Humanity on Trial
Romans 3:9–20
80-343

It was a few years ago, maybe three years ago, that it was brought to my attention that it had been quite a number of years since we had looked at the heart of the book of Romans, chapters 3, 4 and 5. And it was suggested to me at that time that going back to that text might be a wonderful blessing and benediction to the folks in our church who have not done that. We have so many new people and this is such the heart of the gospel that certainly that was a very important suggestion. Given all the other things that we were involved in, took a few years to get around to it, but we arrive there tonight, and gratefully so.

So open your Bible, if you will, to Romans chapter 3. And I want to begin reading at verse 9 and basically read down to verse 20...Romans chapter 3 verses 9 through verse 20.

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all, for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin. As it is written, ‘There is none righteous, no, not even one. There is none who understands. There is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave. With their tongues they keep deceiving, 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 paths, and the path 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 closed and all the world may become accountable to God because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight,; for in the Law comes the knowledge of sin.'”

It is universally true that people like to think of themselves as good, basically. But that is not the testimony of Scripture. The testimony of Scripture is that unequivocably the entire human race is evil, as the vernacular would tell us today, bad to the bone, corrupt to the core.

Men live with the consequent guilt of their wickedness. They don't like it. They don't want to face it. They try to eliminate it by adapting a more convenient kind of morality or by silencing their crying conscience.

Some years ago, a psychologist put it this way, “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, tacky, selfish or rotten. 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 anymore of it in the world.” And with that last statement, the article ended without a solution to get rid of it.

Admittedly we don't like it. Admittedly we wish we could get rid of it. But what is the means to relieve us of guilt? More importantly than living with guilt is living with the reality of future divine judgment. Guilt in a sense is that which we impose on ourselves. And that is not nearly so deadly as that which God will impose upon us. We can make our life in this world miserable by guilt. But God will make our life in the next world miserable by judgment.

Sin produces then a misery in this life and an infinite and eternal misery in the life to come. People try to deal with their guilt in many ways...alcohol, drugs, sometimes suicide, any kind of earthly diversion. But in the end, it's very hard to avoid because according to Romans chapter 2, all human beings have a Law written in their hearts, a Law of God written in the heart of every sinner. Not only do they have a moral sense that is part of being human, like the other senses, seeing and hearing and smelling and tasting. There is this sense of what is right and this sense of what is wrong that is built in to the whole human race.

But in addition to having that moral law written in our hearts, Romans chapter 2 says, we also have a mechanism called the conscience. And the conscience is activated when we violate that moral law that is written in our hearts and it accuses us. It really is a gift from God, the conscience is, because it's a mechanism by which God warns us that we're living in violation of His Law which has consequences in this life and even more consequences in the life to come. We are guilty because we are sinful. We feel guilty because we should feel guilty. We make life miserable for ourselves by our sin. As Seneca put it many years ago, “Every guilty person is his own hangman. And we put ourselves, as it were, on the block of judgment before God because of our sin. And yet we are left to ourselves, unable to do anything to remedy the problem.”

As I just read to you, the whole world, according to verse 19, is accountable to God. And even though Gentiles and the whole human race have a law written in their hearts, and the Jews, he says in chapter 2, have the Law of God written down in Scripture, in neither case, either for the Gentile with the Law written in the heart, or the Jew with the Law written on paper, do they have the ability to take themselves out of that sinful condition, free themselves from that guilt in this life or the horrible judgment in the life to come, as verse 20 says, because by the works of the Law, no flesh will be justified in His sight. We have no capacity to change the sinful condition in ourselves. There is no way that we can do that.

Now before we get to chapter 3 and verse 9, Paul has already been dealing with the guilt of all men. He has let us know by now, if you studied the first section in the bok of Romans, you would be fully aware that all men are immoral...all men are immoral, all men are sinful, all men bear guilt, legitimate guilt for their sin, they feel the weight of that guilt and they stand under the judgment of God. Some guilty sinners are more moral than others. Some are more religious than others. There are pagan Gentiles and there are religious Jews. From the standpoint of morality and religion, we would say the Jews who follow the Old Testament prescriptions are more religious and more moral than outright pagans. But they have no more ability than those pagans to fix themselves. They have no more power, no more ability to relieve themselves of the guilt of sin and by some effort of their own to escape eternal judgment.

