



Humanity: Dignity, Depravity, & Destiny

Week 4 - 9/28/2025

The need to study this topic: Illustrated in the Ligonier State of Theology Survey 2025. One of the most troubling areas of beliefs evangelical Christians have is the doctrine of humanity. 64% believe, "everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God" 53% believe, "everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature."

I want to dive into one passage this morning that illustrates the concepts of human depravity that we have been talking about.

- The black cloth which makes the gospel shine.

I have the text printed in your notes in sections, we'll take them a section at a time.

We have three sections, and we'll think of each section as a scene in a courtroom.

- In scene one, the accusation is proclaimed, verse 9.
- In scene two, the evidence is presented, verses 10-18.
- In scene three, the judgment is pronounced, verses 19-20.

➤ So first let's look at the courtroom scene one, the charge,

THE CHARGE IS: ALL ARE UNDER SIN (9) [repeat]

Verse 9 says,

"What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin."

So, Paul asks the question reflecting on these truths,

- "So when we think about the Jews, what should we conclude, then?"
- "Because of these advantages that the Jews have, are they better off than other people groups in regards to sin and salvation?"
 - "Do Jews surpass other people groups somehow?"
- And the answer is, "No, not at all."

Paul has masterfully laid out the full accusation in the first three chapters of Romans that all, Jews and Gentiles, have sinned.

- So, Jews do not have special privileges, for they are guilty before God too, just like the Roman Gentile world.
- Here in verse 9 is the word, “charged,” which means an accusation.
- It’s the idea that a formal legal charge has been filed to the court.
- In Romans 1-3, Paul has pointed out this charge has been leveled against the Gentiles and the Jews, God’s chosen people. And the creation and the conscience have given testimony this is true.

But here’s the overall point: All people, no matter what social group, are unrighteous and guilty before God.

- That’s the building block in the book of Romans, human depravity, that all are “under sin.”

So, what does this phrase mean, all are, “under sin”?

- Well, this phrase is a powerful metaphor for us to grasp.
- The idea of being “under sin” means that we are not simply people who do bad things from time to time.
 - We are actually subjects of sin; we’re people living under its power.
- The Bible describes sin as an evil, destructive, and enslaving entity, which has a stranglehold on us.
- So that phrase, “under sin” means to be under the authority and control of a king or master. And this is not a good master.
- Think of the *Chronicles of Narnia*. In the *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, all of Narnia was living in an endless cold winter.
- The wicked witch was ruling the land with an evil spell of winter that affected everyone.
 - It was always winter but never Christmas.
- Without Aslan’s power, all Narnians were helpless captives to the evil rule of the witch.
- This evil spell is like being under the power of sin.
- People are helpless captives, living under sin’s cold and bitter rule.
 - And we cannot escape the power of sin on our own.
- Thus, we are slaves to sin, as its evil influence rules over us and inside of us.

➤ Let’s look at the courtroom scene two, which is the case,

THE CASE IS: ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE (10-18) [repeat]

The second section of our passage is verses 10-18, let's read them again,

¹⁰ "as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

So Paul is making his case here, presenting evidence to back up his accusation that all are under the power of sin.

- And the evidence he presents is a string of Old Testament quotations.
- So Paul is bringing rock-solid, Scriptural evidence to make his case.
- He lists six sections of the Old Testament here, one right after the other.
- Psalm 14:1-3; Psalm 5:9; Psalm 140:3; Psalm 10:7; Isaiah 59:7-8; and Psalm 36:1.

Which adds to Paul's case here, all people, Jews and Gentiles, have turned aside.

Now, looking at verses 10-18 again, at first glance, it seems like we have here an unorganized list of Old Testament quotes.

- But when we look closer at the themes, it makes sense why these passages are ordered like this.
- Now, one word the Bible repeatedly uses to describe sin, is the word, "corruption"
- Corruption gets at the idea that sin corrupts a person, it pollutes wherever it goes.
 - Think of rust eating away at metal.
 - Think of a moth eating away at clothes.
- This is how sin corrupts our entire being, sin it eats away at us morally, with the consequences of moral decay leading to eternal disaster.
- So people are depraved, or inwardly ruined, because of sin.
 - They are corrupted to the core.

Paul describes this corruption of sin in three categories using these Old Testament quotes.

First, there is corruption of the entire perspective. Verses 11 and 18.

- The entire perspective of a person's life is corrupted because of sin.

- In other words, the person's worldview does not include God.
 - And what replaces God is self: self-sufficiency and self-determination.
- People have cut themselves off from God, their good Creator.
 - We must define sin with this in mind.
 - Sin is much deeper than doing bad things.
 - It starts and ends when people sever their entire perspective from God.
- Look at verse 11, it says, "No one seeks for God."
- And then verse 18 says, "there is no fear of God before their eyes."
 - So people seek self as the determining factor of their lives, not God.
 - And they don't even fear him, their perspective is totally off.
- This is the root of the tree of sin, it is a corruption, a failure of perspective.
 - Who God is and what he wants is not a part of one's worldview.

