

Paul' Portrait of Miserable Mankind

Romans 3:9-20

January 14, 2024

Today and next week we're gonna be in Romans chapter 3. So if you're not there already, please turn there in, in, your Bibles. And my prayer, as we look at these verses the next couple weeks, my prayer is that we would have just a reinvigorated, a renewed appreciation for the salvation provided for us in Jesus Christ. Just to like in that song we just sang, highlighting our sinfulness in contrast to what our Savior has done for us and how it just caused us to be so thankful.

As we look at Romans 3, we are going to see and be reminded of what Jesus Christ has saved us from. And in this passage, it's not, in particular, the penalty of eternal torment in hell, but we see and are reminded here in Romans 3 of the kind of deplorable man, a vile man, that Christ saved us from being and acting out in this life.

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Christ not only saved us from an eternity in hell, but he also saved us from the power of sin in this life, from being slaves to sin, and all the misery that attends such a person. And so I pray that today, though it is a, a, look at the ugliness of man, I pray it causes all of us to rejoice all the more in our Lord Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.

So let's just begin this morning by reading this. We're going to read Romans 3:9-20. Romans 3, beginning in verse 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, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.'

"'All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.' 'Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.' 'The venom of asp's is under their lips.' 'Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.' 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are misery and ruin, and the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'

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

There's a story told of a man who was walking through a park one Saturday afternoon and there were some young people there and he had a, a, pouch on his side and these young people thought this man was carrying a camera through the park. And this story is obviously from ages ago when not everyone carried a camera in their pocket. But these young people ask this older man to take a picture of them and this man told them, "I already have it."

And looking at the older man confused, the young people asked him, where and when he had previously taken their picture. He then opened his little leather pouch, which had a New Testament in it, not a camera, and he turned to Romans chapter 3. And he read them these verses and said, "that is your picture." And

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then he proceeded to go a little bit further in Romans 3, share the gospel, the good news with them.

We're going to get there a little bit later and then next week. But what we have here from Paul, this is a picture of every man in his fallen state, in sin apart from Christ. It's not a physical description. This is a description of the spiritual state of man in his fallen condition. It's a picture, but you might say a spiritual X-ray, so to speak, that looks into the heart of man.

This spiritual picture, it exposes that man is utterly wicked. No good thing resides in him. The man is fundamentally post-fall, not good, but evil, wicked to the core, totally depraved. And generally, Americans are okay to speak this way in these strong terms about people like Osama bin Laden or other really, really wicked people, but not about humanity in general.

Although nowadays your fundamental goodness or wickedness is determined by your color of skin, essentially woke theology says that all white men, especially white Christian men, are

fundamentally racist and wicked. So it kind of waxes and wanes in, in, the American culture and in the world culture as to how strongly they speak about these things. But for the most part, in our therapeutic age, this kind of language is denied about mankind in general.

People suppress the reality that we are all wicked at heart and even well-meaning Christians. They can look at this graphic portrait that Paul has painted here of wickedness and just kind of brush it off as an exaggeration from Paul, as if he's painting a picture of the worst of humanity. But this isn't really every person, is it? Not everybody is this bad, are they?

But rest assured, Paul, he's describing every man born in sin. Paul's describing every man, woman, and child. Yes, even you. Even me. And maybe this is a portrait of the old you that you've been saved by the grace of God that we've sung about this morning. But this used to be you.

And if you are here this morning and you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, this is still you. Regardless

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of how wicked you think you are or how you feel you are, this is you dear friend. And I pray that as you look into this mirror of Scripture, here, that you see yourself as, God sees you. No more lying to yourself about how truly ugly you are on the inside. No more pretending innocence. This is how God sees you.

A man once said that each man stands before God, today, like a little boy who swears with crying and with tears that he has not been anywhere, anywhere near the jam jar, and who with an air of outrage, he pleads his innocence; in the justice of his position, in total ignorance of the fact that he has spilled in half the jar of Jelly on his shirt, in front of him, but he doesn't know it's there. It's obvious for everyone else to see but him.

This is how the unbeliever is before God; pleading his innocence, all the while, it's obvious that he's guilty. Dear friend, if you are here today and you don't know Jesus, God is going to reveal today on the pages of Scripture what he thinks about you. Don't lie to yourself. Try to tell yourself it isn't true about you. The only hope of salvation is accepting, first

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accepting, what God says about you, the ugliness and darkness of your own heart.

And then the light of the gospel will seem ever bright to you and you can believe and repent and turn from it. So as we look at this passage, we're going to break it down into three points: The charge, the perpetrator and the verdict. The charge in verse 9, the perpetrator in verses 10 to 18, and the verdict in 19 to 20.

But let's start with point number one: The charge. Look back at your text of scripture. In verse 9, Paul says, "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.'" Paul begins with a couple questions and they point back to what Paul has already said in Romans 1 and Romans 2. But the question is regarding, if the Jews have any favor before God, more than other men.