This is the bottom-line truth in the Christian gospel. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Nobody escapes.

Now when Paul comes to chapter 3 and verse 9, he makes his final argument about the sinfulness of all mankind and it is a classic presuppositional argument. He could have argued that sin is a reality because death is a reality. And that is a valid argument. “The wages of sin is death.” And everybody dies. Therefore everybody is a sinner. And he does make that argument. He can argue from the standpoint of past judgments by God, such as God drowning the entire world...a massive judgment, incalculable. In fact, I mentioned this at the Shepherds Conference and somebody gave me a little e-mail from someone that said, I said somewhere between ten million to a hundred million, we have no idea. And somebody wanted to correct me and say, “It was at least six billion people that died in the Flood.” We could find out perhaps in the future if we in heaven care to discuss matters of judgment, which is unlikely. But the world is under this massive kind of sinfulness. You could argue from history and from judgment. You could argue from death which comes to all men. But the strongest and the greatest argument for the sinfulness of man is Scripture...Scripture, the Word of God. What does God have to say? And that is precisely what you have in verses 9 and following.

You will notice in your Bible that the type changes when you come to verse 10. The section starting in verse 10 is introduced with the words, “As it is written...” and that is a reference to Scripture. And then you have a series of statements that runs from verse 10 down through verse 18. Every single one of those is a quote from the Old Testament. So this is God speaking through His divine revelation in Scripture on the sinfulness of sin. This is the coup de grace. You can argue from history. You can argue from judgment. You can argue from reason. You can argue from conscience. But the greatest argument is the argument of Scripture because here is the Word of God. So this is the pinnacle of Paul's presentation on which He calls on God to speak to all the world, sort of climbing the peak and surveying and summarizing all that he has said but now in strictly scriptural terms, powerful, it is convincing.

Now the paradigm here, or the motif if you like that word, is a legal one, it's a trial motif. The procedure in Paul's language here is judicial. It is the language of a courtroom. This is a trial. It has an arraignment. It has an indictment. And it has a verdict.

Let's begin with the arraignment. At this trial, the whole human race is brought before the eternal judge. The arraignment appears in verse 9. “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all, for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.” “What then?” simply means, “What is the case? How are you to understand the situation?”

Now remember, in the prior verses, Paul has shown that the Gentiles without the Law are guilty before God and the Jews with the Law are also guilty before God. The whole world is guilty before God, Jew and Gentile. And in themselves have no capacity to remedy the situation.

Now here he says, “What then? Are we better than they?” To whom does the “we” refer? He's already talked about the Jews. He has already talked about the Gentiles. He has said that the Gentiles have the Law of God written in their hearts. The Jews do have an advantage, chapter 3 verse 1. In fact, they have a great advantage, verse 2, because to them were committed the oracles of God, Scripture. So they not only have the Law of God written in their heart, but they have the Law of God inscripturated.

So he's already dealt with the Jews, and he dealt with the Gentiles. So who is this “we”? Must be

somebody other than the Jews and other than the Gentiles. And I think the best answer is it is Paul and his readers....it is Paul and his readers, believers in Rome, and his companions. That's the “we”. He uses “we” back in verse 8, “We are slanderously reported,” speaking of accusations that were used against him. So I think “we” is referring to Paul and believers. And he is simply saying, “Because we're believers, because we're saved, because we belong to God? Are we somehow better than the rest of the world? Is this...is this reality that we enjoy called salvation a result of us being better than everybody else?” That's, I think, his argument here.