So what exactly does Paul mean when he says, "no one seeks for God" or "no one does good." These phrases are a bit curious.

- Does this mean that no one does anything good at all?
- Does this mean that no one has any spiritual interest at all?
- Well, no, non-believers do many good things toward fellow humans.
 - It's one result of God's common grace given to all people.
 - People, made in God's image, and can do good things in sight of men
 - And Jesus said even evil people give good gifts to their children.
- It also seems that people do have a spiritual sense of things, they see God in nature and they discern spiritual virtues through their conscience.
 - They can have a spiritual interest.

So in one sense, people do good things, and in a sense, people seek for God.

- But not in the ultimate sense, not in the way that ultimately matters.
- We see that the problem is, because of sin's mastery and corruption, even all these positives are polluted and tainted!
- They are not done to glorify God, which is the whole purpose of our existence!
- Because the entire perspective of life is polluted, people cannot please God.

Secondly, there is corruption of the entire population. Verses 10-12.

- We see here, sin's mastery over every individual human being.
- Sin is universal, it affects everyone.
- Everyone has terminal heart disease and we cannot cure ourselves.
 - We need a heart transplant or we will die.
- The entire population of the world is corrupted, infected with sin.

- And notice that Paul uses the phrase “all” or “no one” repeatedly.
 - Actually, I counted seven times in just three verses.
- What is the point of this repetition?
- Well it is another way of making the case that absolutely no person, “no one, no one, no one,” apart from Christ, is righteous.

Third, we see that there is corruption of the entire person. Verses 13-17.

- Notice all the various aspects of a person mentioned in these Old Testament quotations: the mind, throat, tongue, lips, feet, eyes.
 - This is a wide-ranging, comprehensive list.
- All these elements are listed to reveal that sin has corrupted the entire person.
 - Every part of us has been infected.
 - We’re tarnished throughout our whole being.
 - That is what sin does to us.

And this entire-person corruption focuses on two areas, speech and actions.

Sinful speech is verses 13-14. Sinful actions, 15-17.

Let's look at some of these phrases.

- “their throat is an open grave”
 - Evil speech is like an open tomb containing decaying, dead bodies.
- “they use their tongues to deceive”
 - This means that through someone’s speech, deceit and dishonesty are realized.
 - Deceit and lying is played out in everyday life through, words.
- “the venom of asps is under their lips”
 - Speech has the effect of deep violence, like a poisonous snake.
 - Paul may even be referring to a spitting cobra. Not pleasant!
 - Like a cobra spitting poison, the venom is intended to harm and kill.
 - This is what evil words can do.
- Verse 14, “their mouth is full of curses and bitterness”
 - “curses” are appeals to the supernatural, appeals to some power, to bring about injury or to seek someone’s ruin
 - And “bitterness” is using bitter, harsh words to affect someone, to hurt them deeply.
 - Its words of hatred and anger that also may come with violence.

- So verses 13-14 vividly explain that sin's corruption shows itself through our words.

Now look at verses 15-16, this is about sinful actions.

- These verses are talking about people's "path" of life.
- That their ways and their conduct are not peaceful.
- They are quick to kill and to spread violence against fellow humans.
- Sin produces evil and violence in society.
- Violence against one another, this is part of the downward spiral when people don't fear God.

So, we see clearly that the entire person is corrupted, especially as it relates to what people say and what people do.

So the court case is strong, Scripture has spoken, "it is written."

- All have turned aside from God, steered clear of him.
- Mankind has lost a God-centered worldview.
- And, apart from Christ, there is whole-person, whole-population corruption.

And now let's look at the third courtroom scene, the conviction,

THE CONVICTION IS: ALL ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE (19-20) [repeat]

Let's read the third section of our passage, verses 19-20,

¹⁹ "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

This section contains more law court imagery.

- So think of this section as the verdict, the conviction being laid down after the case has been made:
 - All are answerable to God, condemned because of sin.

Once again, Paul speaks here about the Law and the Jews, but he is making a broader point about all of humanity.

- The Jews had the law, but failed to do it. And so they are guilty.
- The law is good, but when combined with sinful humans, it does not provide righteousness, but it only provides the knowledge of sin.

- So the Law cannot not save, it can only bring about condemnation.

The chosen, the people of Israel, had the Law of God in their midst.

- But because they were unfaithful to that Law, they couldn't have a righteous standing before a holy God.
- So Israel is a "case study" for all of us. They had the very words of God!
- If they failed, with all their advantages, we too will certainly fail.
- And we have. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
- And because of this sin, no one is justified in the sight of God, the Judge of Judges, who justly punishes sin.

So what is the conviction in our courtroom scene?

Let me organize this conviction section into three truths.

First, no one speaks a defense.

- All mouths are shut on the defense team in this court case.
- "Every mouth stopped" before God, means that people are clearly guilty.
 - No excuses, no reasons, just silence.
- The passage is saying that all people are silent before a holy God who justly condemns.

