

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Guilt of All Men, Part 1

Scripture: Romans 3:9-12

Code: 45-26

Romans chapter 3 is our passage for tonight...Romans chapter 3 verses 9 through verse 20, a very famous portion of Scripture. And I want to read it to you as we begin and then we'll talk about it for a while tonight and then next Sunday night as well.

Romans chapter 3 verse 9, "What then, are we better? No, in no way for we have already proved that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin. As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that understandeth. There is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable. There is none that doeth good, no not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher, with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God." And we'll stop there.

Man likes to think he's good. In fact, he's pretty well convinced himself that he is. He's okay. He ought to be able to pat himself on the back. He ought to certainly think positively about himself. He really likes to think he's good. But down deep inside man has a real problem in convincing himself of his goodness and the problem is guilt. Because men are inevitably and invariable guilty and they feel that way.

Ann Landers has written an interesting paragraph on guilt. And in that paragraph she says, "One of the most painful self- mutilating time and energy consuming exercises in the human experience is guilt. It can ruin your day or your week or your life, if you let it. It turns up like a bad penny when you do something dishonest, hurtful, selfish, rotten or tacky. Never mind that it was the result of ignorance, stupidity, laziness, thoughtlessness, weak flesh or clay feet. You did wrong and the guilt is killing you. Too bad. But be assured, the agony you feel is normal. Remember, guilt is a pollutant and we don't need any more of it in the world," end of paragraph.

That's where the article ends. And she goes on to another subject. She says guilt is painful, guilt is normal, guilt is a pollutant and we don't need any more of it. But the question you want to ask her is what? How do we get rid of it? She doesn't have an answer, she's on to the next subject.

No matter how often man tells himself he is good, he inevitably faces the fact that he does evil and feels the guilt. Guilt drives people to alcohol, to drugs, to loneliness, insanity, suicide and when they play psychological games with their mind and try to pass their guilt on to somebody else, it only increases their guilt. They're not only guilty for what they did, but now they're guilty for blaming somebody else for it. Sin and its resultant guilt poses the ultimate and severest problem for all mankind. And men would like to get rid of guilt, they really would. But they really don't know how to get rid of it.

I read this week about a man who sent a \$50 check to the IRS and he said, "I'm sending you this check because I can't sleep at night because I was dishonest with my income tax. P.S. If I can sleep after sending this, okay. If I can't, I'll send you the balance."

Seneca, the Roman philosopher and statesman, said, "Every guilty person is his own hangman."

Now man is guilty because he has real guilt. And that's why all of the psychological and psychiatric exercises in the world do not ultimately relieve man of his guilt. They only help him to put it on to somebody else which intensifies the guilt because he's now blaming someone who isn't responsible. Man cannot relieve himself of guilt in a legitimate and effective way. And the reason is because he has real sin and real sin has the effect of guilt...just as real injury to the body causes the effect of pain.

Now the recognition of the sin of man and the guilt of man is the first great element in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church is in the world to tell men they're sinful, to tell men they have real guilt, not just psychological or psychiatric or emotional guilt but real guilt. They have in fact sinned against a holy God and they are responsible. And that is where the gospel always begins. That is why in the epistle to the Romans that we've been studying as Paul throughout this marvelous epistle is committed to presenting the gospel of Christ, as he says in chapter 1 verse 16. He has to begin with a statement on sin. Before he can actually get to the remedy, he has to present the disease. So, in Romans chapter 1 verse 18 through chapter 3 verse 19, where I stopped our reading tonight, right up to that point there is an open condemnation of every human being whose ever lived on the face of the earth and all are held as guilty before God. And that is essentially what it says at the end of verse 19, that is the sort of summation of everything that's gone before since chapter 1. Every mouth is stopped, in other words, there's no defense, there's nothing you can say, there's no way you can get out of it, there's no self-justifying words, every mouth is stopped and all the world is guilty before God. That is what the gospel first has to say to men. We are not here to tell everybody they're okay, we're not here to tell them that they're all right the way they are, that they just need to add a little bit of religion to their already Godward bent, that everything is going to be okay, that God would never look at them as sinners, they're too nice for that. We're not here to say that, we're here to say that men are sinners, they have real guilt before God and they are under condemnation.

