

# Struggling Under Sin's Power

Rom 3:9-20

SS Lesson for 07/10/2016

**Devotional Scripture:** Rom 7:7-24

## OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

*Key Verse: Rom 3:9*

*Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

*Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

SCOPE OF SIN (ROMANS 3:9-12)

*All have sinned (9)*

There is none good except God (Mark 10:18)

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23)

Even if we claim to be without sin, we lie (1 John 1:8)

If angels are not pure, what chance does man have to be pure (Job 15:14-16)

Even our most righteous acts are like filthy rags in God's sight (Isa 64:6)

*All have failed to seek God (10-11)*

Fail to seek God because of relying on earthly powers (Isa 31:1)

Fail to seek God because of not forsaking evil ways and thoughts (Isa 55:6-7)

Fail to seek God because of having a mind hostile to God (Rom 8:7)

Fail to seek God because of turning away from God (Ps 14:2-3)

Yet, in God's mercy He will sometimes reveal Himself despite our not seeking Him (Isa 65:1)

*All have failed to Do Good (12)*

There is no one who does good (Ps 53:1)

There is no one who never sins (Eccl 7:20)

All have gone astray at one time or another (Isa 53:6)

All have followed the desires of their sinful nature (Eph 2:3)

Even when we are obedient, we have only done our duty (Luke 17:10)

CHARACTER OF SIN (ROMANS 3:13-18)

*Affects Our Tongues (13-14)*

Sin affects tongues because sin makes the tongue corrupt the whole person (James 3:6)

Sin affects tongues because sin makes the tongue cause one to be unclean (Matt 15:11)

Sin affects tongues because speaking rashly causes ruin (Prov 13:3)

Sin affects tongues because it keeps one from keeping control over their tongues (James 1:26)

*Affects Our Feet (15-17)*

Sin affects our feet by causing wicked thoughts which makes us rush into evil (Prov 6:18)

Sin affects our feet by causing us to walk away from justice and have no peace (Isa 59:8)

Sin affects our feet by causing us to walk crooked paths that are devious (Prov 2:15)

Sin affects our feet by causing us to walk in places with snares and lies (Prov 22:5)

*Affects Our Eyes (18)*

Sin affects our eyes because the eyes are the lamp of the body and if they see darkness, the body is full of darkness (Matt 6:22-23)

Sin affects our eyes because it is through our eyes that we are influenced to sin (Matt 18:9)

Sin affects our eyes because Satan uses our eyes to make us lust (1 John 2:16)

DEFINER OF SIN—THE LAW (ROMANS 3:19, 20)

*Confirms Our Guilt (19)*

God's word confirms guilt because it makes me recognize sin (Rom 7:12-13)

God's word confirms guilt because it provides warnings (Ps 19:11)

God's word confirms guilt because passions are identified by the law (Rom 7:5)

*Defined failure to justify (20)*

The Law failed to justify, but it introduced a better hope (Heb 7:18-19)

The Law failed to justify because it was only a shadow of the things to come (Heb 10:1-4)

The Law failed to justify because it was weakened by the sinful nature (Rom 8:3)  
The Law failed to justify because no one can be justified by the law (Gal 2:16)  
*Provided the knowledge of sin (20)*  
The Law defined what constituted sin (Rom 7:7)  
The Law warns about sin (Ps 19:8-11)  
The Law provides an understanding of how to keep one's way pure (Ps 119:9)  
The Law provides how not to sin (Ps 119:11)

## **CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS**

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

*The Bad News: All Under Sin (3:9-18)*

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

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

HEART OF THE LESSON FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY

# Introduction

## Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches that humans while on this earth will always be **Struggling Under Sin's Power**. The **study's aim** is to understand that we need salvation from sin. The **study's application** is to know that our attitudes and actions can be changed when we repent and ask Jesus to forgive our sin and trust in Him.