He is saying, “Because we are believers, are we therefore somehow more worthy? Are we somehow better than those who are condemned? Are we different? Are we special?” And the answer is very clear. “Not at all,” verse 9, hupontos(??), all together no...no in every way. We are not better for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin and we are either Jews or Greeks...or Gentiles, Greek or Gentile being the same. We have already proven, already established that the Jews and Greeks are all under sin. That is to say, the entire human race is condemned before God. And that even applies to Paul, his companions and Christians. They belong to the same sin-cursed family. We are all under sin, hupo, preposition, under meaning under the power of sin, under the dominion of sin, to some degree, under the authority of sin, under the control of sin.

It's good for us to remember that though we are Christians, the fact that we are Christians is not a result of the...of our own lives being somehow better, somehow more worthy, somehow more pleasing to God, somehow more righteous or acceptable. In a Christless state, we're all the same. We are under the command, control, dominion, authority of sin. We are under the power of the prince of the air, Ephesians 2, we are children of wrath and we are all the same. So that is the arraignment. We are all called into the court and we are all arraigned. The arraignment is complete. Paul brings the whole human race there, Jew and Gentile. And just because you are now saved in Christ doesn't mean that you somehow escaped the reality of the sinfulness of humanity. We are all the same. We can all be brought before the judgment bar in the court of holy God to be arraigned before the Almighty as those without exception are all guilty sinners.

By the way, we don't cease to be guilty sinners either just because we've been saved. We're still guilty sinners.

From the arraignment, we move to the indictment. And the indictment comes then in verse 10. Here the case against us is given. The specific indictment, clear, precise. And by the way, easy to verify in human experience. Here is the testimony to the doctrine of the universal sinfulness of men and it is the testimony of God Himself, for as I said, every one of these statements is drawn out of the Old Testament. There are thirteen counts against men here, thirteen...four times the word “none” is used, three times the word “all” is used. So this is a comprehensive list. No one escapes the indictment. The list then is a collection of Old Testament quotes.

By the way, that was a very common rabbinic device. It was called a cheroz(??) which literally means a string of pearls. And the rabbis would string together pearls of truth that fit with one another. And here you have these pearls that go together in giving us Old Testament Scriptures that constitute a full necklace, if you will, of spiritual indictment. It begins then, “As it is written,” a very familiar New Testament phrase that makes reference to the Old Testament. Our Lord used it, you remember, when He was being tempted by Satan. And when Satan came after Him, He said three times, “It is written...It is written...It is written,” and then quoted the Old Testament.

It is also in what we call the perfect tense in the Greek. If you remember your English grammar, you might remember what that means. It is...the perfect tense identifies something that happened in past time with continuing effect, continuing significance. So we could read it this way, “It has been written...It has been written and it continues to be true.” That's a perfect tense view of Scripture. It has been written, it was stated as true, it continues to be true. If you said something was in say the aorist tense or the imperfect tense, you might lock it in the past. If you put it in the perfect tense in the Greek language, permanent...it makes it permanent. It was said and it is continually true. Perfect tense then makes permanent what is said. The Word of God then is forever settled in heaven.

So this is God's Word on man's sin and the utter and total lostness of the world. Now as we break down the indictment, break it in to three parts, character, conversation and conduct. What you're like on the inside. What you say. And what you do. Those would be the three aspects of behavior which could be brought under indictment. This, I suppose you could say, in medical terms is a full examination of the sinner, beginning with the x-rays. Go inside and look at character, verses 10 to 12.

We find here that man is sinful at the core, in the heart, in the spirit, in the soul. “The heart of man,” said Jeremiah seventeenth chapter, “is deceitful and desperately wicked.”

So you have here a series of negative statements describing the character of all men. You will meet yourself here. First, in verse 10, “There is none righteous, no not one,” taken from Psalm 14, the opening verses. There is none righteous, no not one. Righteousness simply means right, just, good. Righteousness also I might add, just as a footnote, is the theme in many ways of the whole book of Romans. The word appears in one form or another, at least 30 times. So this book is how to be right with God, how to be good in the sense that makes you acceptable to God, how to be declared just before God. And we learn right at the outset that there is none righteous. And unless someone say except me, the Holy Spirit says no, not you, not one. This righteousness is true only of God.

