

Romans 3:9-20

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[0 : 00] Do turn with me to Romans chapter 3. Romans chapter 3. Feels a little bit like the moment Jesus said about the poor, didn't he?

He said the poor you will always have with you. And I feel for you a little bit at the moment. It must feel like poor leave you. You will always have with you preaching. And so I'm delighted to say that next Sunday, Richard Turnbull is going to come and preach for us morning and night.

And so he's the guy that's been doing the course for us on White Business Matters to God. He's a really excellent preacher. So I'm really looking forward to hearing him. I'm sure you are too.

Romans 3.

Let's pray. Our Father, what we know not teach us. What we are not make us.

What we have not give us. Amen. So Romans 3, 9 to 20. It's another section on sin. And you are saying to yourselves, Please, not another section on sin.

[1 : 05] Please, not another sermon on sin. Does Paul not think we've had enough on the nature of sin and on the nature of judgment and the wrath of God which falls on sin?

He's been chipping away at this, hasn't he? From chapter 1 and verse 18. Where he speaks about the wrath of God being revealed against all unrighteousness. And it seems like we've been here for weeks and weeks and weeks.

Has Paul not said enough about sin that we've got to have one more section on sin and one more sermon on sin? Well, obviously the Holy Spirit who inspired the Apostle Paul didn't think so.

And since these words are inspired by the Holy Spirit, then you and I need to pay attention to them. And so in introduction this morning, I want to look at this from two angles.

Why is Paul not finished yet? Why couldn't he have just wrapped this up? Couldn't he have just said, we've all sinned? Next section, next point. Why does Paul take such a long time in saying all of this about sin?

[2 : 20] Well, I want to look at that briefly because obviously the Holy Spirit has inspired him in that way. And I think it shows us something about ourselves. It points out something of our own nature that we're uncomfortable with.

And we're always uncomfortable when God begins to scratch into our skin. And he begins to scratch into our skin to expose us for what we are.

And he brings things to the surface. And we're distinctly uncomfortable when he doesn't stop. And that's essentially what he does in chapters 1 to 3.

God is putting his claw into our skin and starting to rip us open and he doesn't stop. And we're beginning to think he really needs to. But he just keeps on going and he gets deeper and deeper into the nature of sin.

And it is agony for us. It's agony for us not just to see ourselves in that light. Or for other people to see us in that light.

[3 : 26] But it's uncomfortable for you and I to know that this is how God sees us. And that is how God looks upon us. And we think we've done a great job in putting on a kind of outward skin.

Righteousness. That we appear to be wonderful creatures in God's kingdom, God's universe. And yet what we find in Romans 1 to 3, in this slow and steady exposition, God cuts deeper and deeper and deeper.

And it rips us open and it is humbling and perhaps it is humiliating. And it's embarrassing. It's an exposure of our inner selves. And he rips into our skin and goes deeper and deeper into our lives.

And we hear him saying things like, look at that. And I lived with a dentist who was training to be a dentist. And he told us that one of the first lessons that they were given in dental school is that they were not allowed to say, look at that.

When they opened up their mouth. It's probably a good thing, isn't it? Ah, look at that. Can you imagine your dentist saying that? And when you lie there in the chair and you open up your mouth, you don't want to hear your dentist say, sheesh, look at that.

[4 : 46] Because you'll be out of the door, won't you? You won't do that. But God is saying in Romans 1 to 3, sheesh, look at that.

It doesn't make us feel good about ourselves. It's not designed for that. And he keeps on with this sustained exposure of sin. Saying to you and I, look how deep the rebellion runs. Look how polluted your life is. Look how addicted the heart of idolatry can be. Can you see the pride tucked down under there?

And as we hear God saying those things, we say, don't we, enough. Stop. Please. No more. And I would to God that we would say that in the right way and in the right spirit.

That we would go on to say, not just stop. Please. No more. But we would say, please fix me. Please cure me. Please heal me. Please cleanse me.

[5 : 57] Please wash me. Please pardon me. Please forgive me. Please change me. And so as God sinks the knife into us and exposes our sin once more, that is what we want to say this morning.

The other thing in introduction here is that you'll find, won't you, it's pretty obvious, there's a series of quotations from the Old Testament. And in a sense, what Paul is doing here is he's saying to you, do you see all I've taught you in Romans 1 to 3?

It's all in the Old Testament. There's nothing new here. It's all there. And it's as if he gets out his Old Testament machine gun.

And he just starts shooting verses randomly. Well, not randomly. And it comes out text after text after text with the force of a spiritual blitz. It's like there's Old Testament bombs falling on us left and right and center.

