

The Final Argument

Romans 3:9 – 20

⁹What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. ¹⁰As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹²All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." ¹³"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit."^[c] "The poison of vipers is on their lips." ¹⁴"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." ¹⁵"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ruin and misery mark their ways, ¹⁷and the way of peace they do not know." ¹⁸"There is no fear of God before their eyes." ¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

In today's Bible lesson, Paul addressed the notion of "total depravity." This condition makes man wholly and completely unacceptable to God in and of himself. Man is also incapable of glorifying God in his present state. There's much evidence of sin and depravity all around us. In fact, someone once said that "sin" is one of the only empirically verifiable doctrines in the Christian faith. We can open our eyes and see that sin is real.

Paul concluded in today's lesson that "there is no one righteous, not even one" (verse 10). Left alone, man does not naturally turn to God or seek God. Man most often turns away from God and seeks to satisfy himself. In verses 10-18, Paul quoted heavily from the theology of the Old Testament...especially the Psalms.

According to Paul's writings in verses 10-18, depravity has manifested itself in at least six ways...

- 1. By nature, man does not even seek God. God seeks man.**
- 2. Man brings no innate goodness before the presence of God.**
- 3. Man deceives God and sins against the Lord by his words.**
- 4. Man's character is flawed to the core, leading to sinful acts.**
- 5. Man is swift to sin against God and often without remorse.**
- 6. Man does not even fear the Lord.**

David Jeremiah has written that "in order to prove that all humanity is depraved and in need of God, Paul enters into the closing arguments by using fourteen sweeping statements taken from seven Old Testament passages. All of these quotations drive home the point of human depravity."

This depravity cannot cure itself. Man is caught in a hopeless downward death spiral. Only God can offer hope of intervention and change. In a while, our focus in Romans will shift toward God's solution for human depravity.

As we read today's Bible lesson, we are alarmed and surprised by the depth of man's debauchery and depravity. Mind, heart, spirit, mouth and conscience have all been impacted and tainted. John Stott once wrote that "*this section demonstrates the corruption of the human personality.*" Note that in verses 10-18, the verb tense is most often in the present form or tense. This present tense construction shows us that human conditions have certainly not positively changed or improved since the days of Paul.

In verse 20, Paul made it clear that man cannot be content with self-justification or self-righteousness. No single act can make man right with God...with the exception of surrendering to Christ and receiving the gift of His righteousness. The law reveals our sinfulness but keeping the law cannot render us innocent before the Lord.

Often in the Bible, "bad news," or at the very least, "honest news" has to precede good news. Paul would argue that we have to understand where we are and what our condition is before we can respond to God's grace and power to change us. Paul has labored exhaustively and conscientiously to show us who and where we are apart from Christ. And the picture is not pretty.

Applications . . .

- 1. As you read today's Bible lesson, go back and read the different passages in the Old Testament that Paul quoted in Romans 3. Look at more than just the quoted verses - look at the verses used before and after the ones quoted.**
- 2. Look up the word "depravity" in the dictionary. Compare the definition you find with what Paul wrote in Romans 3.**
- 3. Which of the descriptions of depravity in Romans 3 describe your situation in life?**
- 4. Recall when you first became aware of the meaning of "sin." What was your understanding of the word then? Is the same now?**