

Text: Romans 3:9-20

Ser# 5196

Title: The Universal Guilt of All Mankind

Date: Sunday, January 15, 2011 **Group:** Romans: the Gospel of God's Righteousness

Sermon Type: Expository Sermon

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Fallen Condition Focus: People try to avoid and evade responsibility for their sin.

Propositional Statement: Because God calls all men to account for their own sin, you must acknowledge your guilt and liability to punishment.

Introduction:

1. You will not hear many sermons on sin because it is an uncomfortable topic for many people. Since Adam, people have tried to hide from God, deny their sinfulness and guilt, and evade responsibility for their sins.
2. Many psychologist, psychiatrists, and educators believe that people's greatest problem is *a lack of self-esteem*. However, this flies in the face of Scripture. Scripture nowhere tells us we need to love ourselves more, but it tells us repeatedly that the essence of sin is that we love ourselves too much! It is one of the great ironies of human nature, that man universally attempts to deny God and assert himself by setting himself on the throne of self-government; the result of this act, however, is to make himself a slave to sin.
3. This portion of Scripture is the summary of Paul's argument in 1:18-3:20 concerning the universality of human sin. ***Because God calls all men to account for their own sin, you must acknowledge your guilt and liability to punishment.*** Paul concludes his argument by asserting three facts about the universality of human sin.

I. Spiritual privileges cannot shield a person from guilt and liability to punishment. (9)

1. **Argumentation:** Verses 9-20 contains Paul's summary of his accusation against both Jews and Gentiles as guilty sinners before God (1:18-3:20). But he is still primarily addressing the Jews (2:1-3:8). Paul's argument is *a fortiori* (from the greater to the lesser).¹ If the Jews with all their privileges are guilty before God, then certainly all Gentiles are guilty too.
2. "What then? Are we better?" **Explanation:** Paul includes himself as a Jew in addressing the Jews. In 2:1-29 Paul has demonstrated that the Jew stands equally guilty with the Gentile. In 3:1-8 Paul responds to the argument that he is denying any privileges to the Jew by acknowledging that the Jews do have great privileges, the greatest of which is possession of the OT Law. Now Paul returns to his original argument (3:1-8 is somewhat parenthetical) by denying that these privileges can benefit the Jew by shielding him from responsibility for his sin. In regard to judgment for sin, the Jew stands on level ground with the Gentile.

¹ *a fortiori* (pronounced ah-for-she-ory) prep. Latin for "with even stronger reason," which applies to a situation in which if one thing is true then it can be inferred that a second thing is even more certainly true. Thus, if Abel is too young to serve as administrator, then his younger brother Cain certainly is too young. [from The Free Dictionary by Farlex, <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/a+fortiori> (viewed on 1/15/2011).]

3. “before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin”
- Explanation:** (1) This verb literally means to accuse previously. This identifies the whole section (1:18-3:20) as an “accusation” in which Paul first arraigns the Gentile world as sinners and liable to God’s punishment, then arraigns the Jews. (2) Paul’s conclusion is that all men are under sin. The phrase “under sin” describes man’s condition: He is in bondage to sin and held under its power. He is incapable of freeing himself from it. Its punishment hangs over him and he cannot escape it.

II. The Old Testament Law testifies that all men are guilty and liable to punishment. (10-18)

A. It testifies to the extent of human sinfulness. (10-12)

1. “As it is written” **Argumentation:** Paul turns to the OT Scriptures to support his contention that “all” men are under sin. He draws from five different OT passages to prove his point (Ps. 14:1-3; Ps. 5:9, 140:4; 10:7; and Is. 59:7-8). This teaching of Scripture about the sinfulness of man is sometimes called the *depravity of man, original sin, or the sin nature*.
2. “there is none righteous, no, not one” **Explanation:** vv. 10-12 quote Ps. 14:1-3. This passage describes God looking down from heaven to examine all mankind. The conclusion of his search is that “there is none that doeth good.” Paul uses the word “righteous” here because he is showing that all men have failed to live up to God’s standard of righteousness. God’s righteousness is an important theme in the book of Romans. This quotation from Ps. 14 shows two important facts about the extent of human sinfulness:
 - a. **It extends to all men.** This is seen in the repetition “none . . . none . . . none . . . none” and the twice-repeated “no, not one.” Millard Erickson states: “Not only does the Bible affirm and everywhere assume that all humans are sinners, but it also abundantly illustrates this fact. Blatant sinners appear in the pages of Scripture. The Samaritan woman in John 4 and the thieves on the cross are obvious instances. But what is more impressive is that even the good people, the righteous, the heroes of Scripture, are presented as sinners.” He continues, “An additional proof of the universality of sin is that all persons are subject to the penalty for sin, namely death.”² Our own personal experience and observation further supports the diagnosis that all men are sinners.
 - b. **It extends to every part of man’s being and nature.** These verses indicate that the mind, the will, and the behavior of man are all adversely affected by his sin.
3. “there is none that understandeth” **Explanation:** His understanding is blinded. This is part of the “disapproved mind” (1:23, 25, 26). Because man rejected the knowledge of God, God turned him over to a disapproved mind.
4. “there is none that seeketh after God” **Explanation:** His will is perverted.

² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*. 624.

It is set on self not God.

5. “unprofitable” **Explanation:** Man has utterly failed to live up to God’s purpose in creating him.
6. “none that doeth good” **Explanation:** Nothing that sinful man does is acceptable to God because even when he does something objectively good, it springs from wrong motives and desires which God clearly sees.

