

# God's crushing verdict

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to have the Bible reading now. So we're reading from Romans chapter 3, verses 9 through to verse 20. So Romans 3, verse 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, as it is written.

No one is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless.

No one does good. Not even one. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips.

Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery. And the way of peace they have not known.

[ 1 : 07 ] There is no fear of God before their eyes. 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.

For by the works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Dave's going to come up and speak to us soon from that passage.

Just now would be a great time if you have kids age three to year two at school. We have a program called Grace Kids. Where kids will learn more about God and be looked after. Just out in the grass area between the hall and the auditorium.

That's where that's happening. So if you guys would like to head out now. Just while that's happening, before Dave comes up, I just thought I'd read a part of the short article excerpt that was on the bulletin.

I'll just read that to us. I've been really enjoying the messages on Romans that we've been going through. Obviously all parts of the Bible are extremely valuable, but it's just been so good to hear the messages from Romans just presenting the gospel so clearly.

[ 2 : 27 ] The article says, Some would argue that Paul's letter to the Romans is not for the faint-hearted. It confronts us with the reality of God's justice and his considered commitment to judging sin, which must include my sin.

But coming to terms with sin is not natural or easy for us. God makes clear that sin is a self-deifying attitude, resulting in self-asserting actions against both God and people around us.

But our dishonest, self-excusing view of self refuses to accept that our rebellion against God is as offensive as God declares it to be, deserving his unrestrained wrath. Individuals giving expression to their ruthless self-centeredness are more inclined to attempt to dismantle any notion of God's righteousness than to admit sin and guilt before him.

However, the mess of life cannot be ignored, even by the most dishonest. People know they are broken and dysfunctional, behind the image of happiness and success. In their more honest moments, they long for something better.

They sense that they are made for something better. That's why the gospel of Jesus is great good news, announcing that God has intervened in history to put things right, to put people right so that the good life may be enjoyed.

[ 3 : 34 ] So the gospel is very much for the faint-hearted. Come unto me, you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give rest for your souls. Yeah, if Dave would like to come up now, we'll hear from that section in Romans.

Well, I'd like to start this morning by quoting some song lyrics. It's a pop song. I think it's pop.

I don't know. I don't know music and genre as well enough. It's by John Bellion, if you know John Bellion, and the song is called The Internet. So here's some lyrics from this song. Life became dangerous the day we all became famous.

No one cares if you're happy, just as long as you claim it. No one cares if you have it, just as long as they think you do. I don't need the foot.

I just need you to think I kick it. I don't need the wood. I just need you to think I hit it. I don't need the good. I just need you to think I did it.

[ 4 : 38 ] I don't need the good. I don't need the good. I don't need the word. I just need you to think I said it. I don't need to learn. I just need you to think I get it. I don't need the sermon.

This might be relevant right now. I just need you to think I read it. I don't need the sermon. I don't need the sermon. And then it just repeats just as long as they think you do.

and it's quite a very like bouncy tune but it's quite a piercing social commentary isn't it do you find that piercing I think what he what he's saying is substance reality doesn't count it's not important to get by in the world today the only thing that counts is if people accept whatever image of yourself that you present to the world does that do you think that describes the day we're living in now as much as the internet has changed the way we live this thinking is has been around far longer than the internet just take the people of Israel when they're appointing their first king king Saul this is kind of relevant to the kids talk who did who do they choose like who's going to be their leader what qualities are they going to look for well they look around and go oh there's a guy whose head and shoulders above the rest Pete might have been chosen that day who knows but they pick Saul he is he is tall he can tower over our enemies he can keep us safe and here's God's here's what God says in 1 Samuel 16 man mankind looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart this thinking has been around since the beginning of human history human beings we were made in the image of God each of us were meant to reflect the character the substance of God in everything we did every word we speak all our choices as we engage in the world but instead of expressing God's character the substance we often settle for just getting one another's praise by what we present on the outside like Adam and Eve who so fig leaves fig leaves I don't know leaves together to cover their shame psychologist Larry Crabb he says that's a picture of how we relate to one another how we relate to God we have a covering we present an image a mask a layer so that you you accept me based on that layer because if you get too close and see what I'm really like that's too dangerous you might reject me we're bouncing off each other we're all presenting these layers not the substance of God's character

I wouldn't blame you if you're thinking at this point what has this got to do with Romans 3 and the Bible reading we just read here's how I think it connects Romans 3 9 to 20 and Romans 1 to 3 which we've been looking at for a few weeks now it's like a mirror it's it's like a MRI scan that tells us what I am really like what you are really like what all humanity is really like and it bypasses any image any mask that we present to the world and it shows us the substance it shows us the reality the true condition of our hearts it is difficult to hear it is difficult to accept and our normal way of operating in the world like that song was talking about it doesn't care about substance it doesn't help us to hear what God says to us this morning it's going to be in direct competition to what God says to us this morning because if my self-assessment based off the approval I get from others like I want you to think I'm a good husband