Jews who stand before God for judgment, do they have anything that helps them before God more than the Greeks or more than the

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Gentile pagans? And Paul's answer is, "not at all", most certainly not. And he says, "we have already charged," and this is referring back to Romans 1 and 2, that there is essentially no difference between Jews and Greeks. And this points back to chapters 1 and 2, where Paul has forcefully declared that Pagan Gentiles and religious Jews are, by nature, sinful; stand before a holy God condemned.

He tells us in chapter 2 that God is not partial. He isn't going to favor the Jews over the Greeks or over any other ethnic people. All stand before God on the same ground. They stand condemned before God. So do the Jews have any advantage before God? Well, actually, the Scriptures tell us that the more we know, the more we'll be held responsible for. The more we know, we'll be judged more strictly for that.

And so, if anything, the Jews are at a disadvantage, because they were entrusted with the oracles of God. It says right before this, in chapter 3, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God, but they were unfaithful. So if anything, the Jews are at a disadvantage, but God shows no partiality. All

will be judged by God's standard of righteousness, measuring each man to the righteousness of God himself.

So as we get to this text in chapter 3, verse 9, Paul has already charged that man is horribly sinful and liable to judgement before God. Every man is charged with sin against God. And Paul here, he also says that all men, Jews and Gentiles are under sin. Under is a preposition, which indicates either a position of something like being underneath something else, answering the question, 'where,' which is obviously not the, the, usage here, or it is a marker of that which is in a controlling position and what comes right after that is sin.

So it's identifying something in a controlling position, that is under the control of; under the obligation to; in reference to power, rule, sovereignty, command. And that thing, which is in a controlling position is sin. Which while it can refer to departure from a standard of righteousness, it can also, as it does here, refer to a destructive evil power.

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This destructive evil power of sin is in a controlling position over man. This is elaborated later in Romans. Paul says that all men, they've become slaves to sin. They are enslaved to this power of sin. Bavinck says this of sin. He says, "It holds sway over the whole person, over mind and will, heart and conscience, soul and body, over all one's capacities and powers."

So, no man is free from the power of sin, and no part of man is free from the power of sin. Mind, heart, will, conscience, all enslaved to the power of sin. This is the doctrine of total depravity. Sin infects and controls every man and every faculty of man, such that nothing truly good can come from the heart of man, any more than a bad tree can produce good fruit or a thorn, broom, Bush produce figs.

In our fallen state apart from Christ, by nature every man is corrupt, and his nature is inclined to all evil, inclined to hate God, to hate his neighbor. This is the doctrine of total depravity. But this, there are things that this does not mean, as many people charge, the doctrine of total depravity. What this does not mean Bavinck says, "It is not that every human

lives at all times in all possible actual sins, and is in fact guilty of violating all of God's commands."

That is, practically speaking, they're not. Every man is not as bad as he could be. Bavinck goes on, and he says, "It only refers to the deepest inclination, the innermost disposition, the fundamental directedness of human nature. And it confesses that it is not turned toward God, but away from him." That is to say, obviously everyone in the world is not as bad as they could be, nor will everyone work out his deepest inclination to the extreme.

We'll talk about why this is the case a little bit later. But what total depravity, also, does not mean is, that sin has changed man's essence. Sin is not essential to mankind. That old maxim to err is human, is fundamentally false. It's only true of fallen humanity. But error and failing is not what it means to be human. It's not a part of our essence. That is to say, in a fallen state.

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I'm quoting from Bavinck again. He says, "We have retained our reason, our conscience, our will, and can therefore control our lower sensual drives and inclinations and thus force them in the direction of virtue. But total depravity means that when a man is restrained due to his reason or his conscience or other things, it is always out of a love for self and not God.

"It is always for self-preservation to maintain a positive image before other people and the like. Fear of man, not fear of God. Total depravity doesn't mean that men can't ever restrain themselves from doing something evil. It just means that when they do, it is always done for sinful reasons or selfish motivations. All they say and do, all their motivations, proceed from a heart lacking faith. And anything you do without faith is sin.

"But relatively speaking, many actions of men, that men and women do, they don't deserve to be reprimanded. In fact, many actions of men and women are to be commended and emulated. Even Calvin and the reformers, they often commended the actions of

unbelievers and frequently held them up as examples for Christians themselves to follow.

Bavinck says, "In light of the standard, people usually follow in their daily life or in philosophical ethics, one can wholeheartedly admit that much of what people do is good and beautiful, but this is not a true good." He goes on and he says, "Good, true good, good in the eyes of a holy God is only what is done out of faith, according to God's law and to God's glory."

So man is totally unable to do anything truly good, which means man is hopelessly stuck in a state of spiritual death that he cannot himself escape. Such a man, who can do nothing truly good, can do nothing to commend himself to God, nor does he want to. Thus, he is enslaved to sin without any inclination to remove himself and move toward God.

