

"God's Verdict on the World"
Romans 3:9-20
Dr. Jerry Nelson

In the Book of Romans, the Apostle Paul declares the "good news" (gospel) that God offers salvation from sin and destruction to all who will trust the person and saving work of Jesus. To help people understand their need to be "saved," Paul first, from 1:18-3:20, lays out the "bad" news that all people are justly under the wrath of God. In 1:18-32 he spelled out why even those who have never heard of Jesus are under God's wrath and in 2:1-29 he showed that many who think they are okay with God aren't. Now in 3:9-20 he summarizes this bad news, "As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

We read those words and something inside of us says, "That's not true! I know people who do good." Martin Luther correctly stated that this entire passage must be understood from God's perspective rather than ours. This passage describes how God see us, not how we see ourselves or others. (Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 86) We compare ourselves to each other and declare ourselves good or bad. God compares even our best deeds to himself and declares us guilty (Isaiah 64:6 "all our **righteous acts** are like filthy rags"). The Bible says the natural man is unable to please God. This is not because God is "picky" but because our good deeds are self-centered.

In these verses Paul shows us that the **essence** of sin is self-deification. God is, for us, at best, an afterthought, not the guiding person in our lives. We love ourselves more than God. It is our comfort, satisfaction and safety that dominate our motivations rather than God's glory. That's the **essence** of sin but I want to also show you what John Stott calls the **pervasiveness** of sin. (In Stott, *Romans*, 101) The **pervasiveness** of sin, for hundreds of years has been known as "total depravity." "Total depravity" does not mean that every person is as bad as they could be but it does mean every motive and every action is tainted by sin. I remember reading once that if sin were a blue dye, every human being would simply be a different shade of blue.

The **essence** of sin is our failure to live for the glory of God. The **pervasiveness** of sin is seen in how tainted with "self" every thought, word and deed truly is. And now we see the **universality** of sin. (Stott, 101) Paul uses repetition to make his point. Romans 3:10-12 "There is **no one** righteous, **not even one**; there is **no one** who understands, **no one** who seeks God. **All** have turned away, they have **together** become worthless; there is **no one** who does good, **not even one**."

Paul ends his description of the human predicament with these words in verse 19 "...so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Now look for the "good news" beginning in verse 21.

For a more thorough treatment of this text please link to: