

Paul's Letter to the Romans:



THE PINNACLE OF
CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Let All the Poisons That Lurk in the Mud...Pt. 5, The Rose Garden, at last...

Romans 3:1-3:21

When I was a boy, I used to spend a lot of time in East Texas. It seemed like I got to spend the better part of almost every summer with my grandfather and beyond that, it seemed as if every second or third weekend my parents found some reason to drive to East Texas to visit some aunt or uncle or cousin. I particularly enjoyed visiting my mother's sister, Aunt Murdie, who lived on Lawrence Street in Tyler. Now, it wasn't that that there was all that much for a little kid to do at Aunt Murdie's house but visiting her meant that I could read my cousin Eddie's comic books and it meant that there was at least the outside chance that I might get to visit the Tyler Rose Garden.

Now, I'm not sure exactly what it was as a kid that so enamored me to the Tyler Rose Garden. There was just something about it. To my uncultured, unsophisticated mind, it was just about the most perfect place on earth. I remember thinking even back then that heaven probably looked a lot like the Tyler Rose Garden. I just loved the formality, order and precision of the place. I loved the hundreds of different varieties of roses. I loved the dozens and dozens of colors. I loved the thousands upon thousands of blossoms. I loved the stonework and the reflecting ponds and the giant goldfish. But most of all, I

loved the way it smelled. To this day, I can close my eyes and visualize standing out on the elevated veranda above the garden. I can see myself leaning out over the rail looking down on the garden and I can imagine the wafting aroma of twenty thousand roses floating up and permeating everything around me. I can see myself standing there as a seven or eight year old boy breathing in so deeply it made me dizzy. And even today, if I really concentrate I sometimes think can still smell the same roses I smelt over forty years ago.

Of course, there is something else I remember about going to the Rose Garden. I remember that the drive from Lawrence Street to the Rose Garden took us by the Tyler Soap Factory. It too had a smell, a completely different kind of smell. It smelled like the rearward end of hog, the rearward end of dead hog, the rearward end of a dead hog left out in the Texas sun to rot for couple of weeks. You see the Tyler Soap Factory was a place where they rendered the fat out of animal carcasses to make soap and it smelt worse than just about anything you can possibly imagine. It was kind of like a meat packing plant only bad.

The problem was that the get to the Rose Garden from Lawrence Street we had to drive right by the soap factory and it was a brutal drive. It was especially brutal because in those days there was no such thing as an air-conditioned car. When it was hot, and it was always hot, you just rolled down the windows and sucked in whatever ambiance there was. The one exception to that was when you drove by the soap factory. There you rolled up the windows and held your breath and tried like everything to avoid the ambiance altogether. Finally, after eight or nine blocks the road started up a short incline and the stench dissipated and we would roll down the windows and the smell of roses would come wafting in with the warm breeze and it was absolutely wonderful.

Now, I have told you that story not because my memories as a boy are especially important but rather because it parallels almost perfectly, I think, what is going on here in the text of Romans 1:18-3:20. You see in Romans 1:17 Paul broached the subject of the revelation of a righteousness from God.

^{NIV} **Romans 1:17**...For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "**The righteous will live by faith.**"

I think it might help if you think of that verse as if it were a road sign, a road sign that said, "**The Gospel Rose Garden straight ahead.**" Of course, Paul after mentioning the subject Paul doesn't launch into a discussion of the revelation of the righteousness of God right away. No, before we get to delights of the "**Rose Garden**" he wants us to smell, to really garner for ourselves an experiential knowledge the terrible stench of the universal sinfulness of mankind.¹ I think it might help to imagine Paul standing in front of three foul-smelling barrels. I think might help, as well, to imagine that each barrel is labeled and represents a different element of mankind and Paul wanting us to understand the spiritual poverty of each group opens each of them one at a time and then turns and says to us, "**Now in case you don't understand why the world needs a righteousness from God, take a whiff of this.**"

Of course, the first lid he pried open was the one on the barrel containing the outrageously grotesque stench of the idolatrous, sinful pagan Gentiles.² We suffered through that in Romans 1:18-32 and to our shame we had to admit that there was something strangely familiar about what we smelt there.

The second barrel he opened was the one containing the deluded, judgmental stench of the sinful, self-righteous moralist.³ We smelled that in Romans 2:1-17.