B. It testifies to the effects of human sinfulness. (13-17)

1. **Argumentation:** vv. 13-17 describe the actual effects of man’s sin upon his body and behavior.
2. in man’s speech
 - a. “their throat is an open sepulchre” **Explanation:** Quotation of Ps. 5:9. A grave is filled with corruption, uncleanness, and defilement. In OT times, a person who touched a dead body was unclean and required ritual cleansing under the Law. The speech of sinful man is unclean: it defiles both himself and others. Christ diagnosed that the reason for this defilement is that their speech proceeds out of a defiled heart (Mark 7:20-23).
 - b. “with their tongues they have used deceit” **Explanation:** Men glibly pour out lies and deceit. How easily and smoothly do we utter untruths to others.
 - c. “the poison of asps is under their lips” **Explanation:** Human speech is often poisonous and deadly in its effect on other people.
 - d. “whose mouth is filled with cursing and bitterness” **Explanation:** hatred, malice, blasphemy characterize the speech of men. James 3:1-12 describes the inconsistency of those who use their tongues to bless God and curse men.
3. in man’s behavior
 - a. “their feet are swift to shed blood” **Explanation:** Quotation from Is. 59:7-8. People do not value life. The Bible condemns murder not just because it is a violation of “human rights,” but because killing a man who is made in the image of God is an attack on God himself.
 - b. “destruction and misery are in their ways” **Explanation:** Every day, it seems, brings a new report of mass murders, suicide bombers, genocide, broken marriages and destroyed families, and other evidences of the destructive results of sin in people’s lives.
Illustration: I remember watching an episode of Candid Camera on television many years ago. The television crew secretly filmed a pole-vault athlete, dressed in athletic apparel and carrying a long vaulting pole, as he entered an upscale store which sold expensive crystal, china, and glassware. As he turned this way and that in the

store, he “accidentally” shattered glass, swept wares off the shelves, and destroyed fragile and expensive pieces of crystal while the unsuspecting and horrified shop-keeper looked on. This is an exact representation of the wake of destruction left behind by sinners as they selfishly move through life on this earth.

- c. “the way of peace they have not known” **Explanation:** Warring and fighting for supremacy, they do not pursue peace but belligerently assert their own desires.

C. It testifies to the essence of human sinfulness. (18)

1. “There is no fear of God before their eyes” **Explanation:** The absence of the fear of God is the essence of human sinfulness. Men deny his existence (atheism) or simply ignore him. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Prov. 9:10). Contrariwise, the absence of the fear of the Lord is the beginning of sin.

III. God’s people are particularly singled out as guilty and liable to punishment. (19-20)

A. God’s people are the intended recipients of the Law’s testimony. (19)

1. “it saith to them who are under the law” **Explanation:** The “law” is the whole OT—in particular, it refers to the passages just quoted from Psalms and Isaiah. Paul reminds the Jews that when the Scriptures describe the universal sinfulness of man, it includes the Jews. Since God committed the Scriptures to the Jews, they be default refer first to the Jews. They have no ground for excluding themselves from the diagnosis of Scripture.
2. Paul describes two intents of the law which have a special application to the Jew:
 - a. **The Law intends to silence every excuse.** “that every mouth may be stopped” **Explanation:** This pictures a courtroom scene with the defendant utterly silenced by the evidence brought against him and incapable of making any excuse.
 - b. **The Law intends to make all men accountable to God.** “all the world become guilty before God” **Explanation:** Lit. to be accountable or liable to punishment. The law demonstrates man’s guilt, places him under condemnation, and declares his sentence of punishment. *And this is where it leaves him. It can do nothing else for him!*

B. No one can be justified by obedience to the Law’s requirements. (20)

1. “the deeds of the law” **Explanation:** This term means the works by which one attempts to obey and keep the law. It is impossible for any person to be justified by obedience to the law, because all are sinners. This is the first occurrence of the word “justify” in Romans. *Justify means to declare a person righteous.* This statement reveals **the Law’s purpose and function from God’s perspective.** God intended the law to perform a negative purpose. It was to reveal his sinfulness and show him his liability to

punishment.

2. “for by the law is the knowledge of sin” **Explanation:** Here we see further, **the Law’s effect and use from man’s perspective.** The law brings man to know his condition and status before God as guilty and liable to punishment. *This is necessary in order to show us our need for salvation by God. It is the essential preparation for the message of the gospel. Only when a man has come to recognize himself as a sinner, totally incapable of helping himself, will he be willing to turn to Christ for salvation.*

Conclusion:

1. **Application:** In conclusion, there are three applications we need to make as we consider the truth of our own sinfulness:
 - a. Some here today may not as of yet have received Christ. In this case you are now in the position described in our text today: You stand before God as a guilty sinner under God’s condemnation and wrath and facing God’s punishment. Your only reasonable course of action is to receive God’s righteousness which he freely offers to you by grace through Jesus Christ.
 - b. Those of us who are believers have experienced God’s gracious pardon and the gift of righteousness through faith in Christ. But in order for us to appreciate the greatness of God’s grace to us we must first appreciate the greatness of our sin. We must continually express our thanksgiving and grateful praise to God for his amazing grace and live lives which reflect our sense of moral obligation to live our lives for his glory.
 - c. Finally, as believers we must never forget that even though we have been justified (declared righteous), our sinful nature still remains. The picture of sin painted in this passage shows the utter depravity and incorrigibility of our sinful nature. This sinful nature is incapable of improvement or change. Our only proper response to the temptations of our sinful nature is to “put it to death” (Col 3:5-11). There can be no compromise with sin. In fact, Rom 6 shows how we have already been crucified with Christ (Rom 6:11ff) so that sin no longer has power over us. Therefore we must face the reality of our sin with the confidence that we can experience victory over its power in our lives.