And we have been seeing that all the way through the first three chapters of Romans. Man finds it so very difficult to admit that. Dr. Barnhouse wrote, "It is only stubborn self pride that keeps man from the confession to God that would bring release. But that way he refuses to take. Man stands before God today like a little boy who swears with crying and tears that he has not been anywhere near the jam jar and who with an air of outraged innocence pleads the justice of his position in total ignorance of the fact that a good spoonful of the jam is fallen on his shirt, under his chin and is plainly visible to all but himself," end quote.

Now Paul knows that men tend to resist the reality of their sinfulness, so in summing up this portion, he wants to make a final strong statement about the utter and total sinfulness of man. Up to this time, now listen, he has argued that man is sinful from creation, from the testimony of creation. He has argued from the testimony of history. He has argued from the testimony of reason. He has argued from logic. He has argued from conscience. And now comes the coup de grace, he argues from Scripture. He argues in chapter 3 from the very Word of God.

If you look at history you can see man is sinful. If you look at reason you can see man is sinful. If you see his conscience at work you know man is sinful. But most of all, if you listen to the revelation of the Word of God which is the ultimate testimony, you will be finally, I trust, convinced of the sinfulness of man. So beginning in verse 10 and running through verse 18, you have a string of quotes out of the Old Testament. And this is Paul's bringing God into the court to give testimony as to the sinfulness of man. This is Paul at the peak of his argument. This is Paul at the pinnacle summarizing everything he has said only putting it in the terms of the very Word of God Himself. This is God's view of man. We're not any longer dealing with Paul or human reason or human conscience or history, we're dealing with God. It is powerful and it is convincing. And I really believe, beloved, that this is the message that we must preach that there is sin and man is sinful and man is guilty and he must come to the recognition of that, or he will be led to know the one who can be the remedy.

Now the text from verse 9 on is kind of put in a trial motif. It has the feeling of a courtroom, the procedure appears to be judicial. The language is that of a trial. With that in mind, let's begin at the beginning then with the arraignment, the arraignment in verse 9. And here Paul brings the whole world into the court to prove them guilty.

The charge begins with two questions. Most interesting and simple questions. What then, what's the case? How are we to understand the situation? What is the conclusion to all of this? In other words, what are you driving at, Paul? Where are you going with this? What do you mean to say? He has just condemned the immoral pagan, he has just condemned the moral religious man, he has just condemned the Jew who had the right religion. Everybody has been condemned. And now the question, what's next? Where are you going with this? And then this second question, are we better? Paul asks this rhetorically. Do we excel? Are we any better than the foregoing immoral man,

moral man or Jew? Are we any better?

Now immediately you're faced with one question, what is it...who is the "we"? Of whom is he speaking? Many commentators feel he's speaking about the Jews. I tend to think not because he has just finished their section. And he has just answered the questions the Jews would ask in verses 1 through 8. He has already showed the Jews that they do have an advantage over the Gentiles in having the law of God. So why would he ask the same question again? Why would he be saying are we Jews any better, when he has just answered in verse 1 what advantage then has a Jew? And he's just shown that the Jew is really no better off even though he has the law of God, he's under a greater condemnation if he doesn't believe. Whether you're an immoral man, or a moral man or a religious Jew, you're under the same condemnation. They're all sinners. One is no better than the other. One may have the law of God written, one may have the law of God in conscience, but when it comes to guilt before God, they're all the same and they all need salvation.