He is spiritually dead and powerless to move toward God, toward salvation. Man's only hope is that God sends him someone to save him; the spirit to regenerate his dead heart, to bring him to life, to cleanse him of his wickedness, and give him a new life,

a new nature. But this is the charge that Paul brings against every man. He is a slave to sin, guilty before God, no exceptions among fallen mankind.

we're all slaves to sin. Totally depraved. Our thinking is sinful. Our deepest desires and inclinations are only sinful. There's nothing truly good about us apart from Christ. One commentator notes that Paul has previously, in the book of Romans, in the previous two chapters, presented man's sinfulness from creation, from history, from logic and reason, and from conscience.

But now he presents the ultimate testimony of Scripture, the ultimate charge against man by using scripture. And what Paul does here in 10 to 18, he paints a detailed picture using Scripture to describe the perpetrator. The guilty one. Paul's given us the general charge, but now he gives us a detailed description of the perpetrator.

So point two in your outline: The perpetrator. Let's look at the beginning of verse 10. As it is written, Paul is taking a

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whole bunch of Old, text, Testament texts and compiling them together to create this picture. And he starts with, "None is righteous; No, not one." Again, Paul's not just quoting from one Old Testament scripture, but many Psalms. He draws from Isaiah, as well, to make this compilation.

And if we step back and look at this picture that he paints, he starts, really, in the interior of the person, in the heart, you might say, and he works his way out from there. And it's almost as if Paul, he has a subject before him, and he sticks a scope down his throat and into his inside to examine his heart. And that's where he begins. And then it says, if he draws, as he draws this scope out, he observes the throat.

Then he pulls out the scope a little bit further and makes observations about the tongue. And as he pulls it out further, right underneath the lips. And then as he pulls it out, an observation about the mouth in general. And then as he pulls it out even further, he sees the man, the blood on his hands and on his feet and the scenery around the man. But essentially what

Paul gives us here is a comprehensive picture of fallen mankind inside and out.

And I've broken this section up into three sub-points: The image of the interior, the picture of the portal, that is the, the mouth and the throat in the portal to the interior of the man and sub-Point C, the scenery of the Sinner. So the image of the interior: The picture of the portal and the scenery of the sinner.

So let's start where Paul does the image of the interior. Paul says, "no one is righteous." *Dikaios* refers to being in accordance with high standards of rectitude. This is the highest standard of righteousness; God's standard; God himself. Even if men might appear righteous on the outside, there is not one man, in his heart, who measures up to God's standard of righteousness. Not one.

One commentator uses the analogy of a man. In order to meet God's perfect standard of righteousness, he must perform a certain distance of a long jump. A trained long jumper can jump,

25 feet is a really good distance. Before analogy's sake, one commentator says, in order to meet God's standard of righteousness, one must jump from the shores of Hawaii to the shores of the United States.

So even though this trained long jumper who can jump 25 feet, which is much further than I could; looks good compared to me. But compared to, if he has to jump from the shores of Hawaii to the United States, he falls woefully short. Such a feat is impossible. But the point, also, is even if you could outwardly perform that jump, told depravity of man says that it, because you didn't do it for God's glory, it's sin anyway.

So even if men appear righteous, Paul reminds us here that there is none righteous. In the heart of hearts, they don't measure up to God's perfect standard of righteousness, of goodness, not one. Don't be fooled by what you see. Not even one measures up. And Paul continues with the interior view of man when he says in verse 11, "no one understands," this is a present active participle. This one and there's three others in the upcoming context.

But the significance of that is it refers to a present durative action. It's what characterizes someone's life. It is a part of who they are. Not just a one-time action, but a durative action. It characterizes who they are. They, they, don't understand. Jesus used the same kind of verbs in the Sermon on the Mount to describe the kingdom citizen.

And the Beatitudes, the kingdom citizens are those who mourn their sin continually. It's just a character of them. kingdom citizens are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. It's what characterizes their life. Jesus paints a picture of the kingdom citizen there, and this is the counterpart, picture of man apart from Christ, apart from the grace of God. And such a man is marked by a continual lack of spiritual understanding.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, he says, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." And yes, all men are spiritual, but all men in their fallen state, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:1,

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"are spiritually dead." Spiritually dead people can't understand spiritual truths; they can't understand because sin has blinded them spiritually.

If we were to return to our analogy of the man standing on the shore of Hawaii, who must jump to the shores of the United States in order to please God; man in his sin, he doesn't even understand what he must do to please God. He must jump a thousand, thousands of miles to the shores of the United States. But because of man's darkened understanding, he thinks he'll be accepted by God if he just builds a little sand castle on the shore. He doesn't even understand, what is required of him for righteousness' sake, to be saved.