I'm a good father a good pastor a good whatever whatever if my self-assessment based off your approval says one thing but God's assessment says my heart is corrupt I've got to choose which assessment is me which one's more accurate it's hard to accept so I went to the dentist with Emma a few years ago for a general check up she went first and I was a bit nervous in the waiting room and she came out with a glowing report like her teeth are amazing I was like oh good that gave me confidence went in let's just say I got a different report the dentist had something very different to say to me and driving home I felt deflated I felt like my ego was just gone I even resented Emma's I'm not sure if I told you this but I resented your glowing report

[10:15] I'm just what because it highlighted my problems it wasn't pleasant it wasn't pleasant to hear that some of my teeth had rotting holes you're not going to look at my smile any the same after this but they've been filled what if my dentist had just lied to me and gone I'll just keep what you're doing keep keep brushing the way you are your teeth look great wouldn't be a very good dentist he didn't want my mouth to rot it was loving truth Romans 1 to 3 is an assessment of our condition that is hard to accept but it comes from a place of love God doesn't want us to rot it's hard to accept but it comes from a place of love so before we get we're about to dive into the passage but

I think we need to ask ourselves before we hear this will you entertain the possibility that God knows you better than you know you will you allow the righteous judge to show you what you're really like what I'm really like or are you going to just cling to your own self-assessment that you think is true because others are approving what they see in you okay well let's dive in shall we please have your Bibles open to Romans chapter 3 or just listen along so verse 9 verse 9 gives us Paul's main point he's been driving home from chapter 1 verse 18 and he's now reaching the climax he says in verse 9 we have already charged that all both Jews and Greeks

Jews and non-Jews all are under sin whether the openly immoral person the morally sensitive person the religiously privileged person none of us live up to the good we know we should be doing none of us live up to the knowledge of God his character we should be so Paul finishes this main point this main section by bringing home scripture to bear witness to prove that even the Jewish people are not righteous and if the Jews fall short even while having God's perfect law than all humanity too falls short so in a sense these verses there's nothing new here it's kind of a summary it's a climax he's already made the case and now he's bringing God's word as witness he's adding further weight to what he said but he does use a new phrase if you notice in verse 9 to describe what is the root problem for us all what is the problem why aren't we righteous we've got a new phrase here all are under sin that's an interesting expression isn't it this is more than saying that people are basically good and sometimes we get it wrong it's not just saying that people commit sins like lying and cheating and gossiping and slandering and so on and so on it's not just saying that we commit sins any Jew of Paul's day would openly admit that they sin they commit sins and that's why they need the sacrificial system

Paul is saying something more than that he's saying that we are under sin he's describing sin as as a force a power a controlling principle over our lives that keeps us captive we are under the control of sin this is quite a claim because Jews would have thought of themselves as under God that God is the controlling principle of their life Paul is saying no sin is the controlling principle of your life it's a big claim and Paul backs it up by quoting scripture itself quoting the Old Testament the Jews boasted in having the law well listen to what the law says so here's the quotes you can see in the outline where Paul quotes from he jumps all around the Psalms and then he goes to Isaiah in verses 10 to 12 his point there is the problem it's universal and then in verses 13 to 17 we can see the problem in our words and in our actions that we are under sin and we can see the fruit of that it reveals what's in our heart and then verse 18 describes the root cause we don't fear God so let's let's take these one at a time first the power of sin is universal no one or none one is righteous no not one no one understands no one seeks for God all have turned aside together they have become worthless no one does good not even one like it's self evident that those who don't believe in God don't seek for God but like there's plenty of religion going on in today in our world today there's plenty of Buddhist and Hindu monks there's plenty of Muslims praying five times a day there's plenty of Jewish synagogues still gathering there's so much religion in our world today maybe not in our culture as much but around the world it is full of religion and in Paul's day atheists was very rare everyone was worshipping God how can Paul say no one seeks for God

I think we come to that answer in verse 20 but I want you to pause on that I just want you to feel the weight of it no one wants God lined up before the heavenly courtroom bench God says of all of us everyone in this room not righteous no one is righteous some Christians ask of these verses okay Paul do you actually mean no one do you mean every single person is that what you're saying because when you read the context of the Psalms the context of those Psalms is a lot of the Psalms are by King David and he's saying those who oppose him those who oppose God they are in the wicked camp me and everyone who seeks for God they're in the righteous camp so the original meaning is there were some Jews who were righteous but then there's the enemies of God they're in the wicked camp and so some Christians interpret this as saying it's not literally everyone that Paul is talking about we can't just dismiss this that's an important tool for understanding the Bible we've got to understand the quotes in their original context there's a few reasons I'm not convinced that Paul leaves any room for some Jews to be righteous the main basis