I would also add that never in the rest of the epistle to the Romans does Paul identify himself with the Jew...with a rhetorical we. Why would he do that here? I think the we here is the we that gathers up the only remaining people that he hasn't discussed and that would be himself and the Romans to whom he writes which would be representative of the believers. And he's simply asking this question, are we any better than these people? Are we any better than the immoral pagan? The moral religious man? And the religious Jew who are condemned before God? Are we some kind of elite who are intrinsically better than everybody else? I think this fits with verse 8 where you have a we, as we are slanderously reported and as some affirmed that we say, and there the we definitely refers to Paul and his companions in ministry. And so the question is very simple. Are we believers...now mark this very carefully...by nature? Are we who are Christians by nature in ourselves any better than the rest of the condemned world? What's the answer? No. And that's what he says, no...in no way.

So he just gets us into that condemnation so some of us aren't sitting outside saying, "Yes they are awfully bad, those people on the outside are awful," and get the idea that we're some kind of elite and we're redeemed because we were better than everybody else. The answer is ou pantos, all together no, no in every way no. And so he's really gathered up everybody. He's talked about everybody from the most immoral, vile, reprobate, homosexual, vice-ridden person to a person who assembles himself with the community of believers and includes the Apostle Paul and says none of us is any better than the other by ourselves in our human nature we are all equally guilty of sin before God. All of us. This encompasses everybody. For we have already proven, or charged, both Jews and Greeks, everybody is included in that, you're either a Jew or a non-Jew. All are under sin...all of us.

Now, the entire human race then is arraigned in verse 9, everybody. We are condemned for our sin. Now notice the phrase at the end of verse 9, "We are all under sin." The word "under" there is hupa, very common Greek term, it means to be in the power of, under the dominion of, in the authority of,

under the control of, that's the idea. We are under the power of sin, under the control of sin, the authority of sin, the dominion of sin. Who is? All. And that "all", beloved, is an all inclusive all. Everybody...everybody, there's nobody outside of that, nobody. It's hard for people to recognize this, as I said, particularly religious people. You see, you go back to the Jews and how they reacted to this. You know, they just wouldn't accept this. I mean, when the Lord confronted them, or the apostles confronted them about being sinful, they would not accept that. In Galatians 2:15, "We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles." What were they saying? They're saying we're not like them. Them...meaning the Gentiles, who are sinners, we're different. You remember the man born blind in John 9 and then he was healed and the Jewish people confronted him and they said, "Thou wast all together born in sins and dost thou teach us?" See? I mean, you sinner you, are you telling us something? Well what is that assuming? That they're something higher, something better. You see, religious people always feel that way but it isn't true. Even we who are Christians in ourselves before we were redeemed by Christ were no better than anybody else. We didn't become Christians because we were better than anybody else. In a Christless state a man is under the command, control, dominion, authority of sin and Satan utterly.

I think John puts it so beautifully when he says the whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one...whether they admit it or not. And if you don't admit it, then the depth of your self- deceit and delusion is even greater. And may I add as a footnote that a cultured sinner is no closer than a vile sinner? All men are under sin, now that's the arraignment. Everybody in the human race is dragged into the court and arraigned for being under the dominion and the power and the control of sin.

So, the whole human race comes to the judgment bar, the court of holy God and they are arraigned. Now, after the arraignment comes the indictment. And the indictment is very specific beginning in verse 10, very very specific indictment. In fact, there are 13 counts against us...13...precise clear verifiable inhuman experience. And may I add that you not only, in verse 9, have the word "all" are under sin, but in verses 10 through 18, four times the word "none" is used, three times the word "all" is used so the terms are inclusive terms, none and all...thirteen counts.

The count begins verse 10, the indictment, "As it is...what?...written." Now where's he going to go to get his indictment, out of the Scripture, as it is written. That is, by the way, a familiar phrase used when quoting the Old Testament. Perhaps it's most familiar to us as it was used by our own Lord who in conflict with Satan in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 when Satan attempted Him replied three times with the same statement, "It is written." What does that mean? That indicates an Old Testament quote and that's exactly what you have from verse 10 to 18, a series of Old Testament quotes that tell us the truth about man. God's indictment. In fact, the phrase "as it is written" is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense indicates something that was written in time past with continuing results. It is a settled issue. It shows the permanence of the record. It has been written and it has continuing truth. This is God's continually true word on man's sin.