He's darkened in his understanding. He doesn't understand spiritual things and he doesn't accept them. So there is "none righteous. There's no one who even understands" what he must do to be saved. He's darkened in his understanding. He rejects all that God says. And then Paul also says, "No one seeks for God." Again, this is a present active participle. This is what

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characterizes fallen man. He does not seek God. This word seek, it refers to exerting an effort to find or learn something out.

Man in his fallen nature, on his own, does not make any effort to learn anything about the true God, in order to worship him and find saving faith. People may do it for their own pleasure, their own sinful curiosity, but they, unbelievers in their fallen state apart from the Spirit drawing them, they do not seek him that they might worship him.

Thomas Aquinas was once asked on why there seems to be non-Christians who are searching for God when the Bible says no one seeks after God in an unconverted state. And Aquinas replied that we see people all around us who are feverishly seeking for purpose in their lives, pursuing happiness, looking for relief from guilt to silence the pangs of conscience. We see people searching for things that we know can be found only in Christ, but we make the gratuitous assumption that because they are seeking the benefits of God, they must therefore be seeking God, himself.

And Sproul, continuing that thought, he says, "That is the very dilemma of fallen creatures. We want the things that only God can give us, but we do not want him. We want peace, Sproul says, but not the 'prince of peace'. We want purpose, but not the sovereign purposes decreed by God. We want meaning found in ourselves, but not in his rule over us. We see desperate people and we assume, gratuitously assume, as Thomas Aquinas put it, we assume they are seeking for God. But they are not seeking for God and Sproul says, "I know this because God says so."

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Right here in these passages, quoting from Psalms, "no one seeks for God." Regardless of what we observe on the outside, no one, in their heart of hearts, is seeking God. While it might appear to us, some seek him, we know, we trust, because of what Scripture says, that in their hearts they are not. They're only seeking the benefits of God, not to worship him, to love him. "So none is righteous. No, not one, no one understands. No one seeks God."

Paul goes on, he says, "All have turned aside." Turned aside, is a word that means to keep away from or in modern day parlance,

you might say, steers clear of. All steer clear of God. The Hebrew word means to abandon or become a deserter. That is the, the, Hebrew word that Paul quotes from Psalm 14:3. Not only do men not seek God, but they steer clear of him. They desert and abandoned the way, way far away from him. They run like the wind away from him.

And so if we return once again to our analogy of the man on the beach in Hawaii, not only can the man not make the jump that he needs to make, not only does he not understand that's what he needs to do to please God, but also, we see here that, he actually runs the other way, because he hates God. The man's on an island, the volcano's about ready to explode and consume him in fire, and the man needs salvation.

But instead of running away to God, he goes up on the mountain to jump into the volcano. They abandoned God. They run away from the only thing that can save them. They abandoned God so distantly, that they begin to tell themselves that God doesn't even exist. They abandoned the idea of God altogether. They suppress the truth. They lie to themselves and say God doesn't

even exist. They become so rebellious in their minds and hearts, they deny God altogether.

And Paul continues, not only do they not seek God, they flee away from him. Paul says, "then they have become worthless." The Old Testament passage this is taken from, it's a word that is used to refer to milk that has turned sour and rancid, making it undrinkable, making it unusable to make butter or cheese or anything edible, like salt that has lost its saltiness; as Jesus said, it's only useful for trampling under feet, only useful to display judgement against.

So is the natural fallen man. He is spiritually worthless. Is only able to further corrupt and destroy himself and all that he touches. Natural fallen man is spiritually worthless, like rotting milk. He's just a stench to those around him, unable to do any spiritual good. Which is where Paul goes next, "No one does good." And good here, it's a rare word used refer to, that Paul uses over and over in his epistles, to refer to divine goodness.

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The Septuagint, the Old Testament translated into Greek, it's used six times. And the two times, it uses it in relation to man, it is man doing good in relation to belief and trust in God, in Yahweh. This rare word for good, used in relation to divine goodness. So Paul is saying that no one does or acts out of a heart of goodness.

No one acts or does divine good in his heart, because no one is good in his heart. Rather, as previously charged, they are only wicked all the time, suppressing the truth. And just, just, in case we might make ourselves the exception or somebody else, there's that little tagline, "not even one."

Not even one among fallen humanity. Not even one does good, because we all have are born, as we read earlier, born in sin. But this is the picture of the heart that Paul paints, the interior of man. The heart is fundamentally wicked, not good. Man cannot reach God's high standards. Not only can he not reach them, but he doesn't even understand what those standards are, where he needs to go to please God, and besides that he doesn't want to. He wants to run in the other direction.

Man is a walking, talking, rotting corpse that's worthless on the inside, decaying. It's a pretty ugly picture, so far, but as I said earlier, this is a picture of us. Maybe us, before we were saved, but as a picture of who we used to be. But this is what we once were, and it is a picture of some of you sitting here today. This is how God sees you. Rebellious, running the other way, unable to please him, unable to do anything good, ready to receive his wrath. But if this is bad, it only gets more graphic and vile from here.