[ 18 : 31 ] I think is that more important than the original context is what is the apostle Paul using the verses to do now in this in Romans he understands the original context but he's not restrained by the original context to leave a caveat of righteous Jews would contradict what he said in verse 9 that all both Jews and Greeks are under sin it contradicts his whole argument so far and then in verse 19 Paul explicitly applies it to Jewish people we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law so it would undermine his argument to say oh there is some who are righteous and then he applies it to Jews saying what the law says it says to you if you're under the law and then the implication he draws from this is universal every mouth will be stopped the whole world held accountable to God the other reason I'm not convinced is that it's a little selective to say that

Psalms the context of Psalms is righteous and unrighteous because the Isaiah quote is talking to all Jews that is the original context so what I think Paul is doing is going Jews you think you're in the righteous camp and everyone else is wicked but you are in the wicked camp and that's you can see that by the fruit of what you say and what you do that the law is for you to hear but you don't do it so none is righteous Paul is saying all are under controlling power of sin and Jewish history is testimony to that scripture leaves no one exempt so where does Paul turn in scripture to prove this to give evidence of this I thought about that like where would you go like maybe the golden calf incident in the giving of the law immediately they're worshipping other gods like how would you prove that someone isn't righteous with all the religion going on in

Jewish day I think it's interesting that Paul goes to the mouth look at all the references to the mouth he looks at the flesh there's lots about the mouth the feet the eyes what reveals the true condition of our heart is seen very clearly by what comes out of our mouth our choices tell us something but he's like the apostle James and Jesus himself who really focus on the mouth as evidence of what's in our heart so look at all the imagery there their throat is an open grave like it just smells of death in there it produces death they use their tongue to deceive the venom of asps is under their lips their mouth is full of curses and bitterness their feet are swift to shed blood and their paths are ruin and misery and the way of peace they have not known there is no fear of God before their eyes brutal pictures as we compare the words that come out of our mouths to the words that come out of God's mouth we shouldn't compare to one another we need to compare to God his righteousness our state reveals itself so I want to draw on

Psalms 19 which really just rejoices in God's words God's words are sure and true you can rely on them but do you hold back the whole truth when it benefits you have you been quick to say something if it backs up your argument and you don't really care if it's true or not you'll work that out later you just let it fly God's words are always true and sure God's words revive the soul has poison come out of your mouth recently where someone feels bitten by you aren't there some phrases that just eat away at you like you might have forgiven that person for it but you still remember that exact phrase don't you words can be poison to relationships

God's words bring rejoicing to the heart have you used words to make others feel rejected by you our words expose us out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks so there might be lots of religion going on lots of rituals happening but our words our flesh shows what's really going on in the condition of our heart man might look at the outside but God looks at the heart and ruin relationships misery doing harm to one another lack of peace if we look back on our lives we can see the carnage we do violence with our words and this all comes we're told verse 18 there's a lack of fear of

[ 24 : 50 ] God before our eyes so fear of God is to live in awe of him utter respect utter worship but our words that spew out of our mouth show that we aren't worshipping God otherwise like James says we would be blessing people how can blessing and curses come out of the same mouth rather than worship of God being the principle of our life always before our eyes everything we see everything we do through that lens of the worship of God we live lives our own way all Jew and non Jew are under sin and so we come back to that question all this religion going on in the world and in people's lives why is that not seeking God why is that not good enough verse 20 for by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight if you did God's law

God's law is good it's good to do God's law of course but thinking it's by your own efforts thinking that you are doing what's right that that's the basis of your goodness that's man-made religion that's like trying to climb a ladder up to God but true religion is taking God at his word I think Paul is playing with the word flesh here so in verse 20 by works the law no human being that is literally no flesh will be justified in his sight I think he's playing with that word you're putting confidence in yourself your own flesh your own goodness what you can achieve but look at your flesh it is producing things that God doesn't do you might be very religious on the outside but your flesh betrays you your words show the character of what's going on that's because our flesh is under the control of sin the law of

Moses the ten commandments and so on they were never meant to be a ladder up to God even at the moment of God giving the law like I've already said Israel was breaking the law worshipping other gods people could not keep the law obeying the law is good it gives expression to what God's character is like but it never made it possible to be acceptable to God the law could never save us from the controlling power of sin in our lives what the law could do is show sin comes the knowledge of sin now I think we my gut instinct my gut instinct is to take that negatively that to be shown our sin is a negative thing but I think that's further grace of God to be shown our sin the Jewish people should have been the first to go I need help I need a saviour my flesh can't keep the law

