

XVII. Romans in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of God
“The Divine Indictment”
Romans 3:9–18
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
July 11, 2021 • Sunday Morning Sermon

We are now in our 17th study of Romans so let’s look at Romans 3 where we left off from the last study. Romans 3:9–19 says [9] *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, [10] as it is written:*

“None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God. [12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” [13] “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” [14] “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” [15] “Their feet are swift to shed blood; [16] in their paths are ruin and misery, [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 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. The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

In 1983 under the leadership of Dr. Barker and Tom Cheely, I had the privilege to go as a missionary to plant a PCA church in Charlotte, North Carolina as a daughter church of Briarwood. What I didn’t know was that almost simultaneously at that moment was a man who was an ordained officer at Briarwood was transferred from Birmingham and showed up to help us with our core group of about 38 people in Charlotte as we started meeting in a modular unit, which is a double wide trailer with the wheels covered up. At first, it seemed as though people would end up driving by the church and not stop due to having so few cars. So to give people somewhat of a comfort level to stop we asked people to drive every car their family owned and so we’d fill up the parking lot even though we hadn’t filled up the modular unit yet for worship.

Larry Kirkman, the one who transferred from Briarwood, was the one who helped us with this idea of showing more cars and this past year he went to be with the Lord but he became a good friend of mine. He was a wonderful businessman, husband and father. He loved the Lord and His church. I always thought it was so appropriate that Larry loved the Lord’s church because his last name was Kirkman. It is a holy name from Scotland that means churchman and that is what he was. He and I would meet about once a month for encouragement and fellowship and I would always try to ask him questions to learn from him because he was a very smart man.

One day I learned something from him that had to do with a name that he gave me that he said was very important. The name was Vocational Energy Management Quotient. I said ‘what does that mean?’ He said ‘it means when you get up everyday there are things that you do in your vocation that you can’t wait to do and there are things in your vocation that you absolutely do not want to do, but if you don’t do those things then you will never get to do what you want to do. So you steward the energy to make sure you do what you don’t want to do in order to get to what you do want to do.’ My mother already had this idea but just didn’t know the proper name for it because every morning she basically told me to go do what you don’t want to do so you can get to what you do want to do.

This is speculation but I believe that is what Paul has been doing in Romans 1 through 3. Paul is going to something that he must do and needs to do, in order to get to what he wants to do and I believe he can't wait to use one word and we'll get there in the next study. It is the word 'but' or 'however.' When he gets to using those words then he gets to talk with us about the Good News. Paul has been wanting to get to Rome because he is eager, energetic and unashamed to preach the Gospel but God keeps telling him 'no' but God will get him there through Roman imprisonment but right now he is having to write this letter of the exposition of the Gospel of God since he can't get there yet.

The word Gospel means Good News and the reason the Gospel is Good News is because the backdrop and context of the Gospel in Jesus Christ is extremely, overwhelmingly, and challengingly bad news. One will never see the Gospel as Good News until the bad news is seen. I know that Paul can't wait to get to the Good News but he also knows you will never understand how good, amazing, wonderful, glorious and marvelous it is until you understand the depth and despair. Paul peaked our interest in Romans 1:16–17 which says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

Why would Paul say this? In Romans 1:18 all the way to where we are in Romans 3 Paul has been dealing with the bad news – the upfront, unvarnished declaration of the bad news – and now we're in the court room where the Divine Judge has delivered the indictment. In Romans 1:18–39 Paul brought all the pagan world of Gentiles with the religion of irreligion to the bar of God's justice and the verdict was guilty. Then in Romans 2 Paul brought all of the man-made religion and philosophical inquiries of religious Gentiles and pronounced it hypocritical, inadequate and guilty. Then he brought the Jewish people before the Judge who had been given the true religion but had perverted it, not using it as God had designed it. True religion was to send us to Jesus and to mature us to serve Jesus, not to save us but the Jews had taken the privilege and signs given them in true religion and used that to say it would save them. Only Jesus can save you.

True religion had been given to the nation of Israel long before Jesus came but it was meant to point them to Christ. If true religion could save then why in the world did God send His Son Jesus? True religion with its signs of baptism, the Lord's Supper, Lord's Day worship, etc., can't save you but they can point you to the Savior. So Paul has taken all the Jews and Gentiles and brought them before the bar of God's justice and then Paul brings the Divine indictment. Let's look back at the opening verse for this study.

