

The Cause of it All

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Please turn with me to Romans chapter 3. Romans chapter 3. If you're new or visiting, welcome. My name is BK. I have the pleasure of serving as one of the pastors here.

We have been going through an expositional study of the book of Romans. And before I get into the main text, what I'd like to do for the next couple of minutes is I want us to zoom back from the text a little bit.

I want you to take a look at Romans 1. And I'm going to give you a quick division of the text because it's going to help you understand the text, help you understand where I'm going.

But if you did not know, the book of Romans essentially answers five major questions that everyone, and I mean everyone at some point in their life, asks.

This section that we've been doing from Romans 1, 18 to 20, or verses 3, chapter 3 to 20, answers the question, what's wrong with the world and what's wrong with me?

[1 : 10] It's one of the questions that we ask at some point. To prove his case, Paul takes us into what is known as the divine courtroom.

You see the outline there. He begins in verse 18 with a charge that humanity has suppressed the truth of God. Romans 1, 18 simply says, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

So that's the charge that the apostle Paul acting as the lawyer before this great court of God. So from verses 19 of chapter 1 to verse 32, it's the case against the Gentile, the case against the irreligious, the person who simply says, well, I never heard God.

I've never heard of God. I did not have a prophet tell me anything. So how can I be accountable or be charged rightfully by God as suppressing the truth?

And Paul answers him, as you remember, hey, listen, creation attests to who he is. It attests to his good nature. And we also have a conscience built within us that testifies to this truth.

[2 : 37] So then we get to verse chapter 2 to chapter 3, verse 8 is the case against the Jew, the religious, the religious insider, as it were, who had the law of Moses, who had prophets, and who had this sign of the covenant.

And Paul goes through showing them that even though you have all these religious things, does not mean that you are right before God.

In chapter 3, 9, we read the verdict. For we have already charged all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. And that term under sin literally means being under sin, the weight, the pressure of the sin in our life.

And the next section that we looked at is the evidence. And we read that between verses 10 to 18. The reality is we are of the natural man.

We are not naturally of God. We are naturally of ourselves. And it's proven, and if you were with us last week, through our words, through our actions.

[3 : 55] When we look at the wake of our life, the misery and disaster we have caused, others have caused us, and we've caused to others.

There is no argument to be made that anybody is righteous. And finally, this morning, I want to address the root of it all.

And this is found in Romans 3, 18. That there is no fear of God before their eyes. That's it.

That's the cause beneath the condition. That's the furnace that fuels our fire of sin. That is the reason for the wreckage in our life.

Here's the truth. We don't sin just because we're weak. We sin because we've lost sight of who God is.

[4 : 58] We don't lie because it's easy. We lie because we no longer believe God is truth. We don't chase pleasure just because we're bored.

We chase it because we've forgotten the joy of knowing God. We don't ignore the word of God just because we're busy. We ignore it because we no longer believe he speaks with authority. We don't hold grudges just because we're hurt. We hold them because we've lost sight of how deeply you and I have been forgiven. We don't worship idols just because we're tempted. We worship them because we've dethroned the living God in our own hearts. And we don't minimize sin just because culture permits it. We minimize it because we've forgotten God hates it. And ultimately, we don't rebel just because we don't know better. We rebel because we think we know better than God.

[6 : 10] Ultimately, the fact is you and I no longer tremble before his holiness. We do not revere God's majesty.

And we don't fear God. That is where we are going this morning. The second part of the sermon, we are going to look at the sentence that God gives us, which is found in verses 19 and 20. So our sermon today is going to be divided into three parts. The first, we're going to take a deeper look into the final indictment found in verse 18. And then the last two parts of the sermon, we're going to address the sentence that God proclaims over us.

But before I go any further, let me just open us up in prayer before him. Dear holy, heavenly Father, we just come before you. Father, I'm asking for a humble spirit and a clear voice.

I don't preach this because I have overcome the world. There's only one who has overcome the world, and that is Jesus Christ. But Father, through the power of the Spirit, you give us the ability to hate our sin.

[7 : 30] You give us the ability to fear you, to turn from self and turn toward you. Lord, there's many temptations in this world that keep us from you.

But more than anything else, it's our heart. Father, we've got rocky, stony, stubborn hearts. We want what pleases us in the moment.

So Father, as I go through this text, I pray that you will make these truths evident before all, whether they be just visiting or someone who has been here for decades, O Lord.

