

NO EXCEPTIONS, NO EXCUSES

First Baptist Church
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Romans 3:9-20:

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:

“None 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.”
“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 works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

INTRODUCTION:

We live in a world where lies and deception contend against truth and honesty on every day and in every place. Lies may cause us to feel good but they have deadly consequences. In the Garden of Eden, the crafty serpent asked Eve, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1 ESV) Eve said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:2-5 ESV). The deadly deception resulted in the corruption of creation, the fall of man. Jesus said that the devil was "a murderer from the

beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44 ESV).

Adolf Hitler once said "The great masses of the people will more easily fall victims to a big lie than to a small one." Some big lies are even dressed up in nice clothes. They look good on the outside, and they resonate with a sinful heart. A person engaged in habitual sin argues personal autonomy from the twin lies of atheism and evolution. Paul wrote earlier in this epistle:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:18-25 ESV)

Some lies seem innocuous and nice. Here is one: "all people are basically good." The musical group Earth, Wind and Fire picked up that false theme in their 1975 classic "*Way of the World*" when they wrote "A child is born with a heart of gold, the way of the world makes his heart grow cold." Any parent or daycare worker will tell you from personal experience that, as cute as a little one is, original sin is alive and well in the heart of every child. Every night at the dinner table I hear stories of little ones hitting others for no reason, not sharing, insisting on their own way and trying to deceive and manipulate their teachers and their peers.

If all people are basically good, *what is wrong with the world?* Despite all the technological progress over the course of human history, mankind has still not overcome the basic problems that plague us in every generation: war, murder, rape, theft, dishonesty, greed, strife, divorce, death and senseless destruction to name only a few. While technology may keep you alive a little longer, it won't help you get along with others any better. More laws, more police and more education have not stopped crime. Indeed, there is some indication that things are only getting worse.

Virtually every religion and philosophy acknowledges that there is something wrong with the world and prescribes a remedy. Marxism said capitalism was the problem and introduced the twin evils of communism and totalitarianism. The Enlightenment philosophers said ignorance was the problem, but even the most educated are capable of evil beyond imagination. Intellectuals at Auschwitz experimented with live human beings by day and listened to classical music at night. Buddhists say the problem is desire, but we have never figured out how to desire no desires.

If all people are basically good, *what is wrong with me?* I find it easy to point my finger at the evil out there and shift the blame somewhere else. Yet, I know deep down inside that the evil in the world lurks in my heart as well. I don't like to admit it, but I know it is true. I have been dishonest, greedy, proud, deceitful and completely self-centered. Even my good deeds have sprung from motives that I can question the purity of. Did I give to the poor more to get my name in a brochure? Did I do a good deed so that people would think well of me? Was I more concerned with the plight of the homeless or the reputation of selfish, self-satisfied *me*.

Since we were children, the familiar refrain at the end of every bedtime story was "And they all lived happily ever after." This is neither true in this world or the next. "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many." (Matthew 7:13 ESV). Jesus explained "Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:40-42 ESV)

People claim exceptions and are quick with excuses. My all-time favorite excuse was the client who was guilty of operating a motor vehicle under the influence of intoxicating liquor and, having run of excuses, desperately advanced one more, reminiscent of childhood "But I didn't mean it!" On that great day of judgment, such an excuse will be unavailing for humanity, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." (Romans 1:20 NIV). Exceptions will be useless too, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23 ESV).

When you visit your physician, you seek an accurate diagnosis of your physical condition. The Scriptures provide us an accurate diagnosis of the soul of man. As tough as it is,

you would not want your physician to lie to you. It is the man that tells you the truth who is your friend.

I. Humanity is universally under sin.

Paul previously argued that even though being a Jew does not cause one to be in a saving relationship with God, having been born into the Jewish community had great advantages with respect to salvation over being a Gentile. Paul does not list the ways in which the Jews were advantaged over the Gentiles, other than identifying their greatest advantage: "*the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.*" God had given the Jews the advantage of possessing the written Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. In the Holy Scriptures, the knowledge of God and His salvation had been imparted to the Jewish people.

