

**The Book of Romans  
Not Even One! (Part 2)**

Romans 3:9-20

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I was thinking this week, in our culture today there may be no clearer picture of man's preoccupation with self, than the selfie. Think about this with me for a moment. People take hundreds of pictures of themselves and they post those pictures all over the Internet, and they send them to family and to friends. I understand, I get it, I'm not preaching against selfies, but it's a pretty bizarre phenomenon. I mean, what would you think if I opened my wallet this morning and it was filled with pictures of me? Or, what would you think if you visited my home and as you walked around all the walls were crowded with portraits of Tom? Let me assure you, that's not true. It's bizarre. And if the candid selfie wasn't bad enough, now people are carefully staging and highly editing their selfies in order to make themselves appear even better. In fact, my daughters tell me that there's a trend among women to post selfies that were, frankly, obviously taken after a lot of care was used, a lot of makeup, a lot of, you know, work on the hair. And the selfie's taken and the caption is, "Just woke up like this," or hashtag #NoMakeUp. Yeah, right.

As I thought about that, it occurred to me that, sadly, we all have the same propensity to deception, not only when it comes to how we present ourselves physically, but to how we portray our spiritual condition to others. That's especially true here in North Texas where everybody's a Christian. Unfortunately, we can begin to believe our carefully staged, heavily edited, spiritual portrait. Donald Grey Barnhouse writes this, "Most people live in a world where they have camouflaged the true circumstances of their lives in order to protect their own natures. They are not willing to accept the verdict which God has rendered concerning their own evil nature. The result is that they come to dwell, little by little, in a world of spiritual make believe." They just think they're pretty good, pretty good people. It's their own, heavily doctored, spiritual selfie.

I love Romans 3 because it's strips away the facade. Romans 3 takes away the lies, it destroys the make believe, and it shows us, the reality, literally, with no makeup. This is how we look. I love this passage, as well, because it is so insightful to the world in which we live. This passage helps us understand the way the world is. What you read in the headlines of your newspaper this last week, it's explained by what is in this passage. What's going on in our nation, that troubles us all, it's explained by this passage. What's going on the lives of the unbelievers around us, how our own hearts used to be, before Christ, we gain insight into all of that right here in this text. It is a timeless text for the ages.

Now, so far in his letter to the Romans, just to remind you, Paul has already indicted both the Jews and the Gentiles of personal guilt before God. In chapter 1, the pagan Gentiles, chapter 2 and half of chapter 3, the Jews and all of those who claim to worship the true God. But beginning with chapter 3 verse 9 Paul steps back from specific people groups and he provides us with a sweeping summary of mankind's universal and total depravity. He paints what is a disturbing portrait. It is a portrait of God's view of every man and woman. His goal is to show man's universal lack of personal righteousness and his desperate need for the gospel that Paul preached. Let's read it together. Romans 3:9.

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

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS NOT EVEN ONE;  
THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,  
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;  
ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;  
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,  
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”  
“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,  
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,”  
“THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;  
“WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;  
“THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,  
DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,  
AND THE PATH 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 closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

This passage is one of the most important texts in the entire Bible. It both describes and it proves from the Scripture, the moral corruption that theologians call total depravity. We learn from this passage, as I noted last week, that depravity is, first of all, universal. That is, that it affects the entire human race. And we learned that depravity is total. And by that we don't mean every person is as bad as they could be, we mean that depravity affects every part of every person, every faculty of body and soul; it's total.

Now, as we began to study this paragraph last time we considered, in verse 9, the formal indictment of man's depravity, the formal indictment of man's depravity. Notice what Paul says in verse 9, “What then? Are we better than they?” Now, as I argued with you last time, “we”

here could refer to the Jews. “Are we Jews better than they?” That is a possibility. But I think it’s better, for the several reasons I shared with you last time, and I won’t go through them again, but I think it’s better to take this as Paul saying, “Are we Christians, inherently, by nature, better than all of the people I’ve indicted so far, all the pagan Gentiles and all the unbelieving Jews?” And he says, “Not at all,” absolutely not, “for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.”

