

God's Great News for Humanity's Great Problem *Paul's Letter to the Romans*

The Diagnosis of Humanity's Great Problem: All Are Infected *Romans 3:9 – 20*

Exegetical Outline

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; 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.’

¹⁹ Now we 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.

Introduction: Women at Their Worst

This week, we're going to be looking at a summary of the great human problem, the problem of sin. And in order to introduce this material, I'm going to tell you a story about a time and place in our culture where the worst characteristics of people are revealed: women at a wedding dress sale at Filene's Basement. My friend and former housemate Liza got married to Dan in July of 2008. Building up to that was a lot of planning and preparation, and of course, the finding of a wedding dress. So months before, Filene's Basement downtown had a sale on wedding dresses, where dresses that normally cost \$1200 were on sale for a mere \$600. Liza assembled a team of her girl friends to leave with her at 6am. That team included my wife Ming, our housemates Carla and Kenita, and Liza's friend Christine. So these women put on red bandanas so they could spot each other easily. They got there early only to find that hundreds of other women had gotten there earlier, like from 3am, and were already in line. They were also in matching uniforms, like pink spandex, or yellow T-shirts that said 'Team Debbie.' When Filene's Basement opened their doors, the first 50 – 100 women rushed in and grabbed every wedding dress in the place, leaving absolutely nothing for the remaining hundreds of women following them. Some clutched as many dresses as they could hold. Others piled dresses on the floor and linked arms in a circle to surround the dresses and guard them against other predators. You might think that they would let the dresses go after the bride in each group had a chance to look through them and decide which ones she wasn't interested in. But no: They held onto them. After all, there might be a better one somewhere else. If you wanted a dress, you had to trade dresses, one for one. It was a new currency system, like cigarettes in prison. Or was it like a lioness making an offering of raw meat in exchange for another scrumptious morsel from other lionesses? Only until the bridezilla in each group had satisfied her very picky and particular tastes and carried off her prey did the women in her hunting party let go of the other dresses. Then the scavengers would descend on the leftovers and do the same thing again. When Liza, Ming, and the other women got home, they had to pray and repent and be cleansed by God of the attitudes that came up inside them.

Why do I share that story? Because in these moments, we glimpse the truth about humanity. This is who we are. We reveal ourselves in the moments where every button we have is being pressed: hopes for marriage, frantic desire to save money, longing to appear beautiful, feeling competition with others, loyalty to your friend, and fear of what would happen if your wedding is not the ideal. When all these things are colliding for us, we show that we are sinful and weakened. It's like college in some ways, where in a moment, all your buttons can be pressed, like when the AHANA ball is coming up, you spend too much on your credit card so your parents get mad, you do poorly in a class, and you have a conflict with someone. What are you feeling inside? Your fear of failure, competition with others, confusion over your sense of purpose and identity, jealousy of your friends, hunger for respect, longing for romance, temptation to give in to...whatever it is, resentment towards your parents, and nihilistic numbness of soul can surface all in one weekend. You ever have a weekend like that? And it will reveal that you have issues. Let the inconvenient truth penetrate your mind for just a minute. Are you feeling it? In these moments, when every button you have is being pressed, you see yourself for who you truly are. You need healing.

The Context:

We are in the Hospital of God, and we have seen our sin be exposed slowly but surely over the last three weeks. We've examined three types of Patients in the Hospital, or three archetypes of humanity. First were 'the bad men or women', the Control Freaks. They were characterized by the downward spiral of self-centeredness and control, anxiety, self centeredness and control, whereby their character, sexuality, and relationships become deeply tainted by their own self-centeredness. Second was the archetypal 'good people', the Judgmental Moralizers. This second type of people was characterized by the pointing finger of judgmentalism. They looked at 'bad people' and judged them as guilty, but they were totally inconsistent by not applying their own judgmental standards to themselves. Thus, while one finger was extended to accuse others of selfishness, three other fingers were tucked away very discreetly to condemn themselves. These people were also infected with sin. And third was the best of humanity, the Jews. Historically in the Old Testament period, the Jewish community was privileged with knowledge of God's Law, a very clear mirror in which to see their own problems, but they became very self-righteous on the basis that they had this mirror. High standards, whatever they are, do not actually make us better people; they make us bigger hypocrites, if we are trying to derive an identity based on standards, that is. That is where all the evidence in this physical and spiritual examination is leading: Humanity is infected by sin. And now Paul will give us the full diagnosis.

