

The Bad News

Text: Romans 3:9-20

By Pastor Trent Boedicker

Stories of violence have dominated the news this past week. Eight days ago, on August 3rd, people were shopping at a busy Walmart in El Paso Texas, when a young man walked into the store carrying a rifle, and began shooting. The crowd fled as quickly as they could. Some people took cover under tables, while others hid behind shipping containers. Police quickly arrived on the scene and the shooter was soon apprehended. But the incident left 22 people dead, and 24 injured. This was one of the deadliest mass shootings in Texas history, and the seventh deadliest in modern US history.

Just thirteen hours later, the country was shocked again by the report of another shooting, this time in Dayton, Ohio where a gunman opened fire downtown killing 10 people and injuring 27 others.

When we hear stories like this we are grieved. Our hearts break for the families who lost loved ones, and for the communities that have been shaken by violence. We can't help but ask the question, what is wrong with our world? All week, the media has been trying to decipher the motives that would cause a person to commit such terrible atrocities. Reporters have delved into their backgrounds, and people have gotten caught up in the debate about where to cast the blame. But in the midst of it all, we sense that there is a much deeper problem with humanity.

In the book, "Fallen: A Theology of Sin," one author says,

We read the news and ask, what is wrong with [the world]? Terrorism, ethnic cleansing, child abuse, robbery, and sex trafficking together cry out that this world is not the way it is supposed to be.

With honest self-examination we may also ask: What is wrong with us? ...slander, gossip, neglect of the poor, and disunity exclaim that we too are not the way we are supposed to be.

Seldom do we vocalize: What is wrong with me? But we may wonder: Pride, greed, selfishness, discontent should not characterize me, but too often they do... Why does God's glory often not capture my heart? The human phenomenon bears witness that something is wrong—with the world, with us, and with me.¹

That's the focus of our passage this morning. In Paul's letter to the Romans, the apostle is eager to share the gospel with his readers. But he realizes that we are unable to comprehend the good news of Jesus Christ, until we come to terms with the bad news of our human condition. He tells us that we are sinners, in need of a Savior.

This isn't easy for us to hear. Most people would like think they are doing just fine on our own. They argue: "Wait a minute. Don't tell me I'm a sinner! I try my best to live a moral life. I'm a good person. I may not be perfect, but I think I'm better than most." However, the issue isn't how I measure up to others; the issue is how I measure against God's holy standard. If we

are honest with ourselves, we admit that there is something wrong (not just with the world, and not just with society). There something wrong with our heart, only God can heal.

Paul devotes the first three chapters of Romans to the bad news. He takes an honest look at humanity and comes to the conclusion that we have a problem. We are so easily led astray. We struggle to do the right thing, and all too often find ourselves doing what is wrong. When we do good, our motives are not always what they should be. No matter how hard we try, we fall miserably short of the people we were made to be.

This isn't how things were meant to be. When God created the universe everything he made was perfect, including humanity. We were designed to reflect God's image, and have the capacity to do tremendous good in this world. But along the way, something happened. The first man and woman turned from God in the garden, and disobeyed his command. From that moment on the human heart has been corrupted by sin.

Paul describe the extent of our problem in Romans 3. These are not easy verses to read, but it is necessary to recognize our sin, if we are to embrace the love of the Savior.

The passage tells us that all people are sinners.

Look at verses 9-10. The apostle asks, *“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one.’”*

We have a tendency to compare ourselves with others, in an effort to make ourselves look better, so Paul made it clear that everyone has a problem with sin. He states it in the most absolute terms possible: all people are under sin, no one is righteous, not even one. Lest we try to point at someone else, and say “no, they're the ones with the problem, not me,” Paul examines every segment of humanity: the pagan world, those who consider themselves upright and moral, and the religious people of his day. And he comes the same conclusion. We have a problem.

Earlier, in chapter one, he addresses the Gentiles world and notes how foolish human beings have become. They have turned away from the one true God to worship idols. That was something he had witnessed firsthand, during his missionary journeys. In nearly every city he visited, there were temples dedicated to the Greek and Roman gods: like Zeus, Apollos, Aphrodite... among many others. The farmer prayed to the storm god asking for him to send the rains when it was time to crops to be planted. The soldier prayed to the god of war when he headed into to battle, asking for victory. Travelers prayed to the god of the sea when they set sail across the waters, asking for safe passage. The sick prayed to the god of healing when their health was failing, asking to be renewed. There were all kinds of gods and goddess in their pantheon. And pagan worship often devolved into drunken revelry in the streets. It broke Paul's heart to see people carried away by error, to the point that they would kneel before statues made of wood of stone. These were counterfeit gods, unable to save.

We sometimes wonder how people in the ancient world could be so blind, but people today are no different. Idolatry is looking to something else, in place of God, to provide meaning, happiness and security for our lives, and don't we do the same thing? Modern idols might take a different form, but we have them too.