Here is Paul’s summary of everything he’s taught the Romans so far. He says, I have made a formal indictment in what I’ve written so far, that all humanity is legally guilty. Guilty of what? Look at verse 9. “We have already charged that both are all under sin.” That is his indictment. All humanity is under sin. What does that mean? Well, we spent quite some time last time looking in context in Paul’s letter to the Romans to see what he meant. And it means several things. First of all, it means that men and women are in the realm of sin. We either dwell in the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We either are under sin and under Law or we are under grace. And all of humanity lives in the realm that is characterized by sin.

We noted that to be under sin meant to be under the practice of sin. That is, we practice sin, we commit sin regularly, and Paul is very clear about that; he is in this text that we’re looking at this morning. It means to be under the power of sin. Paul uses two personifications of sin in Romans, one of sin as a ruthless despot who reigns in our lives and the other as a ruthless, abusive slave master and we its slaves. We’re under the power of sin.

To be under sin also means to be under the guilt of sin. Not the feeling of guilt, although that’s true, but rather real legal guilt. The kind of guilt in a courtroom. And then under the penalty of sin. That is, we’re merely awaiting the execution of the sentence that God has already pronounced. That’s what it means to be under sin. And Paul says, all humanity is under sin.

Now, today we come to the second part of this paragraph and what is the heart of Paul’s argument, and it is the Biblical evidence for man’s depravity, the Biblical evidence. Notice how he begins verse 10, “As it is written.” Paul here introduces the Biblical proof for the indictment that he has just made, that all men are under sin.

Just one quick note about that expression. The Greek verb is actually in the perfect tense. It could be translated this way, “Just as it has been written.” That’s the language the authors of the New Testament love to use when they’re quoting the Old Testament, and it punctuates the fact that the Scripture was written before, in the past, but unlike merely human readings, or human writings I should say, it continues to have authority and relevance and permanence. “It has been written.”

Now following that introduction, you’ll notice that Paul, in typical Jewish fashion, strings together a series of related Old Testament passages as proof that all men are under sin. Let me just say as an aside, by the way, that while we believe strongly, as you know, in expositional

preaching, that's what we do here primarily, this paragraph reminds us that it is legitimate to pull a series of passages together in order to make a theological point, if we are true to the original meaning in the original context. That's what Paul does here.

Now, you'll notice in our English text, the following verses are all capitalized. You see that? Most of our versions do that and they do that to show us that the New Testament author is now quoting from the Old Testament. And what that means is that verses 10 through 18 consist entirely of Old Testament quotes. It's pretty remarkable, because nowhere else in his writings does Paul include such a lengthy quotation from the Old Testament nor does he draw on so many different Old Testament passages. Paul here wants to underscore in a big way that this idea of universal and total lack of righteousness is not some new idea that he's come up with. It's not novel. It's exactly what the Hebrew Scriptures teach.

Now, you'll notice that there are quotes from seven different Old Testament passages in this paragraph. If you have a Bible that has marginal references, notes in the margin, you'll notice where they're from. In verses 10 and 11 he pulls from Psalm 14 or possibly Psalm 53, they're parallel passages. In verse 13 he pulls from Psalm 5, Psalm 140. In verse 14 from Psalm 10. In verses 15 to 17 from Isaiah, Isaiah 59. And then in verse 18 from Psalm 36. So, a number of places in the Old Testament Scriptures.

In their context, in the Old Testament, some of these passages are directed at pagan Gentiles and others of them are directed at unbelieving Jews. This is brilliant on the Apostle Paul's part, because what he does by weaving together, that collection of passages, he underscores that both Jews and Gentiles are all sinful, that this is a description of universal depravity and total depravity, from the Scripture, of all unbelievers. He paints here a portrait, this is what I want you to see, he paints a portrait here of every sinner. In other words, these verses not only describe God's view of the terrorists of ISIS, but the citizens of Southlake. This is how God views you. This is how God views me. Apart from Christ. Apart from the gospel.

