

In **Romans 3:9-20**, the scene is a courtroom, with God as Judge and Jury. The indictment is being read to fallen man/woman. And just as the sinner starts to speak up and try to defend himself, God tells him to stop talking! On that day our only hope is in God's Good News: Jesus! *Why must we see the blackness of sin and the hopelessness and helplessness of our situation apart from our Lord Jesus?* Spurgeon: "Too many think lightly of sin and therefore think lightly of the Savior. He who has stood before God convicted and condemned with a rope about his neck is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live in honor of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed." Every person—rebellious, moral, religious—is hopelessly, helplessly guilty. Each has suppressed known truth from God. Without Jesus the Truth, each of us has this terrible problem. Look how Paul summarizes all 3 cases (**1:18-3:8**) in **3:9-20**. Every person has suppressed God's given truth.

READ :9-18. ALL ARE UNDER SIN! THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD. Paul now appeals to the ultimate authority, the Word of God (from the Psalms and Isaiah).

:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin. Without Jesus, both Jews and Greeks are under sin. There's no one exempt. Something is inherently wrong. Even our thoughts, speech, and behavior are affected by sin.

:10-12 As it is written [in Ps. 14:1-3], "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; :11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS [to bring together, like dealing with puzzle pieces], THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; :12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." It's on permanent record. Compared to others, one might say some are better/worse, but compared to God and His truth, no one is righteous/just. Not only is every person under sin, but NO ONE is even seeking God! Seeking means a determined search after something. Here are all these idolatrous, rebellious, moral, and religious people suppressing God's truth; not one is truly seeking the one true God. "Whatever religion may be, Christianity is not man's search for God nor is the Bible a record of such a search; Christianity is God's search for rebellious mankind and the Bible is His message of redemption." What does 'God' see when He looks at the human race? Every person has turned aside, deviated from the right way. If you take into account someone's motives and power source, no one is doing what is good or right/just in God's sight. True Christianity is walking in line with God's Word, by the power of God's Spirit, for the purpose of God's Glory. It's all about Him. These sinners aren't seeking God; they are fleeing from Him, suffering the results of suppressing His truth (remember **1:21-23**).

:13-14 THEIR TALK IS AFFECTED (see Ps. 5:9, 140:3, 10:7). :13 "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING [their tongues continuously practice deceit], THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS [the poison of deadly snakes is under their lips]; :14 WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS." Look how life is affected by sin. "Open your

mouth and stick out your tongue." After the exam, "You smell like an open grave! You have a tongue that deceives. Your lips deliver a kiss of death. You use biting/stinging words to curse and hurt." Just examining their words, God sees an open grave, smells a horrible stench.

:15-18 THEIR FEET ARE AFFECTED. :15 THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, :16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, :17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." :18 THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES." Quoting **Is. 59:7-8**, the apostle Paul shows that bloodshed is not a mistake or accident. Wherever people go, whatever they do, destruction and misery mark their paths. You can trace them by the ruin and distress they leave behind. The way of peace they do not know. There is no permanent peace; they're not acquainted with it. Every person's entire being is affected by sin. He/She's a sinner by nature, by representative/type, by choice, and by sin in the flesh. These are every person's basic problems. **:18** is the reason why: There is no fear (awe or trembling in terror) of God at all (quoting **Ps. 36:1**)! There is no awe of God or dread at the results of their sins. They've suppressed God's truth.

Now in **:19-20** we are told one way we can't be justified! It's never by Law! **:19-20 Now we [absolutely] know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; :20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.** EVERY MOUTH IS CLOSED. ALL ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD: the Jews because God had given it to them in written form, the Gentiles because His words were written in their hearts (**2:12-15**), for everyone because He has revealed Himself through creation and His Son. What is the purpose of everyone being under the Law? So that (1) every mouth may be closed, (2) all the world may become accountable to God, and, (3) every person will know he/she is a sinner. The Law stops (blocks or stops up, fences in) our mouths. We must be made speechless. Some are forever talking about God, criticizing Him, saying what He should or shouldn't do, questioning Him, giving Him counsel. God makes us realize that all our efforts to defend ourselves, to blame Him or others or circumstances, must finally give way to silence. Shhh! "Shut our mouths, Lord!" **Read Gal. 2:16.** "Father, we thank You for loving us enough to tell us the truth and to shut our mouths!" The Law was given to reveal the sinfulness of sin! We all stand guilty before our Creator and Judge.

