

THERE IS NO ONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE

Romans 3:1-20

Key Verse: 3:10

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ..."

In chapter 2, we learned that God does not show favoritism. His righteous judgment is for all those who sin—both those who sin under the law (Jews) and without the law (Gentiles). In today's passage, Paul again deals with questions concerning the Jews. He also describes once again the sinful state of human beings without Jesus. His conclusion is that there is no one righteous, not even one. Recognizing this verdict against mankind is important, because it leads us to seek an answer to this serious problem.

I. GOD IS FAITHFUL (1-8)

Look at verses 1-2. *What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.* The Jews considered circumcision their trademark as God's chosen people. They often called the Gentiles "the uncircumcised" in a derogatory way. King Saul was seriously wounded in a battle. He asked his armor bearer to kill him because he didn't want to die in the hands of "the uncircumcised" (the Philistines; 1Sa 31:4). The Jews were proud of their circumcision that distinguished them from the Gentiles. But Paul said in Chapter 2 that their physical circumcision was meaningless (just as our baptism is meaningless today unless we have personal faith in Jesus). Only the circumcision of the heart matters. Anyone who repents their sins from the heart is one who is truly circumcised. Then a question arises: What is the advantage of being a Jew? Paul says that there are many. They were chosen by God to be a covenant people (Dt 4:8). The Messiah was sent from the Jews (Jn 4:22). They had many ancestors of faith to look up to, including Abraham, Moses, and David. They had a long spiritual history with many inspiring stories to tell their children. Most of all, the Jews were entrusted with the words of God, the advantage that Paul mentions specifically here (2). Why is being entrusted with the words of God such a blessing? At Mt. Sinai, God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments. He also sent many prophets to give the people his words of truth. God's words helped the Israelites to know who God is. His words taught them how to live by faith in God. God's words helped them to know what is right and what is wrong before God.

In Exodus 19:5-6, God told his people: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." God's plan was to bless the chosen people with his words so that they could be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God wanted them to be a nation of shepherds and Bible teachers who could help all peoples of the world to come to know God. Sadly, this plan did not work out, because the Jews rejected his purpose for them. They became proud. They considered the Gentiles not worthy of

God's blessings. They were entrusted with the words of God. But they failed to share the words of God with other peoples of the world. They abandoned God's purpose for them. It seemed that God had failed because of them.

So Paul asked the question: *What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness?* (3) What is Paul's answer? Look at verse 4. *Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."* God has been faithful even when his people were often unfaithful, turning to idol worship again and again. He faithfully kept all his promises. The biggest promise he kept was sending his one and only Son Jesus to save the sinful world. We know that God has been faithful to us even as we often are unfaithful to him.

Still some people may make a strange argument to defend their sinful life. They could say, as in Paul's human argument in verse 5 used to make the point, "If our bad behavior brings out God's love and justice more clearly, aren't we doing God a favor? Then, he should not be angry with us. He should not condemn us for our sins!" Look at verses 7-8. *Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"?* When people use this line of argument, they come to this perverse conclusion: "Let us do evil that good may result." This is absurd. Sin never brings glory to God, because sin by definition is an act against God. People try to rationalize their sins somehow and anyhow rather than repent before God. Paul says they use erroneous arguments and make slanderous claims. We know that some people say things like, "The loving God wouldn't condemn me," "It's God's job to forgive me," or "I am not a bad person." They try to rationalize their sins rather than repent before God. The truth is that the sin problem does not go away just because people rationalize it. Paul says that their condemnation is just! (8) God is just in bringing his wrath on the sinful world (5).

II. NO ONE IS RIGHTEOUS (9-20)

Look at verses 9-10. *What shall we conclude then? 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. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ..."* What is Paul's conclusion of the matter? It is this: When it comes to sin and salvation, no one has any advantage. It is because everyone has sinned before God. There is no one righteous, not even one. Again, what does it mean to be righteous? It means to have a right relationship with God. It is to be right with God. But no one can be right with God on their own, because there is no one without sin. There is no one righteous, not even one (10). Both Jews and Gentiles are under the power of sin (9). No one is innocent. Everyone is guilty. There are no exceptions.