Now, as we look at the thirteen-part indictment, it's going to have three areas. First, man is indicted for his character, secondly he's indicted for his conversation and thirdly he's indicted for his conduct...his character, his conversation and his conduct. You start with what's inside of him, what comes out of his mouth, and then what he does.

Let's look first of all at the character, verse 10. And these are very simple. I'm not going to have to take a lot of time explaining them to you. They're so precise and so pointed and so rapid fire and uncomplicated that you'll see very clearly what he is saying. Now we start with man's character because that's basically the problem. He's rotten at the core. The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it, says Jeremiah in chapter 17. And the Bible indicates to us that man's heart has gone foul, that man's heart is corrupt, that that inner spring of being is vile and wretched and filthy. And so out of his character comes what he says and what he does.

Now as we look at the character of man in verses 10 through 12, there is a series of negative statements describing man's character. Let's look at the first one. This is the first of the thirteen counts. One, "There is none...there's that word...righteous, no not one." Why does he add that? Because somebody would always say "except for me." No, not you...not you. There is none righteous, that's right out of Psalm 14 the first three verses, a quote from the Old Testament. Nobody is righteous.

Now the concept of righteous and righteousness is really the theme in many ways of the whole epistle. In some form or another that term appears, I think, over 30 times in just these 16 chapters. It's a tremendously important part. Now the word "righteous," you don't have to get too bogged down in it, it means good, it means right, it means just. Nobody is good, nobody, no not anybody, no not you, nobody. Nobody is good. You say, "Well, how good is good? I mean, I'm pretty good. How good do you have to be?" Well, the term used here, "there is none righteous," is used of God, that's right, of God in the New Testament. It is also used of Christ. So how good is good? As good as God, as good as Christ. And that is the only standard and anything less than that is bad. There aren't any levels. You see, there's only two kinds. Are you ready for this? Perfect and bad...that's all.

"Oh," you say, "wait a minute." No, that's all...just perfect and bad. Absolutely righteous like God, like Christ who is utterly holy and without sin. And if you've got one sin, you just belong with the bad. You see, in Matthew 5:48 the Lord said, "Be ye perfect," and you might say, "Well, that's...I'm working on it, how perfect?" "Even as your Father in heaven is perfect." You see, that's always the standard. You see, God...you say, "Well, how does God expect us to get there?" He doesn't. That's the whole point of the gospel. He just expects you to recognize you can't get there. And then He'll take you there through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But that's getting ahead into chapter 3. The point here is that man is either perfect or he's bad. And since none of us is perfect, we're all bad.

I used to illustrate it this way. You know, you might think that basically you're okay, but it's kind of like...it's kind of like if you went down to the Pacific Ocean one day and said I'm going to jump to Hawaii and you trained for months. I mean, you strengthened your legs. You may even developed some kind of little flappers that you could flap...hold you up. And we could all line up maybe all several thousand of us and we could run to the water and dive in and see if we could jump to Hawaii. You want to know something? Nobody would get there. You can't jump to Hawaii. Now granted, some people would get out 20 feet, some people might get out 15, some 10, some might fall on their noses and land in the sand before they even got to the water. But the point is, you can't jump that far. And that's the way it is with God's standard. You see, some people are going to be better than other people, some people are going to go along further than other people. There's a certain amount of relative human goodness and morality, but in the end, the goal is so far beyond anybody...what is the goal? For all have sinned and come short of what? The glory of God. The glory of God is perfection, the glory of God is the emanation of His nature. The glory of God is righteousness. And nobody is righteous like that. If you were, you would be God.

So there's none that is truly good, no one manifests God's true goodness. Now that's where it all starts. Nobody's good, everybody's bad.

Let's go to the second in the list of indictments. And this tells us that man is not only evil, he's also ignorant which compounds his problem. Verse 11, "There is none that understandeth," and you can stop there. Now that's a quote from two places, Psalm 14:2 and it's also in Psalm 53:3. You see, not only is man bad but he doesn't even understand what good is. Now you're getting a rather bleak picture, aren't you? That's the whole point.

