

# Ministry of Grace Church

## Romans 3:9-20 - Sermon Notes

There is none righteous, not even one



### Background

Paul has just finished countering objections that some people might have as he presents the doctrine of justification by faith. He has done this by posing rhetorical questions and answering them. These rhetorical questions are:

Question 1: Is there any real advantage in being a Jew?

Answer: Yes, there most certainly is! They were entrusted with the oracles of God.

Question 2: Since many Jews didn't believe in Jesus the Messiah, does that mean that God is not faithful in saving the Jews?

Answer: No way!

Question 3: Is God unrighteous when he inflicts His wrath against unrighteousness?

Answer: No Way!

Question 4: If God receives glory for judging my sin, then my sin must be OK, right?

Answer: God is not glorified when someone commits sin; God is glorified when He judges sin.

Paul now poses the final rhetorical question in this line of reasoning. You will recall that he is talking about the advantage of being a Jew, yet he is trying to point out to the Jewish Christians in Rome that not only is it **not** necessary to become a Jew before becoming a Christian, but being a direct descendent of Abraham has no bearing at all in whether a person is a Christian or not.

Having argued that God will judge sin and will glorify Himself in doing so and having shown that Christian doctrine does not teach that we should all sin greatly so that God will be greatly glorified, Paul now addresses the final objection.

### Romans 3:9

**What then? Are we better? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;**

This is the final set-up question that Paul has been getting to for this entire section of his argument. However, he could not have done so without guiding his readers along step by step. The question is: **Are we, Jews, better than everyone else?** He then immediately answers this question, “Not at all.”

Now, in summing up his argument he says, “**we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.**” In fact, the first two chapters of this epistle were dedicated to proving that we’re all sinners and we have no excuse before God.

Finally, all of this groundwork has been laid so that Paul can make one of the most profound and revealing declarations in the entire Bible. He will do so by quoting multiple sections from the very “writings” that the Jews have been entrusted with, beginning with:

### **Romans 3:10-12**

**as it is written, “there is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.”**

Don’t you just hate it when someone starts quoting Scripture at you, especially when you know they’re right? Well, that’s just what Paul is doing here. He is talking to Jewish Christians who know the Law and the Prophets (what we call The Old Testament). He has been skillfully showing them that even Jews are no better in God’s eyes than anyone else. Here he is quoting **Psalms 14:1-3** from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Not only is no one righteous, according to Scripture, none of us understands what God wants from us. And this verse also tells us that none of us, left to ourselves, seeks after God. In fact, were it not for the supernatural influence of the Spirit of God, none of us would be able to come to God. We don’t seek Him; He draws us to Himself.

The bottom line is that no one deserves heaven or salvation. No one! In order for us to be saved we must first realize that we are not worthy of salvation. We don’t deserve it, and there is no reason why God should grant it to us apart from His grace and His grace alone!

Paul now says we have all turned out of the way and have become useless. As a result, none of us does anything truly good. Paul, like other writers of Holy Scripture, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, depicts life as a journey, walking down the pathways of life. We have God as our guide on the path as long as we are willing to listen to Him. He knows the path for us to take, the path that will glorify Him. But we often ignore His leading and travel the pathways that we want to take. Inevitably, however, the path we choose leads us into trouble and we have to call out to our Guide for help. The wonderful part of this is that whenever we call out to Him and admit our selfish sinfulness, He is right there to rescue us and to lead us back to the right path.

It doesn’t matter whether we are Jews or Gentiles. It doesn’t matter whether we attend church every Sunday. It doesn’t matter if we read our Bibles every day. It doesn’t matter if we pray without ceasing. It doesn’t matter if we serve on the worship team, as an usher, as a Sunday school teacher, work in the nursery, serve on a committee, or give of our time to work on the church building. It doesn’t matter if we witness faithfully or do any other good deed. When we fail to listen to the still, small voice of God, we fail to follow His leading.