The third barrel he opened was the one containing the rancid stench of the misplaced confidence of the ceremonially religious Jew.⁴ We got a whiff of that starting in Romans 2:18 and unfortunately we have some eight remaining verses to finish before we have that all sniffed up. But that's the good news. The bad news is that after Paul finishes the section dealing with the religious Jews, he is going to dump out all three barrels out on the ground letting the three rank brews run together to the end that their combined, extraordinary stench of the might forever impress upon our spiritual noses the fact that fallen, depraved mankind really does need an alien righteousness from God. That will occur in Romans 3:9-3:20. Then after that and only after that will we be able to roll down the windows and smell the beauty of the revelation of the righteousness of God that He has graciously provided in the gospel of Jesus Christ. That will occur in Romans 3:21.

So, ready or not, here we go.

Now in this section, Romans 3:1-8, we are going to finish up with hypocritical, religious Jews. You will remember last time that Paul really indicted the religious Jews on two very particular charges. First, he hammered them because they possessed the law and esteemed the law but did not keep the law. We saw that in Romans 2:17-24. Then starting in Romans 2:25, Paul turned to his criticism toward their misplaced confidence in the value of circumcision. Paul drove home the point that the circumcision they so dearly loved only had value if they obeyed the law, something that he had already argued they did not do. He even added, and this would have been particularly offensive to first century Jews, that if they disobeyed the law their circumcision would effectively become uncircumcision.

^{NIV} **Romans 2:25**...Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised

To that Paul added two extraordinary ideas. First, he argued that if the uncircumcised Gentiles kept the law, their obedience would be counted as circumcision.

^{NIV} **Romans 2:26**...If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?

Secondly, he argued that the real Jews were not marked by outward physical circumcision but rather by an inward circumcision of the heart.

^{NIV} **Romans 2:29**...No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

Now I want you to think for a minute because the ramifications of what that means are extraordinary. That would have meant that even blond haired, blue-eyed, uncircumcised, barbarian Gentile from northern Gaul, was actually a true Jew if he possessed a circumcised heart. It would have also meant that ten generations of Jewish lineage would have accounted for nothing if a man did not possess the inward reality.

Now you can see I think how that would have left a first century Jew's mind a reeling and it would have invariably caused them to ask this question, **"So Paul, are you saying there is no benefit to being a Jew at all?"** You can see that that is what actually does happen starting in Romans 3:1.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:1**...What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? ²Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.

It's a great question, don't you think? I mean was Paul implying that being connected to God's covenant people gave them no advantage over the rest of the pagan world? Now. I think I mentioned last week that C.H. Dodd wrote in his commentary that Paul should have answered, "**No advantage at all**" but didn't because he just couldn't bring himself to denigrate his own Judaism.⁵ But notice Paul's answer doesn't seem to reflect any hesitancy. Rather, he seems to just blurt out a positive answer, "**Well of course there are all kinds of advantages to being a Jew.**" Now it is interesting here that Paul only lists one advantage. He will get to some of the other advantages later. But the one advantage he does list here is a significant one.

The advantage he lists is the fact that the Jews possess the oracles, the very words of God. Paul says that is a tremendous advantage over the pagans. You can see that especially, I think, as you think back over Romans 1. You will remember that the revelation that Gentiles possessed, their understanding of God came from their consciences and from the created universe about them. They only had general revelation. But the Jews had the law, they had circumcision and they had special revelation. In other words, they had the Scriptures, the oracles of God. They had more knowledge, more understanding than the pagans. God had revealed Himself to them in a very special, unique way. Now that would have been a very important advantage in coming to grasp with the claims of Christ. And I want you think about that. How would you have responded to the coming of the Messiah if you had been a first century pagan and didn't know the Old Testament Scriptures? Well the first question you would have had to ask was,

“What’s a Messiah?” But the Jew didn’t have to do that. If someone started quoting Isaiah 53 to talk about Christ being God’s suffering servant and you don’t know who Isaiah was, you would have been at a distinct disadvantage. So Paul’s answer to the first question was, **“There is a great advantage to being a Jew. Indeed, they have the written revelation of God. So they know, know by revelation, a great many things the pagan Gentiles do not.”**

Now the second question raised by Paul’s imaginary objector shows up in the next verse, Romans 3:3.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:3**...What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?