Now, this string of Old Testament references here are not simply put together in a random way. Paul, instead, weaves them together with great precision, with great artistry. Let me show you how he develops his thought and I'll give you an overview, and then we'll come back and take it apart and look at it. In verse 10 he begins with a summary statement of depravity. "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO NOT ONE." And then, beginning in verse 11 down through verse 17, he shows us the depth to which depravity goes. It impacts us in every aspect of our being: our minds, our wills, our lifestyles, our behavior, our speech, our relationships. And then having shown the depth of depravity in verse 18, he identifies the foundation of depravity, "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

So, let's consider then first, back in verse 10, a summary of depravity. He says, "as it is written, 'THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE.'" This is a sweeping indictment of all humanity. But what does it mean, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS"? The Greek word translated righteous

here, as well as its Hebrew counterpart, simply means, to conform to a standard, to conform to a standard. You can see this in some of the texts in the Old Testament where it's used in a non-theological setting. For example, in Leviticus 19:36 God says this, "You shall have righteous balances and righteous weights." What does that mean?

Well, you understand that the culture then was an agricultural society, an agrarian society in which grains and other produce were sold. Well, obviously, there had to be some standard, in some way, to measure out how much was sold. And so you had a set of scales that balanced. On one side of the scale you would put the different increments of weight, depending on how much the customer wanted. For simplicity's sake, let's say one pound, five pounds, ten pounds. The customer says, I want ten pounds of grain. You would put your ten pound weight on one side of the scale and then you would put grain on the other side of the scale until it balanced.

But you can imagine that this system was open to a lot of dishonesty, and unscrupulous men would take those weights that were supposed to be standard weights and they would have a set that had some shaved off of them, and they would have a set that had some added to them - depending on whether they were buying or selling - so that they could be in the most advantageous place, essentially cheating. And God says, if you're going to be my people you're not going to act that way in your business. You're going to use righteous weights and righteous balances. What does that mean? It means ones that conform to the standard. There's a standard for how much ten pounds is. Make sure your measurements conform to the standard, they're righteous.

Now, you can see then when this word righteous is used in theological settings, it still means to meet the standard. But in theological settings it means to meet God's standard, the standard laid out in His Law. It is to live in perfect conformity to the Law of God. There are several passages I could take you to, but in the interest of time let me take you to the one that I think is the clearest for our purposes. Turn back to Ecclesiastes 7 and notice verse 20. Solomon writes, "Indeed," this is Ecclesiastes 7:20, "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth." But what does it mean to be righteous, Solomon? "Who continually does good and who never sins." There's the ultimate standard of righteousness.

You want to meet God's standard? You want to be acceptable to God based on your own efforts? There's the standard. You must be a righteous person and to be righteous in this sense means to continually do good and never sin. In other words, to be righteous is to conform perfectly to God's standard.

Now, what is God's standard? Well, it's His Word obviously, but again, to simplify it, our Lord summarizes God's perfect standard this way in Matthew 22. He says, "LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, SOUL, MIND, AND STRENGTH," and "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." There's the standard. So, here it is, you want to earn your way to heaven? You want to make it on your own? All you've got to do is meet God's standard, and all He asks is

that every moment of your life you love Him perfectly and every moment of your life you love your neighbor as yourself. That's the standard, that's righteous.

Now, go back to Romans 3 and let's see what Paul says. Romans 3, "as it is written," there is none who meets the standard. "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE." There's not one who continually does what is good and who does not sin. Apart from justifying grace, not one person who has ever lived has met God's standard. Not one of us stands as right before God. The only exception, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ. But for the rest of humanity, no one possesses a righteousness that meets the demands of God's holy Law. This is the testimony of the rest of Scripture, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS" in this sense.