The Universal Human Problem: Under Sin

Paul begins verse 9 by saying, 'What then? Are we better than they?' Paul is speaking here as a Jew and wrapping up his conversation with the hypothetical Jew who was the last person on the witness stand. He says 'we' because the Jews saw themselves as a special group among humanity, a morally superior group because they knew about

God's Law and other people, 'they,' didn't. But, since Jews and Gentiles were equally sinful, Paul says, 'Not at all, for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.'

Let's look at that startling conclusion. First, he uses the word 'all.' This is a universal condition, affecting all Jews and Gentiles, therefore it is a universal problem. So what is the problem? The problem is that we are under something. Now, why does Paul use the word 'under'? In Greek, that word is 'hupo' and it's used by the centurion who said to Jesus, 'I am a man under authority, and there are men under me.' So, to be 'under' something means that we are positioned under the influence or authority of that something. In this case, each human being is under the influence and authority of sin. The way Paul deals with sin in the book of Romans is twofold and fascinating. On the one hand, sin is something that we commit and therefore are responsible for. We see this throughout Romans 1:18 – 3:20. On the other hand, sin is a sickness that we need to be healed from. This is the view presented in Romans 5:12 – 6:23. Both are valid ways of understanding sin.

The Spread of Sin in Humanity: v.10 – 18

Well, let's see how Paul continues the diagnosis. In the sequence of v.10 – 18, we see sin that causes a break in our relationship with God, and our relationships with one another. I'm just going to read this straight through: as it is written, '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. 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.'

That is group of Old Testament quotations from the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Isaiah 59. To be exact, Paul quotes from Psalm 53:1 – 3, with a slight change. David originally stated, 'There is no one who does good. God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there is anyone who understands, who seeks after God. Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one.' What Paul does is he substitutes the phrase 'does good' with its one-word definition, 'righteous.' This preserves the clear intent of David and makes a linguistic link with Romans 1:18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.' And Paul simply summarizes 'God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there is anyone who understands,' down to 'There is none who understands,' simply to preserve the meter of this poem.

Furthermore, rabbis commonly quoted the Old Testament this way. When they argued, they made their point and then they would quote from the Old Testament to give more ringing weight to their point. When they quoted multiple texts in a row, it was called *charaz*, or stringing the pearls. This particular string of pearls is a searching description of the problem of human sin. Thus, Paul is exercising his excellent rabbinical training, never once changing the meaning of his original texts to craft a poetic string of pearls that fits this new context.

Let's look at the section at a high level. Verses 10 – 12 constitute the first group of pearls, the first poem. Those verses have to do with each person's relation to God. Verses 13 – 18 are the second group of pearls, the second poem. Those verses have to do with each person's relation to other human beings. Thus, this matches the Mosaic Law in a poetic way. The first stone tablet (Commandments 1 – 4) deal with one's relationship to God. The second stone tablet (Commandments 5 – 10) deal with one's relationship to other people. If we wanted to boil it down even further, we can remember Jesus' summary of the Law: 'Love the Lord your God [on the one hand] and love your neighbor as yourself [on the other].' Paul's *charaz* reveals how humanity has failed in both of those aspects. Now, I'm going to describe how this diagnosis can be read first on the personal level and second on the broadest level, the societal level. Let's take the personal level.

From God-Centered to Self-Centered, Personal: v.10 – 12

First, the diagnosis is that we're pretty messed up because we've turned away from God to the self. '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.' When I first read that, I was offended. What about you? Are you offended? What does he mean that there is none who does good? 'I've done 'good'! I've cared for my family! I've done community service!' But C.S. Lewis says in *The Four Loves* that animals care for their offspring, and even for their group. That is not what makes us *good*; it's what makes us *mammals*!!