Lord, I pray that you'd give us the means to understand, because the reality is it's not complicated. It's really simple.

But our hearts have been so misaligned with sin, we tend to make things more complex, thinking that somehow we're not responsible.

[8 : 33] But as creation simply attests, you are great. You are majestic. You are an ordered God.

You are a God who cares about the details. If you didn't care about details, how would our bodies function? How would our eyes work?

How would we be able to speak? These aren't evidences of evolution. These are the supreme evidence of the Creator, who is loving, caring, and knows all.

So we ask these things in your most holy and precious name. Amen. So what we have right here before us in verse 18 is the final indictment.

The final indictment. There is no fear before their eyes. What Paul is doing here is he is quoting Psalm 36.1, where David says, transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart.

[9 : 43] There is no fear of God before his eyes. And that line, no fear of God, is just not some other accusation. What Paul is telling us here, that this is the sole root cause of our rebellion.

It explains why we turned away from God in verse 11. It explains why we deceive, we curse, we destroy with our mouths.

It explains why our feet rush to shed blood, found in verse 15. And it explains why there is ruin, misery, and no peace in our lives.

It is because, quite simply, we do not fear God. Now, the question that you should be asking is, what is the fear of God?

What does it mean to fear of God? And this is something we need to be clear about. The fear of God doesn't mean you tremble like a child in the dark type of fear.

[10 : 54] The fear that God is talking about, or Paul is talking about, is the fear of God is reverence. The fear is awe. It is the deep, heart-leveled recognition that God is holy.

God is sovereign. God is just. God is majestic. And ultimately, God has every right to rule over all mankind.

As one author says, the fear of God is the moral clarity that says, God sees me, God owns me, God will judge me, and I dare not mock him with my life.

You see, the fear of God is not the enemy of joy, as some would say, but it's actually the foundation of wisdom, and it is the wisdom that brings joy. Joy is found in wisdom.

Psalm 19.8 clearly states, the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. To know that we are doing good, that honors the Lord, brings us joy, it rejoices us.

[12:15] Ultimately, Proverbs 9.10 says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. So when Paul says there is no fear of God, he means people live life as if God is irrelevant, God is impotent, or God is invisible.

So the question is, what happens when the fear is gone? I think we all know this question. Restraint is gone.

You see, here's what this verse tells us. It tells us the absence of fear explains the presence of sin. The fact of the matter is, people don't restrain themselves because they no longer believe God is watching.

We don't steal from homes when the owner is there. We don't lie to someone if you believe the truth will be exposed, or you don't curse God to his face if you truly believe he's holy and just and will hold you accountable.

So when fear is gone, restraint disappears. And what's left is called moral freefall. And the fact of the matter is, mankind has seen this over and over and over and over and over in history again and again and again.

[13:51] Think about the French Revolution in the late 1700s. It initially started out about liberty and justice. That's what the people wanted.

The monarchy was against those things. The church was against those things. Well, that revolution quickly descended into chaos, bloodshed, and moral anarchy.

Churches were closed. Most clergy were executed. And Notre Dame Cathedral was actually renamed the Temple of Reason. They started a new calendar, removing all Christian references, and morality became subjective.

And what happened? A reign of terror descended upon France where there was over 17,000 executions by the guillotine.

All for reason, for liberty and truth. You see, no fear of God leads to a deification or a rising up of man and leads to a collapse of restraint.

[15:04] It's what happened in Nazi Germany. Reverence for God was erased, as was the value of life, which led to the mass destruction of Jews.

History doesn't always tell us the horrors of Soviet communism. But atheism was the state policy, and without God, morality became whatever served the state, which led, in experts' estimate, between 20 to 90 million deaths.

Without God, we don't really matter to one another. And today, in this modern, secular world, the rise in pornography, abortion, and drug use has not only grown to be accepted by the government, but it's now being pushed by our government.

We see this leads to the breakdown of marriages and families, the redefinitions of gender and identity, there's rampant materialism, relativism, and narcissism.

God has not only been forgotten, he's been replaced by who? Me. You. What I want. What I think is right.

[16:32] The result? Confusion. Loneliness. Depression. Misery.

And ultimately, chaos. Just even in this last month, maid is now coming after the teens.

If you are depressed and hurt, there's an answer. It's called death. It's despicable, and it's evil. And we lose restraint because we lose reverence.

