

“ACCUSED AND CONDEMNED”
ROMANS 3:19-20

A number of years ago singer Billy Joel talked about his spiritual life: “I wasn’t raised Catholic, but I used to go to Mass with my friends and I viewed the whole business as a lot of very enthralling hocus-pocus. There’s a guy...nailed to a cross and dripping blood, and everybody’s blaming themselves for that man’s torment, but I said to myself, ‘Forget it. I had no hand in that evil. I have no original sin. There’s no blood of any sacred martyr on my hands. I pass on all this.’”

It is just that kind of person that Paul is addressing in Romans 1-3.

Remember that Paul is writing this letter to a church has not met; and he is going to ask them to be his base of operations for a westward advance of the gospel (15:22-29). He is going to want them to support him spiritually and financially, but first he must demonstrate his worthiness to minister in their name. So he writes this letter to articulate his theological beliefs, particularly as they relate to the gospel he will carry to Spain. And he starts his explanation of the gospel where all good gospel explanations begin — with the sinfulness of man. From 1:18 – 3:20, he has been explaining that all men are sinners. Gentiles are sinners (1:18-32). Jews are sinners (2:1-29). All men are sinners (3:1-8). And he demonstrates that this isn’t just his idea, but that this is also the teaching of the OT (3:9-18). And now finally, in 3:19-20, he comes to a conclusion — all men are sinners, and because of that sin, all men are condemned —

ALL MEN ARE SINNERS. AND ALL MEN ARE CONDEMNED.

In these two verses Paul identifies *three accusations* by which all men are condemned as sinners.

As we begin, we should also remind ourselves why this doctrine of man’s depravity is important. It is essential, because as Billy Joel demonstrated for us, if man doesn’t see himself as a sinner, then he will never see his need for a Savior. And if he doesn’t see his need for a Savior, then he will never repent and he will never be spared from the eternal flames of Hell and the infinite wrath of God.

The depravity of man is an essential doctrine. Man can do nothing to save himself. All men need a Savior.

Here, then, are the three condemnations of man that Paul makes as he summarizes and concludes:

- 1. All Men Are Condemned in the LAW (v. 19a)**
- 2. All Men Are Condemned Because of INABILITY (v. 20a)**
- 3. All Men Are Condemned Through KNOWLEDGE of the Law (v. 20b)**

1. All Men Are Condemned in the **LAW** (v. 19a)

- When Paul says, ***We know that whatever the Law says...*** he is referring with the word ***Law*** to the entire Old Testament. That seems clear because he has just quoted extensively from Psalms and Isaiah (six passages), so that's the "Law" that he's talking about. It is more than just Moses, but the entire OT that speaks to the Jews about their situation before God.
 - ✓ And when he says, ***whatever the Law says, it speaks*** he is alluding to the fact that the Scriptures are authoritative in what they say.
 - ✓ The Scriptures are not just authoritative about morality; they are authoritative in ***whatever*** they say. The Scriptures have authority to demand obedience and in this case, the Scriptures are authoritative to evaluate the hearts of men and condemn them for their rebellion against God. No one else and nothing else can speak with a higher authority than Scripture.
- Notice also that Paul says that the OT speaks to those who are ***under the Law***; more literally, he says "those who are *in* the Law." That is, they are living in the sphere of the Law. The Law makes demands of them no matter where they turn. It is similar to what Paul says in 2:12 and 2:14 — they have the Law and they are subject to it in everything.
 - ✓ This is Paul's way of particularly addressing the Jews and their self-righteousness.
 - ✓ The Jew might initially have taken being in/under the Law to be a good thing — they have the covenant of Abraham and they are safe because they are part of God's chosen people. But Paul says that if they are making that claim then they are dominated by everything the Law says about them — and all those quotations in vv. 10-18 are not about others, but about them. *They* are sinners; *they* are ones worthy of condemnation.
 - ✓ Those had to be stunning words for the self-righteous Jew to read.
- But then notice the application that Paul makes — ***so that*** indicates purpose. The reason that they are singled out as being condemned by the Law is so that ***every mouth may be closed***.
 - ✓ Remember that Paul has just pointed to the words of unrighteous men as a demonstration of their depravity (vv. 13-14). The words of depraved men are deadly, deceitful, destructive, and disagreeable. They use words in protest against God and to harm others.
 - ✓ But the authority of the Scriptures shuts their mouths. The imagery is of a courtroom where the defendant has just heard all the testimony that has been given against him and he has literally nothing to say. His mouth is stopped and he is silent. He cannot say anything to defend himself.
 - ✓ As Calvin says, "without saying a word, he awaits his condemnation."