*(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)*

### Key Verse: Rom 3:9

*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.*

### Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

In this section Paul concluded not only his indictment of the Jews but also the first section of his discussion that God's righteousness is revealed in condemnation against the sinful human race.

Paul asked, **What shall we conclude then?** and, **Are we any better?** The exact meaning of this Greek verb *proechometha* (used only here in the NT) is difficult to determine. It seems best to take the question as coming from Jewish readers to whom Paul has just been writing and to translate it, "Are we preferred?" Both the material preceding and Paul's answer (**Not at all!**) support this solution. "Not at all" is literally "not by any means." This is not Paul's characteristic *mē genoito*, used in verses 3, 6, 31, and elsewhere. Jews have advantages over Gentiles (2:17-20a; 3:1-2), but God does not give them preferential treatment. As evidence that the Jews have no preferred position, Paul stated that he had previously accused both **Jews and Gentiles as all under sin**, that is, they stand under sin's power and control and under the condemnation that results from it (cf. 1:18; 2:5). The order of accusation was first Gentiles (1:18-2:16) and then Jews (chap. 2). This order is reversed here because the Jews were most recently discussed. To validate his accusation that everybody is "under sin" Paul quoted in verses 10-18 from six Old Testament passages. Romans 3:10-12, taken from Psalm 14:1-3, makes the point that all people without exception are not **righteous** (cf. Rom. 1:18, 29-31), do not understand **God** (cf. 1:18b, 28) nor seek (lit., "seek out") Him, **have turned away** from Him (cf. 2:5; Isa. 53:5), are **worthless** (from *achreioō*, "become useless," used only here in the NT), and do not do **good** (*chrēstotēta*, "kindness," or "benevolence in action"; cf. 2 Cor. 6:6; Gal. 5:22; and comments on Rom. 2:4). Apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit people cannot exhibit this fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). They have no inner spiritual capacity whereby they can normally and automatically exercise genuine kindness toward others. Instead sin causes them to be selfish and self-centered. These seven condemnatory phrases end with the words **not even one**, which are also in Romans 3:10. This repetition stresses that not a single exception in the human race (except, of course, the Son of God) can be found. Though Paul did not quote Psalm 14:2, "The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men," that verse is significant, for what follows in that psalm is God's indictment of humanity.

Romans 3:13-18 describe the vileness and wickedness of various parts of the human body, indicating figuratively that every part contributes to a person's condemnation. In sequence these quotations are taken from Psalm 5:9 (Rom. 3:13a); Psalm 140:3 (Rom. 3:13b); Psalm 10:7 (Rom. 3:14); Isaiah 59:7-8 (Rom. 3:15-17); and Psalm 36:1 (Rom. 3:18). They pertain to three actions: talking (**throats... tongues... lips... mouths**; vv. 13-14), conduct (**feet**; vv. 15-17) and seeing (**eyes**; v. 18). Their speech is corrupt (**open graves**; cf. James 3:6), dishonest (**deceit**; cf. Ps. 36:3), damaging (**poison**; cf. James 3:8), and blasphemous (**cursing and bitterness**; cf. James 3:9-10). From talking of sin, they commit sin, even to the point of quickly murdering (cf. Prov. 1:11-12, 15-16). As a result they and others are destroyed materially and spiritually, are miserable, and **know** no inner **peace** (cf. Isa. 57:21). All this is summarized in Paul's words, **There is no fear of God before their eyes**. Fearing God (i.e., reverencing Him by worship, trust, obedience, and service) is the essence of a godly person (cf. Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Ecc. 12:13). So for a Jew not to fear God was the height of sin and folly. In these verses (Rom. 3:10-18) Paul left no basis whatsoever for Jewish readers to say that his point that Jews are sinners contradicts the Old Testament!