There is none righteous, no not one, nor can anyone make himself righteous. You have the same word translated down in verse 20 as justified, it's the same word as righteous, same root. And it says, “No flesh will be justified, or made righteous in His sight by the works of the Law.” So no one is righteous and no one on his own can become righteous.

To break it down a little bit, no one is capable of pleasing God fully. No one can keep God's standard. No one can reach God's level of acceptable goodness. No one can be morally perfect. No one can be holy. And that is God's standard. Scripture says, “Be holy for I am holy.” Repeated, repeated, repeated in the book of Leviticus and repeated again in the New Testament, be holy for I am holy, Peter says, or in the words of Jesus, “Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.” But no one is perfect. No one is holy. No one is righteous. And no one has the capacity to attain to that.

Now there is a relative human goodness. That is to say, not all people are as bad as all other people, and not all people are as bad as it's possible to be. There is in the goodness of God enough common grace in the world to make people good on a human level. So there is a kind of human goodness that theologians like to call bad good. In other words, it's bad people being good. But it's not good good, it's bad good, because its motive is something less than the glory of God. No one manifests God's perfect holiness and righteousness. No one meets the standard. In fact, in the pre-flood civilization, God said He was going to drown the whole world because all He ever saw in the heart of man was only evil continually. Does that mean nobody ever did anything good? Does that mean mothers didn't

love their children? Does that mean they didn't feed the poor? Does that mean they didn't do acts of human kindness? No. It just meant that there was no one whose heart was righteous. It was impossible, it still is. No one meets the standard.

Then in verse 11 we have a second element to the indictment of the heart. “There is none that understands.” There is none that understands. That's taken from Psalm 14:2, Psalm 53:3. Man has no true perception of divine reality. He wouldn't know what goodness was in its full perfection. He has no right apprehension of God. To put it in the language of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “The natural man understands not the things of God, to him they are foolishness.” It is incomprehensible to the sinner what the righteousness of God really is. Romans 8:5, “Those who are according to the flesh set their mind on the things of the flesh. Those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. The mind set on the flesh is death. The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. Then this...because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, it doesn't subject itself to the Law of God, it isn't even able to do so.”

It does not understand. I cannot understand. It cannot comprehend. To just extend that a little bit and put it in to the practical zone where you will understand this. There is in the heart of every person, every unconverted person, ignorance of God, the truth about God. Listen, ignorance of a true understanding of His Word, but more hostility toward that of which he is ignorant. To say it another way, there is a basic hostility in every sinner to God that manifests itself in hostility toward the Bible. Do you ask yourself why there is such universal hostility against the Scripture? It is because sinners are all ignorant of God and take it even deeper, they are enemies of God. And there is a basic hostility toward the Bible that is true of all non-Christians. They are ignorant, and in their ignorance they are unable to understand and they don't like what they do understand.

Now men do have some natural abilities to grasp some things in Scripture. But when it comes to their indictment about their sinfulness and God's righteousness, and the glory of the gospel and the hopelessness of works and self-effort and all of that, they are hostile to it.

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Ephesians expands our understanding of this. He says, concerning non-believers, “They walk in the futility of their mind.” They walk in the vacuum of their mind. They walk in the emptiness of their mind. Romans 1 says they profess themselves to be wise, and they're really fools. And then he says, “Be darkened...verse 18...in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them because of the hardness of their heart and they have become callous and given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”

So you take the indictment that's given here and then to Ephesians 4:18, they're ignorant, they have empty minds when it comes to understanding God. Their minds are darkened, again a perfect tense participle to show that this is a reality that came into existence when they were born and it continues to be the same. They are alienated from the life of God. They don't know God's truth because they can't know God. They are blind. They have no ability to comprehend because of their profound ignorance. And even though they are ever-learning, they never come to the knowledge of the truth.

He further says, following down in Romans chapter 3, “There is none who seeks for God.” They don't know God. They are ignorant. They are evil. They do not seek after God.