- And there is another purpose for the Scriptures speaking authoritatively against the Jews — it is so that ***all the world may become accountable to God.***
 - ✓ The word ***accountable*** also has a courtroom connotation — it is a legal term that refers to one's guilt. Paul is not talking about a "feeling" of guilt, but actual guilt and culpability. The sinner has violated the law of God making him guilty, and now he must give an answer for his guilt. In other words, he is liable to be prosecuted and punished.
 - ✓ And the accountability he has for his sin is ***to God***. They are not just in any courtroom; they are in the courtroom of God and He is their authority and Judge. He is the One whom they must answer. They are not accountable "in general;" they are specifically accountable to God. No matter what their protests are today, they will give an answer to Him.
 - ✓ What's interesting about the phrase ***to God*** is that it generally is used to refer to the one who has been injured or sinned against — so this pictures a trial between God and mankind. Man has sinned, and God has been sinned against. And yet, the Judge presiding over this trial is also God. So man is hopeless in this circumstance. He is wholly condemned.
 - He cannot shift the blame to another; God knows His heart.
 - He cannot deceive the prosecuting attorney and Judge with lies; God the Judge knows all.
 - He cannot impeach the character of the witness or the accuser; it is God Himself.
 - He cannot appeal to his own "good" (self-righteous) character; his sin has been exposed.
 - He cannot claim the court has been unrighteous in its dealings; God is Judge.
 - He is accused, indefensible, and condemned. There are no excuses, explanations, or defenses.
 - As one writer has said about the God to whom all men are accountable, "His knowledge is infinite, His hand is omnipotent, His justice is incorruptible, and from Him nothing can be concealed. Before Him, therefore, every mouth will be stopped, and all the world must confess themselves guilty." [Haldane, 131]
- Now did you also notice a subtle shift that took place in this verse? At the beginning of the verse, Paul is talking about the condemnation of those who are ***in the Law*** — speaking directly about the Jews. Remember what he says about them in chapter two? They have been instructed by the Law, but they do the very things that the Law forbids and condemns (2:21-24). Their "circumcision" is without value. They are condemned. Cf. also 2:4-5. They are storing up wrath for themselves at God's final judgment.
 - ✓ That's where Paul starts in v. 19, but notice the progression — ***every mouth may be closed*** and ***all the world may become accountable.***
 - ✓ Paul has moved from the Jews to all men. All men are guilty.
 - ✓ How can Paul make that transition? It is an argument from the greater to the lesser. Who will be harder to condemn as a sinner — the pagans who engaged in flagrant rebellion against God and were without the Law and the Scriptures, or the Jews who had the Law and the covenants?
 - It will be harder to condemn the Jews. The Jews had a great advantage (3:1); and Paul has just demonstrated that they are still guilty as sinners (vv. 4, 9, 10-18).

- And if the Jews are all condemned as sinners and there are no righteous Jews, then it also can be said that there are no righteous men anywhere in the world. All men will be tried by God and will be silent when the evidence is presented and all will be accountable and condemned by God.
- So in summary, all men are guilty and condemned. Paul has not overstated it in v. 10 — ***there is none righteous, not even one***. Every sinner will stand trial before God and will be condemned.
- The philosopher and mathematician from the 17th century, Blaise Pascal, was exactly right when he said, “There are only two kinds of men: the righteous, who believe themselves sinners; the rest, sinners who believe themselves righteous.” No one is righteous on his own; all are guilty before God.
- Paul makes a second accusation and condemnation against all men —

2. All Men Are Condemned Because of **INABILITY** (v. 20a)

- All men are accountable to God, Paul says in v. 19, ***because*** (v. 20), ***by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified...***
 - ✓ Here Paul isn’t quoting the OT, but it appears that he might be alluding to Ps. 143:2 where David asks, “And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous.” He is appealing to the Lord not to judge Him, because no one can survive His judgment.
 - ✓ This was a theme that Paul also emphasized in Galatians (2:16; 3:11). The Galatians also were tempted to appeal to their self-righteousness and works for their sanctification, if not for their justification also. And Paul corrects them.
 - ✓ It is the temptation of most men to appeal to their own good works to satisfy God.
- And Paul is perfectly clear: no man (***flesh***) will ever be justified by doing the works of the Law.
 - ✓ No one can perfectly keep every commandment of the OT Law (Paul is probably referring again to the Mosaic Law with the word ***Law***).
 - ✓ No one can perfectly keep every intent and motive of the OT Law.
 - ✓ If someone could obey every aspect of the Law, then they could be justified. But no man can. All men are completely incapable of doing everything the Law says.
 - ✓ The only thing any man can do is be a lawbreaker. He cannot keep the law.
 - ✓ Last summer we were on vacation, driving across a lonely stretch of a two-lane road. It generally has very little traffic, and I was stuck behind a semi and one or two other vehicles going about 15 mph below the speed limit. We did that for a mile or two and no one was interested in passing the semi, though there opportunities. So finally at the next clear section of road, I moved over to pass the vehicles and accelerated. And as soon as I did that, I noticed a police car on the shoulder of the road to my left. Immediately I looked at my speedometer. I was doing *exactly* the speed limit! So I

presumed I was going to be ok (thought my heart was racing a little bit). As I passed the semi and pulled back into my lane, I glanced into my side-view mirror and saw his lights turn on and he pulled out and did an immediate u-turn to go my direction. I was sure he was coming for me; and sure enough about a mile down the road, he pulled in behind me and stopped me. He came to my car, asked for my driver's license and insurance and then said, "Do you know why I stopped you?" "No sir, I don't." And I *really* didn't. "You didn't use your turn signal when you pulled out." I wanted to say, "My *turn signal*? You are stopping me for *that*?" Instead, I said something like, "You're right, I didn't."