Man has no...no organ of perception so that he cannot understand the truth. He has no right understanding of God. He has no right apprehensions of God. He has no ability in his humanness to perceive truth about God on his own. That's why Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said the natural man understands not the things of God. He can't know them because they're spiritually discerned and of course, in the flesh he has no organ for understanding it. I mean, man is to the spiritual world as a deaf, dumb and blind person would be to the physical world if that person never ever learned to hear or speak or communicate in any way. Man is utterly cut off from any understanding of God.

To intensify your understanding of how serious this is, a verse come to mind in Ephesians 4:18 and it describes man as man exists in these terms. "Having the understanding darkened...having the understanding darkened." You see, the lights have gone out in man. "He is alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart." Now you have understanding darkened, alienation from the life of God, ignorance and blindness of heart. And that is the picture of man. Not only is he bad but he is hopelessly stupid when it comes to divine truth. Men have a natural innate inability to understand the things of God.

In fact, we learned back in chapter 1, didn't we, that even in man's history when he knows God, verse 21, and that's a very limited knowledge, when he knows there is a God and that God is powerful and supernatural, as we saw in verse 20, even when he knows that he refuses to glorify Him as God, is not thankful and immediately becomes empty in his thinking and his foolish heart is...what?...darkened. And what that is saying is that you can look at it two ways. You can look at it historically or you can look at it individually. Historically, originally man was given the knowledge of God and man by an act of his will turned out the lights. Individually I believe people come into this world born with a sense of God in their conscience, with a sense of God visible through creation and if they reject that then the last little flicker of God's revelation that exists even in conscience and creation is gone and the lights go out. But men in the midst of that stand up and announce that they're wise. Remember that? Which is the ultimate stupidity. As a blind man who goes around telling everyone that he can see when everyone knows he can't see at all. It's like the Emperor's new suit, remember? Everybody knew he was stark naked but him. Darkened. Man is in blackness, he does not know the truth. He is blind.

And by the way, in Ephesians 4:18 the word "blindness" there is a very interesting word. It's the word porosis and it comes from poros(?) which is a stone harder than marble. He's not only blind, he's hopeless. You can't even put anything in, he's like a rock. I remember when I was in seminary we used to do this little exercise. And they tried to get us to learn how to project. And some guys in seminary are timid when they come in, you have to learn how to preach, you know. And they want you to project. And so they usually have us do silly assignments like sell a roll of toilet paper to the class while they're all screaming at us and yelling and this is what we used to do. Can you imagine in seminary the dignity of all of this? But anyway, we'd have to try to get our message across and some people couldn't do it. I mean, they would just stand there and say, "Ho-ho, stop," you know. And some of us would get up on the desk and say, "Now, you be quiet and listen to what I'm going to say." You know, I mean, you've got to learn to project.

But one of the things they gave us to memorize that we used to use was a little line that said, "You blocks, you stones, you worse then senseless things." And I don't know whether they got that out of a theology journal but that's pretty theologically sound...you blocks, you stones, you worse then senseless things. That's man, petrified, if you will. He has no feeling. And by the way, the word porosis came to mean loss of feeling, loss of sense. He is blind, he is ignorant, he can't feel, he is as hard as a rock, he is utterly insensitive, he has no perception of God's truth, his mind is so distorted that all of his conclusions are wrong and when you go to him with the truth he doesn't want to believe it. And you tell him what his problem is and he wasn't even ready to hear that. He's a lot like Ringo the duck. Don't you think? You don't know Ringo the duck?