First Kings 8:46, Solomon says, "there is no man who does not sin." Even our best is sinful to God. Have you ever thought about that? We think about our sin and we think, oh boy, it's going to be bad. If I'm on my own at the judgment, my sin is going to condemn me. Your most righteous acts will condemn you at the judgment. Isaiah 64:6, "For all of us have become like one who was unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." The very best thing you've ever done, apart from Christ, apart from His intervening grace, will get you judgment at the day of judgment. Here's how our Lord put it in Mark 10:18, "No one is good except God alone." "No one is good," Jesus says, "except God alone."

You know what this means? The standard, righteous, it's a standard we can't hit. If we are measured against the plumb line of God's Law we are all found to be crooked. It's a target we can't hit. It's a canyon we can never jump. It's an ocean we can never swim. The standard is perfection. Perfect love for God. Perfect love for others. Every moment of our lives. And we don't meet it. How can we summarize our sinful condition? "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE."

Now, having summarized our condition Paul proceeds then to outline, in verses 11 to 17, the depth of our depravity. He explains just how profoundly sin has affected every area of our lives. I enjoy fountain pens and I get some degree of ridicule from different people for that, but I do enjoy them. And when you clean a fountain pen, if you accidentally drop one drop of ink in an otherwise clear glass of water, what happens? It permeates every centimeter of that water. That's how it is with sin. Sin has permeated every part of our being. It has spread everywhere. That's what Paul wants us to see.

First of all, our depravity consists in darkened minds. Look at verse 11. "THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS." Let me give you the context from Psalm 14. In Psalm 14:2 the Psalmist writes this, "The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men," so you get the picture, God's in heaven, He's looking down across the planet, "the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God." And the obvious implication in the context is, He didn't find a single one, not one person on the planet who understands. What does that mean?

Well, obviously the word means to have an intelligent grasp of something, but what is he talking about here? Well, first of all, you need to note that this is not a momentary lapse of understanding, it's not, I momentarily forgot something. Rather, it is a defining permanent characteristic. In fact, the language has the idea, it's not that I don't understand, it's that we are all people who lack understanding. It's a characteristic of us. Fallen man simply lacks all spiritual understanding.

Now, make sure you're clear on what this doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that unbelievers can't understand the facts of Christianity, or they can't understand the Bible in the way they would understand other literature. I have commentaries on my shelf written by liberals, who reject the truth of Scripture, who can explain the language and the context fairly well, in a helpful way, but they don't believe it. And they don't entrust their lives to it. In that sense, they are unable to understand. They just don't get its truthfulness and its implications in their life.

So, what do sinners, apart from grace, not understand? Let me give you several things, just quickly. First of all, they don't understand all spiritual truth. First Corinthians 2:14, "a natural man," that is, a man who is an unregenerate person, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God," the Scripture, "for they are foolishness to him and he cannot," this is ability, this is capacity, "he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." Again, not the facts, but the truthfulness of them. He doesn't understand them in a life-changing way. He doesn't embrace the implications.

Also, unbelievers don't understand the truth about God. Romans 1, remember, they should have, they knew certain things about God from what was displayed all around them, but instead they worship rocks and sticks and ideas; they immerse themselves in idolatry and false religion. They don't understand the truth about their own desperately lost condition. You know, from time to time I'll have a conversation with an unbeliever who takes this position. Most of the time you talk to people and you're convincing them they're a sinner and most of them will go along with that, yeah, I'm a sinner, I understand that. But occasionally, and you've probably had this experience, where someone will say to you, you know, I appreciate your sincerity and all that, but I just don't need all that stuff because I'm really not a sinner.

Now, how could a person with a brain come to that conclusion? It's because they've ignored their consciences. They've ignored the work of the Law written in the heart. They've ignored the truth of Scripture. They've reclassified, redefined sin so that they meet the standard, and they show, according to Paul here, an utter lack of spiritual understanding. They have no real comprehension of their sin, no conception of the eternal destiny that awaits them.