Now here’s the question being asked, **“Are you saying that the faithlessness of the Jews somehow invalidated the faithfulness of God? Will it undo it? Will it cause God to abandon the promises that He has made?”** Now notice that answer comes in the next verse.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:4**...Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: **“So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.”**

Now that first little phrase, **“Not at all!”** is μή γένοιτο in Greek and it is extraordinarily strong. Some translations trying to bring out the emphasis of the objection render it as **“God forbid!”** You see what is at issue here is the fact that they are calling God’s character into question. It is almost as if they are saying, **“Well God certainly can’t be relied on if that is the case. I mean didn’t He call us? Didn’t He draw us to Himself? If he is going to reject us just because we are unrighteous doesn’t that mean He is just as unfaithful as we are?”** That is why Paul uses such strong language here. It is almost as if he is yelling out, **“No,**

no, no! God is faithful no matter what men do. He is true even if everyone everywhere is faithless."

I think the passage Paul quotes here in defense of his argument is remarkable. Do you recognize it? Let me read it again?

^{NIV} Romans 3:4...So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

Do you recognize it now? It is from Psalm 51:4. Turn there for a minute and let me read it to you.

^{NIV} Psalm 51:4...Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

You see this verse is part of David's prayer of repentance when he broke covenant with God and committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered the noble Uriah. What David was praying in his prayer was that if God chose to judge him, even if God chose to judge him severely, it would be a just judgment and decision. What Paul is doing is picking up David's argument in his prayer and applying it to the judgment of the disobedient Jewish people. You see I think what Paul is doing is arguing from the lesser to the greater and saying something like this, **"If David could pray that God was just in whatever judgment he passed upon his adultery and murder, shouldn't that lead us to say that God will be even more just in whatever judgment he passes upon the Jewish people when they reject gracious provision of the righteousness He has provided in the gospel."**

That brings us to the third question in this series of questions. Now before I read it you should note that there are really two questions in a row asking the same identical thing. That is, there are really two questions here and are logically so similar that they are really the same question.

But that gets hard to see because Paul answers both of those questions with questions. Still, the questions he asks do answer the questions raised. Let's look at the first question in Romans 3:5 and I think you'll see what I mean.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:5**...But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)

Do you see what the question is asking? It's asking, **"Now if my unrighteousness makes God's righteousness even clearer, shouldn't that be enough. Why does God have to go beyond that and doesn't His going beyond that make Him unjust."** And as I said Paul answers that question with a question, a question that really makes a direct statement about God. Look at verse 6.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:6**...Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?

Do you get Paul's answer? It is something like this, **"No it is not unfair for God to judge sin because He is the rightful judge of the world."** I think Paul probably has in mind here something like Genesis 18:25.

^{NIV} **Genesis 18:25**...Far be it from you to do such a thing-- to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Of course, the problem is that the whole world *is* guilty and even if the judge of the whole world does judge the world harshly His judgment will still be right. He has every right to judge His creatures. Now having said that you can see why the second question starting in verse 7 is really the same question asked in verse 5.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:7...Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?"**

You see what they are saying is something like this, **"If God gives righteousness that increases His glory and that righteousness is given in spite of how sinful we are, shouldn't we just go ahead and bust out of whatever restrains us and sin the living daylights out of our lives."** Now notice Paul's answer in verse 8. It's also given in the form of a question just like his answer in verse 6 and it is highly sarcastic.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:8...Why not say-- as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say-- "Let us do evil that good may result?"** Their condemnation is deserved.

You Paul is rebutting the idea that men ought to sin so God's mercy might be magnified. He is saying something like this, **"If you are going to go that far, why not just go all the way and say, 'Let us do evil and God will turn it to good.'"** Paul adds that some people had actually accused him of arguing just such a thing. But Paul doesn't respond to such arguments with any kind of reasoned, intellectual response. No, he just cuts off that line of thinking by saying that whoever argues such a thing will get what they deserve, genuine judgment and condemnation from God. He is saying that whole line of argumentation is so foolish that it is not worthy of a response.

Now finally in this last section, Romans 3:9-20, Paul pulls out all of the stops and really blasts away at the inherent sinfulness of all mankind. Or to return to my original metaphor Paul pushes over the barrels containing the sinful stench of the three separate categories of mankind and let's them run together so that we might fully comprehend just how bad things are. Look at verse 9, Paul starts by stating his conclusion and he frames in the form of a question.

^{NIV} **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.

