

"NO ONE DOES GOOD"

I. Introduction

- A. This passage marks the last part of the argument that began back in 1:18.
 - 1. In this section of the letter, Paul has essentially taken on the role of prosecuting attorney, and he has presented an airtight case.
 - 2. He has demonstrated that we have no way of defending ourselves before the bar of divine judgment.
- B. As we study the concluding part of this argument today, we will see how it sets forth the doctrine that is sometimes referred to by the name 'total depravity.'
 - 1. Our Confession of Faith explains this doctrine by saying that the fall of man resulted in our becoming "wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body." (WCF 6.2)
 - 2. Romans 3:1-20 makes three points in connection with this doctrine.
 - 3. It tells us that God's judgment is just, that all are under sin, and that there is no possibility of justification by the law.

II. God's Just Judgment (1-8)

- A. Back in chapter 2, Paul made it clear that the Jews' Jewishness cannot save them.
 - 1. This would be like telling a person today that their baptism or their church membership or their response to an altar call or their having prayed some kind of prayer is no guarantee of their salvation.
 - 2. The thing that matters is not any of these externals but the Spirit's work in the heart.

3. Having said this, Paul now anticipates an objection that his Jewish readers might raise.
 4. If what Paul is saying is correct, then what is the advantage in being a Jew?
 5. What benefit is there in being a member of the covenant people?
- B. We might expect Paul to respond by saying that there is no advantage in being a Jew, but that is not what he says.
1. If Paul were to say that, then he would essentially be saying that God is not faithful to his Word.
 2. God promised to make Abraham into a great nation and to bless all the peoples of the earth through Abraham's offspring.
 3. God promised Israel that he would be their God and that they would be his people.
 4. It is a great blessing to be a Jew because the Jews were the recipients of those promises through special revelation.
 5. They were in possession of the Word of God, and that was no small thing.
- C. If Paul said this of the Jews under the old covenant, how much more is it the case for the church under the new covenant?
1. There is great benefit in being a part of the visible church.
 2. It is an enormous privilege to be exposed to the Word of God on a regular basis.
 3. This is why it is so important for us to be in worship each week.
 4. The Spirit of God works through the reading and preaching of God's Word to create and nourish faith.

5. Make sure that you take full advantage of this great blessing.
 6. Stir up a hunger for God's Word in your heart.
 7. And if Sunday morning is not enough to satisfy your appetite, some Sunday evening too and get a double helping of the Word.
- D. The next objection that Paul considers has to do with the relationship between the unfaithfulness of the Jews and the faithfulness of God.
1. The Jews' unfaithfulness to their covenant obligations cannot cause God to be unfaithful to his promise to be the God of the Jews.
 2. We have to remember what Paul said in the previous chapter: being a Jew is not an outward thing but an inward thing.
 3. God's promise to Israel will be upheld because not all who are Jews in the ethnic sense are Jews in the spiritual sense.
 4. God will be faithful to save those Jews whom he has appointed to eternal life.
 5. This is a point that Paul will develop further in chapters 9-11.
- E. We also need to remember that God's covenant with Israel had both blessings and curses.
1. He is just when he judges his people for their sin.
 2. Paul illustrates this by quoting a line from Psalm 51, the penitential psalm that David composed after he committed adultery with Bathsheba.
 3. In that psalm, as David confesses his sin, he acknowledges that God would be justified if he condemned him for his sin.
 4. David knows that God does not owe him mercy.

5. He does not try to rationalize his sin by placing the blame upon Bathsheba or upon the circumstances.
 6. He simply throws himself on God's mercy.
 7. We need to do the same thing.
 8. We need to see that the only thing that God owes us is condemnation.
 9. He would be perfectly justified in sending each and every one of us to hell.
- F. The third objection that Paul addresses in this first section is one that questions the justice of God's judgment.
1. Paul imagines that someone might reason along these lines: if our unrighteousness brings glory to God by presenting him with the opportunity to be merciful to us, then how can it be fair for him to punish us for our sin?
 2. Shouldn't God be thanking us instead of condemning us?
 3. By framing the objection in this way, Paul has reduced it to its absurd conclusion.
 4. If this objection were true, then God would not be able to judge anyone.
 5. He could not punish evil.
 6. The gospel does not encourage us to do evil so that good may come out of it.
 7. The gospel is not antinomian.
 8. It does not say that God's moral law has no abiding validity for the Christian because Christ has set us free from the law.

9. While it is certainly true that as Christians we are not under the law in the sense that God judges us by our performance of the law, we must never forget that Christ uses the law to govern and guide us as his redeemed people.

III. All Are Under Sin (9-18)

- A. This brings us to verses 9-18, where Paul provides Scriptural confirmation of the fact that all people are under sin.
 1. He begins by noting that though the Jews had the rich benefit of having received the oracles of God, they were no better off than the Gentiles.
 2. They too are under the power of sin and under the condemnation that sin deserves.
 3. We are all by nature slaves of sin and children of wrath.
- B. Let's take a few moments now to consider the string of Old Testament citations that Paul uses to demonstrate the extent of our corruption.
 1. "None is righteous; no not one."
 2. Everything that we do is stained by our sin.
 3. No one does anything that merits salvation.
- C. "No one understands."
 1. Even our thinking is corrupted by our sin.
 2. Some of the greatest minds in history have been unable to see the glory of the Christian message.
 3. This is why you can explain the gospel to a person in the clearest possible terms and they still don't get it.

