

Your Day in Court (Part 2)
Romans 3:19-20
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Well, take your Bibles this morning and turn with me to Romans 3. This morning we finish the first section, the first major section of Paul's letter to the Romans. We finish the bad news. It's important to understand, however, that the bad news is part of the good news. When Paul went to explain the gospel to the churches in Rome, he spent two and a half chapters explaining the bad news. He spends a chapter and a half explaining the good news. The reason for that is, you don't really understand your need for the good news until you get a grasp on your true situation, where you really stand before God.

And so, this morning we finish that section that we started back in chapter 1 verse 18 where Paul has laid out for us the universal guilt of mankind. It concludes in a magnificent paragraph that we've been studying together, chapter 3 verse 9 down through verse 20. Let's read it again together; you follow along.

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.

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This paragraph is charged with legal language. It is the language of the court room. In fact, in verse 9 Paul lays out his formal indictment of human depravity. He says, I have charged in the first couple of chapters of this letter, I have charged that all men, without exception, are under sin. I have leveled an indictment against them. In verses 10 through 18 he then presents the biblical evidence. Having given the indictment, he presents his evidence. Notice verse 10 begins, “as it is written.” And then in staccato-like fashion Paul lays out seven Old Testament texts joined together to form a seamless whole that convicts all of humanity of being guilty before God.

In verses 19 and 20, that we began to study last week, he comes to the legal implications of all of this. In light of the indictment, in light of the biblical evidence, where does that leave us? What are the ramifications to us, with reference to the law of God, with reference to God Himself? In verses 19 and 20 we find the legal implications of human depravity.

Now, as I noted for you last time, in these two verses Paul takes us forward to the day of judgment. And he shows each one of us how our day in court, how our day at the final judgment would go – if it were not for Jesus Christ and what He had accomplished, what He accomplished in His life and death. I said last week, I’ll say it again as we begin this morning, if you have never repented of your sins, if you have never confessed Jesus as your Lord, these two verses describe exactly the verdict that you will hear, individually, personally, when you stand before God your Creator someday.

If you have embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, this passage is equally important for you, however, because Paul wrote these words to the Christians in the churches in Rome. You see, we only fully understand what God has done for us when we come to grasp our situation without Christ, when we understand how it really would go for us at the judgment if it had not been for the intervention of Jesus Christ. We don’t worship Him as we ought to worship Him. We don’t love and serve and follow Him as we ought to love and serve and follow Him, to the degree that we should. If you’re a follower of Christ you do those things, but not to the degree we should if we don’t grasp the fullness of our circumstance apart from the work of Jesus Christ.

So, I asked you last week and I’ll ask you again this morning, if you’re a Christian, for the next few minutes I want you to forget that reality. And I want it to sink deep into your soul that if you were to stand before God apart from His grace, this would have been His verdict on your life. His verdict contains five elements, five separate legal decisions. Together those five legal decisions summarize God’s final verdict on every single one of us apart from Jesus Christ.

Now, last week we discovered the first element of God’s verdict. And that is, we are responsible before God’s law. Notice how verse 19 begins, “Now, we know,” that’s how Paul starts when he expects that his readers will agree with him. He says, “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law.” Now who are those under the law? We noted last week that when you look at the first two chapters of Romans, you get two different groups.

First of all, there are those who have access to the written revelation of God. In the first century that was primarily the Jews. They are under the law. They have God's law in writing, they're therefore under the law.

In addition to that, however, Paul has argued in the first two chapters that every human being, whether he has God's written revelation or not, still has the work of the law written in his heart. The result of that is that every human being has enough knowledge of God's law to render him completely responsible for keeping God's law. That's the point Paul is making. All humanity is under the law. Some under the written law, but everyone else under the work of the law written on the heart.

I mean, think about yourself for a moment. How many Bibles do you have or have access to? How many sermons have you listened to? How many verses could you recall from memory just because you've, sort of, caught them by osmosis, if you haven't memorized them intentionally? Think about how often your conscience has confronted you, either before you were about to commit some sin or after you had. Put it all together and what Paul wants us to understand is that at the judgment not one person will be able to claim ignorance. Not one person will be able to claim exemption from keeping the law of God. We are all responsible before God's law. That is the first element in God's verdict. And that's foundational. The first thing God would say about you at the judgment, if you go there without Christ, what He will say about you is, you were responsible. You knew. And you still made the choices that you made.