Do you understand what his question is asking? It's asking this, **"So you are saying that we are better off?"** Of course, that leads us to ask the question, **"Who is the "we" here?"** I think without question the **"we"** here refers back to the religious Jews and points back especially to Romans 3:1. I think Paul is returning to the question that was raised there. I think you could summarize their questions and Paul's answers like this.

The religious Jew asks, **"So is no advantage to being a Jew?"**

Paul answers, **"Yes, there is an advantage because the Jews have the word of God."**

Then the religious Jew responds, **"So then we are better off than the pagan Gentiles?"**

Paul answers that question negatively saying, **"No...haven't I just made the point that all people everywhere are under sin. If anything the Jews are in danger of greater judgment simply because they have had the greater light."**⁶

Now what Paul does to prove his point in the next nine verses is to call upon the authority of Scripture. In doing so, he quotes a whole catena or chain of Old Testament passages to make his point.⁷ Now the first verse is Romans 3:10 is a quote drawn from Psalm 14:1.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:10**...As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;

Now holding you place in Romans 3, turn and look at Psalm 14:1.

^{NIV} **Psalm 14:1**...The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good."

Do you see any difference in the psalm from the way it quoted in Romans 3:10? What has Paul changed? Of course, he has changed the word "**good**" to the word "**righteous**." Why would he do that? He did that because he is trying to drive home the point that men and women and boys and girls everywhere need the "**righteousness that God provides in the gospel**."⁸ Now keep your place in Psalm 14 and turn back to Romans 3:11.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:11**...there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

Now, look back at Psalm 14:2. You can see Romans 3:11 is a direct quote of Psalm 14:2

^{NIV} **Psalm 14:2**...The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.

Now keep holding your place in Psalm 14 and turn back to Romans 3 and look at verse 12.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:12**...All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Notice that it too is a quote from Psalm 14. It is a quote from verse 3.

^{NIV} **Psalm 14:3**...All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Of course, what is remarkable is that Psalm 14:1-3 is also repeated verbatim in Psalm 53:1-3.

^{NIV} **Psalm 53:1**...The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good. ² God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. ³ Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one

Now let me ask you a few questions based upon this passage.

- 1) How many people are there that are righteous? **None.**
- 2) How many people are there that have a proper understanding of the kindness of God? **None.**
- 3) How many people are there that seek after God? **None.**
- 4) How many have turned away from God? **All of them.**
- 5) How many are worthless before God? **All of them.**
- 6) How many people are there that do good? **None.**
- 7) Not even one? **No, not even one.**

Now, I have to tell you that I am hard pressed as a Bible teacher to see how anybody could read that litany of descriptions of mankind's fallen condition and still reject the reformed doctrine of the total depravity of mankind. I do not see how a person could let this section have its full weight, how they could the words have their obvious meaning and still hold to the idea that there is some little spark of divine goodness left in a fallen human heart that wants to come or is even able to come to God in faith. In fact for a person to believe that they have to make Paul's words here mean almost the exact opposite of what they say.

I can understand that a person might not like the doctrine of election. I can understand how they might think it is unfair or arbitrary. But I cannot understand how such a person could look at these verse here in Romans 3:10-12 and still think that sinners are somehow pursuing God on their own. Surely the whole point of Romans thus far has been that all men everywhere pervert the richness of the kindness of God into a lie, a mistruth, and an abomination. Surely if a person is going to be a honest student of the Bible is he going to have to have to admit that for a person to be saved, God is going to have to break through that person's unbelief and wickedness and grant them a righteousness that is solely and completely outside of their natural being and inclination.

Now to me there are only two possible ways that can happen. Either God has to grant some sort of prevenient grace to all people everywhere where they can respond to the gospel or else God has to specifically regenerate the hearts of fallen men and women so they will respond in faith. I do not see how any honest Bible student can come to any other conclusion. Of course, the first view, the view involving prevenient grace is not really even hinted at in the Bible. It was an idea first conceived by those who flatly rejected the idea that God chooses His own. I reject the idea of prevenient grace in favor of the idea of God's sovereign choice and mercy and truthfully I do not see how anyone letting the words here have their full weight can do anything else.