Romans 3:9 says [9] *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that **all, both Jews and Greeks**, (the whole known world) **are under sin**.* Paul has chosen these words carefully. Paul did not say 'all sin,' 'all are sinning,' 'all will sin' or 'all have sinned' (in this part of the text) although all of that is true. He is telling us the weight of sin is upon every single one of us, from the moment of conception until the Judgment Seat, unless God intervenes with a new birth and we are born again to be set free. We are all under sin – under its guilt – and no amount of man-made religion can deliver. We are under sin's shame and no amount of behavior modification can deliver. We are under its dominion and we're helpless and hopeless. Many times when things are going well we tend to think 'oh I'm on top of things' but spiritually we are not on top of things – we're under sin. We are under its guilt, penalty, power, practice and its shame. There are no exceptions. This is where Paul has brought us. Paul

has made sure we don't miss the first order of the doctrine of the Gospel where the first order is the bad news.

We learned in Romans 2 that there is coming a Day when all will appear before the Judgment Seat, to give an account to God who will render to every man according to what he has done, as according to the Gospel. This is the foundational doctrine of the Gospel that tells you how great the Good News is. If you don't get this, you will never come to Christ to save you from your sins. Briarwood exists as a church for what God has appointed us to exist for and that is to proclaim evangelistically and to disciple men and women with the whole counsel of God wrapped in the truth. That is our calling because the Gospel isn't that Jesus will get you out of debt or that Jesus will make you healthy, wealthy and wise, for the Gospel is that Jesus went to the cross to die to save you from the dominion of sin – to deliver you from sin's penalty, its power, increasingly from its practice and one day when you go to be with Him, He'll deliver you from its presence. Matthew 1:21 says *[21] She will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.* This is what the Gospel is and what Jesus does. That's why it's so important for us to understand this foundational doctrine to the Gospel for ONLY Jesus can save and that's why God sent His Son. What we could not do He most surely does for all who put their trust in Him.

Paul wants us to feel this indictment so he draws a picture for us to show that all are under sin – Jew and Gentile. This is not something Paul made us for he is explaining to us something that the Old Testament has been declaring both in whisper and megaphone all throughout and Paul uses quotes from the Old Testament that brings a portrait of what it means to be under sin. Half of these quotes he gives as precepts from the Old Testament of what it means to be under sin and the other half are descriptive – they are metaphors of what it looks like when someone is under sin. These quotes are amazingly clear, astonishingly powerful and they can't be explained away for they just simply have to be taken for what it is. We'll take a look at them to try and absorb what they are saying. They are linear and logical as one builds upon another. Let's look at this distillation Paul gives us from the prophets and the psalms.

The quotes are in Romans 3:10–18 but we'll just start with verse 10 which says *[10] as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; We know this is not something new just by the way Paul starts, 'as it is written...'* Paul wants us to see how much we can rejoice in the Good News of the Gospel in Christ. If all are under sin then it stands to reason that 'none' are righteous (vs 10). Not a single person is righteous in this world and we're not as evil or as sinful as we would be if it not for the common grace of God. Our total depravity is not lived out in absolute depravity because God in common grace restrains us from being as evil as we could be or would be, but that doesn't make them righteous. Yes, it's true people have done good things and that's what we would call civic righteousness but we have not performed that which is righteous before God. None of us are perfectly obedient to the law of God.

Here's an illustration. The greatest commandment in the Bible is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. So to love your neighbor in righteousness as yourself you have to know your righteousness with God. God speaks through the inadequacies of a preacher but if your mind wanders while he is speaking have you loved the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind? So if that's the greatest commandment then that is the greatest sin. There is none righteous, no not one. You will not get by being graded on a curve. The soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:20, Romans 6:23). No one is righteous and that leads us to the second thing that Paul profiles from the Old Testament.

Romans 3:11 says [11] *no one understands; no one seeks for God.* I was raised in a Christian home with Christian grandparents and parents and was taken to church all my life and none of it made sense to me nor did I want it to make sense to me, why? It was because I was in rebellion against God. Then at age 21 it made sense, why? The information didn't change but it was the reception that changed when God gave me eyes to see and ears to hear. The blinded eyes were opened and the dull hearing was now clear. Now instead of not understanding, I couldn't get enough. The day I committed my life to Christ I went home and read the entire New Testament. I can't tell you how many times I avoided reading the Bible before Christ came into my life and after I can't get enough of it. Up until the Spirit draws you to Christ, no one understands or desires it.