When we do that, we turn aside to do these things for ourselves instead of doing them for His glory. And Paul tells us that we become useless to God and the things we do are not good things. Now Paul continues -

### **Romans 3:13-18**

**“Their throat is an open tomb, 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.”**

This verse is made up of two direct quotations from the Septuagint (**Psalms 5:9b** and **Psalms 140:3b**)

Paul’s use of the Septuagint to quote from rather than the Masoretic Text (the predominant Hebrew version of the Old Testament at that time) is interesting. In fact, in all of his writings Paul, like all the other writers of the New Testament, quotes predominantly from the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic Text. For the other writers of the New Testament this may not seem too strange since they were predominantly not from the “learned” class of Jews. Paul, on the other hand, was brought up under Gamaliel, one of the leading Jewish teachers of the time. Paul’s use of the Septuagint probably reflects the fact that most Christians of the first and second centuries used and were familiar with the Septuagint. Thus, he was quoting from a version that they would recognize readily.

This passage then tells us that natural man practices deceit with his tongue. Without God’s regeneration, man uses smooth words to deceive others into satisfying his own desire. That sounds like good ol’ everyday advertising to me. Back in the 1940s they would have called it propaganda! Finally, this passage tells us that the words of unregenerate man can bite like a deadly snake.

Do you notice the commonality in these two verses? Both of them talk about parts of the body associated with harmful speech. The first quotation talks about their throat as being an open grave. The second quotation says that the poison of asps is under their lips. These are metaphorical references to the words of man and how quickly they can cause harm when used in a deceitful and intentionally harmful way.

These intentionally hurtful words are full of bitterness, used to express evil toward others. And Paul is not yet finished with his description of mankind apart from the Spirit of God. There are still four more verses describing us all.

Next, Paul quotes from **Isaiah 59:7** which says,

**Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and ruin are in their paths.**

This passage in Isaiah occurs in the midst of a description of the character of the nation of Israel in the time of Isaiah. The expression, “their feet are swift,” implies the eagerness of the Jewish people to commit crime, particularly deeds of bodily injury and cruelty. They pursued the innocent ones and were not afraid to shed others’ blood to gratify their wicked desires, or to satisfy their vengeance on those who opposed them. By using Isaiah, Paul may be taking a jab particularly at Jews. However, I think that he is also using this to point to the non-Jews who may have been getting a bit proud themselves

Notice also, in the Isaiah passage, that it is not just their actions that indicate the wickedness of their hearts. Isaiah says that their thoughts were thoughts of iniquity. Even when they were not performing deeds of wickedness and injury to others, they were thinking about doing evil.

In quoting this passage, however, Paul is showing us that this is the nature of all of mankind, not just Jews. It is clear from Paul's description of the depravity of mankind in this passage that without the grace of a merciful God, none of us would ever be able to stand before the Judge of the universe without fear of condemnation.

If we hearken back to the metaphor of life being depicted as walking along a pathway, we begin to see the magnitude of this sinful characteristic of man. Instead of a leisurely stroll down the path of life or even hastening one's step to pursue closeness to our Travel Guide, Paul portrays man dashing off the path of righteousness in order to attack others. It is indicative of the overwhelming influence of our sin nature when it is not being held in check by the Holy Spirit of God.

Next, he identifies some of the results of their having "turned aside," that is, they have left the path of righteousness, and having used their words to eviscerate others, they have demonstrated their wickedness through their words. And the results include the fact that destruction and misery are in their pathways. Notice that when we leave the pathway that God wants us to travel and go our own way, our new path will have things that God's way wouldn't have had. In this case it is destruction and misery. Also notice that "paths" is plural. Those who follow the urgings of their human nature (our sin nature) will encounter destruction and misery no matter what path they take.

Something to pay special attention to is the fact that the definite article is not present before the word translated "path." This would lead us to translate this as "a path of peace" not "the path of peace." In other words, there is not a single way of peace. Any path that God leads us down is potentially "a path of peace," but the path we select for ourselves apart from God is never "a path of peace."

Now we come to the last in a series of quotes that Paul makes from the Septuagint. This one comes from **Psalms 36:1**. He uses this to show a third result of rejecting God. Remember that two of the results to expect when one has turned out of God's path and has gone along his own path; destruction and misery are in their pathway, and they have not known a pathway of peace. He now states the third: they don't fear God. That is, they are not afraid of meeting up with God on the pathway they have chosen.

Throughout the Old Testament we see the expression "the fear of the Lord" used to describe those who recognize His exalted position and their own lowly position. To a Christian, the fear of God is an expression of awe and reverence for who He is and what He has done.

