

## **Romans 3:9-20**

### **'It's time to shut up!'**

**Some time ago, in High Park in Toronto, Canada, there lived a duck called "Ringo".**

- And this duck made the headlines of one of the paper's because one day it accidentally poked her beak through the ring of ring pull of a can and was not able to remove it.
- This resulted in her being unable to eat and certain death from starvation likely.
- The duck's plight was noticed by some of the park visitors and as a result she became something of a celebrity.
- All kinds of people got involved and various solutions were tried in order to capture and help poor Ringo.
- A cannon, that fired a large net was tried but no success.
- A diver tried to scare Ringo out of the bulrushes but no success.
- Ringo was tempted with corn and bread but that only attracted sea gulls.
- Even a champion duck-caller came and attracted every duck for miles, but not Ringo.
- All the efforts to help her failed, as each time the duck mistook the efforts to help as threats and eventually disappeared before anyone could provide the rescue she so desperately needed.<sup>1</sup>

**The apostle Paul tells us in Romans that we and the rest of humanity like Ringo are in serious danger and are helpless to do anything about it.**

- But wonderfully God has provided a rescue through the gospel, the good news of Jesus and what He's done to save us.
- Paul writes to Christians who unlike Ringo have accepted the rescue which is available, and he writes to awaken in them and in a passion for the gospel that will explode in enthusiasm to share it with each other and with those who don't know about it.

**But the thing is, we won't be excited about the gospel until we truly understand why we need to be rescued.**

- What the ring around our beak is.
- Because when we see how much trouble and danger we are in and how helpless we are, Jesus' offer of rescue becomes more amazing.
- Paul aims to show us that *"we're more wicked than we ever realised, but more loved than we ever dreamed"*<sup>2</sup>, to borrow a phrase from Rico Tice.
- And in the first part of his letter from Romans 1:18 through to Romans 3:20, Paul shows the depth of human wickedness and sin.
- But then in Romans 3:21 we have the turning point of the letter. After chapters of how wicked we are, Paul turns his attention to how good and loving God has been to us.
- So as we look at Romans 3:9-20 it's not going to be happy reading or hearing, but remember it's not hopeless.

**Paul as prosecutor on behalf of God is now summing his argument against the whole world.**

- Look at the charge he gives in verse 9.

### **READ ROMANS 3:9**

- *"What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin."*

**That's what Paul has shown in the previous chapters.**

- It doesn't matter whether you're Jew or a Gentile (basically everybody), you are a sinner.
- Someone who is under the power and control of sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Zerby, What is a duck worth?

<sup>2</sup> Rico Tice on Evangelism and 'Christianity Explored' in Modern Reformation Magazine

- And because we are sinners, we find God’s verdict of judgment in verse 19.

**READ ROMANS 3:19**

- *“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.”*

**So the thrust of the passage from verse 9 to 20 is that:**

- “Everyone is a sinner and guilty before God and deserving of His judgment and there is nothing we can do about it!”
- And just to make sure that we are convinced of this, Paul says in verse 10, listen to what God has been saying for centuries, before quoting a number of verses from the Psalms and Isaiah, which together have been described as ‘fourteen horrible things about all men’<sup>3</sup>.

**Imagine that each of these fourteen statements was a like a bead being placed onto a necklace, but the necklace actually turns out to be a hangman’s noose.**

- First bead. There is no-one righteous.
- Second. There is no-one who understands.
- Third. There is no-one who seeks God.
- Fourth. All have turned away.
- Fifth. They all have together become worthless.
- Sixth. There is no-one who does good.
- Seventh. Their throats are open graves.
- Eighth. Their tongues practise deceit.
- Ninth. The poison of vipers is on their lips.
- Tenth. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.
- Eleventh. Their feet are swift to shed blood.
- Twelfth. Ruin and misery mark their ways.
- Thirteenth. The way of peace they do not know.
- And fourteenth. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

**It’s dark picture of humanity and shows how serious sin is, how guilty, and how deserving of God’s judgment we are.**

- To help us see this I want us to look at four things about sin<sup>4</sup>.