Paul concluded his discussion with a final statement to the Jews concerning the purpose and ministry of **the Law**. He included himself with his Jewish readers when he said, **Now we know**. The principle is obvious: the Law's pronouncements are **to those who are under the Law**. The Law was not a special talisman that

the Jews could obey or ignore as they wished; they were “under” it and accountable to God (cf. Jews and Gentiles being “under sin,” v. 9). The Law’s ministry was **so that every mouth may be silenced** (lit., “stopped”), **and the whole world held accountable** (lit., “become answerable”) **to God. No one** can argue in his own defense that he is not under sin. The Law points up God’s standards and illustrates people’s inability to live up to them. Finally, **the Law** is not a way for a person to **be declared righteous** (justified) **in His sight** (cf. 3:28). That was not its purpose (Acts 13:39; Gal. 2:16; 3:11). Instead, **the Law** was given so that **through it we become conscious** (lit., “through the Law is full knowledge”) **of sin** (cf. Rom. 5:20; 7:7-13). The Mosaic Law is an instrument not of justification but of condemnation.

### **Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

Our text begins with a question. It seeks an answer, a conclusion. The issue concerns the relative standing of Jews and Gentiles. Are Jews in a better position spiritually before God? One would think so. They have the “oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2), after all. However, this would be the wrong conclusion. Many tend to view sin in relative terms—we can always find someone worse than we are! But God is not dealing with us in relative terms. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (Jas. 2:10). God’s judgment of sin is absolute. One sin is enough to separate us from Him forever. And all of us, whether Jew or Gentile, have many, many sins. Let us explore this situation further. The Jew here is conceived as the classic religious man. He has God’s Word and God’s law. He has religious duty and religious structure to order his life, just like many people today. On the other hand, the Gentile is conceived of as less religious. He may be completely irreligious and not inclined to a careful and ordered religious life. Or he may adhere to a loose religious paganism, with a moral and religious code that is likely much less serious and severe than that of the Jew. Yet Paul emphatically states that the Jew is not better off than the Gentile. He meant this in the sense of dealing with sin. Both stand guilty before God. Both fall under the power of sin. Both are sinners, and both are condemned before God. The religion of the religious Jew cannot deliver him. And the moral license of the pagan Gentile does not make him free. The religious man and the irreligious man, then and today, are both sinners and both under sin’s domain and power. Paul declared that this had been demonstrated by his argument in Romans. It is the only proper scriptural conclusion. All who fall under this teaching (and that includes everyone) should pay heed. This is the doctrine of universal guilt. All men are sinners. All men are guilty before God, and no amount of religion can deliver them. The evidence is given in Romans 3:10-18. Paul quoted numerous Old Testament passages to establish the depth and nature of human sinfulness. We must pay heed to this because we will never seek the grace of God’s salvation without a proper consciousness of our sins. It is tempting to look around and see a person who outwardly seems to be a worse sinner than you are and conclude with some pride that God must be happy with you. This is the great error—to think that God grades us by comparing us to others. Rather, we are judged by God’s holy Word and His own impeccable holiness. None of us can stand under such scrutiny, given what we are. “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps. 130:3). We need forgiveness to be saved, not religious standing. We need God’s grace, not our works. The Jew and the Gentile are the same. The religious man and the irreligious man are in the same boat. All fall under the power and guilt of sin, and all need a Saviour.

### ***Lesson Introduction and Background***

#### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

Do you believe what you see in the mirror? Certainly we all know that the images we see there are those of ourselves, not someone else. But do we really recognize the significance of what we see in the mirror? Do we notice that we no longer look as we once did? Or do we still mostly see the person in the mirror from years back? Do we see the way we have become different, or do we imagine we look and can act as we once did? The reality of changing appearance is hard to admit as years pass. Harder still are the intangible realities regarding who we truly are as people. Some have an unrealistically negative view of themselves: I’m a failure; no one can love me; surely God is very unhappy with me. Others may have the opposite: an unrealistically positive view of themselves. In either case, we may arrive at our unrealistic view because we compare ourselves with others, concluding that we are markedly better or worse than the people we know. The gospel is a reality check, like an honest look in a mirror, on our estimate of ourselves. Today’s text summarizes a key aspect of that reality check.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul addressed Christians of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds who struggled to receive and respect each other as members of Christ’s body. Paul mounts an argument in the first three chapters to show that neither has an advantage over the other. Gentiles might claim that they are not responsible for their