The purpose of **1:18-3:18** is to forbid our saying, "Yes, I agree, but..." No more talking; it's time to listen! God has wonderful news, but He can't tell us if we keep insisting on finding others worse or don't agree that we're all under sin. We're all accountable (under judgment) to God. **Heb. 9:27** says, "**It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.**" **Jn. 16:8-11.**

:20 Justified=declared and made right/just with God. Divine justice satisfied. Jesus satisfied the Father's justice because of who He is and what He did on the cross. He was the perfect sacrifice. And, at our moment of hearing, believing, and calling on Jesus' name, FHIDLS takes place (Forgiveness of sins, new Hearts, Intimacy with God as Father, Direct access to God, Law

written on our hearts and minds, and the Spirit takes up permanent residence in our bodies)! You can't get this by any law! The Law can save no one. This is a clear statement. God's Law is like a spiritual x-ray which shows the true condition of every person, but is not in itself a cure. Law exhibits the moral perfection of God. It reveals the inexcusable guilt of mankind. It reveals, condemns, stimulates sin, and drives a person to see his/her need of a Deliverer, whose name is Jesus.

So, by the works of Law, no flesh will be made right/just with God! Law simply shows us how sinful we are. To understand sin, we must understand the Law. "The Law deepens our awareness of failure; it loudly proclaims our need for the Good News of God." Our country's solutions? "Get rid of God. Get rid of absolutes. Redefine or legalize sin!" If we stop here, it's the darkest picture ever painted. Every man/woman/child stands before God guilty. God's judgment is universally demanded. His wrath is continually poured out from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness/injustice of mankind **(1:18)** because they've suppressed His truth. Also, there's a coming day of wrath for every unbeliever. Apart from radical heart surgery and dealing with sins, there is no hope for any one of us. We're dead in our hearts and our sins.

The evidence of the witness of God's Scriptures and creation, history, the testimony of our own lives, and the Person of Jesus silence the lips of all. Mankind has never provided a righteousness (justice) that will satisfy God and the demands of His holy Law. Mankind has four incurable problems: (1) he/she can't change his/her nature, (2) he/she can't earn forgiveness of sins, (3) he/she's got Adam as his/her representative, and (4) he/she's got sin in the flesh. Every person is a sinner by nature, by his/her thoughts and practices, by representative (until a person comes to know Jesus as Lord, the first man Adam is every human being's representative), and by sin in the flesh. Are we ready to listen rather than talk? When all else fails, then we are ready to listen to God's message of **3:21-8:39**. Are we now ready for God's solution to our dilemma? He has a wonderful, gracious one!! His name is Jesus!

Reflecting on Romans 3:9-20: As you examine these twelve verses, what are two lessons that stood out to you? When and how did you learn the hopelessness and helplessness of your situation apart from Jesus? As you reflect on **:19-20**, what are your takeaways? Why is it impossible to get right/just with God by morality and/or Law and/or flesh? How does your life reflect that you've been justified by faith in Jesus apart from works of law?

How can sinful people get just/right with a holy God? From **1:18-3:20**, we saw the bad news. We discovered that every person is guilty before God. There is none righteous, who understands, who seeks for God, who does good, not even one! Every mouth is closed and all the world is accountable to God. The Law can't help because its purposes are to reveal, condemn, and stimulate sin, not to save. The idolatrous, the immoral and depraved, the moral, & even the religious rightly deserve God's wrath and eternal separation from Him. Yet remember: The Gospel is the power of God for deliverance to everyone who has faith in Jesus. God's righteousness is the theme introduced in **1:16-17**.

Read :21-24. THE JUSTICE/RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD HAS BEEN REVEALED. **:21 But now[!] apart from the Law the righteousness (justice) of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.** God's righteousness can't be obtained through obedience to the OT Law. **Read 3:28, 4:13-15, and Gal. 2:16.** God's justice can never be achieved by human effort, no matter the rules. Something has happened that has changed everything. The righteousness of God is a legal term which means to declare and make right/just; God's justice revealed and satisfied. It means all the demands of the case have been satisfied. GOD'S JUSTICE WAS SATISFIED BY JESUS AND HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS. **It was witnessed by the OT Law and Prophets.** OT predictions (like **Is. 53**) saying God's justice would be satisfied. We heard about it. Now we see it! In **3:21**, we have God's answer to man's failure or inadequacy and sin. It's Jesus, who takes away the sins of the world (**Jn. 1:29b**).