We also see here, no one escapes judgment.

- Verse 19 says, "the whole world may be held accountable."
- This means the whole world is liable, subject to legal action, and responsible for the judgment.
- In our world today, it seems like people get away with stuff all the time.
- But, no one will get away with sin, no one will escape its penalty.
- We are all accountable to God on judgment day.

Third, in this conviction section we learn that, no one earns righteousness.

- All the way up in verse 10 it says, "None is righteous, no not one."
- And at the end here we read, "by works of the law no human being will be justified."
- The word "justified" here means, no one will be declared righteous.
 - Sound familiar to verse 10? Yep, same idea.
- In God's court, no one will be declared righteous by doing the deeds required by the Law.
- Because of the corruption of sin, it is simply not possible to do all the works of obedience to the Law.
- Righteousness must come from another source.

So, let's summarize quickly what we learned in Romans 3 as an illustration of human depravity.

- The **charge** has been made; all are under sin. (9)
- The **case** has been argued; all have turned aside. (10-18)
 - Corruption of the entire **perspective** (11, 18) worldview.
 - Corruption of the entire **population** (10-12). All, no one, etc.
 - Corruption of the entire **person** (13-17) - mind, throat, tongue, lips, feet, eyes... every part of us has been affected by sin.
 - That's total depravity, pervasive depravity.
- And the **conviction** has been announced; all are accountable and guilty.(19-20)
 - No one **speaks** a defense. (19a)
 - No one **escapes** judgment. (19b)
 - And no one **earns** righteousness. (20)
 - That's total inability, spiritual inability.

I want to share with you a quote from Douglas Moo.

- He has written some excellent commentaries on Romans.
- His words fit with what we have been talking about.
- He talks about the controlling metaphor or image of this passage. He says,

“The image, then, is of all humanity standing before God, accountable to him for willful and inexcusable violations of his will, awaiting the sentence of condemnation that their actions deserve.”

This quote gets at how this entire section in Romans should land on us.

- All humanity stands before the offended Judge of the world,
- We're accountable before him and we're sentenced to eternal punishment.
- This can be a hard passage to swallow amidst our politically correct society.
 - Sin controls, sin corrupts, sin convicts.
- These are very weighty, heavy truths about humanity.

We need to see and feel this desperate state of humanity without Christ.

- We need to feel the control of sin.
 - People are slaves to its power.
- We need to see the corruption of sin.
 - It has polluted all aspects of every person.
- And we need sense the weight of the conviction of sin.

- The whole world is guilty and answerable to God.

Before we leave this morning, I have a couple principles for application.

First, these truths about sin should drive us to humility.

- Passages like this should rightly humble us. I know that it humbles me.
- As I have prayed about this passage, humility is what has stood out to me.
- When I think about my life, my sins, my connection to corruption...I am humbled.
- Just thinking about this for a few minutes, causes me to feel heaviness.
- I realize that, apart from Christ, I am desperately sick, corrupted to the core.
- And there is nothing I can do on my strength to earn righteousness. Nothing.
- What is more, even though I am a Christian, I am no better than anyone else.
- I can't have pride or boast, all stand guilty and without excuse.
- All I can do is trust in the amazing grace of Christ. He said,
- "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."
- So we don't have to come up with excuses when we sin, we just come to Christ in humility, and he gives us rest for our souls.
- So let's renew our sense of humility before God this morning.

Secondly, these truths about sin should drive us to our knees.

- The eternal consequences of our passage are strong.
- If we take this passage seriously, the eternal state of each person apart from Christ is desperate. Do we remember to see the world in this way?
 - Think about your neighbors, your co-workers, your family members.
- We are driven to our knees in prayer.
- We must ask God to work, to have mercy, and to motivate us to reach out.
- Jesus saw people as harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, steering clear of God, wondering around without hope.
- So, Jesus told us to pray to God, the Lord of the harvest, to send out workers into his harvest field.
- Let's do that, let's pray for more workers, and maybe, just maybe, we will become those workers that we pray for.

Well, we have this bad news, but we know that this is not the end of the legal proceedings. Is it?

- Christ has been sacrificed on the cross.
- The conviction that we deserve fell on him, sin's penalty is death.
 - Christ took the punishment for all who believe.

- This is what Romans 3:25 says, “God put Christ forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” What good news!
- Now a great exchange has taken place before the court.
- Our conviction is been paid for and Christ’s righteousness is given to us.
- We will see all this explained in the next section of Romans. So stay tuned.
 - Justification is “by God’s grace as a gift”
 - Redemption is “in Christ Jesus.”
 - And “the righteousness of God through faith in Christ Jesus for all who believe.”
- So, we can sing Amazing Grace in the courtroom, because believers stand before a just God not guilty, justified and saved in Christ!

Growth Project

- Read this list of verses and jot down what they teach about the destiny and purpose of humans (Isaiah 43:6-7; 1 Cor 10:31; Rom 8:29; Eph 4:24).