

# All Under Sin

## Romans 3:9-20

In 1910 Catholic thinker G. K. Chesterton published a collection of essays inspired by a title given to him two years earlier by The Times newspaper, which had asked a number of authors to write on the topic: "What's wrong with the world?". Chesterton's answer at that time was the shortest of those submitted - he simply wrote: "Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely yours, G.K. Chesterton".

This is precisely Paul's point in Romans 3:9-20. As we've been learning from our study in Romans, the picture that Paul paints of the human race is not a pretty sight. Here in this section Paul gets to the punch line of what he's been saying for three long chapters.

- The whole world is under God's wrath (1:18)
- The Gentiles are guilty (1:18-32)
- The Moralists are guilty (2:1-16)
- The Jews are guilty (2:17-29)
- No excuses will be accepted (3:1-8)

In this passage we are forced to view the reality of our sin against God and other people. In short, we are the problem; I am what's wrong with the world. This section begins with a question that is quickly answered in verse 9. Then, quoting a string of Old Testament Scripture, Paul holds up the mirror of the Word to show us just how sinful we really are.

Listen to the whole passage:

## Romans 3:9-20

**9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.**

**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."**

**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.**

**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.**

Interestingly, Paul does not begin with an introduction, but with his conclusion.

## **The Conclusion: All are under sin (3:9).**

### **9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.**

Paul is teaching us the universality of sin. This is the first occurrence of sin in Romans. Paul goes on to use that word nearly 50 times from here through chapter 8.

Paul has proved that sin has infected every part of the human race. No group is exempt. The Jews are guilty, the Gentiles are guilty, the moral man is guilty, the religious man is guilty. The rich man is guilty—but so is the poor man. Men are guilty—and so are women. Seniors are sinners and so are children. It doesn't matter how you divide the human race. As the last three words of that verse say we are **"all under sin."**

It's a military term that means to be under the authority or power of someone else. To be "under sin" means that outside of Christ, we are under the *power of sin*. It dominates our lives so that we obey its lusts. In John 8:34 Jesus said, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin."** We sin because we are sinners.

Because we are under the power of sin, slaves to sin, we are also under the *guilt of sin*. To be "under sin" means that we are truly guilty of violating God's holy law. I am not saying that everyone always *feels* guilty, but that we are truly guilty before God. We are all under sin.

Paul has already spent almost three whole chapters proving the sinfulness of mankind. So now he shows us again what God says about us from the scripture.

### **The Proof from Scripture:**

Notice the little phrase in verse 10: **"As it is written..."** This is a common expression in the Book of Romans, stated on 16 different occasions. I love that this is in the present tense, meaning that the Bible still speaks, right now, into our situation. It's not a dead book, but rather is "living and active" as Hebrews 4:12 says. Paul is not speaking from his own authority but from the authority of the authoritative Word of God.

### **1. Our Sinful Character (3:10-12)**

Look at verse 10, **"There is none righteous, no, not one."** Here is God's evaluation as He looks down from heaven. He doesn't see a single righteous person—not even one. But how can this be? How can God look down at 6 billion people and not see even one righteous man? The answer is that God judges according to a different standard than the one we use. Most of us want God to grade on the curve. That is why Paul is answering the question "Are we any better than they?" All of us love to compare ourselves with someone who is worse than we are and say, "Well, I'm not as bad as he is."

But God doesn't judge that way. When he looks down from heaven, the standard he uses is his own sinless perfection. He compares us to his own perfect holiness, his own perfect love, his own perfect wisdom, his own perfect justice. And compared with God's own perfection, there is no one—not even one person—who comes close to being righteous in his eyes.

Look at how Paul describes our sinful character in these verses. Paul hammers the lid of our coffin with so many nails that you cannot pry it open: none righteous; not even one; none who understands, 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! Paul

does not let anyone slip under the radar! From God's point of view there isn't a single righteous person in the entire human race.

It is important to understand Paul's perspective in saying these things. Is he suggesting that there is absolutely no one who does good in any sense at all? No, he's not saying that. Mother Teresa was a far better person than Adolf Hitler. Some people are incredibly evil while others seem almost saintly. It would be pointless to deny that truth.

How do you reconcile the obvious moral differences among people with the sweeping conclusions of verse 12? The answer lies in the basic difference between relative and absolute goodness. In the sense of absolute perfection, there is no one who does good. Since "good" in God's sight means to do what we do for His glory, no one outside of Christ does good. Everything we do before we come to Christ is tainted by the disease of sin. No human being could ever do good by God's standard. Relatively speaking though, some people are much "better" and some are much "worse."

In verse 23 Paul defines sin as falling short of the glory of God. All fall short. Think about it this way: Suppose the human race held a contest to see who could jump to the moon. Some of us would get a few inches off the ground. Maybe a Michael Jordan or Carl Lewis would get a few feet off the ground. But all of us would fall short. When the standard is the glory of God, no one is good. No not one.

We are all under sin because of our sinful character.

## 2. Our Sinful Conversation (3:13-14)

After describing our character, Paul turns next to our conversation. This makes sense because what comes out of our mouths has its source in our sinful hearts as Jesus said in Matthew 12:34: **"You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."**

Most people sin by what they say and how they say it. Have you ever wished you could take back something you've said that really hurt someone? I have. That's why in Proverbs 6, when God mentions six things He hates, three of them have to do with what we say.