I need you to do it God they should have been the first to cry out for grace it is a good thing to be shown our sin the law was never meant to be the basis of your acceptance with God the law does show our need for God to save us so every mouth will be silence as we all appear before God and he asks why should I let you into my heaven why should I bless you with life now and forever what's the answer we give to him what's your answer you give to him if you put confidence in your own flesh in being a good person you will not be justified God will not pronounce over your life a verdict of righteous our flesh is under sin and we see the effects of that we are left whether a religious person or not religious person we're all left without excuse none of us can say to

God I didn't know none of us can give anything to God to be the basis of our acceptance our mouths will have nothing to say there will just be silence guilty you've not lived up to my righteous character now I know this is heavy I can feel the room maybe that's the way I'm presenting it but maybe it's just the weight of these verses as well this is heavy none of us have a leg to stand on that's the main point of

[ 30 : 42 ] Romans 1 18 to 320 who needs the gospel we all do the whole every person you ever come across we all do but this section of Romans isn't the main point some people might sadistically enjoy condemning people God doesn't he does not delight in the death of the wicked he wants all to repent as brutal and as these chapters in Romans are they're not the main point they're preliminary they're preparing us if you bypass it you'll miss the main point we need to hear this but it's preparing us for the main point and I just want to give we'll focus on the main point the delightful passage next week from verse 21 that paragraph there but I feel like

I need to give a sneak preview this morning the question at this point isn't what people often say how can God be loving and send people to hell that's not the question that's a man centred question if we listen to these chapters we're all exposed that's not the question but there is a question still looming if God is righteous and takes our sins seriously and he must condemn sin he's got to be righteous he's got to be just but then he's promised in his word that he will save his sinful people he's committed himself to saving his sinful people how's he going to judge sin and save sinful people and keep his word we know his words are trustworthy and sure how will he be righteous how is that reconciled but now verse 21 but now the righteousness of

God has been manifested apart from the law although the law and prophets bear witness to it the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith the crushing verdict is to prepare us for this main point our own flesh cannot make us right is not good cannot give us a good relationship with God does not give us any basis to receive any blessing from God we should not put confidence in our own flesh but we are righteous we can be righteous in the blood of

Jesus and this is a gift to be received by faith the guilty verdict lands on him and his righteous life and all the blessings of being in relationship with God become ours the verdict of righteous is said over my life over your life it's not by works your own confidence in your own flesh but receiving by faith faith taking God at his word taking God at his promise God I've done for you what you can never do for yourself all the blessings that Jesus enjoys are yours it leaves us all with a choice whose assessment are we going to believe about ourselves will you accept God's assessment of the true condition of your heart or will you back your own self assessment that you back up by the praise of other people who praise what they see on the outside we've got to start there whose assessment is right during my first semester at

Bible college just before we started a Greek exam quite fun fun experience I tell you but if there's any subject at Bible college where a Bible college student will have ammunition to go I'm head and shoulders above the rest I'm quite a godly person I think it's languages I think we can boast in languages it's almost like someone at Bible study going well the Greek says somehow the languages we use this image of being godly and superior anyway that's all to say that just before we did this exam my lecturer prayed about us being sinful and just totally accepted by the blood of Jesus and this exam wouldn't change that

[ 36 : 24 ] I wouldn't add to it wouldn't take away from that it just was one of those aha moments one of those moments where I just felt peace I didn't realise it but I think there was just within me this competition like my image of being a Bible college student whatever godliness I've wrapped up in this Greek exam suddenly it just that's not important I'm loved by God because of what Jesus has done it strips away pride it strips away fear and shame I'm totally loved by God I think it even produced unity in the class people actually wanted to help each other rather than compete I just wanted to give a snapshot that the gospel works only the gospel can produce this kind of fruit of peace of humility of unity

I really like Tim Keller's quote it's memorable it's worth memorizing I think the gospel says you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe but more accepted and loved than you ever dared hope it gives you that humility and that full acceptance and peace at the same time only the gospel can do that the gospel says my fundamental identity is loved by God whatever else changes that remains the same because it's based on his grace not in my flesh my works so will you pin your life now and forever on your own flesh what you can produce or will you pin your life now and forever on the grace of

God being accepted in the blood of Jesus will you pray with me let's pray father I thank you that you love us enough to tell us the truth that you expose ourselves you show every area of our life where we place hope in the wrong things to try and control the blessing in our life Lord thank you for exposing that I pray that you would then lead each of our hearts to your promise in the blood of Jesus that you have done everything that we couldn't do that you have taken away our guilt and shame and our condemnation in

Jesus dying in our place and that we have full access to you that we have the hope of every blessing in belonging to you forever Lord help each of our hearts to take you at your word so that we might enjoy that blessing in you Lord humble us by this help us to have a love for those who are still under the control of sin in their life Lord help us to see people that way help us not to be ashamed of the gospel but be saying by our words and deeds that life is found in you I pray this in Jesus name Amen