Now, there's a second element to God's verdict at the judgment. If we're not in Christ at the judgment God will find, secondly, that we are guilty, with no defense. We are guilty, with no defense. Look again at 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." "So that" obviously speaks of purpose. Paul is saying that God made every man responsible before His law in order to accomplish two very specific purposes. The first purpose is "so that every mouth may be closed." The verb translated "may be closed" simply means to be shut, to be silenced. These are potent words.

The picture is a vivid and powerful one. It pictures a defendant in court who has listened as the charges have been read; he's listened as the evidence has been presented. And then comes his time to speak in his own defense and he finds himself completely speechless because of the sheer weight of the evidence that has been presented. He has nothing to say. And so without saying a single word, he simply stands and waits for the condemnation and the sentence. The law has been explained, the defendant has been accused of violating the law, the evidence has been presented, the judge has found the defendant guilty as charged, and the defendant concludes, when given the chance to defend himself, there is simply nothing I can say in my own defense.

Paul says one great purpose of the law is that it serves to remove all self defense. Think about that. Think about how different God's court room is from our own legal system. One author

puts it this way, he says, “We are tried by our peers, who frequently excuse bad behavior. Juries can be tampered with. Judges can be bribed or simply make mistakes. Human law is inexact and imperfect. There are often loopholes and technicalities. We can plead extenuating circumstances. We appeal to a higher court. And another beyond that. Even if we are still found guilty we can continue our efforts at self-vindication. We can carry on our legal battle from the prison law library. We can write letters. We can write a book and sell the television rights to our story. We can maintain our innocence with our family, friends, and fellow prisoners. We can refuse to be silenced. Defendants here seem to just keep on talking. But before God, every mouth will be silenced.”

In fact, let me put it to you this way. The only true Christians are those who have already shut up, who no longer offer any defense of their sin but have accepted full responsibility. They know there’s no defense. Lloyd-Jones puts it this way, he says, “Have you stopped speaking? Have you been silenced in the presence of God? Have you given up self-justification? Have you given up arguing against this verdict of the great apostle? Or are you saying, but surely after all I’ve done, this good and that, I’m not as bad as that. If you’re saying that you have missed the Scripture, because the effect of this Scripture is to silence, to stop, every mouth. You are not a Christian unless you have been made speechless. How do you know whether you’re a Christian or not? It is that you stop talking.”

Notice, Paul says, in verse 19, “every mouth.” Without the grace of God this is the end of every human being. But, you know, the believer has already come to this place. As I said, the believer has already, as it were, put his hand over his mouth and accepted full responsibility. If you’re a believer you’re like David in Psalm 51 who said, “Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified,” God, “when You speak and You are blameless when You judge.” In other words, David’s saying, God, whatever You decide to do to me, I deserve it and worse. Have you ever said that to God? True Christians say that. They understand their true guilt.

My wife and I, when our children were younger we taught them the children’s catechism. I recommend it to you; it’s a great way to expose them to Christian doctrine at an early age. And they get so much of it. If you’ve been around our church any time at all, you’ve probably heard me tell my favorite story from those catechism days. One day Sheila and one of our daughters, who will remain nameless to protect the guilty, were at the grocery store. This is in Los Angeles. This daughter was struggling to obey and, frankly, desperately failing. And when they got to the cash register, she saw it. There it was, all the candy, beautifully portrayed at eye level for the kids to see. You parents know about this. It’s like she had died and gone to Disneyland. You know, it’s all there. And so she began to plead with my wife to have a treat. You’ve probably experienced that.

Now, you've got to picture the scene. They're standing in a long line, they're always long lines in L.A., there's just so many people, and there are long lines in every other cash register line, and they're in a crowded L.A. supermarket with dozens of people within earshot. And so Sheila said to her, "Sweetheart, you don't deserve a treat based on how you have misbehaved today in the store." In a very loud voice my daughter responded, "I know mommy, all I deserve is the wrath and curse of God." She got it. She understood.

That is exactly the purpose of God's law. It is to remind us that we are guilty. That we have no legitimate defense. That we, that you, that I deserve the wrath, the just anger, and the curse, the eternal curse on our souls, of God. That's what we deserve. This passage reminds us that our primary problem is not our circumstances. It's not even ourselves and our own internal struggle with sin. Our greatest problem is our status before God. Paul has primarily been arguing in these chapters that we stand under the verdict of guilty in the court room of God our Creator. This is our problem. It's not primarily our internal condition, as bad as that is, although the gospel has a remedy for that as well.