- ✓ That's not too different from the way most of us think about God's Law — "I'm not murdering anyone and you want to indict me for some *minor* sin of pride, or deceit, or greed, or selfishness?" The point is not that we aren't lawbreakers; we just don't think we are *significant* lawbreakers. But Paul is pointing to the fact that all of us everywhere are lawbreakers who deserve condemnation. And none of us can say anymore against God than I could say against that police officer.
- Now what Paul also says here is that man cannot be **justified** by his own obedience to the Law. The term justification is a key one in this book and one that we will begin talking about more when we get back to the book of Romans later this fall (after I take some vacation time and we do a short series on "Election Essentials"). Briefly, what does Paul mean by justification?
 - ✓ In justification, men are *declared* to be righteous. We are not *made* righteous (the Roman Catholic teaching) and we are not simply "pardoned," (though we *are* pardoned in the process of justification), and we are not made inwardly holy (though our nature *is* changed). Justification is a legal term where the Judge makes a legal and binding declaration in which the Judge declines to condemn and instead declares Himself satisfied and the sinner righteous (with an imputed righteousness). It is the opposite of condemnation. In condemnation, the sinner is not only punished, but he is declared guilty; in justification, the sinner is not only not punished, but he is also declared to be righteous so that he *cannot* be punished.
 - ✓ And it is important to note that no man can do that for himself and the Law cannot do that for him.
 - ✓ Simply said, the Law has no power to justify any man. Any to attempt to obey the Law is the opposite of living by faith, which is the only means to be justified (1:17). Man and the Law are utterly incapable of doing anything to save man from God's wrath against his sin.
 - ✓ We are all guilty and incapable. C. S. Lewis rightly said, "No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good." He can't be good and he can't make himself righteous.
- Having accused men of being condemned by the Law and their inability to keep the Law, Paul has one final indictment —

3. All Men Are Condemned Through KNOWLEDGE of the Law (v. 20b)

- Paul's final statement in this section is that no man can be justified by keeping the Law because *through the Law comes the knowledge of sin*.
 - ✓ In other words, men who attempt to keep the Law have misunderstood or forgotten the nature and the purpose of the Law.
 - ✓ The Law was not given so that men could keep it, and prove that they are inherently righteous.
 - ✓ The Law was given to prove that men are inherently unrighteous and incapable of pleasing God. The Law was given so that men would have *knowledge of sin*.
 - ✓ This is the same principle that Paul speaks of in Galatians 3:19-25. The Law is given to expose the extent of sin in the heart of man. Cf. also Rom. 5:20; 7:7-11
 - ✓ The Law was given by God through Moses to make people conscious of sin. We *are* sinners and we have sinned *against God*.
 - ✓ As one writer has said, "the law detects sin, but it does not remove it." [Shedd] And the law is not an instrument of justification, but condemnation. [Witmer] The "straight-edge of the Law...shows us how crooked we are." [Phillips]
- How shall we think about this one final statement about the sinfulness of man?
 - ✓ As John Stott has said, we are not helpless victims of some cruel fate against us, but we are responsible for our own conduct, which has been rebellion against God. No matter how nice we appear to our neighbors, we are inherently sinful and we all have acted out that sin within us. We must believe this, or the next section in Romans on justification will not make sense and we will not see the need for salvation and we will not be saved.
 - ✓ This truth is integral to the gospel. When you are sharing the gospel, this is where we must start. We don't start with man's seeming goodness, but we demonstrate that there is nothing good within him and that God will condemn him if he does not repent and change. There is no good news of salvation until the sinner has heard the bad news of his sin and condemnation.
- Friend, if you believe this morning that you are acceptable to God and that you have no guilt for any sin you are horribly and desperately wrong. You have never been more wrong about anything in your life. The Scriptures have condemned the Jew and the Scripture similarly condemns you. You are hopeless.

CONCLUSION: A few minutes ago I told you about meeting a police officer in another state. While I thought he was stopping me for something trivial, I was in fact a lawbreaker. But in an act of great kindness, he didn't give me a ticket. For which I was very thankful (and demonstrated it by using my signal for the rest of our trip).

But God is different than that police officer. While He is a God of great grace, every sin must be punished or God will cease to be a righteous Judge. He has to condemn every sin of every man. And so all of us have been or are under condemnation. I say that some of us "have been" under condemnation because there is a way out of the condemnation — it is through Jesus Christ. Christ died on the cross not because He was a sinner, but because He was willing to absorb the judgment God had stored up against us. And because He was a perfect man and infinite God, He could pay that infinite debt of sin we had accumulated and satisfy God's wrath against us. So if you believe and trust in Christ as Savior, God will forgive you.

God is a God of grace. But His grace is not in overlooking our sin, but in pouring out the wrath intended for us on Christ. And Christ has satisfied that wrath. If you are not a Christian, if you still believe you are acceptable to God even with your sin, I urge you to give up your sin, appeal to God for forgiving mercy, and begin living for him instead of yourself. That is the only means for hope for any of us.

BENEDICTION: Rom. 16:25-27