Mother Theresa was a nun who devoted her entire life to take care of the poor and the sick in India. Many people respect her and consider her a saint. But even she needed Jesus to be saved from her sins. I respect Billy Graham, not only for helping many people through his lifetime of preaching, but also for setting a good example for

other servants of God in the area of money and women. As a young evangelist, he decided not to get into a car with another woman, even his secretary, unless a third person was present. He placed the money he made from his best-selling books in the care of the trustees and received monthly salary from the foundation. He is a great spiritual leader. But he would be the first one to tell you that he is a sinner and he needs Jesus. There is no one righteous, not even one. Paul adds in verse 11. ... *there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God*. Yes, there are millions of people who are searching for a god. They go to temples and bow down to all kinds of idols. But sadly they do not understand the God who loves them. They do not seek the God who sacrificed so much to save them from their sin and death.

Do you consider yourself a sinner? I didn't think I was a sinner when I first came to study the Bible as a young man. In fact, I was offended when my Bible teacher told me that I was a sinner. I said, "I have never been to jail. I am a pretty good person. Don't call me a sinner." I didn't realize how terrible sinner I was. Now, I know how terrible sinner I am before God. My sins are many, including pride, ingratitude, selfishness, lustful desires, and so on. Remembering how terrible sinner I am helps me to thank God for his grace of salvation. It's a miracle that a sinner like me is saved by God. I cannot thank the Lord Jesus enough, even if I praise him all my life!

In verses 12-18, Paul quotes various Scriptures from the Old Testament to show that everyone in the world has sinned and is under the power of sin. Verse 12 says: "*All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one*" (cf. Ps 14:3). Scientists today are working on artificial intelligence. Soon a sophisticated machine will be invented to read and record what is on people's minds. What would such a machine show if it scans our minds right now? I am afraid it will show many ugly things in my mind. I cannot say I am a man who does good before God's eyes. May God have mercy on me! Paul continues in verse 13, "*Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.*" "*The poison of vipers is on their lips*" (cf. Ps 5:9). In this verse, three parts of our body is mentioned—throat, tongue and lips, all pointing to one problem of the sinful people, that is, their spoken words. The throats of sinful people are like open graves. An open grave with rotting body would smell terrible. When people's minds are tainted with sin, what comes out of their mouths stinks. Paul says in verse 14, "*Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness*" (Ps 10:7). Some people today cannot speak without uttering cursing words or words that dishonor the name of God and Jesus. Their words are not only vulgar, filthy and blasphemous, but also deadly like the poison of vipers. There is a saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." I don't think this is entirely true. Slandering words can also kill a person. It is easy to tear down a person with stinging words rather than build up a person with encouraging words. We should use our mouths to speak the truth, to build up others with encouraging words. We should sing praise to the Lord for his blessings. Most of all, Paul says later in this letter that there is a very important function of our mouth in regard to our salvation. Romans 10:10 says: "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."

In addition to the mouth, Paul mentions other body parts to show how humanity has sinned before God—the feet and the eyes. Verses 15-17 are from Isaiah 59:7-8 and Psalm 36:1: *“Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* Many places of the world have been ruined by the trampling of people’s feet. They are polluted by people’s trash and destructive ways of living. Even an idyllic town like Charlottesville, Virginia, is turned into a place of fear and anxiety for young women because of sins. Above all, there is no fear of God before people’s eyes. They reject God. As Paul said in Romans 1, although they know God, they neither give thanks to him nor glorify him. The wrath of God is being revealed against their wickedness.

Look at verses 19-20. *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. 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.* Paul revisits the question of the law that the Jews held so dearly. They had the privilege of having the law of God. The law taught them what is right and what is wrong before God. But the law could not save them from their sins. No one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law (20). It is because no one can keep the law perfectly. Rather, the purpose of the law is to make us become conscious of our sin. The law is like a referee in a football game. The zebra can tell you what a legal move is and what would result in penalty. He cannot help you to score a touchdown. So what is Paul’s conclusion again? He says that the law says to the Jews to be silent. The law declares to them, “You are guilty.” Paul also says that the whole world is held accountable to God. Both Jews and Gentiles are guilty. There is no one righteous, not even one.

We feel depressed to read about the sinful humanity under God’s wrath as Paul describes it in Romans 1-3a. The world has become a terrible place, mainly because people have abandoned God and followed their foolish ways. So why does Paul describe the terrible state of mankind for us? He does so because it is important for us to know the spiritual reality that we face. Only by recognizing the problem, we begin to seek the solution. And the solution, as we will learn next week in Romans 3b, is Jesus. Everyone has sinned and everyone needs a Savior in Jesus!