

Romans 3:9-24

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Romans 3:9-24: Man's Desperation for God's Good News, Part 6

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

The Apostle Paul has been laying out a case like a lawyer. We know who did it. We know who is guilty and there is no defense for any of us. All men are under the wrath of God, guilty as charged before Him. That is why we are desperate for the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Verse 9 of chapter 3 is where we will begin. "What then? Are we better than they?" Paul has just talked about the advantage of being a Jew versus being a Gentile and now he turns the argument again. Notice he said, "Are we better?" The Apostle Paul was a Jew, and he was converted. He became a believer on the Damascus Road. He knew what he was talking about. "Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks [or Gentiles] are all under sin."

The word "**charged**" there means to blame, to place an accusation. The Apostle Paul says that the charge has been leveled and it is clear that all men, Gentiles and Jews, are under sin. They are all guilty as charged. He sums up what he has been saying now for two chapters: every man is desperate for the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul mentioned the oracles in verse 2. The Lord Jesus picks up on the same idea in [Luke 24](#). The word "**oracles**" is the word **logion**. It comes from the word "**logos**" which means *word*. It refers to the fact that God personally revealed many things to the Jews that He did not reveal to the Gentile. This was God's indictment against them. It didn't help them a bit. It made them proud and arrogant. It did not lead them to repentance before God.

In [Luke 24:44-47](#) the Lord Jesus brings up three areas where they had knowledge. The Apostle Paul picks up on those areas and uses them as his last three witnesses as he presents his case against man.

Luke 24:44 says, "Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me [1] in the Law of Moses, [2] and the Prophets [3] and the Psalms must be fulfilled.'"

They had the knowledge. It was all written in that. What was the knowledge? That all men were under sin; that all men are guilty before God.

[Luke 24:45](#): "Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'"

That was in their writings. It was written in the Psalms, the Prophets and the Law. The Apostle Paul has been saying, "You Jews have an advantage. What is that advantage? The knowledge that God has given to you." Now Paul is going to call forth the witnesses and say, "Do you want to know what I am saying? Alright, I am making my closing remarks.

No man will ever say another word because what I am about to tell you brings the case to its close. All men are guilty before God, even the Jew, even the religious."

In Romans 3:10-18 Paul brings forward the Psalms and the Prophets. There are three witnesses he is going to bring to the stand. He is like a lawyer who knows the case is sealed.

"Three Witnesses"

Ro3:10-18

First of all, he brings forth the Psalms He is going to show how they bear witness that all men are guilty before God.

Look at Romans 3:10-12. He shows them how the condemnation of all mankind is written: "There is none righteous, not even one." The word "**none**" there is the term **ouk**. It means absolutely none, there could never be even one. Then to emphasize it he says, "*not even one.*"

"Well, Abraham was a good guy." Paul says, "not even one." Abraham had to be reckoned righteous by his belief. There is no man on this earth born of man and woman that was ever righteous before God. He goes on: "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God." Again, the word "none" means absolutely no one. The term "*understands*" is the Greek term **sunemi**, which means the ability to take all the different facts, put them together and come to a conclusion that would give them understanding about God and divine things. Paul says, "There is not a single man, Jew or Gentile on this earth, who has any kind of spiritual understanding whatsoever."

Can you imagine, if you were a Jewish person listening to this, how you would take that? You thought you knew about God. But you see, what they called holy, what we would call holy and righteous, is what God calls filthy rags. Paul is saying, "There is not a man ever born of man and woman who has any spiritual understanding at all." He says, "*No one seeks for God.*"

The word for "**seeks**" is the word that means to seek diligently in order to obtain. In the passage here it means that nobody is seeking God in order to obtain His favor. Man doesn't want God. We get the picture. Adam, our head, sinned. And because of that, depravity entered into the human race.

Romans 3:12 says, "All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."

Have you ever met somebody walking down the hall, maybe of the church, and you knew they had something against you? You didn't want to face them, so you consciously turned and went another direction. That is exactly what the word means, to intentionally avoid, to intentionally turn and go another way. In his heart a man knows that what he does is wrong. He knows that there is a standard God is going to require. Even the Gentiles knew that what they were doing was worthy of death, but they didn't want God because they didn't want to stop what they were doing. The Jews turned aside to their own standards. They turned away from the moral law and to the Talmud. In those 613 laws they created their own standard of righteousness.

The Word of God says that both Jew and Gentile are guilty. All men have turned aside. They have become useless. They turned away from God and, as a result of that, they are now useless. They are absolutely of no profit whatsoever to God. That is an interesting statement, isn't it? That is exactly what we were all like before we were saved. We were not a bit of use whatsoever to God. There is not a thing in man that God wants. Man never seeks after God. Man doesn't have any spiritual understanding.

Man is not useful to God whatsoever. He has to be transformed by the grace of God. We become useable when the good news comes into our life and Jesus comes into our heart. The Spirit of God changes us and makes us into a new creature. That is the only way we will ever be useful to God.

Religious people hate this kind of stuff. You might say, "I am a good person!" By whose standard are you good? Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees." The Pharisees wore these boxes on their forehead called **phylacteries**. Every time they would obey one of the laws in their oral law, they would put that inside that box. The bigger the box got, the more spiritual they were. When you got real spiritual your head got so heavy you had to hire somebody to hold your head up. I suspect one of them walked by Jesus that day. Oh, he is so spiritual! Somebody is holding his head up. Man, he has just obeyed all the laws. And Jesus said, "You see that man right there. If you want to enter the kingdom of heaven, you had better have a righteousness better than what he has!" Everybody standing around said, "Oh, my goodness. There is no hope for us."

That is the message—the **desperation of mankind**. Apart from Jesus there is no hope. **Religion** does not save anybody. **Religion** simply becomes a form that denies the power thereof.

The Apostle Paul, in building his case, quotes out of [Psalm 14:1-3](#) and [Psalm 53:1-3](#). This is what they had. This is what he has been telling them. "You have had this. This is your advantage. But you haven't paid attention to what it has been saying."

[Psalm 14:1-3](#) says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God. They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.'"

The fool says, "There is no one who dictates anything to me. I am on my own. I'll live my own way." The Word of God says, "The fool has said in his heart." That was in their literature.

Look at [Psalm 53:1-3](#): "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice; 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."

I tell you; sometimes we forget what grace is. We forget the fact that no man seeks after God. Aren't you glad God seeks after us? That is what the whole message is all about. We don't pride ourselves because we are believers and they are all sinners. Man, it is only by the grace of God that we would be right where they are. That is what he is saying. All men are under sin. All men are guilty before God.

Well, he continues to show how the Psalms prove that man is corrupt, that he is depraved in his nature. The first thing he does is examine his words. There are two ways you can tell about a person—by their words and by their works. He uses the Psalms to testify concerning the words.

Romans 3:13, "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."

Paul is quoting from [Psalm 5:9](#) and [Psalm 140:3](#).

[Psalm 5:9](#) says, "There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue."

[Psalm 140:3](#) says, "They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; poison of a viper is under their lips."

Romans 3:14 quotes out of [Psalm 10:7](#) which says, "His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is mischief and wickedness."

Now the Apostle Paul is showing you something. It is like he turns from being judge to becoming a physician. Have you ever walked into a doctor's office and they took one of those little things and stuck it in your throat and said, "Say ahhh." Paul opens up their mouth and says, "Look at the garbage coming out of it. Let's look inside and see the cesspool it is coming out of." He said, "Their throats are like open graves." That phrase is very familiar in the Old Testament. They understood it to mean "destructive". In other

words, the words that they speak destroy; they do not give life or build up. Regardless of what context you want to put that in, that is the way lost man is.

Now think about an **open grave**. Think about bodies lying in an open grave with no casket, uncovered. What is happening? All that corruption is coming out. He said it is just like that with a person who doesn't know Christ, a person who is under Adam, shut up under sin. They are a person who can't say a word because the law has already condemned him. This is what he is like. Everything inside of him is destructive, corrupt. When it comes out, all it is going to do is poison and bring destruction.

One of the ways in which they punished people back in the New Testament was if you ever murdered somebody, they would take his dead body and put it on your back and you would wear it until that person's dead body corrupted your own and you died. That was your penalty for having done what you did. You can see the corruption that comes out of that, the awful disease that comes out of it. He says, "Their mouths are like open graves." All that corruption, all that destruction that comes out. Can you imagine saying this to the Jews? Can you imagine them saying, "What? Why, not us. We say good stuff." No, it comes out of a well that is polluted. They teach the law and it brings destruction. There is not one thing they could teach or say that would ever bring life. It would always destroy.

Paul goes on to use the phrase "**the poison of an asp**." The asp was a snake that was so poisonous that when it bit you it killed you. It brought forth death. It is another way of saying the same thing. This destructive evil is in the form of bitterness and cursing. Cursing is when you wish evil on somebody else. You pronounce it on them. You wish it on them. You inflict it upon them. Somebody has harmed you and you are going to inflict evil back on them. You curse them with what you say. That is what comes out of people's hearts who are wicked, who are depraved, who do not know Jesus Christ.

Now, it is at this point that Paul says, "Okay, Psalms you can take a seat. I will call you back in just a second. Go on over and sit down. Prophets, come on up here and take a seat. We have another witness here. I am closing out my case that God has against all men." He calls Isaiah up to the seat and says, "Now, Prophets, show us by the works that man does that he is condemned."

Romans 3:15: "Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths."