Scripture tells us that there is no excuse. Turn back to Romans 1:20-21. Paul writes,

²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (NASB)

God has made himself known in a general sense to all people. When you look at the stars at night, or stand on the shore of the ocean, or climb to the top of a mountain, we find evidence of a wise and powerful and benevolent Creator who brought the universe into existence and gave us life. If we know nothing else about him, it is clear that he has to be greater than us.

We saw some beautiful things on our vacation. One of the first days in Arizona, we drove to the southern rim of Grand Canyon. We had never been there before. I've seen pictures, but there are some things you have to experience in person. It was awesome. Stepping to the edge of the vast chasm makes you feel so small. We stopped at several lookouts, for a slightly different view, trying to take it all in, and each one was more amazing than the last. It almost felt too majestic to be real, like someone had stretched an enormous canvas across the horizon, and painted a masterpiece. Standing there, you couldn't help but realize that we worship a great and glorious God.

Even those without Scripture have access to basic information about God. He is real, and wants to be found. This knowledge alone isn't enough to save us, but it points us in the right direction and urges us to pursue him with all our heart.

But this is the problem. The apostle tells us that even though the Lord has revealed himself in this way, the world does not honor him, but people have chosen to exchange the truth of God for a lie. Instead of seeking our creator, we worship gods of their own design. That a pretty bleak assessment of mankind. How are we doing? Do we measure up? No, not even close.

But these verses are talking about the pagans, right, not the rest of us? As Paul wrote these words, he could almost hear the religious people of his day saying, "preach it, brother! Tell those sinners how much they deserve God's wrath!" But he wasn't finished. He moves on, and speaks to those who considered themselves good and moral people, showing them that they were no better. He was thinking especially of his fellow countrymen. In some ways, the Jewish people had an advantage over the Gentiles. They were the people of God. The Lord had appeared to their ancestors. They were given the Torah, the Law of Moses. They had the Scriptures to guide them. But its one thing to know the commands of God, and its another thing to keep them. Paul shows the religious people that they too fell short.

Turn to Romans 2:1. He says, *“Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”*

It’s easy to point out the failures in others. That’s what our kids like to do. “Daddy, he did this. Daddy he did that.” Okay, that isn’t good. But what are you doing? -- The apostle urges his readers to examine their own lives. Could we honestly claim to kept all the commands? You’ve never disobeyed your parents. You have never been jealous of your neighbor. You never taken something that didn’t belong to you? You have never told a lie? You never created an idol in your heart or taken the Lord’s name in vain? We’re just getting started. There is a massive list. Even if it were true, you have followed the letter of the law, that doesn’t let you off the hook. The Law speaks to our attitudes and desires as well, telling us: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might,”* (Dt. 6:5). Who can say they have consistently lived up to this standard throughout their entire life? No one, other than Jesus.

All of the sudden, those who were patting themselves on the back for being so virtuous found themselves feeling a little convicted. Not only have they practiced the same kinds of sins as others, but they were guilty of pride as well. Maybe we haven’t kept all of God’s commands. Maybe we haven’t always lived exactly the way that we should. M. That’s a warning to us. Sometimes the people who come from a religious background have a harder time accepting the gospel than others, because they think that they have it all together. We see people in the world living wild and crazy lives, and say “I don’t have those kinds of problems.” Maybe not, but we have problems of our own. // We are tempted to look at all of the good things we have done: the meetings we’ve attended, the hours we have served, the rituals we have observed, but that isn’t enough. God sees right through the outer façade and knows the inner condition of our heart. - “What then? Are we any better than them? Not at all...” The apostle shows us that all people (Jews and Gentiles) are sinners, in need of God’s mercy.

The passage also shows us that sin corrupts our entire being.

In Romans 3, Paul strings together a list of quotations from the OT to demonstrate how much of a mess sin makes in our lives. Look at verse 10...

as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one; ¹¹ There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; ¹² All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one.” ¹³ “Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving,” “The poison of asps is under their lips”; ¹⁴ “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness”; ¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood, ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their paths, ¹⁷ And the path of peace they have not known.” ¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Romans 3:10–18)

Notice how every aspect of our existence has been influenced by the power of sin: our mind, our mouths, our feet, and our eyes. One commentator explains:

This list serves to affirm what theologians speak of as total depravity, not that man in his natural state is as bad as he can possibly be, but rather that his entire being is adversely affected by sin. His whole nature is permeated with it.ⁱⁱ

It is like a poison that works its way through the bloodstream, wreaking havoc on our entire body. If left untreated, it is lethal,

Sin corrupts our thinking. Verse 11 says, “*There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.*” At first glance, it might seem to us that people have the desire to know God. After all, look at all the different religions in the world. Doesn’t that suggest we naturally seek the Lord? No. It tells us how confused we are and how easily we are led astray. People are carried away by every wind of doctrine, choosing to believe what they want to hear, refusing to listen to anything that brings conviction. The human race has turned away from that knowledge to worship a god of our own design.

