." - Romans 3:13-14 NIV

The vile stench exhaling from an open grave doesn't come from the grave itself ... but from the rottenness within. The fangs of a serpent though normally folded back and hidden; suddenly appear and strike when it's riled. Sound familiar?

- Every untrue and unclean word exposes a decayed heart.
- Every unkind and uncaring word has toxic consequences.

B. So, it's our wicked *words*, and: Our wicked *ways*

[Is 59:7-8] "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." – Romans 3:15-17 NIV

Q: Do you know what people want more than peace?

A: They want their own way!

- That's why peace is as tough to maintain as it is to establish.

It's significant that the first recorded sin outside of Eden was murder (*Gen 4:8*). Man's first sin separated man from God. This second sin separated man from man.

THE CAUSE OF IT ALL

Q: How is it that we can turn so easily against our neighbors, ourselves, and even our Creator?

A: Paul closes this string of O.T. quotes with the cause of it all:

[Ps 36:1] "There is no fear of God before their eyes." – Romans 3:18 NIV

Proverbs 9:10 warns: The fear of God is the foundation of wisdom (a reverence and awe that borders on fright). But, we often give other fears a higher priority. And when we focus on less-significant fears, our compass turns us:

- A. From the eternal to the temporal.
- B. From highest good to immediate good.
- C. From glorification to gratification.

CONVICTED AND CONDEMNED

Now Paul offers a startling revelation about the O.T. law:

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. – Romans 3:19 NIV

Imagine, before God's throne, if every time you opened your mouth to defend yourself, venom sprayed out and instantly corroded everything it touched. You'd close your mouth and keep it shut!

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. – Romans 3:20 NIV

What Paul is saying is that the law of God is like a mirror. It can show you how dirty your face is, but you won't get clean by rubbing the mirror on your face. The mirror simply reveals the need for soap and water. In this way, we're convicted and condemned by the law.

We're thoroughly out-of-order, and neither good deeds nor religious philosophies can liberate, restore, or cleanse us.

- But the one who can is less than half an inch away ... in verse 21.

Old Testament References

Romans 3:10-18

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one ..." - Romans 3:10 NIV

There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins. - *Ecc. 7:20 NIV*

"... there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." - Romans 3:12 NIV

The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. - Psalm 14:2-3 NIV

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good. God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. - Psalm 53:1-3 NIV

"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." - Romans 3:13a NIV

Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit. - Psalm 5:9 NIV

"The poison of vipers is on their lips." - Romans 3:13b NIV

They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips. Selah - Psalm 140:3 NIV

"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." - Romans 3:14 NIV

His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue. - Psalm 10:7 NIV

"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." - Romans 3:15-17 NIV

Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; - Isaiah 59:7-8 NIV

"There is no fear of God before their eyes." - Romans 3:18 NIV

... concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. - Psalm 36:1 NIV