They also have no understanding of the truth about how to be right with God. Ask the average unbeliever who believes there is a God, how can you be right with God? And what will they say? You know, I'm trying to do the best I can. I'm trying to be a good person. I think my good works outweigh my bad works. They have no understanding.

Now, why does man have this lack of understanding in all things spiritual? This is key to understand. It's not because of a lack of information. Man's problem is willful ignorance. Turned over to the Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4, Paul here is describing pagans, and he's saying to us, don't live like pagans, don't walk, notice verse 17 of Ephesians 4, "that you walk no longer as the pagans walk," don't live like they live, and the first thing he notes is, "in the futility of their mind," in vain empty thoughts. In other words, their philosophies, their ideologies, their way of thinking, the grid through which they see the world. In our culture it's primarily naturalism. Paul says, don't walk after their futile ideas, like naturalism.

Verse 18, why would you embrace those ideologies and philosophies? Because you're darkened, they're "darkened in their understanding." There it is again, they don't understand, "excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them." But what's ground zero? Where does all of this start? Notice the end of verse 18, "because of the hardness of their heart." That's exactly what Paul said in Romans 1. It's not a lack of information. It's hard hearted rebellion. That's the reason for the darkened mind.

What is the solution for man's spiritual ignorance? I love the way John puts it in 1 John 5:20, he says this, "the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true." Jesus gives us understanding.

Depravity includes darkened minds. Our depravity also includes, secondly, enslaved wills. Look back in Romans 3:11, "THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD." Literally, there is none who seeks out God. Unbelievers fail to desire God. They fail to desire to know God. They fail to worship God. They fail to enjoy God. They fail to give God glory. Why? Because sin is, at its heart, a rebellion against God being God. I want to be God instead.

One commentator puts it this way, "Sin is the revolt of the self against God, the dethronement of God with a view to the enthronement of oneself. Ultimately sin is self-deification," I love this, this is so true, "the reckless determination to occupy the throne which belongs to God alone." That's sin. "The reckless determination to occupy the throne which belongs to God alone." And so, "THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD." When it comes to spiritual understanding, all men are blind. When it comes to a relationship with God, all men are dead in their trespasses and sins.

Not one person apart from grace (Do you hear what Paul is saying?), not one person apart from divine grace is seeking God. Instead, we all run from God, just like Adam and Eve did. Man is so blind. You know, doesn't it just make sense that we, the creature, would seek our Creator, would seek everything we need from Him, would seek our life, our happiness, our joy, our forgiveness, our relationship with Him, from Him? And yet we're so blinded by our darkened understandings that we don't seek those things from God, instead, we seek them everywhere else.



By the way, when Paul says “THERE IS NO ONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD,” it shows us just how ludicrous it is to have seeker sensitive services. There are no seekers. That’s what Paul says. There are no seekers. In fact, I love what Martin Lloyd Jones writes; this was before the seeker sensitive movement so he wasn’t responding to it, he was anticipating it. Listen to what he writes. “There is nothing so unscriptural as to say that the natural man is seeking for God and that his trouble is that nobody has ever given him the gospel he’s been waiting for and expecting to hear. This is a flat contradiction of the Scriptural declaration that, “THERE IS NONE THAT SEEKS AFTER GOD.” Man, by nature, is a God hater. He is at enmity with God. He is “dead in trespasses and sins.”

Now, you say, okay Tom, I hear you, “THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD,” but wait a minute. What about all the world’s religions.? Aren’t they sincerely seeking God, they’re just misled? No. Paul says, “THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD.” As we learned in Romans 1, false religion, atheism, agnosticism, are simply ways to run away from the true knowledge of the true God that’s revealed in His creation, that’s written into the human conscience and heart; it’s everywhere he looks.

In fact, look back at chapter 1 verse 20, “For since the creation of the world,” in other words, from the very beginning, “God’s invisible attributes,” specifically, “His eternal power and His deity,” His divine nature, “have been clearly seen,” and not just seen, they are understood, “being understood.” How? By looking at what He made, “so that all men,” without exception, “are without excuse.” Here it is, verse 21, “For even though they knew God, they didn’t honor Him as God.” They willfully chose not to honor Him and not to give thanks. So understand then, that the world religions are not seeking God, they are running from the true God.