There are two ways to interpret this section, and I think that both are equally valid. (1) The first possibility is to link the word 'good' in 3:11 to Romans 2:7, 'perseverance in doing good.' That is, persistently doing good all the time. There is not one person who does good all the time. That makes a lot of sense to me. The Christian definition of humanity is not that at every point we are as bad as we can be, but that every point, we are not as good as we could be, and should be. And who can argue with that?? I'll call this 'the consistency question.' (2) But there is an alternative view that may also be true. This view would argue that we do good things out of consistently self-centered motives. This is 'the motive question.' And no one argues this better than three modern thinkers: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Marx told us that we are incurably selfish in the realm of money, that even acts of benevolence are really self-serving. Look at how wealthy people often act: 'Let's bail out Wall Street!' Roman aristocrats gave bread and circuses to the poor because...they really cared about them? No! To keep them happy without giving them real change. Bismarck in Germany and Lenin in Russia were the first to give government sponsored medical care to people because...they really cared? No! To build loyalty to their regimes. And then, look at how many major charities were started by ruthless business tycoons trying to salvage their notorious public image – Alfred Nobel invented dynamite and explosive armaments; Bill Gates gave us buggy software. Most charities serve people's own local interests, like their kids' school.¹ Nietzsche and Freud argued that even though we outwardly behave in socially acceptable ways, we are inwardly driven by aggression and lust. And if we go down to a bookstore, we could pick up such titles as *Getting Good Loving*, *Getting the Love You Want*, and *Keeping the Love You Found*. In fact, there are screenfuls of titles that begin with the word 'Getting' or 'Taking.' If we look at magazine covers, we'd find scads of articles every week having to do with: *Taking Charge of Your Sex Life*, *Getting the Romance You Long For*, etc. Move over to the career section and the emphasis shifts back to money, like in *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, and we're back to Marx. Precious little if anything at all is said about giving. Why are these books so popular? Because they build on our selfish motivation, confirming exactly what Nietzsche and Freud said. Here is Freud: 'I have found little that is 'good' about human beings on the whole. In my experience most of them are trash, no matter whether they publicly subscribe to this or that ethical doctrine or to none at all. That is something that you cannot say aloud, or perhaps even think.'

So which of the two interpretations is correct? Is it the consistency question where we are not good consistently? Or is it the motivation question where our so-called 'random acts of kindness' have a more sinister motivation? Regardless of how we interpret 'There is none who does good,' we are on solid ground either way. We are not on solid ground when we argue that people are basically good.

Illus: Author Donald Miller, who wrote *Blue Like Jazz*, said that this was a hard truth. Don and a friend of his were watching the news. They heard about murders and rapes in the Congo.

To illustrate how bad our condition truly is, if we see it accurately, I'm going to quote from a friend of mine. He shared a journal reflection that is one of the most penetrating I've ever read. 'One of the ways in which I have grown and experienced the most in the last five months has been newfound understanding of the darker parts of my soul. I never before realized how capable I am of all the things I loathe, that the sickness of the front page of every newspaper lurks within me, that I am well equipped to violate anyone, my closest friends, whoever, in the most destructive ways possible, sexually, physically, relationally. I used to understand when people said things like, 'I can't see how anyone could do such a thing,' but now I don't. Now I can see how they could do it, and how I could do it, too. This kind of knowledge, low and strong in my gut, not just in my head, and the struggle it takes to restrain myself – or the awe of the distant realization that I have no desire to restrain myself – have created within me a profoundly new understanding of who I am. It is painful and brilliant, light revealing sickness where I didn't even know there was darkness.' Yikes! That is what it means to be 'under sin.' Reports of human goodness are greatly exaggerated.

But it's not here to make you just try harder morally and individually. That is an Enlightenment mistake. The universe is first and foremost a relational universe, and Paul is making a relational argument. God is the central focus. **SLIDE 5** In v.11, 'there is none who seeks for God.' In v.12, 'all have turned aside,' from God, that is. In v.18, 'there is no fear of God before their eyes.' And in v.19, 'all the world [will] become accountable to God.' This is an ontological argument. It's our disconnect from God Himself that is the source of human degeneracy. Look at the word 'righteous,' for example. 'Righteous' refers to keeping a relationship, keeping a commitment, in this case with God. Paul has already stated and proved in Romans 1:18 – 3:8 that we do not keep our relationship with God. Each person turns away from God in different ways. If you're a Control Freak, you say, 'I want to

¹ Teresa Odendahl, *Charity Begins At Home*

worship myself, not God.’ So you replace God with yourself. If you’re a Judgmental Moralizer, you say, ‘I want to be the judge, not let God be the judge.’ So you take God’s seat as Judge and replace God with yourself. The Jewish person of Paul’s day replaced God with God’s Law, and Paul said that’s a mistake. In each case, self is at the center. Humanity is self-centered. And that means that there is no way that we have made any relationship more important than we are.