Without a judge, justice becomes personal and subjective. Without a creator, there's no value in creation. It's all one big cosmic accident.

Without eternity. Without eternity. Without eternity. Only the pursuit of power and pleasure remain. You see, without the image of God doctrine, human life became a matter of biological utility.

[17:42] You are either useful to me or you are not. And if you are not, you have no value.

What about us? Let's be honest. We don't have to look out there to find it. We can find it right here, right? It happens when we sin and we shrug it off.

The question needs to be asked, do we fear God? When we cut corners, we break our word, we nurse our bitterness, the question is, do we fear God? When you gossip, grumble, and act in pride, are you aware that God sees these things? You see, this verse just doesn't diagnose society.

It diagnoses you. It diagnoses me. You see, when we live without reverence, we drift toward rebellion.

[18 : 45] When we forget God's holiness, we excuse our compromise. And when we lose fear, we lose truth, and we lose ultimately ourselves.

But here's the miracle of the gospel. Jesus Christ himself feared the perfect, the Father perfectly. Hebrews 5, 7 says, In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death.

And he was heard because of his reverence. Reverence. Reverence. And he never sinned. And he never spoke with deceit.

He always obeyed even unto death. And then he took the judgment that we deserve for living without fear.

Why? So that those who once rejected God could now revere him. So that those who once mocked the judge can now cry, Abba, Father.

[20 : 00] You see, the fear of God does not drive us away from God. It drives us to God.

It drives us to the foot of the cross. And it is the grace of God that lifts our face to see a Savior there. Psalm 14 simply says, The fool says in his heart there is no God. So what now?

We've just been told that our nature is so corrupt that we do not only seek God, we actually purposely go out of our way to suppress that truth.

That we see the results of this in every aspect of our lives, our speech, our actions, the wake of our actions.

[20 : 57] And now we read that it's all because we do not fear God. So in this text of Romans 3, we now reach the moment every courtroom leads to.

The sentencing. We've heard the charge. We've listened through the testimonies. We've heard the verdict. We've heard the explanation of that verdict.

And now the sentencing. The evidence has been laid bare. And the judge speaks his sentence.

That sentence is the whole world is condemned before God. Let's read Romans 3. 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.

The gavel comes down. The gavel comes down. The apostle Paul is now delivering the sentencing in this divine courtroom.

[22 : 17] The charge has been read guilty. The explanation has been explained. And now in verse 19, we read, so that every mouth may be stopped.

The image here is unmistakable. It's almost as if the defendant rises to offer one final excuse. One reason to plead that he's innocent.

Perhaps a rebuttal, a justification, a protest. But the judge quickly raises his hand and says, enough.

The mouths are stopped. That means there is no defense. There's no appeals. There's no more arguments to be heard.

Now the question is, who is under the law? Whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law. Now at first glance, you might think Paul is only talking about the Jews because they received the Mosaic law.

[23 : 31] But remember, Paul has already included both Jews and Gentiles in the charge in the verdict from chapter 3, verse 9. But you will remember if you were with us, one, the Jews had the written law and the Gentiles had the law written on their hearts.

That is Romans 2, 14, 15. In other words, no one is left off the hook. The law speaks to all and it speaks with authority. And God's law isn't just a suggestion.

It is a mirror and it shows us who we are. So when that mouth is stopped, there's no more boasting about our morality.

There's no more blaming our upbringing. There's no comparisons to someone who's worse than us. And there's no more claims to spiritual neutrality. The courtroom is silent. And this is the moment where the self-righteous become self-aware.

[24 : 51] This is where pride dies and accountability begins. This is what Isaiah said in Isaiah 6. Woe is me, for I am undone.

This is what Job felt when he said, Behold, I am of small account. What shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.

You see, this is what the law does. It shuts us up and it shuts us down.

So the whole world may be accountable to God. This is a universal judgment. What this means is no tribe is exempt. No nation is exempt.

No class is exempt. No religion is exempt. Accountable means to be answerable or subject to judgment. The fact is we just don't have to answer to our conscience or society or perhaps our families.

[26 : 04] We have to answer to God. The judge is not our neighbor. The standard is not our own.

The verdict is not ours to declare. The fact is we will answer to God.

And what Paul is getting at that this is where repentance begins. It happens not when we feel bad about our sin, not when we vow to do better, but when our mouths are stopped and we realize, I've got nothing to say or offer.

The truth is you will never cling to grace until you know that you have no defense.