Now in Romans 3:10-13 Paul has hammered away at the fallen and depraved character of sinful mankind. In verses 13-18, he is going to expose sinful mankind's depraved conduct. Notice first how he starts with that which is inside sinful man and spews forth in vile and sinful communication.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:13**..."Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

Now that first image, the image of an open grave ought to invoke the idea of corruption and defilement. In the first century most of the dead were buried in vaults or crypts and left to decompose. Only after that happened did the family gather their bones and store them in clay pots or jars. To walk by an open grave meant that one would smell the real and devastating reality of death. That's what Paul says the throats of sinful mankind are like. The scent of death wafts upward and outward from them because they are filled with death and corruption. Luther reckoned that the image of an open grave was put there because the mouth of the wicked lures men down to death. Listen to what he writes:

First, they devour the dead...Just as the grave is the receptacle of the dead...So also their teaching and their mouth, or throat (that is, the word which comes from their mouth or throat), only swallows up the dead who have gone from faith to unbelief, and swallows them up in such a way that there is no hope of returning from the death of this unbelief, unless they can be recalled by the most wonderful power of God before they descend to hell...He says, moreover, that the grave is "open" because they devour and seduce many people...Hence heresy, or faithless teaching, is nothing else than a kind of disease or plague which infects and kills many people, just as is the case with the physical plague.⁹

But fallen mankind isn't satisfied to be dead itself nor is it satisfied to lure men to itself. No, it wants to lash out. Its lips harbor poison just like a viper's poison and the image is one that implies that such lips strike out to destroy and to maim. The third image that says that their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness completes the idea and perhaps explains the nature of the poison on the lips. Now these three ideas are all taken from the Psalms.

^{NIV} **Psalm 5:9**...Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.

^{NIV} **Psalm 140:3** They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips. Selah

^{NIV} **Psalm 10:7** His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue.

Now, do you know what is remarkable about these three passages? In their original setting they are all directed against the enemies of God and the nation Israel. In other words, in their original setting these words were directed against the Gentiles. That is especially remarkable because Romans 3:15, which is a quote of Isaiah 59:7-8, was not originally directed against the Gentiles. In its original context in Isaiah it was directed against the disobedient sons of Israel.¹⁰

Now, look at Romans 3:15.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:15**..."Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ ruin and misery mark their ways, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know."

^{NIV} **Isaiah 59:7**...Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. ⁸ The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace.

Do you see the point? The pattern of their lives is toward blood guiltiness. Their way, their paths, their roads, the place they walk, the place their feet tread lead to destruction. They simply do not know any other way. I love Kent Hughes quote of Will Durant here.

"In the last 3,421 years of recorded history only 268 have seen no war."¹¹

And the original context of Isaiah here is not referring to Gentiles but to disobedient Jews and I guarantee you Paul knew the intent of the original context. That is why he can summarize all that he has said of both groups in Romans 3:18.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:18**... "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

This passage is summary of Psalm 36 and remarkably in its original context is not directed specifically toward either toward Jews or Gentiles but is takes on rather an almost proverbial nature in accusing anyone who is wicked. Listen to Psalm 36:1.¹²

^{NIV} **Psalm 36:1**... For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD. An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes.

Now in Romans 3:19 Paul finally comes to his summation and I want you to think of him as a prosecutor standing before a jury pointing back over his shoulder at the whole fallen sinful mass of humanity saying, **"Look here then that's the case against the accused. They won't have anything to say in return because there is nothing they can say, they are guilty, guilty, guilty."** Listen to Calvin:

It is a metaphor taken from courts of law, where the accused, if he has anything to plead as a lawful defense, demands leave to speak, that he might clear himself from the things laid to his charge; but if he is convicted by his own conscience, he is silent, and without saying a word waits for his condemnation, being even already by his own silence condemned.¹³

Now look at he actually says that in verse 19.

^{NIV} **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. ²⁰Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Don't you think that is an incredible image? Each mounting accusation against mankind has rebutted its excuses. Every excuse, every defense has been answered and answered so completely so fully that all mankind can do now is stare blankly with its mouth hanging open in disbelief and guilt.

It is like a good murder mystery where the police are questioning a suspect and he is declaring his innocence and then the detective finally drops his bombshell, **"You know we have evidence against you. We have your DNA at the scene. We have your hair and fiber there as well. We have your fingerprints in blood on the murder weapon. We have your skin under the victim's fingernails. We have two eye witnesses and oh yeah, one of them actually videotaped you committing the crime."**

You see there is just no way out. I mean at that point there is just not really much else that can be said. You see that is where Paul has been heading. He has wanted to establish the universal sinfulness of mankind and I think he has done it, done it in spades.