Illus: Last year, when we went to New Orleans to do Katrina relief for spring break, some of the folks in my small group who were not Christians asked, ‘Is it more evil to hurt other people, or to turn away from God?’

How should this material affect us? If you do not know Jesus, you need to serious think about why you feel like you don’t need him! You might want to give your life to Jesus because you want to do other people around you a favor, because you want to do the world a favor! If you do know Jesus, it should give us tremendous compassion for all of our friends who do not yet know Jesus Christ! They are under the influence. Just as some people get a little buzzed and still get behind the wheel, is it really that healthy to be a influenced by sin and steer the wheel of your life? It’s not that we can physically stop people from making their own choices, but we can always be there with compassion when there’s a crash.

The Infection All Over Our Bodies, Personal: v.10-18

Paul describes sin as it affects other people in our lives. He portrays in lurid detail sin as a disease that goes from the head to the toe. **SLIDE 6, 7** Notice where sin surfaces first? Once again, as with Romans 1:21 – 32, it is through the mouth. ‘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.’² Then sin works its way down to the feet. ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace have they not known.’ And finally sin comes back up to attack the eyes. ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’

Illus: Consider how, on a personal level, our words are often poison. I watched poisonous words eat at a friend of mine during his undergrad years. He came in as a freshman already stressed out. He went for midnight runs around Campus Drive to get his mind out of panic mode. He even came to my room at 3am one night – waking me up – because he felt like a failure who had nowhere to go. Something was definitely wrong because he couldn’t even really articulate what was bothering him. What eventually surfaced the following year was that his parents were saying a lot of things to him. They always compared him to his older sister, who had gone to Harvard. They talked endlessly about what kind of sacrifices they made for him up until then, and they used the words, ‘You should’ *a lot*. All these words were inside my friend, eating at him from the inside like a poison, and causing all kinds of pain. His junior year, he was open enough with his parents to admit to them that he was considering something else, and they laid into him with all kinds of guilt. After he graduated, he came to live with me in East Palo Alto doing ministry to Mexican immigrant families, so I met his dad for the first time over dinner at a Chinese restaurant. His dad was not happy with him or with me. Actually, he spit a four letter word out at his son, and implicitly, at me: ‘What do you think of this sh-- that he’s doing?’ Truly that is poison. That has got to be sobering as Asian Americans, because we know how to inject guilt and shame into each other by the way we talk, which can scar a person for a long time.

Now the sad thing to see is that this antagonism goes from the verbal level to the level of hand to hand mortal combat. In verses 15 – 17, Paul goes on to describe the most common way human beings relate to each other: by violence. He quotes from Isaiah 59:7 – 8 to say poetically, ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known.’

The Norwegian Academy of Sciences has determined that since 3600 B.C. there have been 14,531 wars and only 292 years of peace. This is approximately 2.6 wars per year, and one year of peace out of every two decades, or a little over 36 hours of peace per month, or about one minute of peace every four hours. Statistics say that one out of

² A parallel can be drawn back to Rom.1:22, where we have sin first issuing forth through the mouth when the Control Freak ‘profess[es] to be wise.’ He develops his verbal skills in 1:29 – 30 when he becomes a ‘gossip, slanderer, hater of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful.’ He loves to put others down and put himself on a pedestal. Yet at the end of this dramatic expose of human sin in verse 3:19, we’re going to see the human mouth hang open in silence. And after examining uniqueness of Jesus, self-righteous boasting is completely excluded and permanently silenced in 3:27. That is a very fitting road for human speech to take. Humanity will stand before God silent. Only in Christ and by the Spirit will our mouth be redeemed and put to proper use in 6:12 – 14 (and incredibly, the speaking gift of prophecy is supreme among the spiritual gifts in 12:6 – 8 and 1 Cor.14).

every eight of you who are Asian American has seen domestic violence in your home.³ Violence in Boston's streets is on the rise. But one of the best statements on human sinfulness comes from a government agency. The Minnesota Crime Commission some years ago studied humanity and came to this frightening conclusion: 'Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it--his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny him these wants, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He is dirty. He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist.'