Thirdly, no one seeks for God. I drive by some churches that say 'seeker centered worship.' I automatically have two disconnects there. One is I thought worship had to be God-centered worship, not seeker centered or believer centered for it's not about you or me. It's about what gives praise and pleasure to God according to the elements He has designed in worship. Secondly, the Bible keeps telling me no one seeks God. So who can show up at a seeker centered service. No one seeks for God and I know someone reading this may think they know someone seeking but really you know someone in their sin are seeking the blessings of God that only come from God but they are not seeking God for they don't have room for Him. They are seeking their god and they are more than happy for peace, purpose and God's blessings but they don't want Him. Their god is themselves and the idols of idolatry they have arranged around them that aren't working. That is why they are seeking from God what they need but they are not seeking Him. It's not that they aren't seeking what God gives but they aren't seeking God because there is no room for Him. Let's continue in the text.

Romans 3:12 says [12] *All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.* When I became a Christian at 21 there was a popular singer on her what out at the time named Peggy Lee who sang a song titled 'Is that all there is?' I didn't necessarily like her style but her song resonated with me. The song reflects Ecclesiastes where all is vanity under the sun. Is being famous the ticket? Look at the list of the most powerful, richest, famous, applauded people as others say 'if I could just be that person' and see how much money they spend on therapists. Take a look at the suicide rate, it doesn't work. Together, they embrace emptiness and worthlessness.

When my kids were small, we always vacationed at this place off the coast of Wilmington, North Carolina and there were always two things we would do first once we got there. The first was bury dad (me) in the sand. I would usually negotiate to keep my face above sand. Secondly, we'd take the displaced sand and build these wonderful sand castles. Then after we'd been out there all afternoon building them, we'd go in and sleep as the tide came in. The next morning the sand castles would be gone. Most of us are spending our whole life in what will be swept away in the breath of His coming, just like a sand castle with the tide. Together we embrace uselessness and as we build our sand castle we don't have time for that which is really important.

Romans 3:12 goes onto say no one does good but you might be thinking people do good yet good is not only an external act but is an internal motivation. Think of the rich young ruler and what he called Jesus. Mark 10:17-18 says [17] *And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* [18] *And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."* Jesus was basically telling the man that he didn't know who He was yet the ruler

was flattering Him with this term good and Paul is telling us here in Romans there is none good. In other words, Paul is drawing upon Jesus' words which is drawing upon the Old Testament.

So, you might be thinking 'what about the man who gives his life for someone else or the one who intervenes for another?' Those are external good things but good things have an internal motivation and that is the glory of God and selflessness in life to the glory of God, and that's missing. Goodness is that which brings the truth, glory, and majesty of God in this world. Do you remember how Jesus answered the rich young ruler's question? Let's continue in the passage in Mark 10:19–22 which says [19] *You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'* [20] *And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."* [21] *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* [22] *Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

It wasn't because he had many possessions but his possessions had him and he violates two of the commandments, the first and the last – have no other gods before Me and do not covet which Jesus exposes. On the outside we would have called this man good but the reality is there is none good, no not one. Now Paul moves from these prescriptive profiles to a descriptive by using metaphors. Let's continue in Romans 3.

Romans 3:13–14 says [13] *"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive."* *"The venom of asps is under their lips."* [14] *"Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."* Here Paul uses throat, tongues, lips and mouth and interestingly when he is describing those of us under sin, he uses metaphors that are all about the area of communication. Why? Jesus tells us when He says in Luke 6:45, [45] *The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, **for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*** If you want to know the condition of the heart just listen long enough – the throat opens up and you see decade corruption in the heart for it's an open grave. The tongue invents ways to deceive.

An asp is a snake with a deadly bite for it has these pockets of venom in its mouth that are unleashed when it bites. We have these pockets of venom in our heart. It's not the mouth for the mouth is exposing what is in the heart – the heart of the problem is the problem with the heart from which the throat begins to get filled, the lips speak, the poison comes and the words deceive. How in the world did movies get the coding of 'adult language' or 'mature audience'? When in reality they are talking about the most adolescent language as possible. These days it's absolute cursing and bitterness. I don't even understand how we are able to tell a story on film before 1960, yet what you are seeing today in these movies are the heart of the culture we live in. We are seeing what fills people and what fills the heart comes out of the mouth including cursing and bitterness.

I grew up in a home where probably the worst thing I ever heard was 'oh!' and it wasn't because they were better people but it was because God had gotten their heart. Therefore, their mouth began to be filled with what filled their heart. Let's continue in the passage.

Romans 3:15–18 says [15] *"Their feet are swift to shed blood; [16] in their paths are ruin and misery, [17] and the way of peace they have not known."* [18] *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

We see in verse 15 that this lifestyle of those who don't seek God will lead to a lifestyle of violence, murder and you're probably thinking we're not those kinds of barbarians, yet in the last 2100 years the safest century was the first century. Just considering wars, do you know what

century has taken more lives? It is the 20th century and the 21st is on track right now to be even greater. Go look into the Korean War, WWI, WWII, the Spanish American War, the Vietnam conflict, and all the other conflicts and tribal wars. More people were killed with man-made violence in the last century than all other centuries before added up. Jesus is coming soon. I'm not even including the hundreds of millions killed politically by Stalin, Lenin, Pol Pot, Hitler, Mao and the 65 million we have killed in America in the womb and called it a right.