*Firstly,*

**Point 1: Sin is spiritual (v11, 18)**

**What I mean by sin is spiritual is that sin primarily affects our relationship with God.**

- Often we think of sin as being something we do, usually an action against someone else.
- We get angry at people, or lust after someone.
- We get jealous of people, we lie to people.
- Murder, adultery, theft, are crimes against people.
- Sometimes it’s an action against ourselves.
- But these expressions of sin are a result of rejecting and rebelling against God.
- It’s because we don’t love God, and don’t care about what He has to say, and because what we want and think is best, is most important, that we do these actions we call sin.

**Sin is primarily a spiritual act of rebellion against God our Creator which leads to wrong actions towards others.**

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<sup>3</sup> William Newell, Romans

<sup>4</sup> The four point I thank Vaughan Roberts for

**Think about the first sin in the Garden of Eden.**

- Adam and Eve's sin was against God.
- It was rejecting His loving rule; it was saying we don't want you to be God over us.
- Only after this did they start sinning against each other.

**Do you see how sin is described in terms of being against God at the beginning and end of these Old Testament quotations, almost forming a bracket around them?**

**READ ROMANS 3:11**

- *"no-one who seeks God."*

**READ ROMANS 3:18**

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

**No-one seeks God. No fear of God.**

- In the spiritual game of hide and seek, we are the ones who are hiding and God is the one seeking.
- Humans naturally are just not interested in God.
- We couldn't care less about what God thinks about us.
- We do what we like because we want to be God.

**Sin is spiritual. It affects our relationship with God as it causes us to rebel against His loving rule over our lives.**

*Secondly,*

**Point 2: Sin is universal (v9-12)**

**What I mean by sin is universal is that sin affects everyone.**

- This comes out so clearly in verses 9-12.

**READ ROMANS 3:9-12**

- *"What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.*
- *As it is written: There is no-one righteous, not even one;*
- *there is no-one who understands, no-one who seeks God.*
- *All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no-one who does good, not even one."*

**Do you see how Paul rams this point home, that sin affects everyone?**

- Jews and Gentiles alike.
- All.
- No-one.
- Not even one.
- They have together.

**Everyone is born into identical conditions.**

- In the boat called "Sinners".
- That's not to say some people are at more of an advantage than others.
- Jews have the blessing of the Old Testament which points to Jesus, the one who fulfils God promises of one who saves people from their sin and judgment.

- Children born into Christian homes have the advantage of parents who know the gospel and can teach it to them from an early age.
- But in spite of this advantage in terms of nearness to the gospel, they are still just as guilty as someone who has never heard the gospel or about Jesus.

**Let me put it another way.**

- Imagine your standing in front of God and next to you is Jon Venables one of the James Bulger killers who has been in the news this week.
- God's pronouncement on both of you is guilty. How does that make you feel?

**No-one is righteous.**

- No-one is right with God.
- All have broken God's law.

**No-one understands.**

- We're not interested in knowing about God.
- Christians how interested are you or how much time do you spend studying the deep truths about God?

**All have turned aside.**

- We have gone the wrong way, like a soldier deserting the army, we have disobeyed God.

**Together we have become worthless.**

- Like rotten fruit, we are useless.

**No-one does good.**

- Think for a moment about the things that people do which we think are good. Giving money to charity. Helping those less fortunate. Obeying the speed limit. We could make a really long list.
- And these are good things, don't get me wrong. The problem is that they are good things by our standard of goodness. They are good because we say they are good.
- But God's standard of goodness is higher than ours, and so Isaiah says *"all our righteous acts are like filthy rags"*<sup>5</sup>. Literally a bloody menstrual cloth, so contaminated it must be destroyed.
- God's standard of goodness is more than just good actions; it's having the right thoughts and motivations for doing these actions.
- Our actions that we think are good are sin if they are not motivated by love for God.
- It's about who we are doing these good things for.
- Are we doing them because we think God will bless us in return? If that's the case we are doing it for ourselves.
- Are we doing them for approval, to make ourselves look good, to be able to think better of ourselves?
- See when we think this way about our goodness, it become clear that in God's eyes no-one does good.
- We don't love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
- John Bunyan said: *"The best prayer I ever prayed had enough sin in it to damn the whole world."*<sup>6</sup>
- We are all guilty sinners.