You say, “Wait a minute. Doesn't the Bible say he that seeks finds, Matthew 7? Doesn't Hebrews say He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him? Doesn't...doesn't it tell us in Isaiah that if we seek with all our heart we'll find Him? Is that contradictory?” No...no, simply to say man does not naturally seek God. In fact, Romans chapter 1 verse 21 says the very opposite, “Though they knew of God, they didn't honor Him as God or give thanks, became empty in their speculations, their foolish hearts was darkened, professing to be wise they became fools. And then they turned the glory of the incorruptible God into an image of corruptible man or birds, four-footed animals, crawling creatures. And God gave them over to perverse sexuality, homosexuality and a reprobate mind.”

So what they did know about God, not a saving knowledge, but what was perceivable to them by creation, the power of God, what was perceivable to them by the Law written in their hearts, the morality of God was the limit of it. And when they saw the power of God and the morality of God, they ran from it. That's the history of humanity. The only time the sinner ever seeks for God is when God first seeks the sinner. John 6 says, “No man comes to Me unless the Father draws him...unless the Father draws him.”

But that really isn't the concept here that's being conveyed. When it says here, “No one seeks for God,” it's not really talking about a salvation kind of seeking. It's not...that's not the point. It means that the center of our life is not God. That's what it's saying. No one is looking at life, as it were, to honor God, to glorify God, to make God the focus of life. No one really desires the full manifestation of the glory of God and all His wondrous perfections as the dominating objective of their life.

No one naturally adores God, longs for His sovereign majesty to be put on display. No one naturally wants to feed on His truth, live in His presence, obey His commands, pray to Him, trust Him in everything and declare His praise. That's what it's saying.

The opposite of Psalm 16:8 and 9 where David says, “I've set the Lord always before me,” that's the view of the saint. That's the view of the believer who seeks after God in everything, not just in a saving sense but seeks the honor of God, the glory of God, the praise of God. That's not how men live. They are their own gods. And if need be, they manufacture gods out of their own minds, aided and abetted by demons. But naturally they do not put God at the center of their lives, even the religious people. It's a god of their own making, not the true and living God.

So this is a desperate condition. There's none righteous. There is none who understands. Their minds are darkened and empty. And there is none who focuses on God, who seeks for the honor and glory of God in all of life. Verse 12 then goes back to Psalm 14 and picks up something from verse 3, “All have turned aside.” Or to put it another way, “They've all gone off the track, out of the path, no exceptions. All are deviate.” They've all deviated out of the way, blinded by sin to the truth with no particular interest in the glory of God, they are all diverted by their lusts and desires out of the path of truth, out of the path of salvation. They literally have turned aside, ekklino. That's exactly what it means. They have fled, if you will. It's used of fleeing from wild animals. In one use in classical Greek the verb was used by Polybius for a group of soldiers who turned and fled in confusion in the midst of a battle, deserters. The whole human race has deserted the way of God. The whole human race has deserted the path of truth. Isaiah 53:6 says, “We've gone astray and every man has turned to his own way.”

There's more. Go back again to the next statement in verse 12. “They have become useless together, collectively, no exceptions, useless.” The Hebrew equivalent of this word is used of milk

that's gone sour, what do you do with that? Pour down the drain. The human race is rancid. The human race can't serve its function. The human race is rotten and corrupt to be thrown away like salt without savor, or rotten fruit, or bad milk. They have no more value. They're good for nothing.

Homer uses this word in the Odyssey to refer to the senseless laughter of a moron. And by the way, Psalm 14:3 adds that man is filthy, or the marginal reading, “Stinking, putrid, to be discarded.” And this is quite an anthropology, isn't it? I doubt that this is what they tell you in your anthropology class at UCLA, about how wonderful man is and how noble man is and how he has ascended through the chains of evolution to reach the apex. When the truth of the matter is he is base by definition written by God Himself.

Verse 12, again, “There is none who does good,” same as verse 10. There's none righteous, not even one is another way to say it. “There is none who does good, there's not even one.” And the word for good here, this, by the way, is taken from Psalm 53:3, this whole section moves between Psalm 53 and Psalm 14. The word has to do with moral goodness. This is the sixth indictment here, condemning the character of man. He doesn't do anything that is genuinely good. Some of man's character, here's your biblical anthropology, man is bad, ignorant, rebellious, wayward, useless. And we could stack up some adjectives that could even make it worse...rotten to the very core. And remember, this is universal. This is true of Jews and Gentiles. This is true even of believers.