As Paul, as I mentioned, begins to remove the scope from his subject, from the heart of man. He pulls it out through the portal to the inner man, the mouth or the throat. And that brings us to Sub-point B, the picture of the portal. The picture of the portal. Jesus said in Luke 16:45, "That out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." The mouth and the throat are the portal to the heart; it is this portal, the passageway, which brings forth what is inside the heart. And that's what Paul paints a picture of.

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Now look at verse 13. He begins by saying, "their throat is an open grave." The verb in that sentence there in the original is not 'is', but the verb is the word open, and it's a participle. A better way to translate this might be their throat is an opening grave. The imagery is unmistakable. If the throat is the portal to the heart, the inner man, and the heart is full of death and decay, because it's a grave, it's a portal to a grave; when the throat opens, when man goes to speak, it's like opening a grave with fresh decay in it.

I don't know how well acquainted you are with Fresh Decay. My closest acquaintance with something actively decaying and opening a door to something that was actively decaying was one day, a week prior to this day, I had unplugged my freezer in the garage with all the meat in it to do something else to plug something else in, and I forgot to plug the freezer back in.

A week later, I went to get some meat out of the freezer for my wife to make something, and I can't even begin to explain to you the horrendous smell that came forth from that freezer. The stench that came forth, the, the, vileness of it. That's the

imagery here that Paul is trying to evoke. Almost, the sense of smell is trying to be evoked here, as an opening of a grave, with fresh decay in it.

When an unbeliever opens the portal of their heart, there's a stench of death and decay that comes forth, absolutely grotesque and revolting. It's a picture of everything you say, and even if they appear good, in God's sight, they look like this, because they come from a heart that is set against him, that hates him.

Very, very ugly picture Paul begins to paint here. The throat, as a portal to a fresh, fresh decay. Opening the mouth is opening a portal to a fresh decay. In the, what comes forth is vile; picture of every man. He goes on and he says, "They use their tongues to deceive." To deceive is the, in the Hebrew, the verse that Paul took from here, quoted from here, is the word flattery. So here deception refers to taking advantage through craft and underhanded methods, which includes flattery; buttering someone up with false words to take advantage of them.

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And the original that Paul quotes from, the Hebrew, it's an imperfect form, which makes this a habitual, ongoing action. Fallen man, fallen mankind is habitually deceiving. They're characterized by using their tongue for their own advantage, at the expense of others. But the irony is, they use their tongues to deceive others, all the while unaware that the sin that produces these outward words of deception are also at work in their own hearts and their own minds, deceiving them about their sinfulness.

They flatter others for their own advantage, and they flatter themselves, and they tell themselves that they're good and they're great, leading themselves into destruction along with everyone else that they lead. So man continually uses his tongue to deceive men apart from Christ. That is their continual action. The continual use of their tongue is to deceive. Nothing good, as Paul has said.

Then Paul, he attaches another Old Testament reference, as he continues to paint this picture. He observes the throat and the tongue, and as he's leaving the mouth, he sees right under the

lips and he says, he appends this Psalm, "The venom of asp's is under their lips." An Asp is specifically an Egyptian cobra. But this phrase, venom of asp's can refer to, generally, just any venomous snake.

Here in our part of the world, you might think of a rattlesnake. I don't know if you've ever seen any of those videos of people milking rattlesnakes for the venom. And they grab the back of their head and they put the snake towards that little jar with a piece on top. And they throw their head, and the fangs come down. That's the imagery that Paul's getting at here. Those fangs that are the delivery system to the venom reside just behind the lips of the snake. And when that snake opens to strike, they drop down and inject the deadly poison into their victim.

But this word, venom here, it's a very rare word used only here and in the book of James, twice. Refers to poison or venom from an animal or a highly corrosive substance that can even erode metal. James in his epistle uses it, also, in relation to the tongue and says, that the tongue is "full of deadly poison." But

later in chapter 5 verse 3, James describes it as a corrosive poison that eats through flesh like fire.

So fallen mankind, his throat is an open grave that brings forth death. His tongue is used to deceive. Right behind his lips are fangs that deliver words that burn through flesh like fire. This is an ugly picture of someone. A monstrous picture of a man who has fangs behind his lips like a viper or rattlesnake. An ugly, grotesque picture of a man. And yet this is either you or it used to be you. But it's absolutely repulsive. But this is what God thinks of every man in his fallen condition. Every man waiting to strike to devour someone.

Paul continues, he says, "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." It's almost as if Paul has removed the scope. He's seen all these things. He makes this summary statement about the fallen man. "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness" and of course, if your mouth is a portal to a grave, you have deadly fangs with venom behind your lips, of course, the only thing that's going to come from this is bitterness and cursing.