Thirdly,

**Point 3: Sin is total (v13-17)**

**What I mean by sin is total is that sin affects every area of our life.**

- This truth is sometimes referred to as the doctrine of total depravity.

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<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 64:6

<sup>6</sup> John Bunyan, Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners

**Now we must be clear what this does not mean.**

- It doesn't mean that we are as bad as we could possibly be.
- Also it doesn't mean that we are guilty of committing every possible sin.

**Rather, it means that every part of us is tainted with sin.**

- There isn't a single part of us that is as it should be.
- Imagine that the colour of sin was blue, if that was the case, every part of our body and life would have a shade of blue.<sup>7</sup>
- Our skin would have a shade of blue, the white of our eyes would have a shade of blue, our heart and the blood it pumps would have a shade of blue, and when we watch back our home videos what they show would have a shade of blue.
- If this wasn't clear already from verses 10-12, it should be from verses 13-17 which have been described as *"an X-ray study of the lost sinner, from head to foot"*<sup>8</sup>.

**READ ROMANS 3:13-17**

- *"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practise deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips.*
- *Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.*
- *Their feet are swift to shed blood;*
- *ruin and misery mark their ways,*
- *and the way of peace they do not know."*

**Paul begins by examining the mouth.**

- We don't have to work too hard to think of examples of what Paul is thinking.
- Throats are open graves. Saturday afternoons on the football terraces.
- Tongues practice deceit. We think of politicians, and wonder if they are telling us the truth. And it's not just politicians, we are all liars. And it's not something we are taught to do. Your mum didn't sit you up on her knee and said today I want to teach you how to lie.
- Poison of vipers is on their lips. Parents gossiping while they wait for their kids in the playgrounds. Rumours being spread by the tabloid newspapers.
- Mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Swear words are found on the lips of young and old, from the primary schools and PG films, to pubs and homes.

**But the fact that our mouths are sinful shows that we have deeper problem.**

- Remember Jesus' words: *"the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."*<sup>9</sup>
- Our mouths reveal what our hearts are like.
- Replace throats, tongues, lips, mouths with heart, and that's what we really are like.

**But Paul doesn't stop with our mouths.**

- He moves onto our feet, and the direction humans takes.
- Someone calculated the violence in warfare during the last 2,000 of western civilisation, in terms of number of wars and magnitude of violence and discovered that the most peaceful century was the first century.
- Should we be surprised by that? After all that was the century that witnessed the coming of the Prince of Peace.<sup>10</sup>
- Another study calculated that for the last 4,000 years of human history there have been but 286 years of peace despite more than 8,000 peace treaties.

<sup>7</sup> [http://preceptaustin.org/romans\\_310-20.htm](http://preceptaustin.org/romans_310-20.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Warren Wiersbe, Be Right

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 15:18-19

<sup>10</sup> RC Sproul, Romans

**Aside from war, there are other ways that blood is shed, murder, euthanasia, abortion.**

- The ruin and misery caused by the school bully, gangs, parent's violent outbursts, and the cutting words of friends.
- It's true that Britain isn't as broken as other countries in the world. Fear of the police and prison are some of the ways that God restrains evil in this land.
- But think about what happens when a countries infrastructure disappears, what do we commonly see happen on TV, looting!

**Sin is total.**

- We might not be as bad as we could be, but no part of us is as good as it should be.

**Sin is universal.**

- All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

**Sin is spiritual.**

- It is against God, and makes us guilty before God because it's His law we have broken.

**So this is the charge against all humanity.**

- Everyone is a sinner and guilty before God.
- And this leads us to God's verdict and the final thing about sin.