sin because they did not have God's law. But Paul notes that they have violated the will of God that is demonstrated in creation, visible to every person (Romans 1:18-32). As for his fellow Jews, Paul points out that having God's law and obeying it are very different things. Jews who have the law are put to shame by those who never had the law but still manage to obey it. History reveals that Israelites with God's law were no better at obeying him than were Gentiles without the law (Romans 2:1-29). Paul's argument was not to deny the importance either of God's call to Israel or the law that was given to that nation. The Jews held an advantageous position historically since they "have been entrusted with the very words of God" (Romans 3:1, 2). The law performed a vital function even when disobeyed, showing Israel and all humanity how deeply everyone needs God's gracious salvation. Even if every person is shown to be unfaithful, God is still faithful (3:3, 4). Our text today brings to a climax the arguments from these early chapters of Romans, addressing the issue of advantage further still.

### **From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

Many of us have been influenced by culture to think that no one is wrong, no one is a sinner, and everyone just makes mistakes. There is no thought that sin is an offense to a Holy God or that one will be held accountable to God and His righteousness in the end. Without being mean spirited but with compassion and love, we must convince our students that sin is morally and spiritually wrong and will incur punishment. Only the Spirit of God can do this. However, it is our work and privilege to bring the Scriptures to the attention of our students. We can pray that they will see these truths and react appropriately. We also need to emphasize the truth that only by God's grace can we be forgiven of sin and cleansed from it. Life is about redemption and restoration to fellowship with our Holy God. No person wants to hear that he is guilty of an offense, especially against God. When the subject is broached, someone may start to make excuses and diversions, such as "Well, what about the mentally challenged? How can they be held responsible?" The answer here is, of course, that we must let God handle issues such as this since we do not know the answers and cannot do anything about it anyway. A diversion to a related but unanswerable topic does not negate the truth of God's Word. Each person must ask in his heart how he has dealt with his sins. As to who is ultimately to be saved and why and who will ultimately be lost and why, we must depend on God's Word and learn not to speculate beyond what is written.

## **Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Scope of Sin (Romans 3:9-12)**

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."

### **All have sinned (9)**

*There is none good except God (Mark 10:18)*

18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-except God alone.

*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23)*

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

*Even if we claim to be without sin, we lie (1 John 1:8)*

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

*If angels are not pure, what chance does man have to be pure (Job 15:14-16)*

14 "What is man, that he could be pure, or one born of woman, that he could be righteous? 15 If God places no trust in his holy ones, if even the heavens are not pure in his eyes, 16 how much less man, who is vile and corrupt, who drinks up evil like water!

*Even our most righteous acts are like filthy rags in God's sight (Isa 64:6)*

6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

### **All have failed to seek God (10-11)**

*Fail to seek God because of relying on earthly powers (Isa 31:1)*

1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD.

*Fail to seek God because of not forsaking evil ways and thoughts (Isa 55:6-7)*

6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts.

*Fail to seek God because of having a mind hostile to God (Rom 8:7)*

7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

*Fail to seek God because of turning away from God (Ps 14:2-3)*

2 The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. 3 All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

*Yet, in God's mercy He will sometimes reveal Himself despite our not seeking Him (Isa 65:1)*

1 "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'

### **All have failed to Do Good (12)**

*There is no one who does good (Ps 53:1)*

1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good.