Yet, the Jews are not any better off in the final judgment. All of humanity, both Jews and Gentiles, are under sin. And God's judgment is impartial; every person will be judged "according to what they have done." All are guilty, there are no exceptions or excuses. At the divine bar of judgment, all are justly condemned. No one is able to escape the coming judgment by what they do or do not do. You cannot be good enough. The fact that you are not as bad as some other person does not help either. The whole of humanity is rightly indicted.

All people are under the power of sin. They are captive to it. They are under its dominion and power. *We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.* There is a profound difference. We have turned away from God and have become slaves to sin by nature.

Paul sets forth a diatribe, an accusation, by stringing together 6 to 7 OT passages. First, no one is righteous, no, not one. No one is right before God. This is the condition of every human being apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ. All our so-called righteous acts are like filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6). We cannot stand before God. Human righteousness is not the same as divine righteousness. We wrongly think that human goodness can please God. James Montgomery Boice said that "human righteousness is like Monopoly money. It is useful in the game we call life; however, it is not the currency of God's kingdom." Humanity still makes the same mistake that Israel made: "Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. (Romans 10:3 NIV). No one is righteous, no, not one.

No one understands. There is a lack of spiritual perception. The unregenerate usually do not know and do not care. The lights are not on. They do not have ears to hear nor eyes to see. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

"The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit." (1 Corinthians 2:14).

No one seeks God. That is no one seeks the one and only true and living God. People universally are religious since they are natural worshippers. We are wired that way. Every person worships something or someone. By nature, a person will not worship the one and true living God but something else, and that something else is called an idol. Idolatry is by far the most frequently discussed sin in the Scriptures. We all love a salad bar. There is such a variety of things to choose from. I will take some lettuce and some tomatoes. Hold on the onions. None of that potato salad stuff, when did they make that anyway? Oh yes, I will have plenty of croutons. A little of this and a little of that and I have my own personalized, individualized salad. Tragically, people pick and choose when it comes to religion. People pick and choose the various attributes of the god they worship. They pick and choose the various attributes of the god they worship so that their god becomes a personal but false idol of their own imagination. There is eternal danger in worshipping a false god. Idolatry deceives the idolater only. He is not seeking the one and only true and living God. *He is running away from Him!*

This is the T in TULIP acronym for the doctrines of grace. Total depravity, or better yet, radical depravity. Every human being apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ is radically sinful such that he or she cannot take even the smallest of steps toward God unless God first intervenes. Every human being apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ is dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1 ESV). The sinner is like a spiritual corpse per Abraham Kuyper or a walking zombie per John Gerstner. Article 9 of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith explains it succinctly and aptly:

1. God has indued the will of man, by nature, with liberty and the power to choose and to act upon his choice. This free will is neither forced, nor destined by any necessity of nature to do good or evil.
2. Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God, but he was unstable, so that he might fall from this condition.
3. Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has completely lost all ability of will to perform any of the spiritual good which accompanies salvation. As a natural man, he is altogether averse to spiritual good, and dead in sin. He is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself for conversion.
4. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into a state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage to sin, and by grace alone He enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good. But because of his remaining corruptions he does not only (or perfectly) will that which is good, but also wills that which is evil.
5. The will of man will only be made perfectly and immutably free to will good alone in the state of glory.

Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. (John 6:44 ESV) . All have "swerved from the right path" (says Montgomery). Their failure to seek God is more than an accidental omission. Its deliberate. In the end their lives turn out to be useless and unprofitable. They have gone sour. "Even in those actions of sinners that have some goodness in them there is a fundamental error in the principle and end; so that it may be said, There is none that doeth good." (Matthew Henry).