*Fourthly,*

**Point 4: Sin is fatal (v19-20)**

**The fact that we all are sinners and guilty before God is not our biggest problem.**

- Our biggest problem is how God responds to us as sinners.
- God reaction to sin is wrath.
- God hates sin and must punish it.
- Paul earlier wrote that we are *"storing up wrath against [ourselves] for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed"*<sup>11</sup>.
- A day is coming when God will judge everyone and punish our sin by sending us to hell, the place of everlasting destruction.

**Sin is fatal.**

- It brings God's judgment and there is nothing we can do about this.

**READ ROMANS 3:19-20**

- *"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.*
- *Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."*

**In verse 19 and 20, we are back in the courtroom, and we are standing in the docks and God is going to give His verdict.**

- His judgment is going to be according to His standard of righteousness revealed in the law.
- The law that He gave to Moses who wrote it down which we find in our Bibles.
- But that's not the only place the law was written down.
- Romans 2:15 tells us that the requirements of the law are written on our hearts and our consciences bear witness to this.

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 2:5

- The law makes it clear, the end of the verse 20 tells us, that we are sinners.
- Through the law we become conscious of sin, that none of us is right with God.

**“Everyone is a sinner and guilty before God and deserving of His judgment and there is nothing we can do about it!”**

**And at that point, it’s time to shut up!**

- You have nothing left to say.
- No excuses – it’s time to shut up!
- No plan B – it’s time to shut up!
- No I can try harder – it’s time to shut up!
- No I can do better – it’s time to shut up!

**In the film Schindler’s List, there’s a part where the main character Oskar Schindler manages to keep a number of Jews from going to Auschwitz through bribery.**

- The Jews on “Schindler’s List” are put on board trains going to Schindler’s home town to work in his factory.
- But one of the trains carrying the Jewish women is accidentally redirected to Auschwitz.
- You see the women crammed in the carriages, looking out of the windows, seeing people by the side of the tracks with faces that paint the horror that awaits.
- You feel their despair as arrive in Auschwitz.
- You know what’s going to happen. It was there that almost a million Jews were killed in gas chambers.
- It’s a highly emotive film, but that’s the emotion we need to see about ourselves.

**We are sinners. We are guilty, guilty, guilty.**

- We have no defence.
- There is nothing we can say or do to get out of this situation.
- We are heading to death and hell, the eternal gas chamber.
- Is there any hope?

**Well these women in Auschwitz were in a helpless situation.**

- Nothing they could say or do to be rescued, but there was one man who could.
- One man who had the right credentials because he was a member of the Nazi party.
- One man who desired to show them mercy and compassion.
- Oskar Schindler, and in the film he goes to Auschwitz and bribes the camp commander with diamonds in exchange for their release.

**Martyn Lloyd-Jones said:**

- *“You do not begin to be a Christian, until your mouth is shut, is stopped, and you are speechless and have nothing to say. You put up your arguments, and produce all your righteousness; then the Law speaks and it all withers to nothing – becomes ‘filthy rags’ and ‘dung,’ and you have nothing to say.”<sup>12</sup>*

**Because in the silence of courtroom where we stand guilty before God, and it’s only a matter of time before we are punished in hell, there comes a voice.**

- The voice comes from the only man who can do anything about the situation we are in.
- One man who has the right credentials because He is righteous.
- This man desire to show mercy and compassion towards us.
- Hope comes to a helpless situation.

**READ ROMANS 3:21**

- *“But...”*

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<sup>12</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Romans 2:1-3:20

**Three letters, b-u-t, are difference between heaven and hell.**

- As one person has put it,<sup>13</sup> the volcano of grace (God's undeserved kindness to sinner) that has been rumbling in previous chapters, now explodes as Paul writes about how God is glorified as:
- the guilty are justified (declared 'not guilty');
- sinners are redeemed from slavery to sin,
- God's wrath removed from those He is angry at,
- and the unrighteous made righteous through Jesus' death on the cross.

**This is the offer of rescue and salvation for sinners heading towards hell.**

- This is the offer of relationship with God restored and eternal life with Him in heaven.
- This is an offer that we don't deserve.