From God-Centered to Self-Centered, Societal: v.10 – 12

Now I'd like to consider this not on a personal level but a societal, especially because many people have the objection that the idea of God causes violence and wars. Isn't religion the problem? **SLIDE 8** The world before Jesus was made up of tribes, nations, and empires. And people fought each other because of tribe, nation, and empire. Religion was formed around the ideas of tribe, nation, and empire. In Egypt, you worshiped the Egyptian gods, like the Nile River. In Greece, you worshiped the Greek gods; in Japan, the Japanese gods, and so on. So politics and religion were one. Then, Jesus came into the world into an Israel oppressed by the Romans. He did something that changed everything. He died and rose from the dead for the sake of the whole world, and turned his Jewish followers into a radical reconciliation movement that couldn't stay in Israel. They went into the whole world, loving their enemies as Jesus taught them. They picked up abandoned babies left on doorsteps. They turned homes into the first real hospitals. They entered plague-infested cities to care for the poor and dying. And when Romans officers waging war wanted to become Christians, the Christians would say, 'Great! But you have to resign from that particular warfare position because Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, and we don't think you can do that while you're killing them.' The first 300 years of Christianity were amazing, from an ethical standpoint. They were transnational, being in many different tribes, nations, and empires, and were a reconciling influence.

But then the ideas of tribe, nation, and empire started influencing the church again. Emperor Constantine in 316 CE led an army of Christians against another group of Christians called the Donatists. So the 300 years of the Christian anti-war posture ended, and theories of just war started instead, e.g. Augustine's *City of God* in the early 400's. It was far better than all out war, but it was certainly a step away from the pure following of Jesus. It took about 1,000 years, but the ideas of tribe, nation, and empire infected the Roman church, as we see in the Christian-Muslim conflicts throughout the Middle East and Asia Minor, which was mostly about controlling trade routes and sea lanes. It also involved Christian on Christian violence again, with Roman Catholics attacking Eastern Orthodox and sacking Constantinople. So once again, something about Roman culture and politics made it make mistakes, and I think it was the underlying cause – the structural cause – of tribe, nation, and empire.

By the time of the Enlightenment, Europeans were tired of what they called the 'wars of religion.' So they thought that by abandoning Christianity and embracing atheism, they would be rid of wars. But what they embraced instead was tribe, nation, and empire using atheism as a new 'rational' ideology. And what they got was more war and more violence, beginning with the French Revolution. Nation-building and atheism went hand in hand. And by the end of the 20th century, this is what the death toll was: **SLIDE 9**

War Related Deaths (including civilians)	
16th Century	1.6 million
17th Century	6.1 million
18th Century	7.0 million
19th Century	19.4 million
20th Century	108.0 million

Now when we look at the 20th century and ask, 'What caused that devastation? What caused this number to be greater than the previous 19 centuries combined?' Now some people want to divide by the total population for each

³ <http://www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute/GenderViolence/statistics.htm>. 12.8% of Asian and Pacific Islander women reported experiencing physical assault by an intimate partner at least once during their lifetime; 3.8% reported having been raped. The rate of physical assault was lower than those reported by Whites (21.3%); African-Americans (26.3%); Hispanic, of any race, (21.2%); mixed race (27.0%); and American Indians and Alaskan Natives (30.7%). The low rate for Asian and Pacific Islander women may be attributed to underreporting.

century, and that's a good point, but it's mathematically difficult because it's a whole century we're looking at. So looking just at the absolute numbers, we look for the usual suspects, like organized religion, and we find that it's not there. Instead, what caused this was organized atheism and nation-building. Think about atheist regimes: Enver Hoxha in Albania, Stalin in the Soviet Union killed about 20 million people, Mao in China's Cultural Revolution killed at least 3 million. Cambodia's Khmer Rouge killed 1.5 million. North Korea and Vietnam have killed who knows how many? There were an estimated 2 million North Koreans killed by the 1990 – 93 famine alone. Organized religion made some mistakes, but organized atheism totally sucked!!! Those are the explicitly atheist regimes only. Add in other nation building or nationalistic revolts: the massacre of Armenians by the Turks beginning on April 24, 1915, where up to 2 million people were killed. Then we had World War I, the war to end all wars, except it was only the beginning. Nazi Germany of course slaughtered 6 million Jews. Japan did similar things throughout Asia. The total death count of World War II was about 50 million. The national revolts and civil wars in Africa and South America cost a staggering number of lives. The U.S. destabilized Southeast Asia in the 60's and 70's. And meanwhile, violence in urban areas worldwide is increasing. When I lived in East Palo Alto, California, I couldn't wear red and I had to be really careful with blue because they were gang colors. Truly, 'their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known.'