Now, of course, there is the interesting issue of the law raised in these last two verses. One would expect that Paul would just say plainly that all men stand accused but he doesn't do it quite that way. Instead, he raises the issue of the condemnatory nature of the law and here's the thing whenever Paul brings up the issue of the law, he is almost certainly focusing on the Jews. You would expect him to end this section by saying, **"Look here the whole sorry, stinking**

world is sinful before God.” And he does do that but he does it obliquely by focusing on the Jews as he closes the section. And here is why he does that. You see, he is arguing, I think, from the greater to the lesser.¹⁴ I think Paul is thinking that if he has successfully proven the sinfulness of the Jews, he has successfully proven the sinfulness of the whole world.¹⁵ If those that had the law, the sign of circumcision and even the oracles of God stand guilty and condemned before God how much more guilty are they who have not had such gifts to hold them in check. If the Jews are condemned, the whole world is condemned.

Now brothers and sisters, that concludes our trip through the eight or nine blocks alongside the soap factory. It has not been especially pleasant but it has been necessary. It has been necessary, I think, to forever clear our minds of the outrageously blasphemous idea that somehow man is inherently good. It has also allowed us to clear our minds of the idea that there is something in us that is worthy of God's affection. Our trip has sharpened our senses to the sinfulness of humanity and it has sharpened our awareness of our own sinful neediness.¹⁶ I think now we can see afresh that all men everywhere do indeed need the righteousness that God has so mercifully revealed in the gospel of the Lord Jesus and I think we can also see afresh that that number includes even us.¹⁷

Now having said that let me just crack the window here and read the opening part of verse 21.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:21**...But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known...

Do you smell that? Take a deep breath. I don't know about you but think the smell of roses may be wafting on the breeze. Let's pray.

¹ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwin C. Hoskyns, from the 6th ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 84 “Is there in all this something new and surprising? Is it resignation following upon disillusionment, or enthusiasm born of pessimism? Is it violence offered to the riches of human life, a revolt against history, or the arrogance some form of Gnostic radicalism? No, the indictment of which we disapprove so strongly—is written; it has been proclaimed long ago. The whole course of history pronounces this indictment against itself. How can a man be called historically minded’, if he persistently overlooks it? If all the great outstanding figures in history, whose judgments are worthy of serious consideration, if all the prophets, Psalmists, philosophers, Fathers of the Church, Reformers, poets, artists, were asked opinion, would one of them assert that men were good, or capable of good? Is the doctrine of original sin merely one among many? Is it not rather, according to its fundamental meaning, the Doctrine which emerges from all honest study of history? Is it not the doctrine, which in the last resort, underlies the whole teaching of history? Is it possible for us to adopt a ‘different point of view’ from that of the Bible, Augustine, and the Reformers? What the does history teach about the things, which men do or do not do? Does it teach that some men, at least, are like God? No, but that—There is none righteous, no, not one.”

² C.K. Barrett, *Romans: The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 31-41.

³ John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News For the World*, (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 80-89.

⁴ *Ibid*, 90-98.

⁵ C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans* in the Moffatt NT Commentary Series (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932; reprinted 1947), 43. “The Jewish objector is thus driven from his last ditch. “Then what is the Jew’s superiority?” he exclaims; “what is the good of circumcision?” The logical answer on the basis of Paul’s argument is, “None whatever!” But the trouble is that the Jewish objector “is in Paul’s own mind.” His Pharisaism—or shall we say, his patriotism?—was too deeply engrained for him to put right out of his mind the idea that somehow the divine covenant with mankind had a “most favored nation clause.” And so he surprisingly answers his own question: “Much in every way.” Then he embarks on what should have been a list of the various ways in which the Jews had such superiority, but actually gets no further than the first item this to begin with—Jews were entrusted with the scriptures of God.”

⁶ Dodd, 47. As usual, Dodd is very entertaining. “Paul now, feeling no doubt that his argument in the preceding section has got nowhere, repeats the question of 3:1 in other words: ‘Well now, are we Jews in a better position [than pagans]? The answer, if Moffatt’s translation is right, is the direct opposite of the answer given in 3:2. ‘Not at all.’ But it must be confessed that neither the reading nor the meaning of the Greek is quite certain here. The text and the interpretation of the question are doubtful, but Moffatt’s rendering is probably to be accepted. The Greek wording of the answer might be read either as ‘Absolutely not,’ or as ‘Not absolutely.’ In the only other passage where Paul uses the expression it is similarly ambiguous, and there Moffatt’s paraphrase suggests that he took it to mean ‘Not absolutely’ (‘Not...literally’ is his actual rendering). Here, however, he takes it to mean ‘Absolutely not’; and this seems to be more in accord with normal

usage. But one would like to save Paul from such a direct self-contradiction within a few verses, and the words do admit of the sense that, though temporarily and relatively the Jews have a certain advantage, yet in an absolute view of the matter that advantage vanishes.”