**You see as we reflect on what God says we are truly like as sinners.**

- As we stop for a minute and think about ourselves, our lives as God sees them.
- When get rid of our pride which makes us think we are better than we are.
- When we stop comparing ourselves to other people to make us think we are not that bad.
- When we acknowledge how truly wicked we are. How every part our bodies and lives is tainted with sin.
- Not only should we see the rightness of God's judgment of condemning us to hell.
- But it should also blow our minds that God should even consider saving one person, let alone offering salvation to all who would receive it.

**Those of you who are not yet Christians, you are in a dangerous place, you are heading for disaster.**

- It's like the doctor has given you the news that you've got cancer.
- God wants you to know how He sees you now, but also to tell you that there is a cure to your situation.
- God isn't like a doctor who keeps quiet about the cancer when it's at a curable stage. He tells us what we are like so that we can be save because He loves us and wants us to be His people.
- To accept this cure, to accept this offer of rescue, all you simply have to do is put your trust in what Jesus has done by dying on the cross and being raised to life, and serve Him as your Lord, the one who is charge of your life.
- If you haven't done this yet, can I plead with you to do it now before it's too late.

**But for many of us here who are trusting in Jesus, who are Christians, can I encourage you (and I'm preaching to myself as well) to respond to this passage in three ways:**

*Firstly,*

**Every day take time to dwell on your past condition as sinners under the wrath of God and rightly deserving of hell.**

- And pray that as you do, as you take yourself to this place of despair and helplessness and terror, God will help you see the gospel as sweeter and more wonderful than you already do, and that He would increase your love for and desire to obey the Saviour who died for you.

**Every day too, take time to remember and confess your sins to God.**

- We are no longer under God's condemnation, but in this life sin still dwells within in us.
- We still fail to love God as we should.
- We still act in ways that dishonour and displease Him.
- So we need to take time to confess our sins to God, to renew our trust that Jesus has done everything we need to be forgiven, so that we continue to have an intimate relationship with our Lord and God.

*Secondly,*

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew Jones in a sermon preached at St Helen's Bishopgate

### **Cultivate a love for the lost.**

- Romans 3:9-20 describes how God sees every human on this planet outside of Christ.
- Having experienced the wonder of the gospel and salvation because of what Christ has done, it should give us a great burden for those who have not yet experienced this.
- The apostle Paul later in Romans, having written of the wonders of the gospel from 3:21 right through to the great statements in chapter 8 that *“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* and that nothing *“will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”*, he then writes at the start of chapter 9:

### **READ ROMANS 9:2-3**

- *“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.*
- *For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race...”*

### **As Paul reflected on the gospel that had saved him, his heart broke for people who were not yet saved and this drove his passion for evangelism.**

- So let's cultivate a love for the lost by reflecting on the gospel, and as we do let's pray that God's Spirit will spark to life in us a grief for those who haven't been saved by Jesus and a desire to tell them how they can be.

*Then thirdly,*

### **Let's give each other a break.**

- The church is full of sinners, sinning saints and sinning sinners.
- Your wife or husband is a sinner.
- Your children are sinners.
- Your parents are sinners.
- Your pastor is a sinner.
- It's true that Christians are justified, but we are still sinners. We are the bride of Christ and the Lord's harlot.
- Although we might be fighting hard to put to death our sinful nature, it is a slow, hard, and often inconsistent work.
- So often, church life, married life, family life, can be pretty bleak, because there are sinners involved in it.
- Remember it will be probably worse if the sinners involved aren't saved yet.
- I'm not saying it's not important to grow in godliness, I'm not saying that our church, families, marriages should be healthier and better, they should.
- But let's be realistic, until Jesus returns and the new heavens and earth, things are going to be imperfect and sinful.
- Let's have a realism that drives us to be more godly, but also helps us be more forgiving and give people a break because they haven't got their resurrection bodies yet!

### **Sin is spiritual – it affects our relationship with God.**

- Sin is universal – it affects everyone.
- Sin is total – it affects every area of our lives.
- Sin is fatal – it puts us under God's judgment.
- But there is hope.

**Guilty, vile and helpless we. Spotless lamb of God was He. Full atonement can it be. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!**