So, the character is defined. Secondly, the conversation. Out of the abundance of the heart...what happens? The mouth speaks so we can learn about the heart by listening to the mouth. And here in verses 13 and 14 Paul quotes from Psalm 5:9, Psalm 140 verse 3, Psalm 10 verse 7, and he's now concerned with the mouth.

By the way, James 3:3 to 10 talks about the mouth being like a flame of fire, spreading a conflagration of corruption everywhere. Proverbs 10:32 says, “The mouth of the wicked speaks perverseness.” Proverbs 15:2, “The mouth of fools pours forth foolishness. The mouth of the wicked...verse 28...pours ut evil things.” So Paul introduces the conversation of the man which is so revealing of his character. His character might be under wraps until he opens his mouth. It doesn't take long. Verse 13, “Their throat is an open grave.” This from Psalm 5:9...”Their throat is an open grave.” That's frankly what we would call a gross picture. Nothing is more abominable in the ancient world than an open grave and a stinking rotting body putting out its staggering and unbearable stench.

Now we're not talking here about bad breath, we're talking here about something far deeper than that. The grave is open, and again it's a perfect participle, and it stays open. What comes from the inside, out the mouth is the same putrid rotten corrupt reality that has just been described as the character. Man's soul is dead in trespasses and sin and the putrid stinking decaying corpse emits a foul and filthy smell through the throat in the form of words.

So, with their tongues, they keep deceiving. This again from Psalm 5:9, tense indicates again a life habit, deceit, dolioo, the root idea is a fishhook, the fishhook is deceptive, the fish thinks lunch, the bait, you think lunch, the fish, you deceive the fish. That's dolioo. Psalm 36:3, “The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit.” Psalm 52:2, “Like a sharp razor is the mouth, working deceitfully.” I always remember a story of lady I read in the L.A. Times some years ago who was angry at a man and let him get close to her. And she had a razor blade between her teeth and sliced off his lips. He was rushed the emergency hospital. Psalm 57:4 says, “Their teeth are spears and arrows.” Read

Jeremiah 9, read Isaiah 59, the Old Testament is loaded about statements about the corruption of the mouth. And Isaiah recognized it, didn't he?, in Isaiah 6 when he was feeling the weight of his sin, he said, “I am a man with an unclean mouth and I dwell amidst a people of unclean lips.”

It's not just unclean, it's deadly. Verse 13, at the end, “The poison of asps is under their lips.” That's from Psalm 140 and verse 3, this kind of speech that comes out of the corruption of the heart between the lips that is so vile and so filthy and so corrupt is also destructive. It has a poison. And there's an analogy with a snake, the fangs of a deadly snake ordinarily lie folded back. They're folded back in the upper jaw. But when it throws open its head, they flip down so that the poison of asps is tucked under their lips until they're ready to strike, and then those hollow fangs flip out, drop down. When the snake bites, the fangs press a sac of deadly poison hidden under their lips, injecting venom through them like a needle into the victim. Words are deadly. There are many battles that are started over words in your house and beyond, even wars among nations have been started by what was said. Deadly.

It says then, continuing to look at the mouth, verse 14, “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness,” taken from Psalm 10:7. Cursing and bitterness, cursing is literally a malediction against someone, to speak evil of someone. Bitterness, pikria, extreme wickedness resulting in vile speech against God and men. All you have to do is listen to the speech of the world, foul, bitter, angry, cursing, filthy, blasphemous, proud, lustful, violent, lying, deceptive, destructive. And the open grave simply releases the stench of the corrupt heart.