But our real issue is our standing before God. That's, by the way, why we should never present the gospel as a fix for man's problems. Don't say, you need to trust Jesus because He'll fix your marriage and He'll make you more successful in your business. He may or may not do those things. Obviously, if you obey Him it will help your marriage be a better marriage. But the real issue in the gospel is not any of that. It's how to be reconciled with God. Man's greatest problem is he's guilty before his Creator. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul, and following, Paul tells us, "we are ambassadors for Christ," with one message, "be reconciled to God." That's what the gospel calls for.

The verdict is in. We have been declared guilty and there's not a single thing we can say in our defense. And stay with me here, if we are guilty then God can never declare us, in and of ourselves, to be righteous. Because we're guilty. We desperately need the righteousness of another. An alien righteousness to us. A righteousness that comes from God to us, which is the gospel.

However men may appear to us, and we all have this sliding scale, right? You think about your coworkers, your neighbors who are unbelievers and about some of them you say, you know, he's a pretty good guy, she's really, she's a good person. And then there are others you say, well, maybe not. We have this sort of scale. However men may appear to us, they all appear equally guilty and without defense before God. While the kind and degree of their sin may be different, and our own sin may be different, our standing before God apart from Christ is no different than that of a terrorist, a mass murderer, or Hitler himself. We are guilty, with no defense.

The third decision in God's verdict is that we abide under God's wrath, under His just anger. Look at verse 19 again, "so that all the world may become accountable to God." Paul's already made the point that one purpose for the law is "so that every mouth may be closed." Now he

adds a second purpose for the law, “so that all the world may become accountable.” You can see in the context here, “all the world” is parallel to “every mouth,” so we’re talking about every person without exception.

But the Greek word accountable is a very unusual word. In fact, it’s only found here in the New Testament. It is definitely a legal word, as you would expect in this paragraph. It’s a forensic word. It describes someone, listen carefully, who has already lost his case in court. His case has already been heard. He lost. In addition, there is no possibility of him disproving the charge against him. He is, therefore, currently liable to punishment. That’s really what the word means, liable to punishment.

Now specifically, Paul says, we are “accountable to God.” That’s pretty remarkable, because the Greek word accountable in secular contexts was usually followed by the name of one of two people, either the one against whom the crime had been committed, you were legally liable to punishment because of that person, or the name of the judge before whom you appeared. In this case God is both. He’s the offended party and He’s the judge. The picture here is of someone standing before the bar of God, his guilt has already been proven beyond all doubt, and his sentence has been established. All that’s left is the execution of the sentence.

It’s a very hard word to translate into English. And they chose the word accountable, which is okay, but it implies, you know, lack of certainty. Like maybe he’ll be found guilty, maybe he won’t, he’s accountable to the law. That’s not the idea behind this word. There is certainty behind this word. I think maybe the best modern equivalent to this Greek word is this, in God’s sight the entire world is currently living on death row having exhausted every possible appeal. That’s the idea of this accountable. On death row with no appeals left. This is man’s condition. This is my condition without Christ. It’s your condition without Christ.

Turn over to John 3. The most famous verse in the Bible, verse 16,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son [*the first time*] into the world to judge the world, but that the world [*might be rescued*] might be saved through Him.

That’s why He came. Verse 18, “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who,” watch this now, verse 18,

he who does not believe in Jesus Christ has been judged already, [*in one sense*] because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

Verse 20, they didn't want their deeds exposed. Their choice has judged them, has made it evident who they really are. Look down a verse 36. Here's the summary. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life." He has, as his current possession, the life from above. The life that not only lasts forever, but life of a different kind. Life from above. The life of God Himself. "But he who does not obey the Son will not see life," now watch this, the end of verse 36, "but the wrath," the just anger, "of God," literally, present tense, "is constantly abiding on him."

Jonathan Edwards, who preached, arguably the most famous sermon in American history, *Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God*, tried to capture our precarious position. By the way, most people misunderstand Edwards. It's like he took some sadistic delight in what he was preaching. Nothing could be further from the truth if you read Edwards. He was passionately concerned for the people to whom he preached. And he wanted them to understand just how dangerous their position was and urged them to be reconciled to God.

And so, he described the precarious position and the reality of impending judgment as if each one of us were a loathsome spider suspended, even now, as we live our lives here, over the pit of hell by the hand of God. And he described it as though we were suspended over hell by a single thread that could easily break at any moment. His point was, life can go so quickly and we are in an awfully precarious circumstance, because we live under and abide under the wrath, the just anger of God.