You'll never cry for mercy until you stop claiming you're innocent. You see, this verse confronts every category of person.

[27 : 18] The religious, it tells us to stop talking about your rituals and your church attendance. To the rebellious, stop pretending you'll deal with God later.

Stop comparing your goodness to the world around you. Here's the thing.

You're not the exception. You're not the standard. You're not the judge. In case you did not notice in the court, you are the one sitting in the defendant's chair and your mouth is shut.

But here's the beauty. Silence before God is not hopelessness. Silence before God is the beginning of hope and healing.

When you stop talking, when you stop defending, when you stop rationalizing, and when you finally see your guilt, that's when you begin to hear the gospel.

[28 : 32] The gospel. The good news. And what does this gospel lead to? This leads to my third point.

The death of self-righteousness. The gospel leads to the death of self-righteousness.

This isn't a mistrial. This isn't a hung jury. There is no appeal. The court of heaven has issued its final and binding ruling.

Every mouth stopped. The whole world condemned. And the law powerless to equip. Verse 20. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his God's sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

So what's the natural response to when we're found guilty? See, Paul has just silenced the world.

Every mouth is stopped. Every excuse is erased.

[29 : 40] Every defense has been flattened. So what does the human heart naturally try to do?

Earn it back. We always try to earn it back.

Okay, I admit, God, I have sinned. I admit it. How do I make it right? What can I do? Tell me what to do.

Give me the rules. I promise I'll follow them next time. Let me work this off, God.

Can I please just work off my guilt? See, that's how the human mind works. That's how life works, right?

You fail a class, you study harder. You break the law, you do community service. You lose your reputation, you rebuild it. But in God's courtroom, the rules are different.

[30 : 47] Because it says by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight. So what does works of the law mean?

It means obedience to the commandments, the moral effort, the religious rituals, the doing good.

Paul is being crystal clear here. No human being will be justified by that.

Why? Because the law demands perfect obedience. Not just sincerity. Not just I promise to be better.

I really meant it in my heart. If you only knew my motives. No, the law demands perfection. James 2 reminds us, whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

The standard isn't good enough. The standard is God's righteousness. I may not know all of you, but the ones that I do know, and my mom's here too.

[32 : 06] Not everyone is righteous here. None of you are. See, God doesn't care if you think you did it with pure motives.

The text has clearly communicated that there's no such thing. You see, this is the point where our self-righteousness dies. Justification means being declared righteous before God.

And Paul tells us, you can't earn it. You can't buy it. You can't be born into it. What this does, that this is the death of every man-made religion.

This is where the world's wisdom collapses. This is the end of self-righteousness. Our effort, our discipline, our tradition, our morality, our human goodness, all of it fails to justify.

To put it another way, there is no ladder high enough to climb out of our pit of despair. There is no scale balanced enough to erase our guilt.

[33 : 21] And there is no law clean enough to cleanse our sin. This courtroom of God is clear. Not only are you guilty, you can't fix it, and you can't save yourself.

So what does the law do? Is the law useless? Notice it says, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

That's what the law does. It reveals sin. It does not remove sin. You with me on that? It reveals it. It doesn't remove it. It's a mirror, as one person said.

It's a mirror, not a mop. Right? It exposes the filth, but it can't wash it away. You don't look in the mirror and wipe your face with that mirror.

You need water. You need soap. In God's courtroom, the law is not your defense. It's not your defense attorney. It's the witness that testifies against you.

[34 : 24] It points at your life and says, you're guilty. You've fallen short. And this is where Paul prepares us for the wonderful news of verse 21.

But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.

So the trial is over. The evidence has been examined. The law has spoken. The sentence is this. No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by works of the law.

So what now? Let me appeal to you right now. Stop trying to be good enough.

Stop trying to be moral enough. Stop trying to be religious enough, whatever that would be. Stop measuring your good needs and hoping the scales will tip to you.

[35 : 37] Stop thinking your past disqualifies you and your effort can earn you a second chance. Stop assuming that one day you will stand before God and say, but I tried.

Text is telling you right here, you will not be justified by your works. Text is telling you right here, you will not be justified. But here's the good news. There is only one way to be justified.

And that is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. See, we've reached the end of the prosecution.

This passage ends the first major section of Romans. Romans 3, 9 to 20 is the closing argument of the most important courtroom in human history.

And the verdict is this. You are not righteous. Your sin is not superficial. The cause is internal, not external.