:22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction. How can we personally be forgiven and declared/made right/just with almighty God? Through faith in the One who satisfied the Father's justice. **Jn. 6:29** "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him [Jesus] whom He has sent." Jesus has become our righteousness (**1 Cor. 1:30**). Jesus is God's solution to your nature (a sinner), your heredity (IN Adam), your sins (forgiveness), and sin in the flesh! God has provided the way to be forgiven, declared and made righteous/just, to share His glory, and to be able to walk by the Spirit! *This is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are or what we have or haven't done.*

How do you get this gift? Paul's answer centers on the Person and work of Jesus, the Lord and Savior and (for the Jewish person) Messiah (see **1 Pet. 2:24, Heb. 9:26-28**). You are 'saved' when you from the heart believe in Jesus' Person & work. See **Jn. 1:12, Rom. 10:9-15, Gal. 2:16, Acts 13:38-39**. We don't contribute a thing, just trust/faith in the Person and work of Jesus.

:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile so far as sin is concerned (:9). Sin = to miss the mark. Without Jesus, all a person does is sin (**5:12, 6:20**). We all fall short of God's glory! The glory of God is the majesty of His holy person, the essence of who He is displayed. This is what God intends human beings to share. We've all missed God's mark and fallen short of His glory. What a great loss! Look what we were missing out on! We move away, drooping shoulders, rightly condemned. No one can solve the problem...but God! The

righteous Judge says, "Wait, I have a gift for you!" Justification, which can also be translated 'righteousness'. We're just/right with GOD Himself.

:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. "Paul begins to open the window of divine grace." He's used the word grace in **1:5** and **1:7** in his introduction, but **3:24** begins a new understanding of this special term. He'll mention grace another 20+ times in this letter. Since all have sinned, if a person is to be saved, it must be by God's grace, His undeserved favor. Because of Jesus' person and His death on the Cross and paying the penalty for our sins and for us as sinners, when we place our faith in Jesus, God's justice is ours as a gift. "It was given freely, unearned or unmerited by the recipient." And at that moment of justification, FHIDLS takes place. What love! What grace! Justified is a "wholly legal transaction." All the demands of the Law are fulfilled. And, it was given as a free gift, "not because we are good but because He is good."

—through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. While justification is a legal term, redemption is a commercial term, from the slave market. It means to set free by paying a price. It was the payment needed to purchase a slave. Jesus paid that price by His Person and death on the cross: who He is and what He did. Jesus was the ransom for us; He became sin for us. God wholeheartedly loves us, enough to give His Son to die for us (**5:8**). Our redemption was not cheap; nothing less than His Son's Person and death for us as sinners and for our sins would do. The whole intent of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ was to be obedient to His Father, to bring glory to Him, to bring us to faith in Him as Lord and Savior, and to come to personally know God as our Father and the Spirit as our Helper.

Reflecting on Romans 3:21-24: What thoughts come to mind when you meditate on the Person of Jesus and His work on the Cross and what it meant for you? What are two essential lessons you learned as you think about these verses? What changes in your thinking, choices, words, and/or actions do these verses mean for you? If emailing or writing a letter to someone, what are the facts from this passage you would emphasize?

In **Romans 3:9-20**, the scene is a courtroom, with God as Judge and Jury. The indictment is being read to fallen man/woman. And just as the sinner starts to speak up and try to defend himself, God tells him to stop talking! On that day our only hope is in God's Good News: Jesus! *Why must we see the blackness of sin and the hopelessness and helplessness of our situation apart from our Lord Jesus?* Spurgeon: "Too many think lightly of sin and therefore think lightly of the Savior. He who has stood before God convicted and condemned with a rope about his neck is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live in honor of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed." Every person—rebellious, moral, religious—is hopelessly, helplessly guilty. Each has suppressed known truth from God. Without Jesus the Truth, each of us has this terrible problem. Look how Paul summarizes all 3 cases (**1:18-3:8**) in **3:9-20**. Every person has suppressed God's given truth.

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