You say, well, you know there are people in my life who are unbelievers who appear to be seeking God, what about them? Well, if someone is truly seeking the true God, it’s only because of divine intervention. It’s only because of grace. Although we should seek God our Creator, Paul says here that none does, not one person does or ever has. Instead, if we are to be rescued, God must come seeking us. This is the story of the Bible.

The very first sin in Genesis 3, how did Adam and Eve respond? Did they run to God for forgiveness? No, they ran the other way. And it was God the Son who came in the cool of the day seeking them. Genesis 3:9, “the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” God seeking man. And that’s the story of the Bible. In fact, that’s why Christ came. I love what he says in John 4:23, He’s talking to the Samaritan woman and He says to her, “God seeks true worshippers.” How does God seek true worshipers? In and through His Son. Luke 19:10, Jesus says this, “the Son of Man,” that’s Himself, “the Son of Man has come.” He says, here’s the reason for the incarnation, “I came to seek and to save that which was lost.” No one, no person who has ever lived, no person alive today, no person who will ever live, seeks God. There’s only one true seeker in the universe and that’s God.

Paul's point here is that our wills are corrupt. Fallen men and fallen women always choose to run from God. They choose against God. They choose against God's Law. This is a reminder to us, it humbles us. If you're sitting here this morning and you are in Christ, it's not because you sought God; it's because God, in His mercy and grace, sought you and found you and made you His own. There is still "NONE WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD."

Thirdly, our depravity produces rebellious lifestyles. Verse 12, "ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS." Notice again the comprehensive expression "ALL," no exceptions, "HAVE TURNED ASIDE." That Greek word means to keep away from, to steer clear of. This is not an accidental straying from the path, whoops, I messed up, I misstepped. This is a purposeful intentional act of rebellion. All of us have turned aside, intentionally, purposefully, from the path that God has laid out for us in His Word, the patterns of behavior that He has commanded, and we have pursued instead our own way.

By the way, this expression in verse 12 isn't addressing so much our individual acts of sin, he's going to get to that, this has more to do with the total direction of our lives. We are off the rails, we are off the path, and that's where we spend our entire life, apart from grace. It's like Isaiah 53:6, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." Charles Hodge writes, "Blinded by sin to the perfections and loveliness of God, they have turned from the way which He has prescribed which leads to Himself, and have made the choice of another way."

Now, what ways do people choose off of the path? I love the way Martin Luther, in his commentary on Romans, puts it. Listen to this. He says, "Some go out of the way to the left. Namely, those who serve wealth, honor, pleasure, and the glory of this world. Others go out of the way to the right. Namely, those who hold to their own righteousness, virtue, and wisdom. But neither of them cares for God's righteousness, nor obeys Him." In other words, you can leave the way and you can give yourself to sin and you can live in utter wickedness and do everything imaginable, or you can go to your own way by being a pretty good person and being self-righteous. But either way, you've left God's path. He's absolutely right, "ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE."

Notice verse 12, "TOGETHER," that is, everyone, with no exception, "THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS." This is an interesting word in the Hebrew text of Psalm 14. The word useless there is a word which means tainted. In fact, it's a word that's used of milk that has soured and is no longer good.

But we've all had this experience right? It's late in the evening and you're about to head toward bed and you think, boy, a nice tall cold glass of milk would be a wonderful thing. So you go to the fridge and you find the carton and you pour yourself a nice tall glass. And you start to chug it down and the first bit of it hits your taste buds and you realize it's bad, it's sour. And you get this sort of repulsive feeling that sweeps over you and you run to the sink and you spit it out, and

you pour the glass down with disgust, and then you get the carton and you empty the carton in the sink. Sour.