Most people want to ignore this, they don't want to talk about the wrath of God. In fact, if you talk about, anything about Hell or the wrath of God you're called a hellfire and damnation preacher as though you take some sadistic joy in these things. Listen, there's nothing harder to speak about, there's nothing harder for you to hear. But this is the reality. This is truth. This is what Jesus taught, either He spoke the truth or He was a liar, but this is what He taught. Very unpopular, even in churches, but it's a reality. John 3:36 says, "the wrath," the just anger, "of God is continually abiding," even today, "over those who don't know Christ."

When I was growing up there were 10 of us, 10 siblings in my family, and when the Sunday paper arrived we all dove for the part we wanted. And I hate to admit this to you, but I always wanted the comics. And there was a comic strip in those days, it doesn't run anymore, where there was a character who walked around and everywhere he walked he had this thundercloud just over him. It's like everywhere he walked he took his cloud with him.

If you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, you live today, and every day of your life, under the looming storm of the just anger of God. It abides on you today, John says. But His wrath will be shown in its greatest fury when someday you will be resurrected, along with all other unbelievers, and you will stand individually, personally, just you, before your Creator. And He will hold you responsible for the life you have lived. He will judge you based on His law. And He will find you guilty without defense. And you will be banished to eternal punishment. Again, this is what the Scriptures teach.

Look at Romans 3, I'm sorry chapter 2, Romans 2:4. Paul says, "do you think lightly of the riches of God's kindness and tolerance and patience?" God's good to you. You have all these things you enjoy. I've got a good life. I've got a nice car. I have a nice house. I have a good job. I'm succeeding. Things are going well. I'm enjoying life. God must be okay with me. Paul says, you're missing the point, you don't know, verse 4,

that the kindness of God is intended to lead you to repentance. But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up God's anger for yourself in the day of His anger and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

This is what God says. This is the reality.

John the Baptist preached this message, Luke 3:7, he warned them to "flee from the wrath to come." First Thessalonians 1:10 describes Jesus as the one "who rescues us from the wrath to come." In Revelation 20 that day of judgment is described.

I saw a great white throne [*John writes*] and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the* book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books.

That's the record of your life. That's every thought you have ever had. That's every word you have ever spoken. That's every act you have ever performed. All recorded in the omniscient mind of God and brought out to convict. "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire," which burns forever. This is what the Scriptures teach. We abide without Christ under God's just anger. In other words, if you're not a Christian, you are living right now on death row and you have no appeals left. The day of judgment is, in one sense, just a formality.

That brings us to verse 20 and the fourth element of the divine verdict, we are hopeless before the divine standard. We can't do anything about our circumstance, verse 20 says, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight." Paul doesn't quote an Old Testament verse here, but he does allude to one, in Psalm 143:2, which says, "In Your sight," speaking to God, "no man living is righteous." Now, what follows there in verse 20, the word because, explains why everyone is guilty with no defense and why everyone abides under God's wrath. Here's why, "because by the works of the Law no flesh," that is, not one human being, "shall be justified," that is, be declared right before God, receive a righteous standing or status, "in God's sight."

Now, this would have surprised the Jews who were listening to Paul. Because the law promised life to the one who could keep it. Romans 2:13, “the doers of the law will be justified.” Romans 10:5, “Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law, ‘shall live by that righteousness.’” They took that to mean that they could earn their way to heaven by their own efforts. But Paul, here in verse 20, says, that not only was keeping the law impossible, which it is, but it was never God’s purpose for the law to justify anyone.

Now, the key phrase is that little expression, “the works of the Law”. That’s a hotly debated phrase, we will come back to that in weeks to come, but let me just define it for you. The works of the law simply means, doing the works that the law requires, doing the works that the law requires. Paul defines it in Galatians 3:10 where he equates the works of the law with “‘ABIDING BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.’” That’s the works of the law.

In addition, this phrase, the works of the law, is always used as the opposite of faith. Listen to Galatians 2:16, “a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus.” Later in the verse, “so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law.” So then, the works of the law, that expression, refers to all human effort, even obedience to God’s revealed commands. It speaks of any human effort to gain God’s acceptance.

Douglas Moo summarizes it this way, “Nothing a person does, whatever the object of obedience or the motivation of that obedience, nothing a person does can bring him or her into favor with God.” Do you understand that about yourself? There’s nothing you can do to change your status of guilty. There’s nothing I can do. No effort will change that status. Serving others. Giving to the poor. Coming to church. Praying. Reading your Bible. Getting baptized. Serving in the church. Those are all things commanded by the Scripture. But doing those things will never change my status of guilty before God.