And he's hurling scriptural hand grenades. And they're exploding everywhere around us. That's what he does in this final point regarding sin. The text is not easy to understand.

[7 : 07] Now look with me at verse 9. Verse 9 I think is quite key. It says, what then, question, what then, question mark, are we Jews any better off?

Now I want you to see that, by the word Jews, if you've got an ESV Bible, there's a little number 5, isn't there? Can you see the number 5? And that will point you down to the footnote at the bottom of the page.

And it says there that it could be translated, are we, not are we Jews? I don't think the word Jews is there.

Are we better off? So the question that we've got to ask is when you come to verse 9, who is the we? Who is the we that Paul is speaking of? Is he speaking of Jews?

Or is he speaking to Christians? In the context, he's just been speaking about how people are slanderously saying things about him.

[8 : 08] And so before, he's speaking of the we as himself, as an apostle and those preaching Jesus Christ. Is it the same we? Or is it Christians?

Or is it the Jews? And it's not easy to see what it is. I think we're better off with the way that the ESV footnote translated it.

I want to argue that he's speaking to Christians. He's spoken as near Romans 1 to 3 of Jews and Gentiles. Everyone is being exposed. That's the general thrust of the letter.

He's been saying, all are sinners. But you are Christians who've come to believe. And so verse 9, what about you? And so at this point, Paul steps forward and he says, we're no different.

We've no advantage. We're all sinners too. Whichever group that he's talking to, whichever the we is, he's saying the big point, we're all sinners.

[9 : 11] Other commentators think he's speaking of Jews. But the crucial point he's making is this. We are all sinners. None of us. None of us can say that we're not this morning.

None of us can think of ourselves more highly than anyone else here this morning. Ted Tripp, in his book, tells of a little boy who was with his family at church as the offering is being lifted.

We forgot the offering in the last hymn, so we'll take it in the next hymn. But as the offering was going around the church, the offering bag, I went to the dad. The dad put in a note.

And then the little girl, she put in a one pound coin. And then the bag reached the little boy. And the little boy put in a two pound coin, reached in his hand and pulled out a ten pound note.

Put it in his pocket. And passed it to his other sister. Of course, his sister saw it and no one else did. And so his sister, you can imagine it, she informs the dad at some point during the service.

[10:17] The father is mortified. Was there ever such a sin committed on the face of the earth? I'm sure you can imagine how the dad felt.

So the father, after the service, takes the little boy to Pastor Ted Tripp. Pastor Ted takes the little boy and his dad into a study.

They both sit down. The little boy looks very frightened. Pastor Ted, after a few moments thought and prayer, said, Isn't it a wonderful thing that Jesus Christ died for sinners like us?

Who commits sins like this? That we would take money out of God's plate in worship. That little boy was profoundly affected by that.

Why was he affected by that? Because Ted Tripp did not sit there as the little boy's judge. But he sat there as a fellow sinner with that little boy.

[11:19] And that's exactly what the Apostle Paul is doing in Romans 3. Whoever you are, whether it's your first time in church today and you're really welcome, if it is your first time, or whether you've been here for decades, we're all fellow sinners.

Welcome to the club. And there's something wrong in our grasp of the gospel, if that isn't the point from which we start. There's something seriously wrong with our grasp of the gospel, if it doesn't start from that point.

We're all sinners. Because that point begins with grace and not judgment. And I think in churches like ours, it's really easy not to start there.

We need to be saying, I'm a sinner too. Come, let us go together to Jesus Christ. Let's hear the gospel that Jesus Christ speaks to sinners.

And that's the context in which he says these words. That is the spirit in which I think these words come out. And so I think in one way, God is scratching deeper and deeper under our skin.

[12:24] And we feel like he's lobbing these hand grenades that are exploding all around us and filling us with shrapnel. Our conscience is being cut over and over again. And yet in another sense, he says, we're all in the same boat.

And thank God for a gospel for sinners like you and me. But now the righteousness of God has been manifest apart from the law.

And as you hear this exposure of sin, keep hearing it with that hope in your heart. There is a cure this morning. The table will tell you that. There is hope this morning.

The bread and wine scream at that at you. And so let's go. In the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ. That's the background. We're all sinners. I'm going to make two four points.

They're brief. First of all, you see in this first group of texts in verses 10 to 12, he shows the general trend of our life. And he says the general trend of your life and my life, as difficult as this heart to hear this morning is, is sinful.

[13:27] And it's ruined a relationship with God. That's the first thing. A ruined relationship with God. Look at verses 10 to 12. There's six short, sharp, rapid fire gunshots of scripture.

None is righteous. No, not one. No, not. No one understands. No one seeks God. All have turned aside. Together. And have become worthless.