The phrase caught my attention. I’m used to driving in small town Ohio, where the roads are simple. You take a left turn to go this direction. You take a right turn to go that direction. But while we were on vacation, we found ourselves driving through big cities where the highways going in every direction. Rush hour traffic is bumper to bumper. If you miss your exit you’re in trouble. That’s not for me. I’ll admit, I am a wimp. Charity graciously did most of the driving, and I handled the navigation, but even that was stressful. We were in San Diego in five o'clock traffic and the GPS said, “take the next exit,” so we did. Then we get a call from Charity’s sister who is ahead of us, and she says, hey don’t take such and such a road it will lead you downtown, and we looked at each other and said oops. Fortunately, it wasn’t too late to get back to where we needed to be. There was one road in particular that kept giving us trouble. The phone said “turn right onto interstate-5.” But we couldn’t tell whether we were supposed to be in this lane or that lane. It was all so confusing, and before we figured it out, we had missed our turn.

And so the human race has turned from God, and we are unable to navigate our way back to him. We are lost and confused, unable to make sense of spiritual things, blinded by sin.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV84) tells us, “*The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*” Maybe you can think back to a time in your life before you knew the Lord when someone tried to tell you about Jesus. You listened, but at the time, it didn’t make any sense to you. It was almost like they were speaking a foreign language. But one day, it was like the lights came on, and you started to understand. You didn’t know what was happening, but the Holy Spirit was stirring in your heart, opening your eyes to the gospel, and you came to believe.

On our own, we do not seek God, He is the one who seeks after us. Apart of his intervention, no one would be found.

Sin corrupts our speech. Verse 13-14 use as serious of metaphors to describe how evil our words can be. “*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.*” What a vivid

picture. Imagine coming face to face with a venomous snake. It is coiled on the ground in front of you, hissing, ready to strike with deadly fangs. Our words can be just as deadly. We've all experienced that in one way or another. People say ugly things, and tear each other down. You've probably been on the receiving end. Someone is angry at you for whatever reason, and they lash out with their tongue saying unkind things. "You idiot! What were thinking! I can't believe how dense you are!" They're only words, but they sting. Words can leave wounds that never completely heal. And as much as we hate to admit it, there have probably been moments when we've been on the giving end as well. Without even thinking, you open your mouth to complain, or to criticize, or to talk about someone behind their back. Afterwards, you regret saying those things, and wish you could hit the backspace button and delete those words, but the damage has already been done.

James warns us about the destructiveness of our words. He says,

Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. James 3:5-6 (NIV84)

Sin corrupts our **relationships**. Verse 15 says, "*Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ ruin and misery mark their ways, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know.*" The verse not only points to the physical violence, we see in the world, but it describes all types of conflict. Because of sin, we have trouble getting along with others, even those who are closest to us. There is conflict in the family. There is conflict between neighbors and friends. There is conflict in the workplace. Wherever we go, tension and strife seem to follow. It wasn't always that way. Before the fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect harmony with one another, and with the Lord. But things changed in their relationships when they took the forbidden fruit. As God confronted them in garden, asking "what have you done?" Adam blamed his wife, and Eve blamed the Lord. Still today, sin separates us from God and drives us apart from one another. One of the most painful experiences we can have is a broken relationship.

These are just a few examples of how sin has corrupted our being. It affects every aspect of our lives. One commentator explains, that "...the problem is not just that [we] commit sins; the problem is that [we] are enslaved to sin. What is needed, therefore, is a new power to break in and set us free—a power found only in the gospel of Jesus Christ."ⁱⁱⁱ

Conclusion –

Sin leaves us guilty before God. Look at verse 19. "*Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God.*" There is nothing we could say to justify ourselves... no excuse that we could make that would change our position... no way to pass the blame onto someone else... The passage uses the imagery of a courtroom. The evidence has been examined. The arguments have been made. The verdict has been reached. We have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But praise the Lord, this is not the final word.

The passage confronts us with the bad news of our human condition, but in the verses that follow the apostle goes on to share the good news of Jesus Christ. There is hope in the savior. God loves us, and was willing to go to unbelievable lengths to rescue us from our sin. He entered this world, taking on flesh and blood, so that he could bear the penalty we deserve on the cross. And he rose from the grave to fill us with new life. “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

These verses humble us, forcing us to be honest with ourselves and with God. We come to realize that we have no righteousness of our own to merit God’s favor. All of our pride and self-confidence melts away, and we cling only to the cross of Jesus.

The passage gives us a greater appreciation for God’s grace. It’s like standing at the edge of Grand Canyon, and marveling at its beauty. When we begin to realize the depths of our sin, and the chasm that once stood in the way separating us from God, we are overwhelmed that he was willing to reach across the divide to show mercy. How awesome is God’s love for us! How wonderful is his salvation! And elderly Christian once said, “my memory is fading but there are two things I will never forget: I am a great sinner, but Jesus Christ is a great Savior.”

ⁱ Christopher W. Morgan, *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*, p.133-134

ⁱⁱ Harrison, E. F. (1976). [Romans](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians* (Vol. 10, p. 40). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

ⁱⁱⁱ Moo, D. J. (1996). [The Epistle to the Romans](#) (p. 210). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.