You say, why is that? There’s an illustration that has been used in many different places by many different authors, but I really like it. Imagine a ship manned by pirates. While they’re out at sea, the pirates on that ship, they’re largely civil to each other, they basically get along. They occasionally have scraps here and there, but for the most part they get along with each other. They work hard toward a common goal. They’re even loyal to each other, up to a point. They help one another in many ways. They even defend each other, defend each other’s lives at points. Those are good deeds.

But all of their good deeds are, at the same time, evil deeds. Why? Because their entire lives are in rebellion against maritime law and against their government. Also, their good deeds are highly selective. They help only those like themselves. They actually rob and maim and murder those who get in their way. So even their kindness grows out of their rebellion. That’s how it is with mankind’s rebellion against God. We may do many things that appear to be good, but our

good is actually bad because it's designed to maintain our rebellion against our authority, against the government of God.

Let me put it a different way, the good deeds that we perform here only have value here. You might be admired by the people around you, you might receive accolades and even awards. Honored. But those good deeds have no value to God. What if prisoners of war decided they needed some barter system, and most of the time this happens. And so the prisoners of war decided in the prison camp they needed some barter system. And all they had was a Monopoly game. And so they decided to use the Monopoly money as their currency. This is going to be their monetary currency in the prison camp. And they buy and they sell and they trade based on this Monopoly money currency. And it works for them. It has value in their world. But imagine when those prisoners of war are released and one of them takes his great wealth that he has amassed, on Park Place or wherever it was, and he takes it to the nearest B. of A. and he tries to cash it in. He will quickly discover that it is completely worthless outside the prison camp.

In the same way, our good works, including even our best obedience to God's moral law, our good works have absolutely no value in heaven. Perfection alone has value in heaven. So based on heaven's sense of value, where do we stand, what's our true condition? We are by nature morally and spiritually corrupt in every part of our being. We are utterly incapable of changing our nature, of doing anything that pleases God. We are unable to change our status, our standing of guilty before God. We deserve His punishment. In other words, we are utterly hopeless on our own.

Do you want to know what God's judgment is of you apart from Christ? Well, Paul has laid it out here in vivid detail. In one sense, all of us have already had our day in court. God has already declared that we are responsible for His law. That we are guilty with no defense. That we abide under His just anger. That we're on death row. And that we're completely hopeless of making any change to our own situation.

There's one final decision that's part of God's verdict. At the end of verse 20, it's that we are fully aware of our true condition. We are fully aware of our true condition. Verse 20 ends this way, "for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." Notice that, for, we could say because, explains the reason that no one can be justified by keeping the law. It's because that was never God's intention with the law. Instead, His design was that through the law would come the knowledge of sin, you would learn what sin is.

Now, the Greek word translated knowledge here is a word that refers to more intimate personal knowledge. There's a nuance of meaning in this word. In other words, what the law provides isn't some sort of cold sterile academic knowledge that somewhere out in the universe sin exists. Instead, the law brings an intimate personal awareness of my own sin. Not only can I not earn justification by myself by keeping God's law, but even my best attempts to do so only point back at my guilt. They highlight my sin even more. The law defines sin, brings it out of its hiding

place. The law shows us how bad it really is. J.B. Phillips, in his paraphrase of this verse, says, “it is the straight-edge of the Law that shows us how crooked we are.”

Think of God’s law like a mirror. You have lots of mirrors in your house. Walk up to a mirror. And that mirror can never clean your face. All it can do is show you how dirty it is. That’s God’s law. It can’t clean us. It wasn’t intended to. It was intended to show us how dirty we are.

What’s the purpose of God’s law for you if you’re not a believer in Jesus Christ? It has three basic purposes if you’re not a follower of Christ. Number one, it’s supposed to awaken your conscience. Look at verse 20, “through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” It was to show you your sin. It was to give you an intimate personal awareness of the fact that you can’t make God happy with your own works. It was to awaken your conscience.

Secondly, it’s to drive you to Christ. Having seen that you can’t do anything on your own, that the face in the mirror is dirty, it’s to drive you to Christ. Galatians 3:24, “the law was our tutor to *bring us* to Christ.” Charles Hodge writes, “The law was not designed to give life, but so to convince of sin that men may be led to renounce their own righteousness and trust in the righteousness of Christ as the only and all sufficient ground of their acceptance with God.”