Well, I read about a duck by the name of Ringo. And he lived in Grenedere(?) Park in Toronto. There was a pond there. People were always throwing pop cans in the park and in the pond and

Ringo was trying to stick his beak in a pop can and he got the pull tab around his beak. And he couldn't get it off and he couldn't open his mouth. As a result, he was starving to death. And so he became a project for the people of Toronto to try to help poor Ringo. They tried everything they could do to get that duck, they couldn't catch him. He didn't know people were trying to help him and he was starving to death. They actually went so far, this article said, as to get a cannon that shoots a net and shot a net over the whole pond and he got away. Then they hired a skin diver to swim around the pond and swim up to Ringo and grab him. But Ringo knew what size ducks were. Then they tried to allure him with food, bread and corn. But all that did was draw hundreds and hundreds of sea gulls. Finally they got Canada's champion duck caller and he got the attention of every duck in the pond but Ringo. They never could help Ringo. He just didn't understand that all those attempts were not designed to frighten him but to free him from his problem.

You deal with man on the same terms. He is hopelessly blinded to the truth about God but he doesn't know that. And when you approach him with the gospel, he thinks you're trying to take something away from him, you're trying to hurt him, you're trying to make things impossible for him when all you want to do is take the tab off his beak so he can solve his problem.

Listen, there's an awful lot of information but very little truth in man's mind...an awful lot of information. But no truth. Paul said they're ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Well, there's a third indictment in verse 11. This is interesting. It says, "There is none that seeketh after God." Now wait a minute...wait a minute. There are a lot of people seeking after God. What about all the religions? Well, we talked about that, didn't we, earlier in our study of Romans. God says here, and this is a quote by the way from Psalm again, this is an obviously true from God's perspective that none seeks after Him. You say, "Well, what about religion? What about all the people who supposedly are on a mission or on a pilgrimage trying to seek God? And what about the Bible? Doesn't the Bible say he that seeks Me shall surely find Me if he seeks for Me with all his heart? Didn't Jesus say in Matthew 7, he that seeketh findeth? To him that knocks, shall be opened. Doesn't Hebrews 11:6 say that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him? And what about this, have you ever read this, or do you remember reading it in Acts 15 verse 16, After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David which has fallen down and I will build again its ruins and I will set it up that the residue of men might seek after the Lord? Doesn't the Bible say that men are to seek God? Is that contradictory?"

No, it isn't contradictory at all. Let me tell you why. The people involved in false religion are seeking something other than God. They're running from God to their own man-made system. The people who seek God, who truly seek God do not seek God on their own initiative. On their own initiative they seek other gods...blinded to the truth. If they seek the true God, it is because God has taken the initiative. Jesus put it this way in one of the most important statements, I think, He ever made. In John chapter 6 and verse 37, just listen to it and you're familiar with it, "All that the Father giveth Me

shall come to me." On what basis then do men come to Him? On the basis that what happens? The Father gives them. Then verse 44, listen to this, "No man can come to Me except the Father who hath sent Me do...what?...draw him." There's no contradiction at all. No contradiction at all. Men do not seek God. Romans 1 says they seek to run from God. They seek their own will and their own way. And they may seek it in religion but it is not the true God. It is the gods that they have manufactured. They turn their back on the true God and they make an image like corruptible man, birds, four-footed beasts and creeping things, you saw it there in Romans 1:21 to 23. So men who go through the religious route are running from God and people who are truly seeking God are not doing it because of their own natural initiative, they're doing it because the Father has begun to draw them. Men naturally don't seek God.

How could they? Does a corpse seek anything? It doesn't seek anything. A corpse doesn't seek anything at all and they're dead and they're blind and they're deaf and they're dumb and they're stupid and that's the way it is with man. And if you think that that's everybody around you, it's you too just so you don't get too far up the ladder. We're all there.

Let me just give you a thought about what it means to seek God. To seek God is more than just a concept related to salvation. I believe it's related to salvation but I believe also that it's much more than that. To seek God doesn't mean only to come and ask for salvation, it means that in everything we seek God. It means what David meant in Psalm 16 when he said, and I think this is one of the most important statements anywhere ever made on the pages of Scripture. Listen to what he said, "I have set the Lord always before me." What does that mean? That means that my focus in everything is God. It's as if he put the Lord in front of him and God became a grid through which he perceived everything, through which he received everything. Going and coming, God was the filter of everything.