Curses refers to an utterance or a prayer in hopes that one might bring evil upon someone else. It's something that's said, intend to bring hurt upon someone else; bring destruction upon someone else. It would be like saying to someone, I wish you would die. Evoking a curse upon them or speaking horrible wishes upon someone behind their back, either way. But the mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

Bitterness refers to the effect that they have on other people. So as death and decay and deadly venom pour forth from the mouth of the man in his anger, and his wrath, his animosity, his harshness, as those things pour forth, they destroy others and they affect bitterness. Well as we look at this ugly, ugly picture of man, thinking that this used to be me, I don't know about you, but I've had enough. This is one ugly, repulsive dude.

But we can't move on because Paul's not done putting more Scripture together to finish painting this picture. But he goes on to look more at the outward action of the man and the destruction that he leaves behind. And that brings us to sub-

point C: The scene of the sinner. The scene of the sinner. Paul says their feet are swift to shed blood.

As Americans, we don't need to look outside our country, outside our state, to find those who are swift to shed blood. You look at the proponents of abortion in our country, and this is manifest and on display for all to see. With the millions of babies that have been slaughtered in the womb in recent decades, I don't think we're under any illusion that this is really what's in the heart of man. But the inclination towards evil, that is in man's heart, works itself out in the shedding of blood. Being quick to shed blood.

And because of the obvious example of this in our day and age of abortion, and I don't really think any of us need any more convincing on this point. We get it. People are quick to shed blood, if for no other reason than they be inconvenienced. Paul makes this the actual one point of being fellow image bearers of God.

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So as Paul backs up and he wants to paint a picture of man, he observes the blood on his hands and his feet. That's what characterizes him; the most heinous of sinners, he's a murderer at heart, murderer in action. And as he backs up further, he begins to paint the scenery of destruction around the man.

He says, "in their paths are ruin and misery." Ruin and misery are a pair of words in the Hebrew that depict complete destruction. It's a violent breaking that's often connected with earthquakes and other passages in the Old Testament. And what is described here is, what is in the wake of such a man's life, what follows the circumstances that attend this kind of man. What is in the wake of fallen man, is violent destruction of everything. What is left in the wake of fallen man is desolation, misery, despair, gloom, and anguish not only for the man, but for everybody else around him.

Fallen man is like a tornado that leaves nothing but ruin and misery in his wake. And I think as many of us have grown up in Christian homes, we've been spared of this. But for many people, this is just everyday life. This is how unbelievers treat one

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another. Fallen men and women, they get married and they are just portholes of death, as Paul describes here. They just bite and devour one another, infect one another, poison one another. Then they have little ones come along and they learn to do the same thing.

And praise God, many of us have been spared from this, but many, this is how they live. This is what their lives look like. There's only misery and ruin. And Paul goes on and he says, "In the way of peace, they have not known." Obviously, if your life is described as doing no good, always focused on the self, quick to shed blood, quick to do violence, and the wake of your life, behind you, wherever you go, is just destruction, like a tornado leaves behind. Of course, you have no peace, relationally or otherwise.

Peace is the opposite effect of the fallen man's life. This is obvious and Paul goes on and he says, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." This is from Psalm 36 verse 1, and in the Hebrew the typical word for fear is *yārē'*. But that's not the word that's used in Psalm 36, that Paul quotes here. In Psalm

36, it is not the word, typical word for fear, but it is the word that refers to trembling, dread, and terror. It refers to something that there is great danger in.

Thus the fallen man, it's not that they don't see God as worthy of worship, it's that they see him, and there's no Fear of judgement in him. They're not drawn to him, but they are also are not afraid of his judgement. They fear no judgement for their wicked deeds and that's why they do all that they do. They have convinced themselves that there is no God, there's nothing to be afraid of, so they can live however they want.

But as we come to the end of this portrait that Paul has painted, this is the person, this is the life of the person who doesn't fear God. A man who bites and devours like a viper, pouring forth death and decay from his mouth, quick to shed blood, leaving death and destruction in the path behind him everywhere he goes. But as we stop and look at this passage of Scripture, and we've alluded to this already.

But do you stop and think, I believe what the Scriptures here say. I believe what they teach here. I believe the painting of the ugliness of man that Paul has masterfully painted here. But I'm not sure I see man is really that bad. I don't see him as is bad as Paul describes here. I mean, I have neighbors who are nice to me, a boss who doesn't believe in the Lord, but he treats me well.

This apparent discrepancy with Scripture, what we see, what we observe, do we take what Scripture says here and what we observe and just say, well, I'll just trust what the Scriptures say and move on. I trust this, even though that isn't my experience. Well, trust is the right disposition to have, but if you think that way, that's just lazy trust. We have to think why the disparity between this ugly picture and everyday life that we experience.

