



AS IT IS
WRITTEN,
"THERE
IS NONE
RIGHTEOUS,
NOT EVEN
ONE."

ROMANS 3:10

WHO

WE ARE

THE STORY
OF CHANGE

DATE

November 7 & 8

WEEK

1 of 4

OVERVIEW

Romans 3

KEY VERSE

Romans 3:10

TEACHERS: It is important to read all four lessons to understand the flow of content.

SETTING THE STAGE

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote what would become 13 books of the New Testament. Highly educated in the religious realm as a Pharisee, his early adult years were spent trying to destroy Christ-followers and the early church. However, as we saw last week, there was a dramatic transformation in his life that happened on the road to Damascus.

Before his conversion, based on the world's standards, Paul was at the top of his game. He was successful in his line of work. He knew the Old Testament, which was their Hebrew Bible. He was as religious as anyone else by comparison. Yet, it was his encounter with Christ that changed his heart to realize he was a sinner in need of a Savior. His life changed as did his purpose.

Paul became God's instrument to inform, educate, challenge, and admonish the early church. His writings have lasted over 2000 years, and the inspired truth in those words continues to be revealing and convicting. As we will see in today's lesson, we all are on a level playing field regardless of background, bank accounts, zip codes, or level of education. We are all sinners in need of a Savior.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. We are Sinful in our Thoughts
2. We are Sinful in our Motives
3. We are Sinful in our Actions

THINGS TO KNOW

- Paul wrote the book of Romans as a letter to the church in Rome; the audience is Christ-followers, not people who are ignorant of the true gospel.
- The book of Romans reads like a lawyer's brief as Paul slowly and skillfully presents the case for the gospel.¹

WHO WE ARE

Introduction

In 1895, German physicist Wilhelm Rontgen accidentally discovered x-rays while studying the effects of passing an electrical current through gases at very low pressures. His discovery revolutionized the medical world overnight. Within a year, Glasgow established the first-ever radiology department. The department head was able to show below the surface pictures of kidney stones and a penny lodged in the esophagus of a child.

Often when people experience discomfort and pain, they go to the doctor who looks below the surface to expose what is really going on in their body. It is hard to imagine the medical world without an x-ray. Seeing below the surface has allowed so many to receive the remedies and treatments that they need. It has given doctors the ability to see bone fractures and breaks. It has revealed arthritis and osteoporosis. It has uncovered pneumonia and breast cancer.

Similarly, the Bible takes an x-ray of our lives. When we are experiencing pain and heartache in our lives, the Scriptures peer below the surface and expose the true ailments that lie beneath the surface.

Over the next several weeks as we walk through “The Story of Change,” we will discover how change takes place in our lives. At a foundational level, we must first understand what the problems are that we are seeking to change. If we are open to being x-rayed by the Bible, it will reveal a sin problem. Every problem we experience in life can be traced back to sin and the carnage it has wreaked throughout our world. Because of sin, we live in a broken world. Because of sin, our health is compromised. Because of sin, violence is prevalent. Because of sin, injustice stands. Because of sin, peace is absent, and wars wage.

While on the outside, things may look intact, underneath the surface, we are fractured and broken. We are ridden with tumors of selfishness, hate, pride, greed, lust, and anxiety.

On the outside, we may have the appearance of righteousness, but on the inside, we stand guilty of committing “cosmic treason against God.”² We are not just people who make mistakes or who have brokenness in our lives. We are sinners. To sin is to say, think, or do anything that is against God’s Word or God’s will. To sin is to transgress God’s holy and righteous standard. As unholy sinners, we are disconnected and estranged from God.

Our biggest problem in the world is not the political climate, terrorism, health crises, or racial injustice. Our biggest problem in the world is our sinfulness. If we want to see the story of change unfold in our world, then we must realize who we are (sinners) and how we can change (through the power of the gospel).



¹ *Life Application New Testament Commentary*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2001, p. 571.

² <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/sin-cosmic-treason/>

In Romans 3, the Apostle Paul shows us who we are as sinners. He explains how sin invades every part of our person – mind, heart, and actions.

ROMANS 3:9-10 *What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;¹⁰ as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE.”*

Throughout the Bible, humanity is identified by two distinct people groups, Jews and Gentiles. In the Old Testament, the Gentiles were the people who were not believers in God. They had no relationship with Yahweh (Hebrew name for God). Some translations call them “pagans.” Jews were the people of God either by heritage or by religion. In the New Testament there is still a distinction between Jews (religious) and Gentiles (non-religious). Paul is showing us in Romans that the religious crowd and the non-religious crowd have the same problem. All are “under sin.” No one is righteous.