Sin is pervasive. Paul now turns to specific human examples, starting with speech. "Their throat is an open grave." The metaphor is striking: what comes out of the sinful human heart is rotting, hideous and devouring. Not only can human speech be disgusting, it can be smoothly deceitful to cheat and manipulate others. "The use their tongues to deceive." "The poison of asps

is under their lips” (v. 13) The asp, or Egyptian cobra, has a small sac of deadly poison in its mouth. Words can sting with bitter hatred which can have a devastating, paralyzing effect on the bite victim. The reputation of another may be ruined through venomous words. James points out that "no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." (James 3:8). "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." Calvin says "if they speak fair, they deceive and blend poison with their flatteries; but if they draw forth what they have in their hearts, bitterness and cursing stream out."

And human conduct as well as speech is pervasively sinful. "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery; and the way of peace they have not known." We are bent on getting our own way and we will not hesitate to use malevolent methods to do so. The root of this poisonous fruit is this: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." The dying thief was incredulous that his crucified partner in crime was still blaspheming even on the threshold of death. "*Do you not fear God,*" he said, "*seeing you are under the same condemnation?*" (Luke 23:40). "Those who fail to respect Him as Judge will never approach moral concerns with the seriousness they deserve, while those who do not know Him as Savior can never be motivated to love as those whose hearts have been overwhelmed with the love of God shown in Christ. Lack of respect for God produces an alarming vacuum in man." ¹ We do not fear God, but hate Him.

Humanity is universally under sin. And the bad news gets even worse...

II. Humanity is universally under condemnation.

The implications are obvious. Those under the law, *i.e. the Jews*, are guilty before God. The allusion is to a court scene in which the mouth of every defendant is stopped. There are no excuses and no alibis. There is nothing to say. There is no allocution. No mumbling, no back talk. Every mouth will be silenced. The whole world will be prosecuted and judged. The whole

¹ D. Stuart Briscoe and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, vol. 29, *Romans*, The Preacher's Commentary Series, 82 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982).

world must answer, not with an excuse but with punishment. Job inquired "how can a man be in the right before God?" (Job 9:2 ESV) David wrote "no one living is righteous before you." (Psalm 143:2 ESV). If the Jews are guilty, certainly the Gentiles are too. There are no exceptions. All will be held accountable to God.

There is no time off for good behavior. No obedience to the law can render you not guilty. Good works are useless. Nothing a person does or does not do can render him innocent. No one can perfectly keep the law. Jesus taught that the most important commandment is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31 ESV)

The law serves as a means of showing to sinful mankind the reality of sin. The law reveals to men and women the true nature of their sinfulness. Through the law, which we do not obey, we really begin to understand the meaning of sin. "This knowledge and the discovery that efforts to please God through self-effort are bound to fail put the race under immense pressure to discover the means whereby man might be reconciled to God. In this desperate sense of need and search, there is yet another evidence of human solidarity. It is ironic that in its search for common ground the human race appears to have overlooked the fact that we are totally united in our subjection to sin, condemnation by God, and necessity for salvation." ²

Humanity is universally under condemnation. The good news is so good because the bad news is so bad.

III. Christ is crucial.

- A. Infinite punishment.
- B. Infinitely heinous.
- C. Infinitely perfect sacrifice.

The Perfect Sacrifice

² D. Stuart Briscoe and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, vol. 29, *Romans*, The Preacher's Commentary Series, 83-84 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982).

God will not accept a sacrifice from the hands of sinful people. He provides one instead. God sends His only Son, who takes on flesh, and then offers His own life and blood as an acceptable sacrifice, as a substitute for His people, not just Jews but Gentiles also. The story of sacrifice crescends with Christ. Christ fulfilled everything that OT sacrifices meant. All future sacrifice becomes unnecessary. Christ's sacrifice was perfect and for all the nations. He atoned for the sins of His people and reconciles them to God. (the temple veil tears in two)

As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Romans 10:15. In Romans 10:15, Paul is quoting part of Isaiah 52:7. The preacher of the good news of salvation from sin and death in Jesus Christ is akin to the messenger who travels over dusty and rocky mountains in sandaled feet to announce the good news of the military victory of the king. Despite the ordeal of such travel and its toll on the feet, the preacher's feet are beautiful because of the wondrous gospel message the preacher sacrificially brings. In the days prior to modern methods of communication, the ancient Jews relied upon appointed heralds or messengers to announce news to other Jews and non-Jews.