Well, this on the pages of Scripture is how God sees every man from his heart to his outward actions, the ugliness of it. But this is a picture of fallen man without any restraint. That is to say, were God to remove all restraint from sin, this is what

every unbelieving man would look like. You could have a pet rattlesnake. I don't advise that. But you could have a pet rattlesnake that you keep muzzled and you let it roam around the house, and it'd be relatively harmless. But does that mean the fundamental nature of the rattlesnake had changed? No.

The moment the restraint was gone, the moment it found a way out of the muzzle, it would turn and strike you. God likewise has given mankind many restraints and praise God that he has. The doctrine of total depravity by no means implies that every man will look like this, practically, but he has the disposition to do it. He has the nature to do it, but he's muzzled.

Bavinck notes, he says, "There are various circumstances that intervene and keep the depravity of man from fully expressing itself. Not only are many sinful deeds restrained by the sword of the government, common civil decency, public opinion, the fear of disgrace and punishment, and so on, but a variety of factors, such as the natural love still inherent in every person, the moral character fostered by upbringing and struggle,

favorable circumstances of constitution, environment or job, and so on.”

“But” Bavinck says, “When conditions are favorable and the need arises, the depravity of man often breaks through the dams and dikes that restrain it.” End Quote. So while the man would be unleashed due to his lack of fearing God, as Paul says here, he is restrained because he fears the sword, he fears punishment, he fears other men. But in none of this, is a righteous inclination toward God.

But we should still rejoice that there are, in place, restraints by God upon fallen mankind. So what does this matter? Well, this matters because we as Christians have a part in being the restraint for many sinners. We need to see it as our responsibility to do so. And I'm not saying you need to go out and start citizen arresting people, but we do actively, consciously need to recognize that this is one of the functions of the institutions that God has given to restrain sin.

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And we have a part in each of those. We could just start with the family. You, as parents and even grandparents, need to understand within the institution of the family, you have authority to restrain sin in the unbelievers in your household, particularly in your unbelieving children.

Yes, we evangelize them. We pray that the Lord would save them and give them a heart that wants to fear God and obey him. But if they don't believe or have not yet believe, you don't just throw your hands up and say, Oh well, God, it's in God's hands. There's nothing I can do with this sinner. God's going to have to change him. For the unbelieving world, this is the old saying, oh, boys will be boys, girls will be girls. No.

As Christians, we understand we're to discipline those whom God has put in our charge and our care, with punishments that fit the crime in order to restrain their sin. If you spare the rod, Solomon tells us in the Proverbs, you hate them. If you love them, you will teach them God's righteous requirements and that there are consequences to their sinful actions. And this ultimately, the teaching them that there are temporal

consequences to their actions, teaches them, points them to the gospel; teaches them that there are ultimate consequences that come from their sin.

But even unbelievers, unbelieving kids, they still have a will. They may not obey because they love God, but they can still obey because they fear the rod or the sword. Total depravity is the theological reason they are the way they are, that they sin. They are sinners. But this is no excuse to sin and continue in it. Each unbelieving man still chooses to sin, and they need to choose not to, even if it is just to avoid the rod or the sword.

And for our children, we pray that one day they choose not to sin because they love God and want to glorify him. But until then, we as parents, we must teach them, restrain them with appropriate discipline. We are restraints upon the unbelieving world, beginning with our kids. We must hold them to the law of the Lord, because that's what they will be held accountable to in the end. And failing to do so is nothing less than hatred.

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So the institution of marriage, the role of parents, restrains the heart of sinful men. There's also the church as an institution and individual members of the church, who are to be salt and light in the world. I grew up in the construction world and it is amazing how uncomfortable one Christian, who doesn't have a foul mouth, can make everybody else uncomfortable on the job site, with their foul mouths, because it exposes it.

And us together, here we form the light of the local church, which is a beacon of hope, but also restraint. But, and we've seen this over the years, the less and less prominent the church is in society, the less restraint there will be. Or, for instance, if the church begins to affirm them in their sin, as we see in our day with all the LGBTQ agenda. If the church begins to affirm them in their sin, there will be no restraint. Again, this is not love. This is hatred.

Removing the restraints that would keep people from sin is nothing less than hatred. So as individuals, we exhort, exhort you, be bold to confront wickedness. Use it as an opportunity to point to the holiness of God and the gospel. They will hate you

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for it, but it is our place to be light and salt to the world. This is also one reason we practice church discipline, as well, to keep the church pure, that other people might see it in fear, turn from their sin, be restrained.

But there's the institution of the family, the institution of the church, and, just, just, finally, briefly, the institution of the state. The state bears the sword to punish those who do evil, to restrain sinners, and suppress their wickedness. And as citizens of a Democratic Republic, we bear responsibility to vote, in order to influence lawmakers, to make laws that they might restrain sin.

