

36. The Book of Romans 3:15-20

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

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(1-4-24)

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Tonight, we find ourselves at the end of the first major section of the Book of Romans—'**Condemnation**' which runs from 1:18-3:20.

As we have previously said, Romans 3:10-18 constitutes Paul's closing arguments in his case for the guilt of all human beings in the sight of Almighty God. The theme of Romans is the '*Gospel of Jesus Christ*' (1:16). The word '*gospel*' means good news—but before Paul can give the *good news*, he first has to present the bad news. (Elaborate)

In this first section of the book Paul is making his case that the whole world apart from Jesus Christ and His payment for their sins on Calvary's Cross is condemned to spend eternity apart from God in hell. Now Paul calls the final Witness for the prosecution to the stand—God Himself!

Verses 10-18 amount to a 14-count indictment of the human race by God right out of His Word.

Romans 3:10–18 (NKJV)

¹⁰ As it is written: *"There is none righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. ¹² They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."* ¹³ *"Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; ¹⁴ "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways; ¹⁷ And the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

This 14-count indictment is directed at 3 primary areas of man's person—his:

- I. Character (verses 10-12)
- II. Conversation (verses 13-14)
- III. Conduct (verses 15-18)

We already looked at '**Character**' and '**Conversation**' which covered the first 10 indictments (verses 10-14)—which now brings us to God's condemnation of man's '**Conduct**'.

III. Conduct—verses 15-17

Indictment #11

- A. "Their feet are swift to shed blood" (verse 15) (Proverbs 1:16; Isaiah 59:7)

Man is a murderer—he kills his own kind more than any other species. In the U.S.A. since 1900 people in America have killed 3 times as many people in private acts of violence as have died in all the wars we have fought in our nation's entire history!

That doesn't even take into consideration the 63 million babies that have been killed through abortion.

Research has determined that a child born today in any one of the fifty largest cities in America has roughly a one in 40 chance of being murdered.

How have the governors and mayors of blue cities and states responded to all the violence? By doing away with cash bail, defunding the police, and letting criminals go free after they have committed acts of violence which has escalated violent crimes and the murder rate.

Indictment #12

B. "Destruction and misery are in their ways" (verse 16) (Isaiah 59:7)

All you have to do is read or watch the news each night to see the senseless violence going on all around us. Everywhere you look there is destruction, devastation and misery caused by the evil and brutality of man—all escalated in the summer of 2020 with the George Floyd riots.

Now we see violent protestors who hate the Jewish people for striking back at Hamas for the brutal and barbaric atrocities they unleashed on peaceful Jews enjoying a concert back on Oct. 7th of 2023.

Jesus foretold that the closer we got to His return—lawlessness would reach epidemic proportions and the love of many would grow cold. (Matthew 24:12)

We see this in the area of domestic violence where wives and children are routinely abused and often killed at the hands of husbands and fathers (women are abusers also)—this also has reached epidemic proportions in our society.

Gun violence is off the charts—as gangs roam our cities and people are being killed for a few bucks or for a cellphone. The response of our leaders is to try to take away the rights of law-abiding citizens to bear arms and protect ourselves and our families making us defenseless 'sitting ducks.'

Indictment #13

C. "And the way of peace they have not known" (verse 17) (Isaiah 59:8)

Isaiah 57:20–21 (NLT)

²⁰ "But those who...reject me are like the restless sea, which is never still but continually churns up mud and dirt.

²¹ There is no peace for the wicked," says my God.

Man will never have peace within himself or with his fellow man as long as he's at war with God—

"Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us." (Romans 5:1).

Indictment #14

D. “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (verse 18) (Psalm 36:1)

This final indictment is actually at the heart of man’s evil conduct—or the result of it:

Psalm 36:1–4 (NKJV)

¹ An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: *There is no fear of God before his eyes.* ² For he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity *and* when he hates. ³ The words of his mouth *are* wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise *and* to do good. ⁴ He devises wickedness on his bed; He sets himself in a way *that is* not good; He does not abhor evil.

Proverbs 9:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ “The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of wisdom...

Proverbs 8:13 (NKJV)

¹³ The fear of the Lord *is* to hate evil...

The *fear of the Lord* is 2-fold: 1) *Positive* (reverential fear); 2) *Negative* (fear of punishment, judgment)—two examples of this from Scripture are:

Romans 14:10–12 (NKJV)

¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ [*not a punitive judgment*]. ¹¹ For it is written: “*As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.*” ¹² So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

Luke 12:4–5 (NKJV)

⁴ “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

The fear of consequences has historically been what our entire criminal justice system is built upon—however, if a person doesn’t care about the consequences of their actions, incarceration is useless in keeping criminals at bay and maintaining law and order.

Let me say this—as Christians obedience to God motivated by love is the higher and more virtuous motivation than is obedience motivated by fear—but listen, obedience motivated by fear isn’t bad!

Whatever motivates obedience to God is better than disobedience any day of the week!

But with regard to verses 10-18, author and pastor William MacDonald had this to say—

“Here we see the total depravity of man, by which we mean that sin has affected all of mankind and that it has affected every part of his being. Obviously, every man has not committed every sin—but he has a nature which is capable of committing them all.