And the third purpose of the law in your life if you’re not a follower of Christ, is to leave you without excuse if you decide to reject the gospel. Look again at verse 19, “You are under the Law, so that on the day of judgment your mouth will be silenced and you will become liable to punishment before God.”

So apart from God’s grace, our day in court on the day of judgment would produce this multifaceted verdict. Through Christ, who will be the judge, God Himself would declare every single one of us responsible before His law, guilty with no defense, abiding under His just wrath forever, hopeless to change our status or to do anything to make ourselves acceptable to Him, and fully aware of our true condition, but having ignored it and having done nothing about it.

Listen, if you’ve never come to Jesus Christ. If you have never repented of your sins and believed in Him. Please understand, this is exactly how God sees you at this moment. You may have convinced yourself through some sentimental idea that you and God have some relationship. But if you have not repented of your sin and put your trust in His Son, John the Apostle says, on the authority of Jesus Christ, that today, as you sit in that pew, you are abiding under the anger of God and you’re only storing up more every moment you breathe. Please understand, this is the bad news. This is the truth about you. Your only hope is the good news.

In a nutshell, the good news is that if you are willing to leave your sin and embrace Jesus as your Lord, God will forgive your sin and He will save you, He will rescue you from His own coming wrath against you. And you can receive that solely by faith. You say, how can God do that? Well, we’re going to learn in the next paragraph of Romans that He can do that because He

accepts Jesus' death on the cross as the complete payment for your sin. And He puts Christ's perfection in your account and treats you as if you had lived Jesus' life. That's the gospel. And that's your only hope. I plead with you today, be reconciled to God.

If you already belong to Christ, that's most of us here, understanding this passage should produce several responses in you. Three of them, very quickly. Number one, if you understand that this would be you, this is how it would go with you, it should produce in you a profound sense of gratitude to God. Do you understand? This is you. This is me. This is how it would go for us. But Christ intervened. It should produce a profound sense of gratitude. Hebrews 13:15, "Through Christ then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." Our whole lives should just bubble over with gratitude because of what He has rescued us from.

It should produce holiness and service. Paul's going to get to that later in Romans, after he gives all of the wonderful grace that God has given in salvation, he comes to chapter 12 verse 1 and the very first thing he says about our response to that is this, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living a holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." In other words, you better remember, you don't belong to yourself anymore. "You have been bought with a price." You belong to Christ. Your life is not yours to live as you choose. If you really understand how He intervened, then you'll get that. And you'll want to follow Him. You'll want to love Him. You'll want to serve Him.

Number three, understanding this passage should produce in you a deep concern for the people around you who are lost. Second Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul says, "Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ," notice this, "and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word," or the message, "of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ." Is that how you think of yourself in this world? "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though," I love this, "as though God were making an appeal," to the people around us, "through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." And, of course, the message of reconciliation comes in verse 21, the next verse in chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians, "God made him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." That's our message.

So, here are the legal implications of everything Paul has taught us so far in the first three chapters of Romans, verses 19 and 20. But I want you to notice, verse 21, how the good news begins, "But now." And that's for next week. Let's pray together.

Father, we are truly grateful. Those of us who belong to You through Your Son, we give You praise, we thank You, O God, for Your mercy and grace in Christ. Lord, this passage resonates with our souls. We understand, we see that this would be us. This is what we would hear. This

is the verdict that would be passed. Apart from Christ and His love and His intervention on the cross. Apart from Your love for us.

Father, we're so grateful. Help us to live with that gratitude constantly pouring out of our souls to You. Forgive us for ever being discouraged or down about anything when we have this relationship to You, when You have intervened in this way. Forgive us for not exalting You daily. Forgive us for not offering continually the sacrifice of praise, even the fruit of lips that give thanks to Your name.

And Father, help us to pursue Christ with our whole hearts, understanding what He has done. Lord, may that motivate and drive us to love Him and worship Him and serve Him and follow Him with our whole hearts through all of life, remembering that we don't belong to ourselves but to Him.

And Father, open our mouths to share the message of reconciliation with others who will hear this verdict if they don't hear the gospel and You don't work through the gospel to bring them to Yourself. Father, may we be Your ambassadors, pleading with people to be reconciled to You.

Father, I pray for those here this morning who are not in Christ. May the reality of this passage bury itself deep within their souls. Lord, may they not be able to get away from what You have said in this passage and may You use the truth of it to draw them truly to Yourself. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.