*There is no one who never sins (Eccl 7:20)*

20 There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

*All have gone astray at one time or another (Isa 53:6)*

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

*All have followed the desires of their sinful nature (Eph 2:3)*

3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

*Even when we are obedient, we have only done our duty (Luke 17:10)*

10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

## **Character of Sin (Romans 3:13-18)**

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."

### **Affects Our Tongues (13-14)**

*Sin affects tongues because sin makes the tongue corrupt the whole person (James 3:6)*

6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

*Sin affects tongues because sin makes the tongue cause one to be unclean (Matt 15:11)*

11 What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'"

*Sin affects tongues because speaking rashly causes ruin (Prov 13:3)*

3 He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

*Sin affects tongues because it keeps one from keeping control over their tongues (James 1:26)*

26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

### **Affects Our Feet (15-17)**

*Sin affects our feet by causing wicked thoughts which makes us rush into evil (Prov 6:18)*

18 a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil,

*Sin affects our feet by causing us to walk away from justice and have no peace (Isa 59:8)*

8 The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace.

*Sin affects our feet by causing us to walk crooked paths that are devious (Prov 2:15)*

15 whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.

*Sin affects our feet by causing us to walk in places with snares and lies (Prov 22:5)*

5 In the paths of the wicked lie thorns and snares, but he who guards his soul stays far from them.

### **Affects Our Eyes (18)**

*Sin affects our eyes because the eyes are the lamp of the body and if they see darkness, the body is full of darkness (Matt 6:22-23)*

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

*Sin affects our eyes because it is through our eyes that we are influenced to sin (Matt 18:9)*

9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

*Sin affects our eyes because Satan uses our eyes to make us lust (1 John 2:16)*

16 For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

### **Definer of Sin—The Law (Romans 3:19, 20)**

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.

### **Confirms Our Guilt (19)**

*God's word confirms guilt because it makes me recognize sin (Rom 7:12-13)*

12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. 13 Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

*God's word confirms guilt because it provides warnings (Ps 19:11)*

11 By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

*God's word confirms guilt because passions are identified by the law (Rom 7:5)*

5 For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.

### **Defined failure to justify (20)**

*The Law failed to justify, but it introduced a better hope (Heb 7:18-19)*

18 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless 19 (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

*The Law failed to justify because it was only a shadow of the things to come (Heb 10:1-4)*

10:1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, 4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

*The Law failed to justify because it was weakened by the sinful nature (Rom 8:3)*

3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,

*The Law failed to justify because no one can be justified by the law (Gal 2:16)*

16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

### **Provided the knowledge of sin (20)**

*The Law defined what constituted sin (Rom 7:7)*

7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

*The Law warns about sin (Ps 19:8-11)*

8 The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. 10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. 11 By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

*The Law provides an understanding of how to keep one's way pure (Ps 119:9)*

9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

*The Law provides how not to sin (Ps 119:11)*

11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### **Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh**

If man's sin provides the backdrop which accents the righteousness of God, then God is exalted and glorified by man's sin. This is true, as the psalmist wrote, "... the wrath of man shall praise Thee" (Psalm 76:10a).<sup>15</sup>

Paul cringes at the suggestion of this heretical thought, but knows it is in the mind of his opponent. Why, then, should God punish me for my sin, when I am really causing God's glory to abound? "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? I am speaking in human terms." (Romans 3:5).

Paul quickly brushes aside this bit of wishful thinking. The Jews were unanimous in their commitment to the fact that God should judge the sins of the Gentiles. Paul simply takes his opponent to the illogical conclusion of his self-defense by pointing out that if God were to follow this principle He would judge no one, even the Gentiles. And no Jew was willing to go this far. There are other reasons Paul could have expounded on, but this was sufficient to silence his objector.

The Jew had pressed this point even farther by suggesting that Paul's gospel of salvation apart from the Law incited men to do evil in order that God would be praised: "And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and some affirm that we say), 'Let us do evil that good may come'? Their condemnation is just" (Romans 3:8).