If Paul had wanted to give a more complete catalog of sins, he could have mentioned the sins of sex: adultery,

homosexuality, lesbianism, perversion, bestiality, prostitution, rape, lewdness, pornography, and smut.

He could have mentioned the sins associated with war: destruction of innocents, atrocities, gas chambers, ovens, concentration camps, torture devices, sadism.

He could have mentioned sins of the home: unfaithfulness, divorce, wife beating, mental cruelty, child abuse.

Add to these the crimes of murder, mutilation, theft, burglary, embezzlement, vandalism, graft, corruption.

Also, the sins of speech: profanity, suggestive jokes, sensual language, cursing, blasphemy, lies, backbiting, gossip, character assassination, grumbling, and complaining.

Other personal sins are: drunkenness, drug addiction, pride, envy, covetousness, ingratitude, filthy thought-life, hatred, and bitterness.

The list is seemingly endless—pollution, littering, racism, exploitation, deceit, betrayal, broken promises, and on and on. What further proof of human depravity is needed?

And yet—**‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’**

In many ways this summarizes the entire thought; every sin and rebellion against God happens because people don’t have the fear of God in their hearts—which even applies to believers. (Woman in adultery—*“What can God do to me, I’m saved?”*)

Total depravity doesn’t mean we’re as bad as we could be—but that doesn’t make us ‘good’—there is none good but God!

So, let’s review briefly—in Romans 1:18-3:20, Paul has put the human race on trial.

- He wants to prove that the whole world apart from Christ is guilty before God—the hedonist, the moralist, and the religionist—everyone! (verse 9)
- In verses 10-18, Paul presents his closing arguments in his case against mankind. He does so by utilizing a common rabbinic practice known as a ‘charaz’ which in Hebrew means ‘*to string pearls.*’
- Paul strings together God’s own words right out of the O.T. which forms a 14-count indictment by God against mankind—to prove the evil and depravity in the human heart.

Now in verses 19-20 Paul moves from the role of prosecuting *attorney* and steps behind the bench and assumes the role of *judge* to give the verdict—‘guilty as charged!’

Some might be inclined to ask—*“Can he do that?”*

Romans 3:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Paul isn’t usurping God’s role as Judge—he is simply acting as a representative of God in *His* court repeating the verdict God has already rendered with regard to fallen man.

William MacDonald—

“When God gave the law to Israel, He was using Israel as a sample of the human race. He found that Israel was a failure, and He correctly applied this finding to all of humanity. It is the same as when a health inspector takes a test-tube of water from a well, tests the sample, finds it polluted, and then pronounces the entire well polluted.

So, Paul explains that when the law speaks, it speaks to those who are under the law—the people of Israel—in order that every mouth, Jew and Gentile, may be stopped, and all the world be brought in guilty before God.”

But actually, Paul's point is that not only are the Jews **"under the law"**—but the Gentiles are under the law also—

Romans 2:12–14, 15-16 (NKJV)

¹² For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law...¹⁴ for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) ¹⁶ in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Jeremiah 17:9–10 (NKJV)

⁹ "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? ¹⁰ I, the Lord, search the heart, / test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

Hebrews 4:13 (NKJV)

¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom *we must give* account.

Romans 3:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ **Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.**

J.B. Phillips wrote:

"We know what the message of the Law is for those who live under it—that every excuse may die on the lips of him who makes it, and no living man may think himself beyond the judgment of God."

Here's the problem with those Jews (like the Scribes, Pharisees, and even Paul before he was saved by grace)—or any religious person who thinks they can get to heaven by keeping God's law (think of the Ten Commandments)—**they only look at the law as being outward.**

In other words, they only believe the law pertains to the outward actions of their lives but are completely ignorant of the fact that—**the law also pertains to the inward attitudes of a person's heart!**

Paul finally came to that realization right before he got saved—and talked about it in Chapter 7 of the Book of Romans: **"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin."** (Romans 7:14).

So, the law is *spiritual*—in other words, it doesn't just pertain to the physical, outward sins a person commits (murder, stealing, adultery etc.)—but also **deals with the sins of the heart.**

Matthew 5:21–22, 27-28 (NLT)

²¹ "You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' ²² But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell...

²⁷ "You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Romans 3:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ **Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.**

Donald Grey Barnhouse—

"The law of God is like a mirror. Now the purpose of a mirror is to reveal to you that your face is dirty, but the purpose of a mirror is not to wash your face. When you look in a mirror and find that your face is dirty, you do not then reach to take the mirror off the wall and attempt to rub it on your face as a cleansing agent. The purpose of the mirror is to drive you to the water. Any other use of the mirror is plain folly."

The law is good when it is used *properly* (for the purpose for which God gave it)—to produce conviction of sin, but it is worthless as a savior from sin.

1 Timothy 1:8–11 (NKJV)

⁸ But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, ¹⁰ for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.

Galatians 3:24–25 (NKJV)

²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

One author put it well:

"No one can be justified by keeping the law. The law was not given to justify people but to produce the knowledge of sin—not the knowledge of salvation, but the knowledge of sin."

Martin Luther said, *"The law's function is not to justify but to terrify."*

There are many people who believe that—all they need is a 'little religion' a 'little law' to be saved and go to heaven—because they're basically good.

Galatians 3:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, *"Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."*

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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