Now the reason I say this is to debunk the myth that Christianity was somehow really to blame for all this. It's true that Christians made mistakes and I want to own those mistakes. But, if you are an atheist and you say, 'I have a hard time believing in Jesus because of the Crusades and Inquisition,' that's fair enough; I had a hard time too. But if you're going to be fair, you must have ten times as hard a time believing in atheism and nation-building, right?! Or are you just ignoring the data? Are you playing favorites? I mean, let's just be fair. Furthermore, you have to separate correlations and causes. Christians making mistakes is a correlation, but the underlying causes were tribe, nation, and empire. Real Christianity for the first 300 years was the only real force that challenged tribe, nation, and empire, because that's just how Jesus is. So if we're troubled by this nationalism and warfare, then logically speaking, we shouldn't reject Jesus, we should embrace him!

Let me show you one more slide, of people who have embraced Jesus. **SLIDE 10** Leo Tolstoy became a Christian after writing War and Peace and started leading non-violent resistance movements among the Russian poor resisting the tyranny of the Russian wealthy landowners. He wrote about how Jesus inspired him, based on how Jesus resisted evil in his world without ever giving into evil himself, personally. That inspired Ahn Chang-Ho in Korea, during the Korean Independence Movement, and Gandhi in South Africa and India. Even though Gandhi never gave his life to Jesus as far as we know, he did turn away from the Bhagavad Gita because he realized that the Hindu caste system legitimates war – the warriors have their own caste right under the Brahmins, the highest caste. So he turned to Jesus' preaching on loving your enemy and reconciling with them. Martin Luther King Jr. and many other Black American Christians reflected every day on the life and teachings of Jesus as they marched against racial injustice non-violently. The People Power Revolution in the Philippines in 1986 forced a corrupt dictator to resign without a drop of blood. Solidarity in Poland was a Catholic movement under Soviet occupation that turned Poland into a democracy overnight peacefully. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was a Christian way of dealing with Apartheid and racial injustice through the government, based on the teachings of Jesus. That's a courageous step compared to how the U.S. has never apologized for land seizure, genocide, slavery, and segregation, and blames the liberal university for talking about issues of history and injustice that the government really should be dealing with. Then the Eastern European Velvet Revolutions were started by Christian students praying around the houses of political targets like pastors and others. The armies would come and not be willing to fire on them, so those regimes fell. In the darkest century of all, Christians shone the most brightly; JESUS shone the most brightly. We're not taught this because most people think Christian faith couldn't possibly be this good, but it is! So this ought to impact you, especially if you're doing the International Studies major. There is no way you should be as excited about nation-building as you ought to be about Jesus!!!

But on the societal level as on the personal level, we blame Jesus for things he's not responsible for, even when he is our best hope for the real problems we have. Why is it that we don't see these patterns? Paul has already said in Romans 3:10 – 12 that we are without understanding, we don't seek God, we don't seek the goodness of God, so that warps our understanding of reality. But two contemporary books help answer this. One is called *Mistakes Were Made (but not by me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts* by Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson. The second is called *A Mind of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives* by Cordelia Fine. Both books describe the mechanism of self-justification. Many times our brains distort reality in order to save our egos. You trick yourself into believing a false reality about yourself and the world. You think you're okay, but that other people are more capable of doing evil than you are, and when other people make mistakes it's their fault plain and