Paul explains that the common denominator of everyone on planet earth is their relationship with sin. Regardless of our culture, our place of origin, our upbringing – we are all “under” sin. The original Greek word for “under” is the preposition “*hupo*.” In the ancient Near Eastern world, this word was used to describe the relationship between a slave and his master, or a prisoner and his guard. A slave and a prisoner would both have to completely subject themselves to the wishes and commands of their master. Doug Moo tells us, “For Paul, then, the human plight is not that people commit sins or even that they are in the habit of committing sins. The problem is that people are helpless prisoners of sin.”³ We are held captive by our propensity to sin. Sin has shackled us to the love of ourselves and restrains us from loving God.

Therefore, God did not send Jesus as a reformer to adjust a broken religious system or as a ruler to free Israel from the Roman Emperor. Instead, God sent Jesus to be a liberator for humanity from the bondage of sin. While Jesus’ earthly ministry included teaching and healing, His primary purpose was His work on the cross to defeat sin and death.

The Bible is clear that on our own, we are slaves to sin (Romans 6:17-18; John 8:34). Sin has not just damaged certain areas of our soul; it has corrupted everything about us. We are radically depraved.

The Apostle Paul in Romans 3 gives us a below the surface, x-ray view of who we are, and how deeply sin has affected our lives.

1. WE ARE SINFUL IN OUR THOUGHTS ---

ROMANS 3:11A *THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;*

The Apostle Paul strings together an argument of the depravity of mankind through recalling the longest series of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament.⁴ The first thing he reveals to us about our problem with sin is that it starts with our minds. Scripture tells us, “*there is none who understands.*”

Paul is not telling us that we are not able to learn. We know that is simply not the case. He is not even telling us that we cannot learn the truth about God or theological doctrine. Many people know

³ J. D. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000, p. 122.

⁴ *Ibid.* 110

theological facts. They know the Bible inside and out, but what they lack is information shifting to transformation. We simply cannot understand rightly because of the influence of sin on our minds. Philip Ryken and James Montgomery Boice so eloquently state:

“This does not mean that a person cannot have a rational understanding of Christianity of what the Bible teaches apart from the illumination of his or her mind by the Spirit. In one sense, a scholar can understand and even teach theology as well as any other branch of human knowledge. An unbelieving philosopher can lecture accurately on the Christian idea of God. But such professors do not believe what they are teaching. If they are asked their personal opinion of what they present, they say that it is all nonsense.”⁵

The missing link between information and transformation is understanding. What we lack as human beings is not knowledge but spiritual understanding. Paul would go on to write to the Church at Ephesus:

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EPHESIANS 4:17-18 *“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” (ESV)*

Sin has so warped our minds that it prevents true understanding about who God is and what He desires to do in our life. If we look back to the Garden of Eden, the strategy of Satan against Adam and Eve was to get them to believe wrongly about God. Satan raised doubt concerning God’s Word to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:1, where he is speaking through the serpent, *“He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden?”’”* (NIV) Satan discredited God’s character with a question. He schemed to cause them to think wrongly about God, to create doubt and to inject lies into their mind. Later in their conversation, he would try to persuade them, *“You will not surely die”* (Genesis 3:4, ESV). Satan denied what God said was true.

Satan proposed an alternative plan to God’s plan. A false plan. He suggested that his plan would allow Eve to be like God and not experience any of the consequences that God had promised would take place. Satan claimed that God’s restrictions on Adam and Eve were restraining instead of protective.

Sinful thinking always over-emphasizes self and minimizes God.

And since then, he has continued to solicit us to take the same path. Sin causes us to believe wrongly about God and ourselves. Sin distorts our thinking. It misshapes the way we perceive the world and the way that we perceive God. Living life with a sinful mind is like looking into a carnival mirror. Certain facets of ourselves appear bigger or smaller than in reality. We may look and see that we have a skinny waist but a giant head. We have long legs and a short torso. We appear to have an enormous nose and a thin chin. Our sinful thinking distorts and twists the way that we see the world. Sinful thinking always over-emphasizes self and minimizes God. Our sinful minds never give us an accurate view of God, others, and the world. Our sinful thinking prevents us from truly understanding the way God originally intended us to understand Him and His Word.

2. WE ARE SINFUL IN OUR MOTIVES

ROMANS 3:11B *THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD.*

⁵ J. M. Boice, & P. G. Ryken, *The doctrines of grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009, p. 77.

Our minds are polluted by sin. That pollution has drifted 12 inches south into our hearts. Scripture is clear that *there is none who seeks after God*. What an indictment upon us. If we are left on our own, we do not desire God. We are far more wicked and guilty than we would like to believe. We are far more sinful than we would like to admit.

There does need to be some clarification with this because there is a vast majority of people in the world that even though they are not Christians they are religious. But the Bible is not speaking of religion. Seeking religion does not equate with seeking a high and holy God.

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Back in the ancient days, before the advent of the iPhone and tablets, children used to play outside. When we would play out in the fresh air, and somebody would hit a car with a ball or break a window, we would all run. As sinners, when trouble arises, we have been runners from the very beginning. This can be traced back all the way to the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned against God. When they ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they ran. The Bible says in Genesis 3:8, *“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”* (ESV) When sin entered the picture, Adam and Eve did not seek out the LORD; they ran and hid. We have been running and hiding ever since.