Inoculation is a small dose of something that keeps you from getting the full blown effect of it. Flu inoculations give you just enough of the flu so that you build up antibodies against it and are prepared to fight it off should you encounter it during flu season. It seems that is what has happened to the church today. The gospel has been reduced to what happens to you when we die, by making Christianity into a mere decision to "ask Jesus into your heart." The gospel message has been tampered with or weakened by man. This has inoculated people from receiving the full depth of gospel joy. It is boring to some!

1. Humanity's fundamental problem is not death. It is sin, guilt and the wrath of God it incurs. Without an acceptable sacrifice, the wrath of God is eternal punishment. No release. No parole. No satisfaction ever! Hell is awful. A place of eternal torment and eternal regret.
2. Christ's sacrifice was as a substitute. Like the ram in the thicket, like the Passover Lamb. He was executed in place of the sinner. "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. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. *It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* (Romans 3:21-26 ESV)

3. Christ's sacrifice was to propitiate the wrath of God. God sent "his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10 ESV). "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them." Romans 1:18-19. The demands of justice, an infinite punishment, was satisfied by an infinite sacrifice. Jesus is the infinite sacrifice of infinite worth to satisfy an infinite offense. This is pleasing to the Lord.

Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning,
Was there ever grief like His?
Friends through fear His cause disowning,
Foes insulting his distress:
Many hands were raised to wound Him,
None would interpose to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him
Was the stroke that Justice gave.

Ye who think of sin but lightly,
Nor suppose the evil great,
Here may view its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the Sacrifice appointed!
See Who bears the awful load!
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed,
Son of Man, and Son of God.

(Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted)

4. Christ's sacrifice was to expiate our sins. To cover. To atone. Christ's sacrifice both propitiates (turns away) the wrath of God and expiates (covers) human sin. That expiation means "removal of sin" underscores a fundamental dimension of redemption: "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:12). "Expiation" focuses on the removal of sin, and "propitiation" on the appeasement of wrath. "Atonement" in Scripture encompasses both concepts. Expiation properly has a thing as its object. We may expiate a crime, or a sin. Propitiation is a personal word. We propitiate a person rather than a sin (though we should not overlook the fact that in the Bible 'propitiate' is occasionally found with sin as the object, the meaning being 'to make propitiation with respect to sin').
5. Christ's sacrifice was final. It is the only effective sacrifice. He alone endured the holocaust of God's wrath. There is only one name under heaven by which we must be saved. "He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up

himself. (Hebrews 7:27 ESV). "He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:12 ESV)

6. The universal call is to repentance (from sin) and faith in Jesus Christ. Though the atonement is sufficient for the world, it is only efficient for those who exercise true repentance and faith. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." John 3:36. Like the OT sacrifice, you must lay your hand on the sacrificial victim. Salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. *The good news is very, very good.*

7. *The Sacrifice of Praise*

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1.

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23 Sacrifices of praise to His glorious grace, offered not in fear but in love. Lay down your life for others, love your enemies, return kindness for insults, let go of worldly riches for the treasure of heaven. You don't have to, you get too. We are not paying, we are praising.

CONCLUSION:

Preach the cross to yourself daily:

1. It will give you a sense of compulsion. There are eternal souls you know that are on the way to hell.

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

2. It will keep you from trying to be perfected by the flesh.

"After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" Galatians 3:3. You will sin and try to earn back God's favor. Or you will not approach the throne of grace.

Humanity is universally under sin and condemnation. Christ is crucial. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 ESV)

Here we have a firm foundation,
Here the refuge of the lost.
Christ the Rock of our salvation,
Christ the Name of which we boast.
Lamb of God for sinners wounded!
Sacrifice to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded
Who on Him their hope have built.

AMEN.

The grace of the LORD Jesus be with God's people. Amen. Rev. 22:21