

PARADISE LOST "DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES" ROMANS 3:9-20

You've no doubt heard it said, "We're all God's children." Martin Luther King, Jr., often used "God's children" in a general way to refer to all people. For example, "Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of *God's children*. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of *brotherhood*." But if all really are God's children spiritually, the gospel isn't good news. In fact, it's hardly news at all. Better to say that while all are God's creation, all are not his children apart from faith in Christ. The Apostle John, himself, says that people *become* children of God through believing in Jesus (Jn 1:12).

Consider what Pastor David Daniels has written: "I met Jesus in 1983. I grew up in a religious family, attended church almost every Sunday and learned a religious catechism. But I had no spiritual connection to Jesus until I heard the Gospel and responded in faith at 17 years old. At that time, I was adopted into the family of God. My relationship with God changed. I 'belonged' to Him (Romans 1:6).

When the scriptures assert that no one is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks for God, no one does good, no one fears God, they mean no one.

— James D. G. Dunn

"Nowhere does the Bible teach that all people are 'children of God.' In fact, the Bible states that all people are sinners (Romans 3:23), separated from God (Ephesians 2:12), enemies of Jesus (Philippians 3:18), lawless rebels (Titus 2:14) and haters of God (Romans 1:30). This is our natural, human condition. We only become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26). At conversion we become 'a people belonging to God' (1 Peter 2:9) and a 'people for His own possession' (Titus 2:14). This is the first step of any person's spiritual journey. It is the step to BELONG" (*Next Step Discipleship*, 27).

This Week's Core Competency

Humanity – I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

When Paul says, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" in Romans 3:23, does he really mean "all," that is every single person without exception? Sometimes "all" (Gk. *pas*), contrary to the statement "all means all and that's all all means," is limited by the context, but that's not the case in Romans 3:23. One author writes: "If we look at the wider context of Romans 1-3, we'll see that Paul uses the word all in Romans 3:23 to speak of all humanity since creation, both Jews and Greeks. But in Romans 3, Paul goes even further to show that the word all in Romans 3:23 doesn't just mean 'all ethnic groups have sinned,' 'all in general have sinned,' or that 'every kind of person has sinned.' Rather Paul shows that each and every individual of fallen humanity has sinned. In Romans 3:10-11, Paul makes this crystal clear: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.

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All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.' The fact that Paul denies the goodness of any fallen individual in Romans 3:10-11 clarifies his meaning of all in Romans 3:23. There would be little reason for Paul to deny that any individual is good, not even one, if 'all' always meant 'all' without any qualification. Thus, we see that the word all in Romans 3:23 alone isn't sufficient to prove that each and every individual descended from Adam has sinned. But the context of Romans 3 demonstrates that that's exactly what Paul means" (Tom Hicks, "Does 'All' Ever Mean 'All' in Scripture," <https://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/founders-ministries-blog/does-all-ever-mean-all-in-scripture.html>).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 3:9-20

9 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. 10 As it is written:

"There is no one righteous, not even one;

11 there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.

12 All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."

13 "Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit."

"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and
bitterness."

15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;

16 ruin and misery mark their ways,

17 and the way of peace they do not know."

18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

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. 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.

Cf., another translation

9 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, 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."

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. (ESV)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

* Circle "we" 2x in v. 9a.

* Put parentheses around "Not at all!" in v. 9.

* Bracket "under the power of sin" in v. 9.

* Circle "worthless" in v. 12.

* Bracket "not even one" in vv. 10, 12.

* Underline "throats," "tongues," "lips," and "mouths" in vv. 13-14.

* Double underline "feet," "ways," and "way" in vv. 15, 16, 17.

* Circle "the law" in vv. 19-20.

* Box "so that" indicating *result* in v. 19.

* Box "therefore" indicating *result* in v. 20.

* Highlight "works of the law" in v. 20.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Paul uses "we" three times in verse 9. To whom does the term refer each time?
2. "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin" (v. 9). Describe what you under the power of sin looked like in your pre-Christian life.
3. The fact that people are religious refutes Paul's words, "there is no one . . . who seeks God," doesn't it? Explain.
4. Explain how Paul can truthfully say, "There is no one who does good, not even one" (v. 12).
5. Identify what "throats," "tongues," "lips," and "mouths" figuratively refer to and what that suggests (cf., Mt 12:34; Jas 3:2b).
6. Put what verses 15-17 mean in your own words.
7. Put the point of verse 19 in your own words.
8. Explain the *contrast* in verse 20.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about how you reconcile what Paul says about people (vv. 10-18) and what the people you know are like.