No one does good. Not even one. Short, sharp, pithy, all picked from the Old Testament. From various contexts.

And Paul puts them in this order. To size down the general trend of our life. And he says it's sinful. There's none righteous.

Remember what Romans is about. Romans is all about righteousness of God being revealed. It's the whole heart of the issue, isn't it? Righteousness is what God is.

[14:28] And what God demands. And what you don't have. Unrighteousness is what we do have. And all unrighteousness calls for the wrath of God.

Righteousness is what God has. And that is what he offers to you in the good news of the Lord Jesus. As a gift. There's none righteous.

No, not one. None of us can stand before God. None of us can feel that we're on the right side of God. Or on the right side of God's law. Every single human being on the face of the earth. All are on the wrong side. None righteous.

No, not one. Not one of us. No one understands. There's no understanding. We all choose to sin. In that sense it's irrational.

Anomalous. Why would we choose to rebel against such a gracious and a great and a kind God? Why would we choose to rebel against the God who has given us absolutely everything?

[15 : 34] Well, it's because we don't understand. Our mind has been darkened. It's been filled with lies. And we've fallen for the deceitfulness of the devil. And we've come to think, haven't we, that God is hard and God is harsh.

And I'm going to take whatever he gives me and I'm going to bury it because God is a hard taskmaster. And I'm going to live life for self and care nothing for him. No one understands. No one seeks God. And so there we are in the darkness of our lives. And that's the general trend of life. We turn aside. Verse 12, we become worthless.

Pointless. A distortion of life. We distract ourselves by anything and everything. So the completely unimportant and utterly trivial becomes really, really important.

And no one does good. And we think we do. We like to think we do. But we're all tainted and marred with sin. Every single one. It's a striking collection of texts.

[16 : 45] It makes us stagger. Because from God's perspective, the whole course of our life is lived in a non-Godward direction. Totally turned away.

Not seeking him. Not understanding. Not being righteous. Not being good. Totally un-Godward in the focus. It's what it means to have a ruined relationship with God.

We're not righteous. We don't understand. We don't seek him. We're not good. Every single one in this world suffers from a ruined relationship with God. And maybe this morning that he didn't even realize it.

It's a big shock, isn't it? You thought you and God were all right. You never even thought of it. But actually, there's a ruined relationship between you and God. And so Paul's question, in verse 9, is for us, are we any better?

Are we any better? Are we any better? No, we've all suffered from this, don't we? Secondly, let's see. Verses 13 to 17, there's more biblical bombs to destroy the view of ourselves.

[17 : 59] So our throat is an open grave. We use our tongues to deceive. The venom of asps, some of their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift, shed blood, and their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they've not known.

There's no fear of God before their eyes. So 12 to 17, he says, firstly, we've got a ruined relationship with God, but then it moves on to a ruined relationship with one another. And the largest emphasis there is our speech, isn't it?

And how we speak to each other. Their throats are like an open grave. It's a really curious phrase. It means that we are like death, swallowing each other up in our speech.

Our tongues are deceitful, our lips corrosive and poisonous, our mouths full of cursing and bitterness. And when he adds this little phrase, on our feet being swift to shed blood, in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they've not known, he's saying that the course of our life leads on a quest of violence and vengeance and misery.

And so it's not peace, it's not wholeness, and it's not healing, but asserting self. A quest for vengeance.

[19 : 27] Broken relationships. Damaging words. And that is the fruit in the effect of sin. I could give you example after example, probably in your family, certainly on your street, definitely in your workplace.

I could take you to social media. I could take you to the way that people speak about one another. The evidence is everywhere. And so let's hear the question again, from verse nine, can you see it? Are we any better? Are we any better? No, we've all sinned like that. We do sin like that.

The third thing is, and we see sin ruins our relationship with God, it ruins relationship with others.

And then the atomic bomb, I think is in verse 18. This is the big bomb, there is no fear of God before their eyes.

It's the final bomb blast to our conscience. There's no fear of God before their eyes. It's a really, it's a strange way of saying it. Why is it a strange way of saying it? Can you think why? There's no need, is there, before their eyes, but Paul could have said, there's no fear of God.

[20 : 51] It would have made exactly the same point. But I think he's adding something here. He's adding something. So we've got a ruined relationship with God, and a ruined relationship with others, but we've also ruined ourselves in our approach to God.

That our approach to God is blind. Before our eyes, there is no fear. Our approach to God is irreverent. Our approach to God is without fear. And we don't seek him, so we have no fear of him. We don't understand him, so we've got no respect of him. We don't know who he is, so we've got no reverence and no awe. There's no fear of God before their eyes. There's no consciousness of God, or what we owe to God, or what God will give to us, or what we would enjoy in the presence of God. And so we don't serve God, and we don't enjoy God. And there's no fear of God before our eyes. And sometimes we make great attempts in an outward and a formal sense to say, well, we've got a great relationship with God.

