

The Gospel as it Really Is: Romans simply Explained
God's Final Verdict: Everyone is Guilty
Romans 3:9-20 27th April
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Introduction = Speed Awareness Course

I am told on good authority, that many, if not most people who find themselves on a speed-awareness course, protest their innocence:

- “I had an aggressive driver on my tail. I had to speed up to shake him off!” “His fault not mine!”
- “My kids on the school run were in a terrible mood and so I was running late for work.”
- And so on

They've all been proven guilty electronically, but still vigorously protest it!

This modern day parable exposes the deep reluctance of men and women, religious or non-religious, to own up to their wrongdoing and confess their sins.

“Sorry seems to be the hardest word” wrote a modern lyricist

On Sunday mornings we're making our way section by section through the book of Romans, the book which outlines the Good News, the Gospel, more fully than perhaps any other Bible book. And it has taken the apostle Paul three relentless, determined, implacable chapters to convince his readers, that we are *all* guilty sinners.

He began, you may remember in chapter 1, with the Gentile world (that is everyone in the world who is not a Jew), with a cloud of 22 common misdemeanours, from sexual impurity to slander. Job done in a mere 14 short verses!

But then he moved to the Jews—and by extension to all religious people - including church-going people like you and I—in chapter 2, where he found the job much more difficult! It took him more than twice 14, it took 37 verses to convince religious people that they too were sinners! Why? Because religious people automatically think they are “better” than people out there in the world, and because they think they are God's

privileged people. Pagan people more readily throw up their hands “I’m guilty as charged, I did 37 mph”, but religious people, not so happy to confess....

...in fact I say Paul takes twice as much space to convict religious people, it’s more like *three times* as much, because part of Paul’s final conclusion on universal guilt—our verses for today - is addressed, especially to the self-righteous Jew, the reluctant religious man or woman!

Let us pause right here and ask ourselves the question: Do you and I, church going folks, acknowledge that we are guilty sinners, or do we even vociferously protest our self-righteous innocence? Are you a good person or are you a sinner? Our answer matters, because we are not yet ready to hear, understand, receive or rejoice in the marvellous Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ until we confess that we are sinners and say things like, *“It’s not my brother, it’s not my sister, but it’s me O Lord, standin’ in the need of prayer”*

And so this morning we come to Paul’s universal conclusion—all mankind, everyone in the world— Jew and Gentile—including you and me—are guilty sinners.

Let’s look at Paul’s words, 3:9-20, and then apply them to ourselves today.

God's final verdict—everyone is guilty

Verse 9: “What shall we conclude then? [See, Paul has arrived at his conclusion] Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin.”

Back in verse 1, Paul reminded us that there were real advantages in being born a Jew—most of all, having in their possession the Word of God, the Bible, the Old Testament. Now he want to make it clear that there is no advantage in being a Jew when it comes to *guilt*. Jews as well as Gentiles are sinners:

“There is no-one righteous, not even one.” (This is God’s final conclusion!)

With quotes from the Old Testament, Paul proves that absolutely everyone is in the same moral boat, everyone is guilty:

“no-one is righteous not even one”., verse 10

“No-one understands”, “no-one seeks God, all have turned away”, v11

“there is no-one who does good, not even one.” verse 12

Have you heard of the doctrine of “Total Depravity”? In verses 12-18, Paul teaches it. Unfortunately the doctrine can easily be misunderstood. It does not refer to the degree of sin but the extent of sin. Hear me out. Every single part of our make up from our bodies to our minds to our desires has been affected by sin, that’s the wide reaching EXTENT of sin, but we are not as wicked as we might be, not to the highest DEGREE, human beings are not devils. “Total Depravity” refers to extent not degree. Let me show before I tell...

I’ve brought with me a glass of water, which represents you and I. Let me stir in one drop of ink, which represents sin and stir. The water is not all poison, but it has all been *infected* by poison. And in the same way, human beings are not thoroughly evil, they are not devils, but sin has affected every part of our makeup

Our minds

“there is no-one who understands”, verse 11- such a broad statement. The wonderful faculty of human reason has been poisoned by sin so that we can no longer trust human reasoning. Said that back in 1:21

Our spiritual desires

“there is no-one who seeks God.”, v.11. We were created to know and love God and find in him our true happiness, but mankind doesn't seek God anymore, in fact, verse 12, we *“all have turned away.”* And as we learnt from chapter 1, turned to idols, instead of God. And the result of this turning away from God, we have become *“worthless,”* verse 11. The noble creature who was given dominion over the world has robbed himself of his own dignity and become something beneath his proper worth.

Our behaviour

What else? Sin has infected our behaviour, *“There is no-one who does good, not even one.”, verse 11.*

Our words

Paul homes in on sins of speech. Perhaps religious people in defending themselves against the grosser sins of sexual impurity or theft or violence, overlook sins of speech!

The bad stuff we may say in the private of our homes can so easily fly under the radar, as acceptable, even respectable behaviour.