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

In Romans 3:9-20 Paul brings the opening argument of his epistle to a close, concluding in verse 20: "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." In other words, obedience to the law is not the means whereby people are justified; it is the means whereby people are made aware that they are under the power of sin, which precludes justification by means of obedience to the law. The following summary of the section makes this perfectly clear: "While the brief questions that open v. 9 connect it with the dialogue of vv. 1-8, it is also clear that Paul is moving toward a summary and application of the teaching he has been developing since 1:18. He labels this long section an 'accusation.' In it, he charges all people, Jews and Gentiles, with being 'under the power of sin' (v. 9b). A string of loosely related OT quotations confirms the universality and describes the variety of the sin that so characterizes all humanity (vv. 10-18). Finally, in vv. 19-20, Paul draws out the implication of this universal bondage to sin: all stand condemned before the divine bar of judgment and are unable to escape that condemnation by anything they do. Thus is the way prepared for the proclamation of God's righteousness in Christ (vv. 21-26)" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 198).

Paul begins by asking whether Jews are any better than Gentiles in the sight of God and answering that they are not. After all, he has already accused both Gentiles and Jews of unrighteousness in 1:18-3:8. Then to confirm his answer and substantiate his accusation, he "daisy-chains" at least six loose quotations from a number of Old Testament passages, using a technique the rabbis called "pearl-stringing." Rather than translate the Hebrew texts, he quotes the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament called the Septuagint (LXX) but not necessarily verbatim. On these quotations, one commentator makes the following general remarks: "Paul was writing to a primarily Gentile congregation, so he concluded (rather than began) his argument with an appeal to Scripture.

Contrast the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who took the opposite approach when he addressed a primarily Jewish readership. The collection of passages Paul used both affirmed the universality of sin (vv. 10-12) and showed its pervasive inroads into all areas of individual and corporate life (vv. 13-18). In verses 10-12, a statement of the universality of sin opens and closes the passage. Sin has affected human intellect, emotions, and volition: all aspects of human personality. Note the repetition of 'none,' as well as 'all' and 'not even one'—all universal terms. In verses 13-18, Paul described the words (vv. 13-14), acts (vv. 15-17), and attitudes (v. 18) of man as tainted by sin" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 49, www.soniclight.com).

Before dismissing Paul's point as overstated consider its sense in light of Ecclesiastes 7:20, which may be the passage quoted in verse 10, "Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and *never sins*." People are neither as bad as they might be nor as good as they should be. While there are some relatively decent people in the world, nobody's perfect, which explains why everybody needs the gospel.

Some of the passages Paul quotes are not directed specifically at Jews; in fact, Jews read them in the synagogue to bolster the presumption of Jewish righteousness over against Gentile wickedness (see James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, *Romans 1-8*, 157). However, Paul's comment, to the effect that whatever the Old Testament says it says to those to whom it was written, debunks the notion that Jews are excluded from the scope of sin and renders the whole world accountable to God. "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law" (v. 20) because "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin" (v. 9).

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Because all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are under the power of sin, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by doing the works of the law, since no one is capable of doing the works of the law.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the message of Romans 1:1-7 and your response to it.

Describe how the "moral continuum" can be used to communicate the message of this passage.

Explain how illustrations pertaining to speech can be used to persuade people they need the gospel.

Talk about how our assumptions regarding people can get in the way of sharing the gospel.

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 9 **we** The exact meaning of the verb Paul uses and whom he has in mind—"we Jews," "we Gentiles," "we Christians," "we apostles," or Paul himself—are uncertain. The translation in the ESV, "we Jews," is adopted by many modern English versions.

v. 9 **Not at all!** "There is a *prima facie* clash between Paul's answer here to 'are we (Jews) better than they (Gentiles)?' and his answer in verse 2 to 'what advantage then hath the Jew?'—'Much every way.' But 'Much every way' has reference to the privileges which the Jews, as the elect nation, enjoyed; 'No, in no wise' relates to their standing before God. Privileges or no privileges, Jews and Gentiles stand equally in need of His grace" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC, 98). "The Jews have an unassailable salvation-historical advantage: God has spoken to them and he has given them promises that will not be retracted (vv. 1-2). But, as Paul has repeatedly emphasized in chap. 2, the Jews have no advantage at all when it comes to God's impartial judgment of every person 'according to his or her works'" (Moo, 201). In a nutshell, "Jews have advantages over Gentiles (2:17-20a; 3:1-2), but God does not give them preferential treatment" (John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 449).

v. 9 **under the power of sin** Lit., "under sin" (ESV). I.e., Gentiles and Jews "stand under sin's power and control and under the condemnation that results from it (cf., 1:18; 2:5)" (449), that is, "they are helpless captives to its power" (Moo, 201).