God says, mankind has gone bad. It's gone bad. We are no longer useful for what we were designed to be. What's the first question of the Shorter Catechism? What is the chief end of man? And the answer? To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. When we strayed from our Creator's path we became completely useless for everything we were designed to be. We're no longer a use to God, we're not really useful to one another, and we're not even useful to ourselves. This is what John Owen said, the great English Puritan, listen to this, commenting on this text, he said, "They are become putrid or corrupted, like petrified or, excuse me, like putrefied fruit or meat, therefore useless, not fit for what they were designed, to serve God, to promote their own good, and the good of others." Useless.

This is not a very flattering indictment, is it? This is our real selfie. Now why, why does Paul emphasize this so much? Why was this indictment of man's sinfulness such an important part of the gospel he preached and why did he take all this time to say it to the Roman Christians? I think there are a couple of reasons, but for us as believers I want you to understand it this way. If you've ever been in a jewelry store, when you go into the store, the owner of the store doesn't just throw the diamonds down on the glass counter. What does he do first? He puts down a piece of black cloth. Why? Because against that dark background the light and the sparkle and the brilliance of the stone is set off. That's exactly what Paul is doing here. That's exactly the reality. We can only appreciate the beauty and the brilliance of the gospel if we first perceive the darkness of man's true spiritual condition. We only want the gospel if we understand the darkness. Lloyd Jones writes, "By showing us the terrible character of sin and the appalling position of man as he is by nature, it therefore shows us by contrast the glory of the grace of God in the gospel."

Very quickly, there are two important implications that grow out of this passage. First implication, before you can be a Christian you first have to understand the truth of your own sinfulness. That's why this was part of the gospel Paul preached. Our Lord put it this way in Luke 5:31, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who were sick." Listen, if you have cancer, but don't know you have cancer, and you think you're perfectly healthy, I will not be able to convince you to go to the doctor. But if you come to some understanding that you are really sick, that you are terminally sick potentially, then you will go to the doctor.

It's only as you begin to understand your own desperate sinfulness that you will be willing to turn from your sin in repentance to Jesus Christ and His perfect life and His substitutionary death and His resurrection as your hope; you'll turn to Him as the doctor, the only physician who can fix you.

I mean, do you really get what Paul is saying here? Do you understand? God wrote this passage about you and about me, apart from Christ in the gospel. This is how God sees you and until you see yourself in this condition you won't go to the doctor.

There's a second implication and that is, for us who are in Christ, your love for God grows out of an understanding of what you've been forgiven. Again, our Lord, in Luke 7:47, speaking of the, you remember, the immoral woman who anointed His feet, He says this, "her sins have been forgiven. He who is forgiven little, loves little." That's a remarkable statement. He is forgiven little, loves little. Now, don't misunderstand, Jesus isn't teaching here that some Christians have only been forgiven a little and others have been forgiven a lot. As we're learning in Romans 3, we're all on a level playing field. We're all bad. That's not what He's saying.

Instead, he is contrasting unbelievers, he's talking to a Pharisee there, an unbeliever who failed to understand his sinfulness compared to true believers who do understand it. But I think at the same time our Lord is making a point that the more profound your understanding of your sinfulness, the greater will be your gratitude to, and your love for, God and His grace. You will love God even more as a result. That's why you need to study this passage. That's why it's important for us as believers to get this. Because as you understand who you really were, as you see your portrait as painted by God, then you see what He's forgiven you from, and you will love Him so much more.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for Your Word. We confess that it humbles us to the dust before You. But Father, thank You that those of us in Christ, in learning what You've saved us from, can love You even more. And Lord, I pray for those here today who don't yet fully grasp, who haven't really understood, the gravity of their condition. Lord, may they see today, as our Lord put it, that they are desperately sick, and may they run to Christ as their only doctor, their only physician. Through His perfect life lived in the place of sinners, through His substitutionary death died in the place of sinners to satisfy Your wrath, and through His glorious resurrection, may they find health and eternal life. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.