

ROMANS 3:9-18 "Oh, The Sinfulness Of The Sinful Heart!"

Paul has taken the time to show the Jews that they cannot depend on their national heritage or their covenant privileges to earn them favor in the eyes of God.

And now in chapter 3 he goes on to explain how those privileges are a real advantage in getting to know the one true God, but that they are not a replacement for faith.

And now, as we come to verse 9, Paul then asks the question

Romans 3:9 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;

When it comes to the acceptance of God's grace no one has the advantage because all are in need, whether Jew or Greek. And all must accept the grace of God for what it is; undeserved mercy.

And so everyone in the world is in the same boat when it comes to our dire situation. That situation is that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Our very nature rebels against such a God and desires to have its own way.

Paul pulls no punches when it comes to the nature of man.

Romans 3:10-18 ¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, 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." ¹³ "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "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 PATHS, ¹⁷ AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." ¹⁸ "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

Now, wait a minute, I thought man was basically good. No, that notion is basically wrong. Why? Because God says so.

The world has a particular view of man which purports that man isn't so bad. Given enough positive influence he can rise above the evil in the world and pull himself up by the bootstraps and evolve into the kind of human being who is nothing short of righteous; self-righteous that is.

In fact, self is the by-word for this thought because if man is the one accomplishing this great feat, then he himself ought to receive the credit. This is the religion of humanism, where man is at the center of the universe, and so he must be elevated above all.

The thought of humanism goes something like this. 'I must have a good self-esteem of myself to adequately relate to others. I must be able to love myself before I can entertain the idea of loving others properly.'

'I must feel good about myself in order to serve the needs of others, so that I may make them feel good about themselves.' If you listen carefully you'll notice that the words *I and self* dominate this thinking.

If I'm going to do anything for anyone else I must seek meet my needs first, and must first feel good about myself. The problem with that thought is that we will never adequately serve others, because we will never adequately feel good about ourselves.

There is always something about ourselves which makes us want something more. 'If I had better looks I would feel better about myself and be more useful to society.'

'If I had bigger biceps and pectorals my self-esteem would soar and I would be a better person.' 'If I were only 2 inches taller my ability to stand up in a crowd would increase and I could speak out more effectively for all the little people in this world.'

'If I had this or I had that. If I looked like that or felt like this about myself.' Self is the only one who seems to matter. It wasn't that many years ago where if this was your attitude there was a word which described you..... selfish.

But now it's vogue to reach for the stars and to make sure that self rises to the top. And if it doesn't, we certainly won't blame self for that, we'll blame someone else, or our upbringing or our surroundings in life.

However, God has an entirely different approach when it comes to describing man and his inherent goodness. In theological terms this is described with the word depravity.

Now depravity is a very strong word which can be a little misunderstood. It doesn't describe how bad every man actually is, but how bad men can possibly be. It deals more with the entire person; body, soul and spirit, being effected by sin.

It describes more of the nature of man and how that nature is one which looks more to self than to the One true God who created him. And whenever we substitute anything or anybody, which includes self, for God, that is known as idolatry.

Paul goes out of his way to explain how, neither Jew or Greek, have any room to boast when it comes to approaching God, because at the root of their nature is something which is unacceptable to God as a means of righteousness, and that is the self which boasts in self and relies on self to pull itself up to the level of God.

"There is no one righteous, not even one..." This is lifted from a verse in the bible written by a man who knew something about the depravity of man and his inherent ability to do evil.

David wrote this in Psa 14:1 "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good."

What is implied here is that no one can do good enough to please God in such a way as to lift the penalty of sin, which God has placed on all men for their natural desire to rebel against their Creator.

This desire came from the fall of Adam and Eve. Upon their disobedience all men would now be born with a sin nature desiring to please self instead of God. And in the process of pleasing self, others took a back seat. In fact men's wickedness was birthed from selfish motives of men's hearts.

That selfishness finally came to a head when God wrote in Gen 6:5-7 "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. 6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. 7 So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth--"

Of course we know that God made that promise come to fruition when He brought a world-wide flood on the earth, destroying everything, which was one more reminder of His penalty of sin: Death.

Now of course, everyone knows that once Noah and his family repopulated the earth all men everywhere had no other desire but to please God continually. Right?

No! Not even the death of all men could take away the nature of man, which was to please self, not God. "There is no one righteous, not even one." That was written by David many years after the flood.

Rom 3:11-12 "there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." [Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20]

Not even one? Is there no one who can stand before God and claim that they have no other desire but to seek God and love Him with all their heart, soul and mind? Is there no one who has not turned away from their Creator and done good, so as to earn salvation?

No mere man, after the fall, has ever been able to say that. They have become worthless? The Greek word here for worthless is *achreioo*, which is, to render useless; spoil.

Is anyone useful to God, so as to take their sinful nature and cosmetically cover it over, so as to make it smell sweet enough to be used to attract people to God?

No! In fact, we are told that our sinful nature is as useful to God as filthy rags when we try to take those good works, which issue forth from our sinful nature, and then try to bring them to God as a fragrant aroma. Even when those "Good works" are religious in nature and unacceptable to God.

God will not be pleased when they are issuing forth from the selfish flesh, with selfish purposes. God warned the selfish Israelites in Leviticus.

Lev 26:27-31 "If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, 28 then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. 29 You will eat the flesh of your sons and the

flesh of your daughters. 30 I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars and pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you. 31 I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and ***I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings.***"

Even those aromas, which we would consider pleasing to the nostrils, which are fleshly in nature, God rejects and says, "I take no delight in them."