⁷ F.F. Bruce, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Tyndale Press, 1963), 97-8. “Here Paul adduces a catena of six Old Testament quotations in which the general sinfulness of men is summed up. The catena comes in here to clinch a case already established by various arguments. If the quotations were examined one by one, it would be necessary to relate them to their historical contexts; some at least of them had a particular rather than a universal reference. But the general picture which they present here rounds off the case which Paul has been building up. And if he supposes an objection to his use of these quotations, the objection is not that he has detached them from their historical contexts, but that they refer to the wicked Gentiles only, not to Israel. ‘No,’ he replies, ‘these quotations are taken from the Jewish scriptures, and therefore the people whom they have primarily in view are Jews.’”

⁸ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans in the New International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 202-3.

⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s works, Vol. 25: Luther’s works, vol. 25 : Lectures on Romans* by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1972; reprinted 1999).

¹⁰ Moo, 204. “While Ps. 14, quoted in vv. 10-12 describes human beings generally and the Psalm verses cited in vv. 13-14 characterize the enemies of the psalmists, Isaiah 59:7b-8aa is directed against the unrighteous in Israel, Again, then, Paul implies that Israel as a whole must now be considered in this category of the ‘wicked.’”

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1991), 77.

¹² *Ibid*, 204.

¹³ John Calvin, *Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 130.

¹⁴ Moo, 206.

¹⁵ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988; reprint, 1994), 170. “Presumably this means that the people in question center themselves on the law, have their whole being in the law. What the law says is certainly addressed to them, not to someone else who is outside the sphere of the law. Some hold that Paul means everyone in the world (e.g., Murray, Hendriksen), but it is unlikely that Paul’s readers would have held that anyone other than the Jew was *under the law*. The law, being from God, has its relevance for all mankind, certainly. But Paul’s point here is that the Jew cannot rest on a fancied security holding that he is safe while the Gentile will come under the judgment of God. The law under which he lives, the law that is addressed to him and on which he prides himself that it is given to him and not to other people, convicts him as well as the Gentiles. *The whole world* (and not merely the Gentile

world) is convicted." Against this view is Murray. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans (NIC)* 2 vols. in one (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968; reprint 1980), 106-7. "The question arises: how extensive is this sphere of the law's application? Does its relevance apply only to those who had the Old Testament, namely, the Jews to whom these oracles had been committed (vs. 2)? This is what we might be led to expect and hence conclude that in this verse Paul is showing the judgment that falls upon the Jews. It would not be unreasonable to infer such limitation in this instance because his main interest is to show the Jews that they were no better than the Gentiles in reference to the judgment concerned. The sinnership and hence condemnation of the Gentiles could be taken for granted as not in dispute among the Jews. But it is a significant fact that this limitation is not borne out by the terms of the passage. For Paul says that "what things soever the law says it speaks to them who are in the law, *in order that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may become liable to God*". There can be no question but here is the note of all-inclusive universality, especially in the words "the whole world". Paul includes the Gentiles who did not have the law in the sense of the Old Testament or of specially revealed law. The Gentiles are therefore regarded as "in the law", that is to say, in the sphere within which the law of which Paul had quoted samples had relevance. This establishes the all-important consideration that although the Gentiles did not have the Old Testament law and in that sense were without the law, yet they were not outside the sphere of judgment which the Old Testament pronounced."

¹⁶ Hughes, 78. "The first function of the law is to unmask..."

¹⁷ Charles Hodge, *Romans* from the Crossway Classic Series edited by Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1993), 77. "In this sense it indicates a conclusion from preceding premises. This fits the context, as verse 20 is a reasonable conclusion from what is said in verse 19: "All the world is guilty before God, *wherefore*, it follows that no one can be justified by deeds." This is the conclusion which the apostle has had in view from the beginning of his argument. His whole intention is to prove that men cannot be justified by their own righteousness, in order to prepare them to receive the righteousness of God."