Well, that leads to the conduct in the arraignment...the conduct in verses 15 and following. We now know what the character's like, what the conversation is like in this universal indictment, and obviously the conduct will follow. Verse 15, “Their feet are swift to shed blood,” taken from Isaiah 59:7. Men are murderers, they are killers from cannibalism to crime. It's just a part of life that men massacre each other. I don't need to give you the history of that, you know it, you see it. Here we are supposedly living in this advanced twenty-first century and there's just slaughter going on all over the world at a greater volume than ever because the weaponry is so much greater. There's travel warfare in the African continent that literally results in genocide as millions of people die unknown personally to the people who killed them. This is true of man, he is by nature a murderer because he is following his father, the devil, who Jesus said was a murderer from the beginning.

The history of murder, slaughter throughout the story of man's life is well-known to us. Ching SenChung(???) 1643 to 1648, a bandit leader in the Chinese Province of Schezwan is estimated to have killed 40 million people...just a footnote.

So goes the history of man. Verse 16, “Destruction and misery are in their paths.” Destruction, suntrimma, literally a shattering into bits, cruelty, misery, meaning suffering distress. It's a word that is a kin to the word for wretched. The abstract sense of that word is misery, but it really means actual, painful, physical suffering. Men leave a trail of destruction and a trail of physical misery as they move through history...violence, bloodshed, devastation mark all human history.

And verse 17, finally, “The path of peace they have not known.” We're not too good at that, are we? Humanity is not very good at getting the final peace, right? Jeremiah put it this way, they say, “Peace, peace, there is no peace.” There is no peace for the wicked. Violence has taken the peace, men cannot attain peace whether it's quarrels in personal relationships, hatreds, fights, arguments, animosities, crimes, revolutions, massive wars, genocide...this is characteristic of man. He does not

know peace. Robert Haldain(?) wrote, “The most savage animals do not destroy so many of their own species to appease their hunger as man destroys his fellow man to satiate his ambition, his revenge, his greed.

So the arraignment came in verse 9, then the indictment, thirteen counts dealing with character, conversation and conduct. But a good prosecutor will sum up his case and make it simple so there's one more essential. The sum of all these crimes rises out of a universal attitude in verse 18. This is what is behind it all, let's call this the motive. Every criminal has a motive. What is the motive for this kind of character? What is the motive for this kind of conversation? What is it that motivates this kind of conduct?

Answer: the motive in verse 18, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” There is no fear of God before their eyes. This is a key point. The transgression of the wicked says within his heart there is no fear of God before his eyes, that is Psalm 36:1 that Paul is referring to here. The transgression of the wicked, that Psalm says, says speaks in the heart, there's no fear of God before his eyes.

Why do men live like this? Why do they act like this? Why do they speak like this? Why do they think like this? Because they will not fear God. Proverbs 16:6 reverses it and says, “By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil.” Fearing God means having a respect for God. It isn't just the fear of His judgment, it's the desire to honor Him for His nature, His works.

Universally men do not fear God, they do not honor God, they do not glorify Him as God. Fearing God in Scripture is a synonym for being a true believer, a God-fearer. It describes that man or woman who has respect for God's holy person, work, word and will. It is not the idea of flight or panic or dread, but reverential respect, a sense of awe. What basically drives and controls who you are is your attitude toward God. In that sense, fearing God is the control of all behavior. It's the control of all speech. And it is the definer of all character. When you accept God as God and you come to worship God and desire to obey God and give Him the honor He is due, it is because your character has been changed and now you have a new motive and it effects your speech and it effects your conduct.

The Old Testament, by the way, is filled with the concept of fearing God on a negative side. Within this whole larger context of fearing God, there is definitely a negative element. Look, God wanted people to be afraid of Him, that's why He turned Lot's wife to a pillar of salt. That's why He threw Adam and Eve out of the Garden, drowned the world, sent snakes to bite the Israelites, swallowed Korah, Dathan and Abiram, killed Nadab and Abihu, sent fire down from heaven, at the call of Elijah consumed a hundred soldiers. God wanted to be feared as a judge. He drowned the Egyptian army, took the life of Eli and his useless sons, Hophni and Phinehas. He killed Absalom, David's rebellious son and powered Samson to slaughter the thousands of Philistines, demanded death for sins. There is to be a healthy fear of the righteous power of God and of His judgment.