simple, but when we make mistakes it was because of larger more complicated forces so that we're not actually to blame. That's why you look at people who get into a lot of conflicts and think there's something wrong with them, but if you get into a lot of conflicts, it's not your fault; it's something wrong with other people still. On the spiritual level, we say things like this: 'Other people choose to do evil, therefore God is to blame because this world sucks, but I want to still do my own thing.' That is how people actually think, but how does that make any sense? Or this: 'Other people have problems – maybe they need Jesus as a 'crutch' – but I'm okay.' You think that because you've not been in a fist-fight recently, or you think that because you're a woman and not a man, that you're not destructive like this. I beg to differ. Nowadays, especially in the U.S., we push the destructive consequences of our actions onto other people far away, or especially in the future. We dump our trash in other countries. And we push all our crises onto our children, and their children. We're pushing the global food crisis to the future, the energy crisis to the future, environmental pollution to the future, global warming to the future, urban problems to the future, massive government deficits to the future, and so on. The truth is: Our sin and evil is not obvious to us affluent and apathetic Americans because we push it far away. You just like to think of yourself as not really participating in this whole system of violence and destruction. Whereas actually, you're the most entrenched, but you continue to blame 'God' or 'Christianity' for things that *you're* responsible for. Let the inconvenient truth penetrate your mind for just a minute. Are you feeling it? In these moments, when every button you have is being pressed, you see yourself for who you truly are, and if you are frightened by that knowledge as you should be, you can come to Jesus. So I am calling you to take seriously here Jesus' healing and transforming power for us on behalf of others. And when we get to the later chapters in Romans, we will hear more about that!! But consider the invitation now: Do other people a favor and come to Jesus!!

Being Guilty of Sin, We Are Helpless Before the Law: v.19 – 20

At this juncture in the diagnosis, not a cry of fear, but a complaint goes up. People shout, 'If we just had better laws...' Verses 19 and 20 are a kind of rebuttal to that. At first, I thought these two verses came out of nowhere, but they're a part of Paul's argument that basically closes every avenue of escape in this courtroom. As a last ditch-effort to avoid our guilt before God, many well-meaning people have said that if we just had a better laws, humanity will be okay. That was my assumption when I became a Public Policy major at Stanford, and I was following a long line of lofty authors that I had read. The real issue is: 'Can something external to man can rescue man from sin?'

Paul once had a similar view, except his standards weren't based on a man-made Gentile philosophy. They were based on the Law of Moses, handed by God to Israel amidst great thunder and fire. Will the Law of Moses, which signifies all that is external to man, bring salvation to man? Paul answers that question once and for all in verses 19-20. 'Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God, because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.'

In other words, the Law was given to bring about the knowledge of sin, or to uncover our sin. It wasn't given to save anyone. It wasn't given to make some people feel morally superior to others. It was made to point out the universal human problem of sin, to bring it to light, and to expose it in the courtroom of God. Paul even quoted David and Isaiah to show that the Law is not their defense. It's their accuser.

Now Paul was speaking to his fellow Jews at the time, as shown by his phrase, 'it speaks to those who are under the Law.' But what about non-Jews, who do not have the Law? Gathering what we learned in Romans 2:1 – 16, when we found that each individual condemns himself based on the judgmental standards he or she uses to judge others, I believe we can say this: The laws of the Gentiles serves the same purpose as the Law of Moses for Israel. It simply reveals sin. Why has the government defined child neglect as a crime in recent years? Not because we are so noble in protecting children. It's because parents have gotten worse! Therefore the more external codes we claim we need, the more guilty we make ourselves out to be. Priding yourself on having laws or high standards is backward; the more laws or standards you're upholding, the more restraints you're saying you need to put on yourself. That's not flattering.

Therefore, the same principle applies. An external code cannot change the inward heart of man. That's why we are absolutely wrong if a Jew falls back on the Law of Moses, or if we Gentiles claim that if we just had a better legal environment we'd be better people. The more external restraints we need, the worse we're shown to be. What we need is someone to change us from the inside, to revolutionize our hearts. Who can change the human heart?

So look at the incredible thing that happens. People finally shut up. Look at verse 19: 'every mouth may be closed.' Remember how sin always works its way out first through the mouth? Now in this hospital, the last cries of denial die down. All are infected with sin, and we have nothing to say in our own defense. We are simply awaiting treatment. Is there any hope for humanity on our own? In verse 20, Paul anticipates what God our Judge will say: 'no flesh will be justified,' which in legal terms means, 'no one will be acquitted when judged.' That is what he anticipates. The evidence stands, and we are GUILTY OF SIN. That means everyone, and Paul himself now steps out of his role as prosecuting attorney and says, 'I, too, am guilty, for I am a Jew under the Law.'

Is there a practical application for this passage? Only one. There is only one option left, and that is to throw ourselves on the mercy of God revealed in the human being Jesus. Next week, we're going to see Jesus. And we're going to see how he heals us.