Seeking the Lord is very much like what Jesus said, "Seek ye first...what?...the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." It is to see that God is the focus of everything. God is the source of everything. God is the beginning and the end of everything. It is to desire the full manifestation of all of God's wondrous perfections. It is to respect and adore His sovereign majesty. It is to feed on His truth. It is to live in His presence, to obey His commandments, to speak to Him in prayer, to trust Him in everything and to spend your life declaring His glory. It is to seek God not only for salvation but to seek that God should be glorified in everything and men do not do that. They do not do that. They run from God in the seeking of their own ends and their own desires.

In Philippians 2:21 is a simple statement, listen to it. "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." What a statement. Everybody is after his own stuff, not Jesus Christ's.

Now, one more, the fourth statement, verse 12, "They are all gone out of the way." Now there are none of them good, none of them understand, none of them seek God and they're all gone out of the

way. And you're right back to Psalm 14 again verse 3, "All men have deviated from God's path." We would expect that, wouldn't we? I mean, if to begin with they're bad, they're certainly not going to stay in God's right good path. And if they're stupid, they're not going to even know where it is. And if they're blind, they're not going to be able to find it. And if they're not looking for it, they'll be off somewhere else, they're all gone out of the way. An interesting Greek term that has the idea of leaning off in the wrong direction. It came to refer to fleeing. It is even used in some classic Greek writings of Polybius for a group of soldiers who turned and fled in confusion during a battle. It's desertion. And maybe that's a good way to see this word, ekklino here, as desertion. Man has deserted the way of God. Isn't that exactly what the prophet Isaiah said, "All we like sheep have...what?...gone astray, we have turned, each one of us has turned to his...what?...own way." We've gone out of God's way. Man is not in God's path. He's gone astray. That's why when Jesus came He made such a monumental announcement when He said, "I am the way."

I don't know if you've known this, maybe you haven't studied this particular thought. But did you know that Christianity as such in its early years became known as quote: "The Way?" That's what it was known as. The Way...there's a cult today known as The Way but they sure picked the right name. Matthew 22:16, listen, "Master, we know that Thou art true and teachest the way of God." Acts 16:17, "These men are the servants of the most high God who show us the way of salvation." Acts 18:26, "Expounded unto him the way of God." Acts 19:9, "They spoke evil of that way." Acts 19 verse 23, "And at the same time there arose no small stir about that way." The way of God, it's called. The way of salvation. The way of God again. And then all of a sudden in the book of Acts it's just the way...the way. In Acts 24:14 it says, "After the way which they call heresy." In Hebrews 10:20 it's called a new and living way. In 2 Peter 2:15 it's called the right way. And in 2 Peter 2:21 the way of righteousness. It became known as the way. And the word simply means a path. And it's the path to God, isn't it. It's the path of goodness and rightness and holiness and salvation. And if you're smart, you'll follow it.

Proverbs 8:13 says, this is so good, "The fear of the Lord is to hate every evil way." And also Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof is the way of death." Men don't follow God's path. They're gone out of the way. And when you come up to them and tell them they're in the wrong path and they're going the wrong way, they are offended at that because, you see, they live under the delusion that they can see when they're blind, they can hear when they are deaf and they can think when they are dead. And that's why any evangelism that is ever done is done in the prompting of the Spirit of God in the heart that stone-cold heart of the unbeliever.

Well, that's only the beginning of the indictment. None righteous, not one. None that understands, none that seeks God, all of them have gone out of the way. And, beloved, until a person recognizes that there's no hope for them...there's no hope.

Let me close with this story. D.L. Moody, great evangelist wrote this, "While I was occupying the Fulton Street pulpit in New York, the governor of the city prison said he would like to have me go down and talk to the prisoners. After the prisoners were all brought in, I found there was no chapel in connection with that prison and I had to talk to them in their cells. I talked from a little iron bridge running across the narrow passageway to some three or four hundred prisoners and I couldn't see one man.