v. 10 **even as it is written** "Verses 10-18, contain the confirmation of the doctrine of the universal sinfulness of men by the testimony of the Scriptures. These passages are not found consecutively in any one place in the Old Testament" (Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 78). "'Even as it is written' is the formula Paul typically uses to introduce quotations of the OT. But nowhere else does Paul use a quotation so long or one drawn from so many different (at least six) OT passages . . . Paul's purpose in citing these verses is clearly to substantiate the accusation of v. 9, and, in particular, his claim that sin is universal . . . The first line (v. 10) is the heading of what follows, with the last line (v. 18) coming back to the same theme in an *inclusio*. Verses 11-12 develop the first line with a series of five generally synonymous repetitions of the theme 'there is no one righteous,' all introduced with 'there is no,' and with a reference to 'all people' breaking them up in the middle (v. 12a). The next four lines (vv. 13-14) describe sins of speech, each line referring to a different organ of speech. Verses 15-17, on the other hand, focus on sins of violence against others" (Moo, 202). "The catena consists of seven citations of varying lengths, five of them from the Psalms," i.e., Eccl 7:20; Ps 14:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Isa 59:7-8; Ps 36:1 (Dunn, 149).

v. 12 **worthless** Or "useless" (NASB); "unprofitable" (NKJV); "gone wrong" (GNT); cf., "corrupt" (Ps 14:3; 53:3). They are "worthless" in that "there is not one who does good." We might say they are all "good for nothing"
vv. 13-14 **throats, tongues** . . . Cf., Mt 12:34. The terms Paul uses in these verses are examples of a figure of speech called *metonymy*, which puts the name of one thing for another that is closely related, e.g., "the White House" for "the President." Here parts of the body used in talking are put for speech. "Taken from three similar denunciations of the wicked in the Psalms, vv. 13-14 depict the sinfulness of human speech" (Moo, 203).

vv. 15, 16 **feet, ways** Again Paul uses *metonymy*; this time to refer to peoples' actions, behavior, or ways of life.

vv. 19, 20 **under the law** "The first occurrence of 'law' (*nomos*) refers to the series of quotations just concluded. Since these quotations are drawn from the Psalms and Isaiah, *nomos* does not designate, as it usually does in Paul, the law of Moses, the torah, but the OT canon (cf. also 1 Cor. 9:8, 9; 14:21, 34; Gal. 4:21b). The second occurrence of *nomos*-it speaks to those who are in the law'-may also refer to the OT as a whole, or it may revert to the more usual narrower meaning, 'Mosaic law'. . . Paul's purpose is to insist that the OT passages quoted in vv. 10-18, while not all originally directed to Israel as a whole, are, indeed, 'speaking to' the Jews generally. They cannot be excluded from the scope of sin" (205). "All that the law says it says to those within the law; so when the law speaks a word of condemnation from which 'not even one' can escape, it says it above all to the people of the law" (Dunn, 157).

v. 20 **works of the law** "Interpreters of Paul have traditionally thought that 'works of the law' refers to anything done in obedience to the law, particularly those 'good works' that one might put forth as a reason why God should accept a person . . . But especially popular of late has been the idea that 'works of the law' is Paul's way of referring to Jewish existence-to the Jews' special covenantal relationship with the Lord, a relationship that came to be expressed especially in the Jews' observance of those 'works of the law,' like circumcision, avoidance of certain food, and observance of special days, that marked them off from their Gentile environment. If we interpret the phrase this way, Paul's point is that the covenant, as the Jews understood it, is inadequate to maintain them in right standing with the Lord. On this view, in other words, the problem Paul has with the Jews here does not have to do with their *performance* of the law but with their *possession* of it" (Moo, 206-207; contra Dunn, 158-60).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

In a 2013 Time magazine article, author Maia Szalavitz writes, "In the study, published in the Journal of Neuroscience, researchers found that people are more likely to give when they think it will make them feel better. They donate, for example, when they feel hope about putting smiles on those expectant and suffering faces. And that hope, or similar feel-good sensations, are driven by the brain's reward systems." When Paul says, "there is no one who does good" in Romans 3:12, this is exactly what he is talking about. It has become popular in our culture to be a do-gooder. Beginning with the TOMS shoes phenomenon in 2006, many companies have followed suit and created give back campaigns. While I love the concept of a company donating to someone in need as a result of my purchase and don't want to judge motives, the fact remains these companies are making a lot of money. Whether motivated by gain or warm fuzzy feelings, many of the good deeds we do are rooted in selfishness. Unless our deeds are done for God's glory alone, we fall under the description of the people Paul writes about in our passage. Our righteousness is found in Christ alone, not in our good deeds. When we serve others out of our position of righteous, not expecting to earn favor with God or receive anything in return, our deeds are indeed good. It's a great reminder to teach our kids to do good with pure motives.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 3:9-20

1. As it is written: "There is _____ righteous, not even _____." (v. 10)
2. According to verse 18, how do these people feel about God?
3. What does the Law do according to verse 20?

What Do You Think

Are you ever tempted to look at other people and think you aren't as bad as they are? Read James 2:10. Is your sin any "better" than someone else's sin?

What R U Going To Do

Even good deeds done with wrong motives are sin. Many times we serve others because we expect something in return. Ask God to give you an opportunity to serve someone without expecting anything in return. Remember to be thankful He used you for His glory!

Core Comp

Humanity - I believe God loves everyone and we all need Jesus as Savior.

Memory Verse

Romans 2:8 - *But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be anger and wrath.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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