[36 : 59] You don't fear God. You can't justify yourself. And you will be held accountable. In fact, this verdict is so final.

This failure is so universal. That the only hope is if somebody would intervene. Amen? And this is where Jesus Christ comes.

But not yet. For now, he means for us to sit in the courtroom. To sit with our mouths shut. To sit with no righteousness of our own.

And that's exactly where God wants us. Because that's when grace begins. The greatest words in this book of Romans might be the first two words of verse 21.

But now. Paul doesn't leave us condemned forever. He doesn't bury us and walk away. He drives us to the bottom so that we will never again trust in ourselves.

[38 : 05] Sometimes we need to be crushed. If you talk to anybody who's been through the military. One of my good friends in high school.

The biggest loud mouth schnook that you'd ever meet. Rude. Kind of had an appetite for causing disruption in the class. He was native Canadian.

And because of that, he was able to join the U.S. Marine Corps. So he went down. And when he came back, he was a new person. He wasn't a smart aleck.

He was a fine, disciplined man. It changed the direction of his life. Because in the Marine Corps, they break you down so that you are nothing. And then they build you up in their image. But here's the most amazing thing about this passage. The judge that lays out this verdict now steps down from this bench and climbs up on the cross. [39 : 13] The silence of verse 19 prepares us for the shout of the gospel. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The judge now pays the price of our rebellion.

My advice to you, if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, or you have it in your mind, hey, I like this God thing, but I think I'll just accept him a little bit later in life.

And I'm going to tell you why that doesn't work. Because what generally happens, and I know a few people who have gone down this road, is because they fail to acknowledge, to see the misery and destruction that the sin causes in their life.

And what happens is, they don't say, oh, well, you know, God, you were right. I'm going to become a Christian now. No, they get mad and angry, because what they thought they were pursuing had to be good.

[40 : 23] So it must have been God who caused that misery and destruction. And do you think on their quote-unquote deathbed, they're like, I'm ready for you, Jesus. They're not.

They're not. They're cold, stone-hearted, angry, vile, bitter people. So my advice, if I were to give you any advice, is stop defending and start repenting.

Maybe today is the day your mouth has finally gone quiet. Maybe today is the day you stop defending your behavior. Maybe today is the day you stop comparing yourself to others.

Maybe today is the day you stop pretending you're the exception to all of these things. The silence is where repentance begins.

The brokenness is where salvation starts. So what are you supposed to do to embrace the salvation? You cry out for mercy.

[41 : 37] You plead not with excuses, but with empty hands and an open heart. You repent. You say, Lord, I turn away from my rebellion, and I turn towards you.

You see, Romans 3.20 doesn't end with despair. It ends with anticipation. It lets us know the law was never meant to save us.

It was meant to drive us to the one who can. The law shows us our need. The cross shows us God's love.

And grace shows you that your guilt doesn't get the last word. Truth is, you may be moral.

You may be religious. You may be deeply sincere. But unless you are justified by grace through faith, you are still guilty.

[42 : 36] And there is only one verdict that matters and only one way to receive it. And that is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

Come to Christ. He silences sin. He satisfies the law. And he justifies the guilty.

Just like me and you. Let me pray. Dear, gracious, holy, heavenly Father, I pray that you would just lead us to shut up.

To not depend on ourselves, to offer excuses, to seek to compromise. So often we just want to ignore the law.

But the law is there. The reason we don't even want to follow it is because we have no fear of you.

[43 : 50] Father, if there is a wayward Christian that is here today, or perhaps more than one, maybe today is the day where they need to pray that you would instill your fear in them.

Sometimes we do need to pray, Lord, I need to fear you. Teach me to fear you, O God. Sometimes our view of you, O God, gets clouded out by our past hurts.

Could be past sins, our past church, the parents we grew up with, the spouse who abused us. Did we?

There's so many things. There's so many different stories about other ways that that pain pushed out all reverence for you because we were trying to breathe on our own and we forgot about you, O God.

But the wholeness, which is holiness, which is found in you, has to begin by either discovering or rediscovering the fear of God, of that awe and of reverence for you.

[45 : 16] Maybe it's time to pray that prayer. So, Father, I ask for your hand of blessing. I ask that you give everyone here wisdom, your wisdom that comes from your word.

Let them have an understanding of it. Let them live by it. We ask these things in your great name.
Jesus Christ, amen.