"After I was done, I thought I'd like to see these men that I'd been talking to and how they received the gospel. So I went down to the first door and looked in the little window of a cell where the inmates could have best heard me. There were some men playing cards. No doubt they had been playing all the time I had been preaching. They didn't want to hear. I said, 'My friends, what's your trouble?'

"'Well, stranger, false witnesses appeared against us. We are innocent.' I said to myself, Christ cannot save anybody here, there's nobody guilty. I went to the occupiers of the next cell and asked why they were there. They said, 'We got into bad company and the man who did the deed got clear and we got caught.' And I said Christ cannot save anybody here.

"I went to the next cell and I asked how it was with them. They said false witnesses went into court and swore falsely. I said Christ cannot save anybody here either.

"I went to the next cell and said, 'How is it with you?' The reply was, 'The fact is the man who did the deed is very much like me, I am perfectly innocent. I was mistaken for him.' I have never found so many innocent men in one prison in my life. It seemed that the magistrates who sent them there were the only guilty ones.

"I began to get discouraged but when I had gotten almost through I found one man with his elbows on his knees and two streams of tears running down his cheeks. I looked in at the little window and I said, 'My friend, what is your trouble?' He looked up with despair and remorse on his face and said, 'My sins are more than I can bear.' I said, 'Thank God for that.'

"'Ain't you the man that's been talking to us? I thought you said you was a friend and you say you're glad my sins are more than I can bear?'

"'Yes.' 'I don't understand your friendship if your glad my sins are more than I can bear.'

"'I'll explain to you. If your sins are more than you can bear, then you will cast them on the one that will bear them for you.'

"'Who is that?' 'It is the Lord Jesus Christ.' And I stood there at the prison door," writes Moody, "and preached Christ and held up Christ for that poor wounded man who was believed to be the worse

man in the whole prison. After telling him of Christ, I got down and prayed. And after I prayed I said, 'Now you pray.' He said he couldn't pray it would be blasphemy. But the man put his head on the pavement and like the publican without even lifting his eyes toward heaven he cried, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner.'" And the story goes on from there, how Moody came back to visit him later.

Those are the only people that can be helped, right? Let's pray.

Lord, we all stand condemned before you sinners, no better than any other for we all come short of the glory. And, Father, we just ask that we who are saved would know that it isn't because we were better than anybody else, it isn't because by nature we were so gifted as to have chosen you, it is because you in sovereign love drew us to Yourself. And may we be ever thankful. So thankful that our life is an act of incessant worship. And I would pray also, Lord, for those who might be in our fellowship tonight who do not know Christ, who have not confronted themselves about their sinfulness and their lostness, who like the prisoners don't see the real issue. May Your Spirit penetrate with conviction till they come to the point where they too are broken and cry out, God be merciful to me a sinner. For then salvation can come.

Do Your work, Lord, in every heart.

While your heads are bowed for just a parting moment. If you have never given your life to Christ, this is the time for you to acknowledge your sin. If God's Spirit is moving in your heart and you sense the Father drawing you to Christ, respond. Simply confess your sin silently in your heart and accept the forgiveness Jesus offers, the one who died on the cross to bear your sins in His own body and rose that you might be good and righteous. Confess your sin and receive Him.

If you already have done that, no matter how long ago you did it, thank Him for the glorious forgiveness He granted you in Christ.

Father, do Your work in every heart and thank You for what we anticipate as we open Your Word, how it thrills us, how it challenges our thinking and our living. Bring every thought, Lord, into the captivity of Christ. We who know You thank You that You've redeemed us and forgiven us, we who were not righteous, who could not understand, who did not seek You and who were all together out of the way. We thank You that You've brought us into the way, that You've caused our hearts to seek You, that You've opened our understanding and that You in Christ have made us what we could never be...righteous. Thank You for that gift of grace. May it be given to others tonight, even in this place for Jesus' glory. Amen.

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