Such an accusation was so incredible Paul refused to give it more than a moment's notice. Anyone who makes such a statement evidences the fact that they deserve to fall under the wrath of God.

### **The Bad News: All Under Sin (3:9-18)**

The Jews, then, do possess unique and unfulfilled promises to look forward to as a nation. These privileges should not in any way give the false hope of special privilege so far as their standing before the judgment bar of God is concerned. Concerning the matter of personal righteousness before God, the Jew is just as lost, just as condemned as the Gentile.

To summarize and emphasize the condemnation of both Jew and Gentile, Paul draws together a series of quotations, primarily from the Psalms, all of which substantiate his contention that no man can win God's approval by means of his own righteousness.

Verses 10-12 give a general overview of man's depravity, stressing the universality of God's condemnation of men. Thus the repetition of the expression, "not even one." "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is 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" (Romans 3:10-12).

The force of these verses is that man can never be pronounced righteous in the eyes of God. He does not seek God; he is incapable of knowing God, and he does not do good.

All of this is viewed from the divine perspective. This is not to say that a man never does anything good and kind for his fellow-man. Paul is not saying that men have no good thoughts or aspirations as judged by men. He

is saying that man has nothing to commend himself to God. Man is incapable of doing anything to please God and to earn His approval, for man is born an enemy of God.

There are many who are outwardly religious and considered pious and devout, but they are not truly seeking God. They are creating a god of their own making. They worship the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:18ff.). There are those who strive to keep God's commandments, but none have managed to keep them at every point, and are thus guilty of failing at all points (James 2:10). The epitome of man's sinfulness is trying to be like God, without God (Isaiah 14:14).

Verses 13-18 move from the general to the specific, describing the depravity of man as it is evidenced by the various members of his anatomy. From head to toe, from the inside out, man is characterized by sin:

Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, Their feet are swift to shed blood, Destruction and misery are in their paths, And the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes (Romans 3:13-18).

The corruption of our hearts has contaminated our tongues. Our speech gives us away; it reveals our enmity with God. Israel complained and murmured against Moses and against God (Exodus 16:2ff.). In Numbers 21 we read of the complaining of the Israelites. God sent a plague of serpents upon them, I believe, to instruct them that the tongue can be like the fangs of the serpent spreading deadly poison. With this, the Psalmist and Paul seem to agree.

With our mouths we spread poison and with our feet we run to do evil. Destruction and misery is the work of our hands. We know not the ways of peace. Surely the centuries of war have made this clear. Mankind collectively is in bad shape; only the most rosey-eyed optimist could deny this. But man individually is also in no condition to stand before a righteous and holy God and claim a righteousness worthy of eternal life.

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

A defensive Jew might attempt to blunt the point of Paul's argument by pressing a technicality. Most of the Old Testament quotations originally had reference to the Gentiles and not the Jews. All well and good. But the Law, that is the Old Testament scriptures, were directed primarily to those under the Law, that is, the Jews. Whatever reference there may be to the Gentiles it certainly applies equally to the Jews. So that Jews and Gentiles are equally condemned by the Old Testament scriptures.

The Jews had distorted the purpose of the Law. It was never intended to commend a man before God, but to condemn him. Like the blood-alcohol test is designed to prove men are drunk, so the Law is designed to prove men are sinners, under the wrath of God. The Law provided a standard of righteousness, not that men could ever attain such human righteousness, but to demonstrate they are incapable of doing so and must find a source of righteousness outside themselves. That is the point of all of the sacrifices of the Old Testament. When the Law revealed a man's sin, God provided a way of sacrifice so that a man would not need to bear the condemnation of God.

The Law was never given to save a man, but to show man that he needed a Saviour. "Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).

