

The Guilt of Mankind vs. The Glory of God

The Depravity of Man . . . The Deliverance of God – Part II

Romans 3:10-12

Introduction

In 1984, the professional basketball team known as the Dallas Mavericks, were in a critically important playoff game against the Los Angeles Lakers. Dallas was the underdog in this game and was expected to lose, but they had fought hard the entire game. It had come down to the last six seconds and Dallas had possession. Derek Harper was the point guard and, for some strange reason, he thought his team was ahead by one point. So, when he got the inbound pass, he ran around and dribbled the ball. When the buzzer sounded, he began to jump up and down as he celebrated their playoff victory.

He celebrated, that is, until his teammates rushed up to him screaming that the game was tied and he had wasted their chance to win the game with one final shot. They were forced into overtime and lost the game by seven points.

A few minutes earlier, this basketball player had been celebrating – and would have continued celebrating, with incredible happiness, except that someone came to him and told him the truth.

For centuries, the Jewish nation had been celebrating their victorious position as sons of Abraham. They believed they had the edge over the rest of the world – the Gentiles – and they believed they were winning the game.

In Romans, chapter 3, however, the apostle Paul has just announced to them the shocking truth. Let us rejoin Paul's announcement, in verse 9, where Paul delivers the astonishing news.

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin

Two Sweeping Declarations

If you take a closer look at this verse, you discover that Paul is making two sweeping declarations.

The Verdict of Universal Depravity

1. First, Paul is declaring the verdict of universal depravity.

Look again at verse 9b.

. . . for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are ALL . . .

(there is the key word – “all”),

. . . under sin

No one is exempt from the verdict. No one has an edge in the game. In other words, no Jew or Gentile has any reason to celebrate. The truth is, everyone has been charged with breaking the Law, and therefore, everyone is in deep trouble with a holy and righteous God.

Of course, the world does not appreciate this message. A number of years ago, a book was written entitled, *I'm Okay, You're Okay*. It basically taught the typical humanism of the day – that mankind might have a few problems to work through, but in the end, everyone will turn out alright because everyone is okay.

What most unbelievers would really appreciate is for believers to stop telling them, “Everything is not

okay. You have nothing to celebrate about. You're in trouble with God, the holy Judge."

That is exactly what Paul does in this verse. He declares, "The whole of mankind is guilty of universal depravity. Nobody is 'okay'."

He will eventually, add to this by saying, "For all have sinned – everyone – *all* – and all fall short of God's glory; God's perfect standard; God's holiness."

Fourteen indictments on the human race

Then, Paul will bring to bear, over the next verses, fourteen indictments on the human race; fourteen evidences, or expressions, of mankind's depravity.

The evil condition of mankind

- Verses 10 through 12 describe the evil condition of mankind.

Verse 10a,

as it is written, "There is none righteous . . .

Verse 11,

*There is none who understands,
There is none who seeks for God;*

Verse 12b,

. . . There is none who does good, . . .

.

The evil communication of mankind

- Verses 13 through 14 describe the evil communication of mankind.

Verse 13,

*Their throat is an open grave, With
their tongues they keep deceiving,
The poison of asps is under their
lips;*

Verse 14,

*Whose mouth is full of cursing and
bitterness;*

The evil chaos of mankind

- Verses 15 through 17 describe the evil chaos of mankind.

Verse 15,

Their feet are swift to shed blood,

Verse 16,

*Destruction and misery are
in their paths,*

Verse 17,

*And the path of peace they have not
known.*

Verse 18,

*There is no fear of God before their
eyes.*

Verse 19,

*Now we know that whatever the Law
says, it speaks to those who are
under the Law, so that every mouth
may be closed and all the world may
become accountable to God;*

It is no wonder the human race wants to get rid of the Law of God – it condemns them with an objective standard of holiness that they cannot keep.

Kent Hughes recorded in his book entitled, *The Disciplines of a Godly Man*, that only thirteen percent of Americans today, see all of the Ten Commandments as binding.

So God is dishonored; parents are dishonored; relationships are dishonored. The character of humanity is up for sale.

Dr. Hughes went on to reveal that the same survey, of people at random, posed the question, "What are you willing to do for ten million dollars?"

The found that:

- twenty five percent would abandon their families,
- twenty three percent would become a prostitute for at least one week, and
- seven percent would kill a stranger.

Imagine that – in a crowded section of a mall containing one hundred people, seven of them would kill you if they got enough money.

So, one out of four would be willing to leave their families for money; others would abandon their morals for money; and some would even kill.

This survey also found that ninety one percent of the respondents lied regularly – at home and at work. Lying has become so much the American way, that even in the highest places of leadership, honesty is becoming more and more the exception.