The guilt that our ancient ancestors felt that caused them to run and hide from God has been passed down from generation to generation. We are all hiding from God. Instead of hiding behind bushes and sewing fig leaves, we hide behind everything else in our lives. We do not pursue a relationship with God; instead, we hide behind our family’s activities. We hide behind our social media profile, our activity in the community, or our careers. We even hide behind our own generosity. None of those things are bad or evil per se, just as the fig leaf and trees were not evil. But when we use those items to hide from God, it is a very different issue. No matter how hard Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves, God knew their true condition. He knew they were naked and ashamed. Just as Adam and Eve stood before God naked and exposed, we stand before the Word of God naked and exposed as sinners with corrupt hearts. No one is exempt from this kind of exposure before God.

The Bible tells us in Jeremiah 17:9, *“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”* The heart of the problem for the human condition is the problem of the heart. We do not desire God. It is not that we lack the capacity to love the Lord; it is that we do not have an appetite for the things of God.

What Paul is saying in Romans 3 is that sin has corrupted our nature and our motives. It has changed our appetite. We do not seek after God, pursue a relationship with Him, nor have an appetite for righteousness. We have an appetite for sin, and without the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we will choose sin over righteousness simply by our very nature.

3. WE ARE SINFUL IN OUR ACTIONS

ROMANS 3:12 *ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; There is none who does good, There is not even one.”*

With a sinful mind and a sinful heart, it is no surprise that we would perform sinful deeds. What lives in the human heart must come out. Imagine living in a world when the evening news is not speaking of some crime committed or of a life taken; there is no mention of a burglary, political scandal, or a rumor of war between countries. It seems so farfetched. Like an attorney, Paul builds his case quickly on what we do that is sinful. He incriminates all of us without exception, stacking the evidence piece by piece.

ROMANS 3:13-17 *“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, With their tongues they keep deceiving,” “THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;* ¹⁴ *“WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;* ¹⁵ *“THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,* ¹⁶ *DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,* ¹⁷ *AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”*

This is no surprise to us. It is no surprise that Paul would accuse us of destroying people with our words. We have experienced and participated in the deadly effects of the uncontrolled tongue. We have felt the sharp stab of words used flippantly. We have all said things in moments of passion and anger that we regretted later because we know the pain would continue long after the heated argument simmered down.

Paul is not establishing this argument against some foreign non-religious people, nor saying this about unreached people in the 10/40 window. He is writing this letter to the Church at Rome. He wants to inform them and us that apart from the sincere heart transforming work of the gospel, we will all continue to think sinfully, desire sin, and carry out our sin. We are sinners. In Romans 3:23, he states concisely, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

In totality, we are desperately wicked and devoid of righteousness. This makes absolute sense when we look at the world and see the pervasive brokenness, frustration, and pain. The world, perhaps without even realizing it, is trying to treat the symptoms of sin and not the disease. Some believe that education will help to relieve the sinfulness of our thoughts. If we can just think better, then we can be better. If the world becomes educated, it will become more wholesome.

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Our world is desiring a utopian society where everyone is educated, has all the things they desire, and enacts goodwill toward one another. But the Bible’s response to that is we cannot treat the symptoms of the sickness in the world; we must treat the disease itself. The Bible tells us that what humanity needs is not reformation but transformation. We need to be made brand new from the inside out. We need our minds to be renewed by the truth. We need our hearts to be satisfied by grace. We need our wills to be redirected by true righteousness.

Why is Paul establishing such a strong case of our sinfulness? Why does he spend so much time showing us x-ray after x-ray of the afflictions that lie deep within our soul? It is because before we can accept the Good News of what God has done for us in Christ, we must accept the bad news of who we are without Christ. We are sinners.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

When you enter a jewelry store to look at diamonds, the jeweler always sets the diamonds on a black cloth. The jeweler wants the radiance of the diamond to contrast with the depth of the blackness of the cloth. He wants all the color and the sparkle to be ever so evident. The depth of the black cloth helps to showcase how beautiful the diamond is. In the same way, the radiance of the gospel shines brightest when contrasted with the depth and blackness of our sin. His grace glows when we see the shadow of our sin. We marvel at His mercy when we gaze at our own wickedness. Before true transforming salvation can take place in our lives, there must be a conviction of our sin.

It is never an enjoyable experience to be reminded of our sinfulness. But it is necessary. John Stott said, “We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior.”⁶ Before we think we are spotless, we must be reminded of the miry pit from which God picked us up. We must remember that we are *sinners* saved by *grace*. Our sinful minds need consistent transformation by the Word of God. Our sinful hearts need to be transformed by His grace. Our deeds need redirection from wickedness to righteousness. Thankfully, as we will see next week, that is just what Jesus does and who Jesus is.

⁶ M. H. Manser, Bible. *In The Westminster collection of Christian quotations*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 19.