*(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/5-some-bad-news-and-good-news-romans-3>)*

### **Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

The words of today's text are quite discouraging if read by themselves. But thanks be to God, they bring to a close what is only the beginning of the message of Romans! The problem of human sin is deep and wide. It goes back to the very beginning of the human family and extends to every member in every place in the world. This problem cannot be solved by human endeavor; we know only how to create and perpetuate the problem. If the problem is to be solved, then God must be the one to solve it. We modern-day Christians can easily fail to hear how this message addresses us. Certainly we see Israel's failure as we read the Old Testament. But, we think, that is them, not us. We have no problem affirming the power of sin in our own world. We see it all around us in others' degraded, chaotic, ruined lives. But, we think, that is them, not us.

Forgetting what our lives would be without God's work in Christ, ignoring how sin's power still reveals itself in us, we can imagine that the universal power of sin is not a factor in our lives. If we succumb to such thinking, we become the kind of people Paul corrected in Romans: those who imagine that their position as God's people gives them a superior status over others. May our study of this text remind us that we, like they, are victims of sin's power, to be saved from it only by God's grace.

### ***Heart of the Lesson from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

When I think of the word "power," I tend to think of strength or might. But power can also mean authority or the right to do something. So, as we consider being under sin's power, we can understand that it has the legal right to control us. Sin is ever lurking at the door to our hearts and minds; the moment we entertain it, ponder it, and think longer about it, we have just given it authorization to tempt us again. On our own, conquering sin would be a never-ending battle, but our merciful God sent His Son to overcome the power of sin, death, and the grave!

Sin is not prejudiced. It strives to infect anyone it can, almost like an uncontrollable virus. Sin does not care about your gender, religious beliefs, or social status. Sin has one objective: to overpower your will, your morality, and your conscience. The question is, Will you yield to it?

The Apostle Paul was a Pharisee; therefore, he was extremely knowledgeable in the Scriptures. Paul's argument in these verses masterfully combines verses from Psalms, Proverbs, and Isaiah. When we have not been transformed by the love of God through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, then we have no righteousness within us. When we are living under sin's power, the words we speak are full of poisonous lies that lead only to death. There is no one who is seeking after God. There is no one who is striving to understand. If sin is the legal authority to which we submit, then we are quick to act in vengeance and seek revenge. We have no knowledge of peace because peace evades us like opposing ends of a magnet. Sin and peace will never connect. Tears, destruction, misery, and ruin are the devastating and often long-lasting effects of sin. Those who surrender to its wishes have no fear of God.

Has an officer of the law ever pulled you over for driving too fast? With my lead foot, this is an all-too-common experience. Nevertheless, often our responses are either that we did not know how fast we were going or that we were unaware what the speed limit was. When we do not know the law, we have no standard to measure our actions against. This is why we need the law. Without it, we are left to our own devices and operate under sin's power because we are blind to the fact that we are sinning. It is through our knowledge of the law that we become mindful of our sin. The truth is that no one likes to discuss sin. It makes us all uncomfortable. We like to think that we are good people striving to do God's will on earth. When we talk about sin, we begin to see the issues in our own hearts. And when these issues arise, we prefer to cover ourselves with fig leaves the way Adam and Eve did, rather than expose ourselves. The power of sin is strong. It likes to wrap itself around us like a boa constrictor, making us believe the lie that we will not escape from its grasp. Remember that God will always provide us "a way to escape" (I Cor. 10:13) from the strong hold of sin. The truth is that if we humble ourselves, admit our wrongdoing, and are willing to change our ways, we can be released from sin's grip.

### ***Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary***

1. Obedience to God is a daily decision because all are influenced by the power of sin (Rom. 3:9)
2. Resist the pull to turn away from God; there is no true satisfaction apart from Him (vss. 10-12)
3. Although all men and women have fallen into sin, they are still deemed valuable by God
4. Our conversation clearly reveals the condition of our hearts (vss. 13-14)
5. Yielding to even the smallest sin puts us on a slippery slope away from God (vss. 15-18)
6. At the final judgment, no excuse for sin will remain (vss. 19-20)