Look at what he is saying here. The vengeance of lost man is incredible. We have seen it in many places, even in the heart of a little child when some other child takes his toy and he looks at him and says, "I hate you. I hate you. You took my toy. I wish you were dead." Where did that come from? Was he taught that in school? Was he taught that at home? No. It came from the fact that he was born depraved as a result of Adam's sin. The vengeance of even a child shows us that man does not have any good in him whatsoever. If you ever think differently, you have missed the point of why the gospel is such good news.

Romans 3:16: "Destruction and misery are in their paths."

Look back over human history and what do you have? You have the ruins of cities that have been destroyed by somebody else. In other words, vengeance is all that they have to show for it, destruction and misery. Homer sang a song about the city of Troy, "The city of Troy is built on the ruins of an earlier city." Since the time Homer sang that song they have found seven more cities underneath the ruins.

Now you say, "I haven't killed anybody. I haven't shot anybody. I am a pretty decent person." No, you have covered it over. It is like putting honey over the top of it, but underneath it is the same vengefulness. One of these days, the Lord Jesus is going to take the church out of this world and this world will for the first time see the hate that has been here, the depravity of man's heart, wickedness like never before. Thank God we are not destined for His wrath. Thank God we have received the Lamb. It is going to be seen one day. The only thing that is restraining it right now is the presence of the Holy Spirit in this world.

Well, in Romans 3:17 he says, "And the path of peace have they not known."

He is not talking about the peace of God. He is talking about peace with man. The book of Isaiah will document that. If you ever doubt the depravity of man, go to Auschwitz. It is a sobering experience. We saw the shower rooms where they would gas the victims. We saw the incinerators where they took the dead bodies and burned them up. We saw chimney-type structures. They made people strip down and crawl into the bottom of them two at a time. Then it was bricked up to shut off all the oxygen. It was a slow torturous death with two men face to face, in a miserable situation like that. They tortured them to death. They enjoyed every minute of it. We saw the room where eyeglasses were stacked 20 feet high! We saw the room filled with human hair. They took the human hair and made rugs out of it. People bought them for high prices in Germany during that particular time. We saw the gold that was in people's teeth that they had taken out. They would take that gold and melt it down and send it to a factory and make jewelry.

The Apostle Paul is saying that every man who is without Jesus Christ has the same kind of perverted, depraved heart. He has never had a holy thought. He does not understand God and has been turned aside by his own wickedness and is living away from

God. This is the situation our world is in today.

Well, [Isaiah 59:7-8](#) tells us what he is talking about:

"Their feet run to evil, and they hasten to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; devastation and destruction are in their highways. They do not know the way of peace, and there is no justice in their tracks; they have made their paths crooked; whoever treads on them does not know peace."

Before the Apostle Paul finishes up he calls the Psalmist back. He sets the Psalms down and says, "Let's hear one more time from your literature, from the Psalms, that which God has given to you. What does the Psalms say is the true problem of all mankind?"

He says in Romans 3:18, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." The Psalms pinpoint it even more distinctly.

[Psalms 36:1](#) says, "Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes."

You know what the problem of all mankind is? It is a heart problem, a depraved, wicked heart. That is why they need the good news of Jesus Christ. That is why they need the new heart that God will give to them. Paul tells the Psalms and the Prophets to sit down and then he says, "Law, where are you? One more time come on back up and I am going to rest my case." The Law comes up and takes a seat. He says, "Okay. You have been wondering what I have been talking about when I said you have been given the oracles of God. I have showed you from the Psalms. I have showed you from the Prophets. Now, let me show you from your own Law that you pride yourselves in. Let me show you how you already know that all men are guilty before God."

Romans 3:19 says, "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law."

Do you know what it means to be under the Law? All men are under the Law. The Law that God wrote on a Gentile's heart; the law that He gave to the Jews. The law that He gave to the Jews condemns all men, not just the Jews. But what does it mean to be under the law? It automatically anticipates that somebody is not doing something right or you wouldn't have had a law to start with.

But you see, we are all under the law. Paul is saying all men are under the law, which means you are subject to it. Now watch what he goes on to say: "that every mouth may be closed." In other words, if you have ever broken one of them, you are guilty of the whole law. Every man living on the face of this earth has broken that law. He is saying, "You Jews are guilty. Now shut up. You Gentiles are guilty. Now shut up. The law has condemned you."

Paul says in chapter 7, "*I was once alive without the Law.* The Law came, sin revived and I died." In other words, he said, "I suddenly found out that what I was doing was called coveting because the Law brings knowledge to sin. So I woke up the next day and I said, 'I am not supposed to covet. I am going to please you, God. I am not going to covet.'" What did he do all day long? Covet, covet, covet. Why? Because no man by his sinful heart can measure up to that law. All men are under it and all men just need to shut up. If you have been guilty of breaking one of them, you are guilty of the whole law. That is what he is saying to them.