“their throats are open graves”, verse 13 - we’ve all seen the images from war or disaster-torn parts of the world, where rescue workers cover their faces with masks to filter out the stench of rotting bodies. Some human speech is like that, Paul says, so foul, it is like standing next to a rotting corpse!

“their tongues practise deceit”, verse 13, they tell lies

“the poison of vipers is on their lips”, verse 13 - some of the things people say are so lethal to others, you might as well have vipers in the room!

“their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness”, verse 14 – their cursing of others is laced with bitterness

Sins of speech. And you, my friend, still think you’re not a sinner? Well let me give you a voice-activated sound recorder, and next Sunday morning 4th, we’ll play back every word you spoke this past week just before the sermon! Better still, let it be everything you said *last week*, lest the knowledge of public disclosure puts a guard on your lips.

But the extent of total depravity goes further than speech....

Sin affects our relationship with others

Next Paul explains how sin affects our relationship with others. *“Their feet are swift to shed blood”, v.15*. You say that one does not apply to me, I’m not quick to take the lives of others! But remember what Jesus said? If you hate, it’s as if you murdered, Matthew 5. Why? Because, in practice, perhaps, the only difference between hatred and murder is opportunity. What happens when a dictator comes to power and now has the opportunity to do what he wants? He wipes out the opposition with the sword. Before he only hated them *in his heart*, but now free from all social restraint he enacts the inevitable conclusion of hatred. So you and I may not have shed blood, but we have hated, and God has seen and logged our hatred. And if not hatred, what about the *“ruin and misery” (v.15)* that often follows in the wake of evil human behaviour? Think—as just one example! - of what happens when the flinty stone of adultery and divorce is thrown into the calm pond of a happy family? Endless ripples of “ruin and misery.” I have a book on my shelves written by two American academics,

documenting their 25 year study of divorce and it's devastating effects on children. It could be called, "*Ruin and misery.*"

Paul continues, "*the way of peace they do not know,*" verse 17. People are always doing or saying things that cause division in their communities, whether family, neighbourhood, country, continent or world.

Oh preacher, what a dark sermon!

But Paul isn't finished, "*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*" verse 18. He's back where he started. To fear God is to have him at the centre of our focus every moment of every day, and therefore to do only what pleases him. To not fear him, is to live without a single thought as to whether or not the Lord is pleased with our thoughts, attitudes, words, deeds.

And still Paul isn't finished, at least not with the Jews, who along with many religious people, so stubbornly refuse to confess their sinfulness:

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

"I've just quoted from the Bible! You're own book condemns you! I hope your mouth has finally been stopped from protesting your innocence!"

20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin

The ten commandments you brag about can never be a *ladder* to heaven—as you obey them you climb up to heaven—because you haven't and you can't obey them.

No, the ten commandments are more like a *prosecutor in court*, convicting you of your sinfulness—"you've broken that one, this one, the other one, You're guilty."

What is the Holy Spirit teaching through these inspired words? First, a general truth, as we come to the end of the first part of Romans,

The Good News of the Gospel begins with bad news

Doctor calls you in for a consultation. He explains this amazing cure he wants to treat you with, he extols it's efficacy, it's power. It's costly, but it will be free to you.

But he's said nothing about the disease you have, not a word about the gravity of your plight, the severity of your condition. So you turn it down, you say to him, "It's a great cure, but since there's nothing wrong with me, I don't need it."

Before we proclaim the Good News of forgiveness and peace with God, we must share the bad news! Otherwise God's remedy for sin will mean nothing! On Day of Pentecost, Peter preached the bad news before he preached the Good News. The Bad News— "you put Jesus to death by nailing him to a cross" (2:23). Then the Good News, "repent and be baptised everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (verse 38)

It's always been difficult to preach the Bad News, but Paul is teaching us, individually and as a church that Bad News is part of the Gospel. Do we include it? Will we?

And finally, a personal truth, a question:

A personal truth: Do you acknowledge that you are a sinner?

Where are you this morning? Do you acknowledge that you are a sinner? Or are you still telling everyone at the speed awareness class that you're innocent? Perhaps blaming others for the stuff *you've* done. May the Holy Spirit convict you and bring you to repentance.

But if you are aware of your sin, profoundly aware, sometimes remorsefully even bitterly aware of your sin; If you find full agreement with the words of the Anglican litany, "O God have mercy upon us *miserable sinners*" well this morning, rejoice! Blessed are those who mourn, because you are ready to hear and receive and believe and enjoy the Good News of a Saviour who came into the world to save *sinners*. Because your conviction reveals that the Holy Spirit is at work in your heart, for Jesus

sent His blessed Spirit into the world, “to convict the world of guilt in regard to sin” (John 16:8) Strange as it may seem, if you know yourself to be a sinner, you’re in a *good* spiritual place. Be comforted!

May the Lord use his Word to bring both conviction and comfort to our hearts today.

Amen.