If there is any truth documented in the Bible, it's the sinfulness of man. All are under sin. People call for 'peace, peace' when there is no peace (Ezekiel 13:10) because they will not deal with the Prince of Peace who is Christ the Lord. Then Paul brings forth the most horrific indictment of all in verse 18 – there is no fear of God in their eyes. There are fears of everything else, but there is not that one fear that brings wisdom. Proverbs 9:10 says *[10] The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.* I can tell you right now I am saved and I have the fear of God. I can't even imagine appearing before this God who is so glorious, majestic and holy. I thank God I can go with assurance because of the blood and righteousness of Christ, when you are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Romans 3:19 says *[19] 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 very clear to tell us there is a Judgment Day coming and everyone is headed there. No one can cancel, move or pass on that appointment. Jesus talks about this Day more than anyone else in Scripture. If you are apart from Christ on that Day there is the Divine indictment and on that Day you will have nothing to say for every mouth is stopped. Every defense strategy has been dismantled, and all are guilty. All will stand under the righteous judgment of God on that Day. On that Day the Righteous Judge will stand and give the Divine indictment and then the Divine appropriate righteous judgment.

If it's hell it will be utter isolation, unending, unendurable torment endured with the mind ever remembering parents, grandparents, preachers pleading with you to 'come to Him on this day.' But in that Day you will have no defense. Come to Him, for the Judge who left the bench of justice to go to the cross, not to bring judgment but to bear your judgment for you to save you. On that Day you will have nothing to say but on this day, there is one thing you can say for the thief on the cross said it – remember me Jesus. The tax collector said it – God, be merciful to me a sinner. Whoever this day the Bible says in Romans 10:13, *[13] For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Again, on that Day you can't and won't speak, silence will be in the court and the only thing that will be heard is the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

On this day you can come to Him so that on that Day you might hear 'well done thou good and faithful servant' and you will be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. So instead of no one being righteous you will be clothed with His righteousness. Instead of not understanding there will be the one who hungered for the Word of God and instead of fugitives of God you turn together as the assembly of God. Instead of worthlessness you love nothing more than gathered worship on the Lord's Day and then bearing witness for Christ everyday and on that Day that portfolio won't describe you but what will describe you is the growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ who took you out from under sin and put you under grace.

Ephesians 2:8–10 says *[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* This day is the day you cry out to God, 'Be merciful to me a sinner!' That phrase 'there is no fear of God in their eyes' is a ringing phrase in my head

and my mind goes back to Isaiah 5 in which six fears over take the ungodly who will not come to Christ. Then in Isaiah 6 is the seventh fear. As Isaiah looked up to heaven and saw the angels and saints praising God, also seeing the trembling of the thresholds for even inanimate objects have enough sense to reverence and tremble. Hearing the Word preached we have been in the Lord's presence and we ought to be like Isaiah who then says in Isaiah 6:5-7, [5] *And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"*

[6] *Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. [7] And He touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."* Then we see how the Lord cleansed Isaiah. Will you now go for the Lord? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be in Your Word together. Thank You for Paul's painstaking commitment to bring us the truth of the bad news so that we might see the amazing truth of the Good News that this Judge is the One who left the bench of judgment to go to the cross to bear our judgment that we in that Day would be written in the Book of Life and the portfolio of life would reveal the righteousness and power of God so that the helpless and hopeless don't have the birthright of sin but have a new birth – born again – a new record, a new heart and a new life because this day we call upon the Lord. If you have not called upon the Lord this day, call and if there is a reason you don't want to, I would love to hear it so please call me at (205) 776-5200 and I would love to talk with you about it. There is a way that has been made now but in that Day there will be no way to call upon Him, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. If you want to pray with someone about having this everlasting life please call us here at Briarwood at the number listed. I invite you to Him today. Then O God for those who have already come to You, have called upon Your Name for salvation, send them out this day, this week to bear witness to the world. The world does not seek You but You have sent us to seek them that they may hear Christ by the Spirit of God through the people of God. Help us go to seek and save the lost through the glorious Gospel of Christ, the Good News. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

THE INDICTMENT

Prescriptive

Descriptive

LIFE TAKEAWAY

On that Day there will be nothing to say; but on this Day there is one thing to say.