Fred Holloman, chaplain of the Kansas Senate, crafted a very interesting prayer, which he prayed as the Senate opened session. He said,

*Omniscient Father, help us to know who is telling the truth; one side tells us one thing, and the other side just the opposite. And if neither side is telling the truth, we would like to know that, too. And if each side is telling only half the truth, give us the wisdom to put the right halves together. In Jesus name, Amen.*ⁱ

Look back at verse 9b. Paul has declared the verdict of universal guilt – *all* are under sin. You could call this the declaration of universal depravity.

Depravity is a word that simply means, “wretched, ruined, sinful, depraved, degenerate”. Webster defines it as, “wicked perversion”.ⁱⁱ

No one is exempt; no one has reason to celebrate – everyone is in deep trouble with God.

I have met a lot of people in my life who have admitted that they are not perfect, “Well, I’m not perfect . . .,” but rare is the person who will say, “I’m depraved. I’ll admit it. I am wicked and perverse.”

Yet, that is the verdict that Paul has just delivered.

The Evidence of Universal Domination

2. The declaration from Paul, in verse 9, is not only the verdict of universal guilt, but secondly, the evidence of universal domination.

Paul wrote, in verse 9b,

. . . for . . . all [are] under sin

Now, there is a word that is disappearing from the English vocabulary – that little three letter word, “sin”. To merely say it imitates the sound of a serpent. And, the reason we do not like to say that word is that it does not leave us with any loophole. It relates us to the activity of the serpent. We will do anything but admit, “I have sinned!”

Donald Barnhouse, in 1953, wrote a commentary on this text and described man as one who,

*. . . stands before God like a little boy who swears with crying and tears that he has not been anywhere near the jam jar, and who with an air of outraged innocence, pleads the justice of his position, in total ignorance of the fact that a good spoonful of the jam has fallen on his shirt [just] under his chin and is plainly visible to [everyone] but himself.*ⁱⁱⁱ

By the way, I want you to know that this is the first time, in the book of Romans, the word “sin” appears. Paul has certainly talked about sin in the first two chapters of Romans. He has graphically described a sinful behavior and sinful thinking. Now, however, for the first time, the word itself appears in his letter.

It is the Greek word, “hamartion,” which literally translates, “to miss the mark”. The mark, or the target, of God is holiness. And Paul declares that everyone has missed the mark.

The world insists, however, that it has not sinned. It has made some mistakes, committed some errors in judgment, had some “slip ups,” some miscalculations, “boo-boos,” and blunders . . . but not sin! So, guilty mankind simply replaces that little three letter word with a variety of more comfortable words.

John MacArthur published a book entitled, *The Vanishing Conscience*, in which he explains that sin and guilt have become public enemy number one. He writes,

These days, everything wrong with humanity is likely to be explained as an illness, an addiction, a result of some pre-existing disability. What we used to call sin is more easily diagnosed as a whole array of disabilities. All kinds of immorality and evil conduct are now identified as symptoms of [some] disorder. Modern culture has created a new gospel – man is not a sinner, but a victim.^{iv}

Let me give a couple of illustrations that evidence this shift in cultural thinking.

A man who was shot and paralyzed while committing a burglary in New York, sued the store owner who shot him. His attorney told a jury that the man was first of all a victim of society, driven to crime by economic disadvantages. Then, the lawyer said, his client was a victim of the insensitivity of the store owner who shot him. Because of the store owner’s callous disregard of the thief’s plight as a victim, the criminal would be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He deserves some redress. The jury agreed. The store owner had to pay the thief a large settlement.

An FBI agent was fired after he embezzled two thousand dollars from the bureau and then, gambled it away in a single afternoon at a casino. Later, he sued, arguing that his gambling addiction was a disability, so being fired was an act of discrimination. He won the case!

Another author added that this “victimism” has so infected our culture than one might even say the victim has become the very mascot of modern society.

Paul does not refer to mankind as victims – but sinners.

He actually says more than simply that. Notice the word translated “under,” in verse 9,

... for . . . all [are] under sin

He is not even really saying that all Jews and Gentiles are sinners, but that they are all under sin – which, of course, makes them sinners.

What does he mean, “all are under sin”?

The word translated “under,” is from the original Greek word “hupo”. It is a very interesting word that means, “under the power of . . . under the authority of . . .”.

It is used in Matthew, chapter 8, verse 9, when the Roman centurion tells the Lord,

... I . . . [have] soldiers under me . . .

In other words, “I have soldiers under my command.”

It was also used in Greek writings, of a student under his teacher; that is, under the direction and authority of his professor.