4. As Paul says elsewhere, the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

D. "No one seeks for God."

1. The human will is corrupted by sin.
2. Of course we are still free to choose what we want, but the fact that we have a fallen nature means we will never choose to honor and serve God.
3. Think about what would happen if you were to offer a child the choice between a plate of Oreos and a plate of broccoli.
4. The child is free to choose, but he is going to choose the thing that he likes.
5. His will is not free from his nature.
6. In our sinful estate, we do not want God.
7. We do not like God.
8. We are God's enemies.
9. We flee from God.
10. This is why Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." (Jn. 6:44)

E. The next line in the string of quotations says that our turning aside from God causes us to become worthless.

1. Our lives amount to nothing when they are not lived in fellowship with the living God.
2. Life is an exercise in futility.

3. As the writer of Ecclesiastes put it, "I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." (Eccl. 1:14)
- F. There is "no one who does good."
1. This does not mean that there is no sense at all in which people do things that are good.
 2. Both Christians and non-Christians do good things all the time.
 3. The point being made here is that we do nothing that is good enough to merit salvation.
 4. God not only looks at external actions but also at the motivations behind those actions.
 5. The only works that are truly good in his sight are those that are done out of perfect love for him and for the sake of his glory.
 6. Nothing that we do measures up to that standard.
- G. Verses 13 and 14 focus on the evil of our speech.
1. We use our tongues to deceive, to curse, to do harm.
 2. Think back over the things that have come out of your mouth over the past few days.
 3. How many times have you used your lips to complain, to manipulate, to injure others, to gossip, to swear, to blaspheme?
 4. Paul was right.
 5. Our throats contain things that are fouler than the rotting flesh that you would find if you were to open up a tomb.

6. Worse yet, the things that come out of our mouths are an expression of what is in our hearts.
- H. Verses 15 through 17 focus on the evil of our actions.
1. Our feet are swift to shed blood.
 2. Human history is a history of violence.
 3. The daily news is filled with murder, warfare, and destruction.
 4. And the root cause of all of this devastation and misery is not political or economical or psychological or sociological.
 5. It is spiritual.
 6. It is caused by the fact that we are all sinners.
- I. The final line in this list of Old Testament citations sums it all up: "There is no fear of God before their eyes."
1. Fallen man has no sense of awe towards God, no desire to honor God, no fear of God's judgment.
 2. This is so evident when we look at people in the world today.
 3. People speak so nonchalantly about God.
 4. They call him 'the man upstairs.'
 5. There is no fear of God in their hearts.
 6. This explains why the world is moving in the direction that it is.
 7. When God is not feared, there is little left to restrain human wickedness.

IV. No Justification by the Law (19-20)

- A. This brings us to the last two verses of our text, where Paul declares that it is impossible for anyone to be justified by works of the law.
1. The requirements set forth in the law are addressed to those who are under the law.
 2. To be “under the law” means that you relate to God by the works-principle, or what Reformed theology calls the covenant of works.
 3. To all who are under it, the law says, ‘Do this, and you will live.’
 4. The law tells you that God will judge you on the basis of whether or not you have done all that he requires.
 5. As we noted earlier, the Christian is not under the law in this sense.
 6. But this does not mean that we are free to ignore the law.
 7. In Christ we are set free from both the curse of the law and the bondage of sin.
 8. As Paul says in chapter 6, “sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” (v. 14)
- B. A day is coming when the mouths of all who remain under the law will be stopped.
1. On judgment day there will be total silence.
 2. No one will be able to lodge a protest against God’s verdict.
 3. When people see their lives measured against the righteous standard of God’s law they will see that they do not have a leg to stand on.
 4. They will simply nod their heads in agreement and mourn over the dreadful consequences of their sin.

5. Do not deceive yourself.
 6. Do not think that God will treat you as a special case and will simply overlook your faults.
 7. The Judge of all the earth is perfectly just, and he shows no partiality at all.
 8. As long as you are under the law, you have no hope on that day.
- C. This is why Paul says, “by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight”.
1. But what does Paul mean by “works of the law”?
 2. This is a point of contention among interpreters.
 3. A school of interpretation that goes by the name “the New Perspective on Paul” contends that this only refers to the ceremonial aspects of the law, such as circumcision and the Jewish food laws.
 4. Roman Catholic interpreters argue that “works of the law” only refer to the works that are done before a person is baptized.
 5. They contend that the good works that we do after baptism are meritorious.
 6. The problem with these interpretations is that they fail to do justice to the overall context of this passage.
 7. Paul has made it abundantly clear in this section that the law binds all mankind, whether Jew or Gentile.
 8. Paul does not draw a contrast between one kind of works and another kind works.

9. He does not say that ceremonial works cannot justify but good works can.
 10. He does not say that the works of the unregenerate cannot justify but the works of the regenerate can.
 11. Instead, Paul puts the righteousness of human works on one side and the righteousness revealed in the gospel on the other side.
 12. As far as justification is concerned, the phrase “works of the law” refers to everything that is done by us and everything that is wrought in us by God.
 13. None of these things can justify.
- D. The reason why there can be no justification through the law is that we do not do all that the law requires.
1. This is why Paul says, “through the law comes knowledge of sin.”
 2. The law was given so that we would renounce all of our supposed righteousness and trust in the righteousness of Christ as the only sufficient ground of our acceptance with God.
 3. Justification is God’s judicial declaration that the demands of his justice are fully satisfied and that there is absolutely no ground for our condemnation.
 4. If we ask God to measure us by our imperfect performance of the law, we cannot be justified.

V. Conclusion

- A. The law shuts our mouths because it shows us that we have no hope as long as we remain under it.
- B. The gospel does the exact opposite.

- C. When we trust in Christ, we are among those to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.
- D. This causes our mouths to be opened up in endless praise to the God who has become our salvation.
- E. As David says in his psalm of repentance, "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise." (Ps. 51:14-15)