But it's not only that. It's revering His holiness. It's honoring Him for His mercy and grace, giving Him glory. The bottom line is this, what is the motive for these crimes? Practical Atheism. At the root of man's problem of sin and unrighteousness is a practical Atheism, he does not fear God. All the previous evils, all the indictments rise out of the absence of that fear. He is motivated by a wrong attitude toward God.

Now that brings us to the final part of this court scene. We've seen the arraignment, the indictment and the motive, here's the verdict...here's the verdict. “Now we know...now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable.” Or if you will, guilty before God.

What's the verdict? Guilty...guilty. The Law of God is the standard, the perfect holy Law of God. All men are under that Law and that Law finds them guilty. You know what the responsibility of a judge is? To bring to bear upon the person brought before his bench, the force of the Law. The judge has one responsibility, uphold the Law. And that's exactly what happens. The whole human race is brought before the tribunal. The judge says when measured against the holy Law of God, all of you who are under that Law have no defense, so that every mouth may be stopped.

What does that mean? What's missing in this trial? If you were putting this trial together, the one who uses a model trial, what's missing? The defense...there hasn't been any defense. There's been all prosecution, there's no defense. The reason there's no defense is there's no defense. Look, I was in court one time when our church and myself were sued for clergy malpractice. I was taken into the court in Glendale, this will be 1980, I think, or in the eighties, and there was a great case attempted to be amassed against us. And I sat in the court and in came the prosecution, the plaintiff and they laid out their whole case against us. And then it was our turn for a defense. And the judge stood up and rendered a summary judgment and said, “We don't need to hear a defense, the case of the plaintiff is not substantial,” and dismissed the case.

So you have a summary judgment, only in the reverse. The judgment here is that the case for the plaintiff is so substantial there is no defense. So verse 19 makes that clear, “Every mouth is stopped and the whole world is guilty before God.” There is no defense. Verse 20 says, “The reason we haven't got a defense is because by the works of the Law no flesh will be made righteous in His sight.” All the Law does is produce the knowledge of sin. It just reveals how sinful man is. This is the picture of the whole human race on which the gospel then is built. I think sometimes we don't understand the glory of the gospel because we don't understand this. Now is the gospel more glorious or less? Far more glorious when you understand the predicament of the guilty sinners, such as we are. When you come to the end of this section in verse 20, if you're a sinner and you haven't heard this before, your heart is beating hard because you have just been indicted, there is no defense, your mouth is stopped, you're guilty before God, you can't do anything about it, you can't keep the Law, you can't live up to the Law and therefore your indictment stands and from your own perspective you are in a hopeless condition and you're left there at the end of verse 20.

And then in verse 21, t he glory of the gospel begins to burst on the scene. And if you come next Sunday night, I'll explain that to you.

Father, Your Word is so consistent, so powerful, so precious, so rich. We thank You for it. We understand the wretchedness that has been described as our wretchedness. This is a description not of somebody else but of us. Not of...not of pagans or just the Jews, but of us. It's a description of all before salvation. It's a disastrous condition in which sinners live. And in this condition they bear fierce guilt in this life, guilt that steals their joy, that makes them empty, hopeless, fearful, anxious and finds no remedy within themselves. It is in this horrible condition that the sinner becomes desperate enough to look for a remedy outside himself beyond him and by Your grace is drawn to the glory of the forgiveness provided in Christ. We thank You, Lord, that we have experienced that. We thank You for the testimonies we heard tonight of the transformation in the life of guilty sinners to joyous,

blessed saints. Thank You, Lord, for that great miracle and for Your Word which lays it out so clearly. May we always remember as we share the gospel that there are many people who can't understand grace because they don't understand Law, who can't understand forgiveness because they don't understand guilt, who can't understand the joy of heaven because they don't understand the horror of hell. Help us, Lord, to give them the full message, to make the sinner aware of his guilt before we make him aware of Your provision. We glory in the gospel, we rejoice in it. We thank You. We know we are saved not because anything we've done but because of Your grace. We give you praise in Your Son's name. Amen.

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