We vote to put people into places that they might restrain sin. And when people don't obey these laws, we have people to put them behind bars to restrain them. Some of you do the God honoring work of enforcing these good laws to restrain people behind those bars. I thank you for doing that. It's not more sanctified than other occupations, but some a lot of times it's more difficult.

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You probably have a more accurate view of mankind that you see this on the pages of Scripture a lot more than the rest of us. But let's all be faithful, continue to be faithful, to obey God and restrain evil by being faithful parents who discipline. By being faithful church members, who live as salt and light in the world, even disciplining one another.

Let us be faithful citizens to vote in such a way that works to restrain sin in the world, because first, it glorifies God, but also as love for neighbor. We don't want to see them go down the path of sin any further. We want to restrain them. Because this dude on the pages of Scripture, this guy here that Paul paints a picture of, he's a monster. We don't want a bunch of monsters roaming our streets.

But just with that little aside, let's return to Romans 3 and begin to wrap this up. We want to be reminded that this horrendously ugly picture, this detestable image of a man, is a picture of every man. Some of you here now, some of you who, you, it used to be you, every fallen man, unrestrained. This is how God sees each man apart from Christ.

Some of us have been set free from slavery by grace, but this was us. But with that in mind, let's round out this last point quickly. The result or the verdict. "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. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

We could probably spend a couple weeks just on these two verses. I'm not by any means giving a detailed exposition. Rather, I'm just going to make the overall point and make some closing comments. Apart from the law, we all think we're good and beautiful even. We lie to ourselves. We cover our sin and we tell ourselves that we're great.

But the law brings the knowledge of who we really are. It dispels the lies that we tell ourselves. The law is not a mirror that tells us what we want to see; that we are the fairest of all. The law is a mirror that shows us we are this ugly monster

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of a man or woman. It stops our mouth of any more excuses. It stops the lies, and it reveals the standard that God is going to hold us to. It reveals that we can't jump from Hawaii to the United States, therefore we will be condemned.

No one is justified before God because he cannot meet the standard. Thus, we all deserve God's full wrath and punishment for our sins. We are all guilty. We are all, each of us, this ugly man on the pages of Scripture; this monster that he describes. We will all give an account before God for our deeds.

If 9 to 18 are the details to the picture Paul paints of every fallen man, then these two verses, 19 to 20, they're the frame around this picture. They're the frame that reads, has your picture on it, and it reads, 'wanted guilty of high crimes against God, punishable by death.' These verses are, preverbally, a wanted poster with your picture on, picture on it, you and you and you.

And if you're in Christ, you received forgiveness of sins and salvation. It's still your picture, but you know you've been

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changed from the inside out. And when you stand before God for judgment, you stand with the righteous robes of Christ, and you'll rejoice, because Christ has already paid your penalty, the price for your crimes. "And there is now therefore no condemnation for you, for those who are in Christ."

And this just causes us to rejoice, all the more now, because we see what the Lord has saved us from, the monster he kept us from being in this life, and eternal punishment, he saved us for in the end. But what a joy to be reminded of what we have been saved from. But if you're here today and you've not been forgiven in Christ, that is still your face on that wanted poster. There's a bounty on your head, and the enemy that plans to cash in on that bounty is death. And that bounty is high, because you've sinned against an infinitely holy God. And death is coming for you. It comes for us all.

You might successfully run from God in this life, but when death catches you, there is no escape and you will stand before God. And this picture that we've looked at today, God's not

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going to see you as the nice person you see yourself as. God's going to see you as, that man. But there is hope.

You don't have to be that man standing before God, condemned. "The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith."

If that's you, still today, that man on the pages of Scripture, you can believe and trust in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, to be washed completely clean of your sins; to be given a new nature, to love and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. And we'll come back next week to talk more about this. But I don't want you to leave, today, still in your sins. You have any questions about this, please, I'll be down front. Come down and talk to me or talk to anybody around you.

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Let's pray, heavenly Father, we rejoice that you saved us from such a horrible life on earth, to be enslaved to sin, to do everything only out of a fear of man or fear of consequences. We rejoice that by your spirit, you have revealed your son, Jesus Christ to us. You have opened our spiritual eyes, regenerated our hearts, to believe and put our faith and trust in you. We are so thankful for that Lord.

We rejoice anew this morning, that you saved us from the monster of a man on the pages of Scripture, from the life of ruin and destruction, and biting and devouring all those that we love. We rejoice in this, and we praise you, because it's only by your grace. A gift you have given us. Nothing worthy in us, but we rejoice that you saved us.

And Lord, we pray for any here who do not yet know you. We pray that they see the ugliness of the monster on the pages of Scripture here. The vileness, that they see that is them; that they see that that's how you see them. But they don't have to stay there. We pray, Lord, that today might be the day of salvation for some who see their desperate need for a savior,

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today, for the first time. We pray that you would work in their hearts and draw them to yourself. That they'd put their faith and trust in you and turn from their sins. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.