So, Paul says, in effect, “All of mankind is under the authority, the command, the domination of sin.”

John wrote, in I John, chapter 5, verse 19b,

... that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

In other words, the whole unredeemed world is dominated by, under the command of, under the authority of evil . . . and sin.

Jesus had earlier, announced the same truth in His message to the Jewish leaders. Turn and look at John’s gospel, chapter 8. Jesus Christ said, in verse 34,

... Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

Jesus says, “Here’s the absolute truth – truly, truly I say to you – because you’ve committed sin, you’ve now proven that you belong to sin. You are not free – you are a slave to your sinful nature.”

Then He illustrates the condition of mankind, in verse 35.

The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever.

What does He mean? Well, remember the Lord is speaking, as verse 31 informs us, to a Jewish audience.

They believed that they owned the father’s house – Abraham’s house. But Christ informs them that they are mere servants of the household, not its owners.

Let me give an illustration.

When I was in my last year of seminary training in Dallas, Texas, Marsha delivered our twin boys into the world. As a result of that, in fact, several months earlier because of the difficulty in her pregnancy, she had left her job, which basically put me through school. So, I got a part time job, after classes, to make do until graduation. I was able to land a job as a courier for a very prosperous commercial real estate firm in North Dallas. These men were making two to four hundred thousand dollars per commission on their complex sales of commercial real estate in the Dallas area. I simply ran errands for them.

One afternoon, after classes, I arrived at the office complex and the president of the company pulled me aside, handed me the keys to his car, and said, “Stephen, I want you to take my car over to the dealership and wait on it while they rotate the tires.”

His car happened to be a limited edition Mercedes Sports Coupe. It was a hard top convertible – white with a deep blue roof. I had seen a description of the car in the office and knew that it cost nearly one hundred fifty thousand dollars – and that was in 1986. I remember being scared to death! As I carefully slid into the drivers seat, I prayed, “Lord, I’m in seminary – I can hardly afford diapers, let alone pay for one small scratch on this car. Please pull a Red Sea moment for me and part the traffic and get me back without any problems.”

I slowly pulled out of the parking lot, eased onto the parkway, and began the five mile trip to the dealership. It was not long before I noticed something – as people drove by, they stared at me – with envy. This had never happened to me before. When I drove on that same parkway in my green Volaré (remember those?!), the only look I got was sympathy.

I pulled up to a red light and people on both sides looked longingly at the car – then at me. I could tell they were thinking, “That guy has made it to the top.”

Do you know what I did? I nodded back at them, fixed the rearview mirror, and kind of settled back in my seat. I got this smirk on my face that, I guess, comes with hundred thousand dollar automobiles.

Now, my boss had also asked me to fill the car up with gas. That had worried me before, but now I was looking for the busiest gas station I could find. I found one, pulled in, and got out. The guy next to me did a double take, and said, “Wow, that is some car!”

I said, “Thanks.”

But then, he asked, “How long have you had it?”

Oh, what temptation! I finally admitted, “I’ve only had it about ten minutes. It’s not mine, it’s my boss’s car.”

He said, “Oh reaaaaaly!”

The truth was, I have to admit, it was a lot of fun, for a moment, acting as if that car belonged to me. The truth was far different than the appearance, however. I was just a hired servant; an errand boy, and I did not own one shiny inch of that car.

In this text of John, as in Romans, chapter 3, the Jewish leaders were walking around with spiritual smirks on their faces – acting as if they owned the house of God. Then, Jesus told them that they were not spiritual sons, but slaves – “. . . slaves to sin.”

In other words, just as a hired servant might live in the master’s house, he is not part of the family. He is not a son – he will never own one inch of the father’s house.

Paul, in effect, tells all of humanity, Jew and Gentile alike, “Wipe the smirk off your face. You have nothing to be arrogant and proud about; you have no reason to celebrate; you haven’t won anything – you forgot to look at the scoreboard.”

The truth is, you are going to lose. Why? Because all of humanity is sinful and guilty and under the irresistible pull and domination of sin.

What is the evidence, Paul? How do you know that?

Paul will begin, in the very next verse of Romans, chapter 3, to deliver his fourteen indictments on the human race, as he describes the depravity of man, and ultimately, the deliverance of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/3/2002 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ R. Kent Hughes, The Disciplines of a Godly Man (Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books, 1991), p. 119.

ⁱⁱ Webster’s New Compact Dictionary (Larchmont, NY, Book Essentials Publications, 1987), p. 116.

ⁱⁱⁱ Donald Grey Barnhouse, Romans, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing, 1953), p. 191.

^{iv} John MacArthur, The Vanishing Conscience.