[22 : 00] And that outward sense is hiding a ruined relationship. Sometimes we can do that with other people, can't we? We can make an outward attempt to say we've got great relationships with other people.

But that outward, formal sense hides what is a ruined relationship behind that. But what we can't hide is that irreverent view of God that's within ourselves.

That is what we're like, towards God fearless. Astonishingly irreverent in our fearlessness of God. And so here's Paul's question.

Are we any better? Are we any better? And the answer is absolutely not. The fourth thing, he does in verses 19 to 20 years, he sews it up with his conclusion.

So what are the consequences of this? What does all this mean? He's reached the bottom line. There's no fear of God before your eyes, no conscience reverence, no conscious worship, no conscious adoration, no conscious awe.

[23 : 18] Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth might be stopped. And the whole world be held accountable to God. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

What are the consequences? Well, there's a number, aren't there? First of all, we come to this verse in the Bible and if we've understood the teaching of Romans, we shut our mouths.

It silences us. And so what can we say? That is not fair. No, God is saying, if you hear this, you need to shut your mouth.

Because this truth shuts your mouth. It says, I have no excuse. My sin is not excusable. My sin is exposed before God and my fearlessness at that point is gone.

And he says, furthermore, not only is your mouth closed, but you will be held accountable to God. All the world will be accountable to this. He says, look at your relationship with me.

[24 : 34] It's ruined. Look at your relationship with one another. And then look at that ruined view that you have of me in your heart. What do you say to that? And the truth is, you've got nothing to say.

Because it's true. And we'll be called to account. And then he adds. He says this, for by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight.

Since through the law comes knowledge of sin. You and I won't be able to stand before God and say, well, I know that part of the law is true and I did those things in my life.

I tried to obey the law in this way. No, he says he won't be able to say that. Because no one is justified by works of the law.

And through the law comes knowledge of sin. Knowledge of sin comes. So here is the mark. So don't do this.

[25 : 39] And when you do it, you've stepped over the mark. Through the law comes knowledge of sin. God says this is sin. We understand that.

We do it. We know that it's sin. The law of God tells you what is right and it tells you what is wrong. But there is a sense, isn't there, when we hear that law, it stirs up sin and it almost provokes us as well.

Children, those of you in school, do you know sometimes, I don't know whether it happens now, but sometimes you get a letter home from school and it will say in handwriting, it says, to the parents of, dot, dot, dot. Do you know that? And your teachers say you're to give this to your parents.

What's the temptation? What's the temptation? What's the temptation, Florence? To give it to your mouth. That ruins this illustration, isn't it?

It's very, very good. Let's, in a couple of years, what's the, what's the, what's the temptation? No, give me the answer I want. To open it.

[26 : 42] That's right, isn't it? That's the temptation, isn't it? You know it's not for you, yet the temptation is, to want to open it, because you know it's about you. It's an Australian Archbishop, I've told you this before, isn't it?

The Australian Archbishop is getting a train into Sydney, Australia, and he sees a sign on the train, which says, no spitting on the train. He said he'd never ever thought about spitting on the train. But suddenly he found himself salivating. Desperate to just, there's a law at work, where the law actually, as we hear it and understand it, brings forth sin.

Here's a boundary. Don't break it. Desperate to break it. You set me a boundary, I'll push it, because it exposes our lack of fear, of God.

That's the nature of sin. And so, oh Lord, have mercy on us. And we thank God that this letter, does not end here.

[27 : 51] Thank God that in the next verse, he goes on to say, doesn't he, that there is a righteousness of God, that has been manifest, that has been revealed, that has been shown, apart from the law. And he says to you this morning, he says, your heart is dark.

But here is life, and here is light, and here is liberty, and here is hope, and here is good news. And so look at me, and all my righteousness, what a mess.

But there is a righteousness from God, that has been revealed, and there is hope for you this morning. And there's a hope that has been firmly fixed, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

and so you believe in him. And you trust him, and you run to him, and you run to him, as if your life depends on it, and you take the gift that he offers you, and as he scratches your heart open, you pray that he will pour his grace into your heart.

The finished work of our Lord and Savior on the cross, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, and our Rescuer, we run to him. He is the one that nourishes us.

[29 : 14] He is the one that keeps us. He is the one that feeds us. He is our only hope, in life and in death. And so, Romans 1 to 3, we all sin.

But will you run to Jesus? Will you run to Jesus, the friend and Savior of sinners? Let's pray. Let's pray.