Are you beginning to see the picture of human nature? Well, Paul is on a roll, he's not finished yet.

Rom 3:13 "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." [Psalm 5:9] "The poison of vipers is on their lips." [Psalm 140:3]

How to win friends and influence people does not seem to be what concerns Paul here. The natural man practices those things which are deadly and only produce death. The ultimate death being spiritual in nature.

<The throat, an open grave.... Death. The tongue and the lips which deliver the speech, Paul says has the poison of vipers..... Death.

Rom 3:14-16 "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." [Psalm 10:7] 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 ruin and misery mark their ways,..." All indications of death.

Do you think Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is trying to make a point here?

Rom 8:5-8 "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires 6 The mind set on the flesh is death, 7 the sinful mind set on the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."

Paul describes these people as ones who are at war with God by saying in Rom 3:17, "and the way of peace they do not know." [Isaiah 59:7,8]

Verses 10 through 18 are all taken from the O.T. scriptures and the last verses we looked at in Rom.3:15-17 are taken from Isaiah. Isaiah was God's prophet who spoke to the nation of Israel and tried to reason with them to turn away from self and turn to God.

Isa 59:7-13 "Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. 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. 9 So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. 10 Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead. 11 We all growl like bears; we moan mournfully like doves. We look for justice, but find none; for deliverance, but it is far away. 12 For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: 13 rebellion and treachery against the LORD, turning our backs on our God, fomenting oppression and revolt, uttering lies our hearts have conceived."

Enough! The picture is clear. Men have a problem. I don't know about you, but the word of God doesn't do much for my "self-esteem" when it comes to the truth of my sinful nature.

And the bottom line is this: When we show forth our natural inclination to only do what pleases self, and to place ourselves at the forefront, we demonstrate what Paul tells us in Rom 3:18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes." [Psalm 36:1]

This is the condition of the world; the condition of the natural man outside of Christ. Neither Jew nor Gentile can escape himself, because self is a spiritual dead man.

The depravity of man is summed up by God as spoken through Paul in Eph 2:1-3 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 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."

Gee, Drew thank you for sharing all of this. I was looking for something refreshing and uplifting and you're down in the basement digging deeper.

These aren't my words. This is God's word and we're told that in 2Ti 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for

teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

My intention this morning is not to discourage us, and it's not Paul's intention either. William Barclay in his commentary on Romans says, "No one saw so clearly the evil of human nature as Paul did; but it must always be noted that the evil of human nature was to him, not a call to hopelessness, but a challenge to hope....

..... When we say that Paul believed in original sin and the depravity of human nature, we must never take that to mean that he despaired of human nature or looked on it with cynical contempt. Paul never underrated the sin of man and he never underrated the redeeming power of Jesus Christ."

Paul's chain of O.T. scriptures, describing all too graphically the nature of all human beings, is not meant to leave us in despair but to wake us up to the inability of our human nature to please God, and so become complacent in our sinful nature, or to boast in its accomplishments.

But there's more to this than simply identifying mankind's problem of sin. There is the realization that despite our lost condition God has loved so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for the penalty of our sin.

And He offers us an eternal inheritance in Christ whereby He adopts us into His Kingdom and we are allowed to enjoy all its benefits, which begin now, in the sense that He gives us the down payment of our reward as He gives us His Holy Spirit.

When we understand the depravity of mankind it should make us stand in awe of the love of God for His people. And it should burden us to reach out to mankind with the greatest news this world has ever heard.

There are lost people everywhere who are in the condition Paul describes in our text who have no hope. That's why it's so important we understand that we're not just keepers of Good News, we are in possession of life itself, and we have been given a task by God Himself to direct people to the One who gives eternal life, eternal hope in Christ.

But there's another question we ought to ask ourselves. Where is the self in this new life? He ought to be dead and buried as we turn

from the old man and embrace the new life we have in Christ by faith.

Faith is the key to a surrendered life to the Master, who has called us out of the darkness of self and sin, into the light of His life, and He says, "Come, follow Me."

How can we even consider not following Him when we know from what depths He has delivered us and the love He has shown by taking our place at the cross.

When we meditate on His love for us and submit to so great a God, His love will enable us to overcome sin in this world and its consequences, and we will truly be able to live in relationship to our God, in such a way, that we will be transformed into Christ-likeness as we shine for our Savior.

You know, the flesh, the world and the devil are all tempting us to live as the old men, where we focus on self, and are overcome with fears, anxieties and feelings contrary to God's will. If we give into them and not trust God with our lives, which He has purchased, the fruit of that lack of faith and trust will become evident and we'll end up looking more like the old man than the redeemed people we are in Christ.

But when we make Christ our focus; when He alone becomes the most important person in our lives, and we humbly submit to the Spirit to empower us to trust and obey God and His word, no matter what, our surrendered life shows Christ to be on the throne of our hearts and His fruit will be evident in our lives.

Life is filled with choices to either be fleshly, self-focused, or spiritual, wherein we deny self and abide in Christ. Always fix your eyes upon Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.

Paul knew the sinfulness of the human nature but He understood that where sin abounds grace abounds even more, and so when he wrote to the church in Philippi he knew that God was the One at work in the lives of His people, and that He would be the One to give His people the grace and strength they needed to live to His honor and glory.

Phi 1:4-6 "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Don't strive in the flesh to accomplish the spiritual good God has for you. By faith, seek to hear from God in His Word, and seek the power of God to do His will being confident of this, "that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Praise God!