Paul traces from scripture how human sin is proved by our speech:

- Throats. The Living Bible paraphrases it this way: "Their talk is foul and filthy like the stench of an open grave." Using a very graphic word picture, Paul is saying that the throat is to the heart what an open grave is to the corpse within it.
- Tongues. The tongue literally "practices deceit." That means that we've been deceitful so much that we've actually become good at it. Have you ever noticed that you don't have to teach a child how to lie? It just comes naturally.
- Lips. The poison of asps is very descriptive. Similar to our rattlesnakes a asp is a viper that has a sac full of venom that is unleashed through hollow fangs when provoked. Our lips can unleash venomous verbiage that poisons the people around us.
- Mouths. Before I was saved I had a very foul mouth, out of which came both cursing and bitterness. Out of the bitterness of the heart flows the cursing of the mouth. David describes a person like this in Psalm 64:3-4: **They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows. They shoot from ambush at the innocent man; they shoot at him suddenly, without fear.**

Paul moves from our sinful character to our sinful conversation to our sinful conduct.

### 3. Our Sinful Conduct (3:15-18)

Because of our depraved condition, our conversations are filled with decaying and depraved words. But it doesn't stop there because by nature we also end up doing deeds that are destructive. Look at Romans 3:15-17:

**"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."**

Our world history is filled with mass extermination, wars, and random crime. It is all over our newspapers and it floods our media. It is in our community and in our homes. From head to foot sin has permeated everything. Mark it down. Wherever man goes, sin soon follows. Death and destruction follow his steps as night follows day.

Why is it that our condition is so messed up? Why are our conversations filled with decay and death? Why is our conduct so violent? The answer in large part is found in Ro 3:18 where we read of yet one more body part tainted by sin: **"There is no fear of God before their eyes."** We have become complacent towards God. We take our sin too lightly because we take God too lightly.

This could be paraphrased: "They care nothing about God or what He thinks about them."

Every sin has its roots in our rejection of God and our refusal to revere Him. I am convinced that the best way to experience victory over sin in our lives is to cultivate a healthy fear of God. Proverbs 16:6: **"by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil."**

When we sin, or are tempted to sin, we usually follow whatever is put before our eyes. If we can consciously keep God before our eyes and focus on the fear that is due His name, we will not want to sin. In other words, when God is "big" we are careful with our conduct; and when we "shrink" Him or ignore Him, we're more apt to do what we want to do. Psalm 101:3: **"I will set before my eyes no vile thing."** Let's be like David who prayed in Psalm 86:11: **"Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name."**

Paul has proved from scripture that sin has infected and affected our character, our conversation, and our conduct. We are all under sin. As someone has said, "If sin were blue, we'd be blue all over." Part would be dark navy blue, part might be sky blue, part might be pale blue, but every part would be blue in some shade or another.

### **The Condemnation of the Law (3:19-20)**

After spelling out the indictment, Paul makes his closing argument in verses 19-20 to show that we are all condemned:

**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.**

**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.**

I see three truths from these two verses.

- We will be silenced before God. As we come face-to-face with the mirror of God's Word and see our scars of sin, it shuts us up. There is nothing we can say, no excuse we can make. Psalm 107:42: **"...all the wicked shut their**

**mouths.**" Salvation comes only to those who are silenced by their sinfulness. Until you and I stop complaining, blaming and making excuses, we cannot be saved. We must own our sin and be silent before the Savior.

- We are accountable to the Almighty. This is a legal term, which means that we are liable before God. We are guilty as charged. Everyone will appear before the Almighty and give an account of their lives. Are you ready for judgment day?
- The Law helps us see that we are lawbreakers. J.B. Philips renders verse 21 this way: *"It is the straightedge of the law that shows us how crooked we are."*

When we look into the mirror of God's Word, it becomes clear pretty quickly that we need an extreme makeover. We are deeply depraved, hopelessly lost, but incredibly loved.

If I stayed strictly with our text, I'd end the message here and say, "Have a great week!" There isn't much hope in these verses. But Paul knows that unless you feel the despair of the awful disease of sin, you won't take the cure. But rather than end here, let's briefly look at verses 21 and 22, where Paul gives us the cure: **But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.**

R. C. Buckner, a big, bold and brash man, lived about 100 years ago in Texas. This imposing figure had a very tender heart for children, starting Buckner's Children's Homes all across the state. The children affectionately called him "Papa Buckner" and would run up to him every time he visited. He would always take the time to pick up each and every child and give them a hug.

One day he was visiting one of the homes and was hugging all the children gathered around him when he noticed a little girl who was standing with her face against the wall. He discovered that she had been seriously burned in an accident, and had a terrible scar on her face. He went over to her and asked, "Sweetheart, don't you want Papa Buckner to hug you?" Without turning around she snarled, "No, I'm too ugly." Papa Buckner knelt down, picked her up in his burly arms, turned her face gently toward his, looked right into her eyes and then planted a tender kiss right on the burned portion of her face. After he kissed her, he said, "Sweetheart, you are beautiful to me, and you are beautiful to God."

Fellow sinner, the holy and awesome God of the universe has bent down and kissed the scars of our sin when He sent the Savior to the world. In spite of our hideous deformities and our unholy depravity, in Christ God wraps His arms around us, turns our face toward His and says, "You are beautiful to me!"

If you have never come to the Lord Jesus Christ, I invite you to come to Him and be delivered from the condemnation of sin. Only through the Holy Spirit can you come. Otherwise you are unable, in rebellion against God, too sinfully ugly to come. But as you run to Jesus, out of a sense of lostness and despair, you will find that God will save you and give you the righteousness of Christ and a new life.