Those who have no fear of our Almighty, Righteous God are not restrained from committing sin. It also means that they won't submit themselves to Him and they won't receive His free gift of salvation offered at the cross. As a result, at the Great White Throne judgment they will be judged for their sins and they will be cast into the lake of fire; no ifs, ands, or buts! Throughout this entire passage Paul is saying that this is the destiny of all people who reject God's grace. There is none righteous, no, not even one (not even you).

## **Romans 3:19-20**

**Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are in the Law, so that every mouth may be shut 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 through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.**

Paul has just completed a number of quotations from their Scriptures which clearly show that all men are sinners; no one is righteous in God's sight. The logical argument from a devout Jew would be that they are righteous because they obey the Law. Paul understood that attitude; he felt the same way before his conversion

Therefore, he now shows them why their reliance on obedience to the Law is pointless.

The purpose of the Law is to condemn all those who try to keep the Law. But that doesn't make sense, does it? Why would God give the Law to mankind knowing that no one could keep the Law?" Paul will answer that question in the next few verses.

What he is saying here is that justification before God cannot be obtained by obeying any set of rules no matter who made the rules. Why? Because it is through rules (Law) that we recognize sin and sinfulness.

Remember the temptation of Adam and Eve? Up until God gave them the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were without sin. If they had eaten of the tree before they were told not to, they would not have been sinning; but due to the fact that they had been commanded not to, it suddenly became sinful to do so.

What Paul is telling us in these verses is that we cannot become righteous by following any set of rules, whether God-made, church-made, or man-made. How then can one become righteous before God? Is it impossible? We'll get into that next time.

## **So What?**

Today, some Christians have the same attitude that the Jews of the first century had. Since we Christians are saved, and we have the Holy Bible as our guide, we feel like we are just a little bit better than everyone else. However, we need to keep in mind that we are just sinners saved by the grace of God. And, without God's grace we would be destined for the lake of fire just like every other sinner. That should not make us proud, it should make us humble!

So what was Paul's conclusion? There is no one righteous. You are not righteous! You are a sinner! You deserve Hell! All of us deserve Hell! We have not followed God with all of our heart. We have lived our lives for ourselves. Our hearts are full of selfish wickedness! But, if we humble ourselves before Almighty God, if we believe that the sinless Son of God died for us and paid our sin-debt, the debt that we owed but could not pay, the debt that He paid even though He didn't owe it, then God declares us to be as sinless as Jesus!

Let us now stop here and consider this. Before accepting Christ as Savior, none of us could have stood before God innocent in any way because we haven't measured up to His standard. When we believed His gospel message and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we were credited with the righteousness of Christ. Without this righteousness credited to our account we are all destined for hell!



In other words, without the blood of Christ, none of us deserves heaven. No, not one!

God expects us to give of our time, talents, and treasure for the furtherance of His kingdom. If we serve Him with the wrong attitude, if we serve Him for the wrong reason, if we serve Him simply because we want to do it, because we think it will earn us something, or because we feel pressured into doing it, we're walking down the wrong path, and we don't glorify God. But whatever we do, if we do it because it glorifies God and the Holy Spirit has led us to do it, this is good, and it pleases God.

We have all felt the pain of deceitful, dishonest words used against us to intentionally harm us. And, we have just learned that it's a part of our fallen human nature to do that to others. As Christians we can overcome our natural tendency to use our words in such a hurtful way. But we can only do so by submitting ourselves to our God and asking the Holy Spirit to control our speech so that it glorifies Him.

It's easy to recall when others have used words to harm us. It is not so easy to remember when we have used words to harm others. As God's children we should never intentionally attack others with vicious words. Let us all humble ourselves before God right now, asking for His Spirit to change our words of bitterness into words of encouragement and love.

We can all see this type of attitude and action being played out all around us. It might be some person going on a rampage because they're angry, or it might be crooked government officials causing pain and suffering for innocent people because of their own selfish greed. It's part of human nature. We Christians need to do two things. First, we need to ensure that we are humbled before God and filled with His Spirit, so we don't think or do any of these things. Then, we need to pray for those who do these things. Be a witness of Christ's love and pray for the salvation of others. Remember that it is only by the grace of God that we will appear before the Judge some day with the righteousness of Christ. Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul!

Even in the midst of trials and tribulation on this earth, we can experience this peace "that passes all understanding" because Jesus offered it to us. In order to have such peace, however, we need to be walking down God's path not our own.

How do we know the path that God wants us to take? Consider this as we walk down the pathway of life:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.  
(Philippians 4:6-7)

Let's pray.