Verse 19 closes with, "*and all the world may become accountable to God.*"

Any religion that preaches works just dies in **3:20. Paul puts works to death right here. He says, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."**

Let me show you something here. There are two parts to the Law. We look at the first part, the moral law, don't we? That is the Ten Commandments.

Since no man can live up to it, then evidently it has already brought forth its condemnation. But now wait a minute. It's not just the moral law that shows you the knowledge of sin. There is another part of the Law they forgot about, and that is the ceremonial part of the Law. Why? Because the ceremonial part of the Law is where the sacrificial system is. In other words, if you can't live up to this, then God's mercy will supersede His Law. God has made a provision to bring a sacrifice.

***"The Mercy Seat...God's mercy always supersedes the Law.
This is the heart of God."***

Every year they had the feast of the Passover and only the High Priest could go into the presence of God. When he walked in, he had to go in for his own sin. He had to go in with the blood to the Holy of Holies where God dwelt. They tied a rope around his ankle so if he had a heart attack inside the Holy of Holies, they could pull him out because no man could run in to help him. God would have smitten them dead because of the sin that was in their life. That is how serious sin is. When he went in, he would take the blood of the sacrificial animal that had to be without blemish. He would take the blood and throw it down on the mercy seat. Now the mercy seat was on top of what they called the Ark of the Covenant.

Inside the Ark of the Covenant were the Tablets of Law. What did the Tablets of law do? Death, condemnation, exposure of sin,

knowledge of sin. But what is on top of it? The Mercy Seat. God's mercy always supersedes His law. This is the heart of God. They should have known this. They had it right there in front of them. He would take the blood in and sprinkle the blood on that mercy seat. Fire would come down from heaven and because of the blood on the mercy seat, man could fellowship with God for one more year.

Jesus did away with the ceremonial law. He is the ceremony. He is the High Priest. He has never sinned. That is why He can go in for our sins and become the sacrifice! He is not only the High Priest, He is the sacrifice! Not only that, it is His blood that was put on the Mercy Seat. Not only that, verse 25 says He is the Mercy Seat. We will be looking at that later. It is through Jesus Christ that we find all of that. The Jew had that right under his nose for centuries but what did he do? He turned against Jesus, the Messiah. They went their own way, just like every man ever born of man and woman. They didn't want God. They didn't seek after God. They didn't have a holy thought in their brain.

If you think your good works are going to get you to heaven, go back to chapter 3 of Romans and let it speak to your heart. No, it won't get you there. As a matter of fact, Romans 3 proves to you that your works will never get you anywhere except to hell. It is only through Jesus Christ that we can be acceptable once again to God. It is never through what a man does, only through what God does.

Verse 20 says again, ***"because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."***

Do you know what the word "***knowledge***" is there? ***Epiginosko***, the full knowledge. Not only head knowledge, but your very life verifies what the Law says, that there is sin in your life. God's law, whether on tablets of stone given by Moses or written on the pagan man's heart shows the sinfulness of man. It is the standard that no man can reach but to which every man is accountable.

So Paul says, "Okay, Law, have you spoken? Psalms, have you spoken? Prophets, have you spoken? I rest my case. God has a case against every man, Gentile, Jew, pagan, pious. Every man is guilty before God."

You may think to yourself, "My goodness, this is the worst news I have ever had in my life." Do you know what he is doing? Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God he is bringing us full circle, right back around to the good news of Jesus Christ. Until you realize how bad it is, you haven't got a clue how good it is. He is going to come around.

***"He paid a price, a debt He didn't owe.
You owed a debt you couldn't pay."***

Look at Romans 3:21-24: "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified...."

I am going to stop right there. I am going to tell you what that word "***justified***" means. Do you know what that word means? ***Acquitted***. You know you are guilty. It has been established. You walk into the divine throne room of God with that guilty countenance and the judgmental finger of God comes down and says, "Guilty as charged!" You just feel so low. "What can I do? What can I do?" A big smile comes on His face and He says, "Oh, friend. It is not what you can do but what I have done for you. You are guilty. I never have erased the fact that you are guilty, but I have dropped the charges. Somebody has paid the price for you that you deserve." Acquitted. That is what the word means. Charges have been dropped.

God said, "I love you so much. I sent Jesus, my Son, to die for you. He paid a price, a debt He didn't owe. You owed a debt you couldn't pay. You have received Him into your heart. I am dropping the charges." God didn't save you, God didn't justify you, as a saint. God justified you as a sinner. I want to help you understand something. After you have been saved, your flesh is no more credible in God's sight than it was before you got saved. Who in the world do we think we are, trying to work for God and asking Him to bless it? No man can do anything by his flesh in God's sight that God ever approves. That is good news, folks. That means I am willing to say, "God, I can't and never could, but you can and you always said you would. Energize me in Your Spirit and let Your works be seen in my life." That is the message of the good news for you and me.