

Brad Jordan / General Adult

Risen and Reigning: An Easter Series / Sin; Total Depravity; Works; Law / Romans 3:9–20

This opening message of the “Risen to Reign” series lays a doctrinal foundation from Romans 3:1–20, exposing humanity's universal depravity and the utter impossibility of attaining righteousness through works of the law. Drawing from Paul's argument, which strings together Old Testament texts, it presents a courtroom-style indictment of both Jew and Gentile alike—declaring that no one is righteous, no one understands, and no one seeks for God. It challenges cultural assumptions about human goodness and confronts the tragic theological ignorance that has infected even the visible church. It reminds us that the gospel only becomes good news when we first understand the bad news: we are utterly condemned apart from Christ. As we prepare to celebrate the resurrection, we must first come face-to-face with the reality of our guilt, the holiness of God, and the absolute necessity of divine grace.

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## Introduction

Last week we announced that this morning we would be taking a short break from our series through the book of Exodus for the purpose of preparing for our celebration of Resurrection Sunday which is exactly 5 weeks from today. In your personal study time, hopefully you have been reading and working through the Spurgeon devotional in an effort to prepare your heart for celebrating the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As you continue to prepare in private, we also will begin to prepare in our corporate worship as well. Over the next five weeks we will be studying from select passages from Paul's Letter to the church at Rome. The title of this short series is “Risen to Reign” and my prayer is that as we move through these next few weeks we would be challenged to evaluate our own lives in light of the finished work of Christ, but that even as we evaluate our lives, we would be praying and thinking on who God is working in at the moment. Who is the soil that is being prepared so that as you sow the seeds of the gospel, they can take root and flourish.

Statistically speaking, Christmas and Easter, or Resurrection Sunday, are the times of the year when church attendance is at its peak and while it is certainly great that we have more people in attendance, what truly matters is the true proclamation of the word. It is absolutely amazing to me to see

how God works in our lives as we come off of a week of celebrating the ordinance of baptism, being reminded that through this symbol we are buried in the likeness of His death and raised in the likeness of His resurrection to newness of life.

Over the course of this series we will move from the depth of the depravity of man to the triumph of grace and our journey will begin in Romans 3 verses 1-20 from which we will focus on verse 9-20. As we prepare to step into the book of Romans without starting at verse 1 it is necessary that we take a few minutes and develop the context for the verses that we will be working in.

Considered by many to be the greatest work given to Paul by the Holy Spirit the letter to the church at Rome is broken into two sections. The first section is devoted to theology and/or doctrine. The second section helps us to understand how the doctrines are to be applied. For us, through this series we will stay predominantly in the doctrinal section of this letter. It is here that we find truth, as it pertains to our human condition, the righteousness of God, the power of the resurrection, the assurance of adoption and the ultimate triumph of grace. This letter was written to a church that, like many of the churches Paul dealt with, was made up of both Jews and Gentiles

In chapters one and two of Romans, Paul begins to paint a picture for us of the problem that we each face. He begins in verse 18-32 of chapter 1. In these verses he demonstrates for us that unbelievers, specifically speaking here, the gentiles, have rejected the revelation of God in nature and then pursued a lifestyle that was both idolatrous and degrading. Romans 1:21-24

**Romans 1:21–24 LSB**

For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing to be wise, they became fools,

and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the likeness of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

**Romans 1:28 LSB**

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind, to do those things which are not proper,

This way of life is deserving of the wrath of God.

Then, lest his the Jewish section of the congregation begin to get a big head, he turns toward them in Chapter 2 declaring in Romans 2:3 "But do you presume this, O man—who passes judgment on those who practice such things and does the same—that you will escape the judgment of God?"

Paul then begins to unpack to the Jewish members that the works of the law by which they seek righteousness will only lead them to unrighteousness. This brings us to our text for today. Please, turn with me to Romans chapter 3 and we will read beginning in verse 1...Please stand for the reading.....

## Text

**Please stand for the reading of God's Holy, Inerrant, Infallible, Complete, Sufficient and Authoritative Word:**

**Romans 3:1–20 LSB**

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?

Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

What then? If some did not believe, does their unbelief abolish the faithfulness of God?

May it never be! Rather, let God be true and every man a liar, as it is written,

"THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS,

AND OVERCOME WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is the God who inflicts wrath unrighteous? (I am speaking in human terms.)

May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

And why not *say* (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.

What then? Are we better? 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 WORTHLESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,

THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

"THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN TOMB,

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 in the Law, so that every mouth may be shut 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.

Father, We thank you from the depths of our beings for your wondrous grace and love. Grace and Love through which our Lord and Savior Christ, on the cross of Calvary, bore Your holy and righteous wrath for our sins. Paying the debt that we could not pay, as a result may that cross be to me as the tree that sweetened the waters at Marah, by sweetening my bitter sorrows. May it be as the rod that blossoms with life and beauty, and as the brazen serpent in the wilderness that calls forth the look of faith. By the cross of Jesus may we be reminded that our every sin was crucified in Him and by this reminder may we ever draw nearer to Your side. May that cross be the ground of all our comfort, the liveliness of all our duties, the sum of all of Your gospel promises, the comfort of all our afflictions, the vigor our our love, thankfulness, graces; that by the truth of the cross may we find rest in You, the rest of ceaseless praise. Father, You have also appointed us a cross to take up and carry, a cross before we receive a crown. You have appointed that cross to be our portion, but our love of self hates that cross, the sinful flesh within us is unreconciled to it and without your gift of grace we cannot bear it, walk with it, nor profit from it. O blessed redeemer what mercies that You give through this daily cross that we have been given to bear. Our rebellious will deems this cross hateful and heavy because we shirk Your load. Teach us precious Lord, that with this cross You send promised grace so that we may bear it patiently, that our cross is the yoke of Christ which is easy and His burden is light. Father we thank you for your tender mercies and we pray all of this in the name of Your blessed Son, Jesus, Amen.

# The Accusation

Verse 9 serves as a transition, one that summarizes the section of scripture that immediately precedes it and reaches back to chapter 1 and brings forward what Paul has already proclaimed regarding the Gentiles. By asking the two opening questions Paul moves from specific statements regarding Jews and Gentiles to a broader, all encompassing statement, reiterating what he has already laid out before us and summarizing it into the final clause of verse 9, an accusatory statement that ensures the reader, whether Jew or Gentile, indeed the entire world, would understand exactly where they stand.

One of the greatest issues that we face in the world is fundamental lack of understanding regarding two primary realities. The first of those realities is that God is a holy, righteous and just God. The second of those is our true standing before Him. In a study done in 2010 just over 8 out of ten people worldwide believe in some little g god. Out of that roughly 31.5% of people profess to be Christians (roughly 2.2 billion people). If we were to poll those 2.2 billion people regarding their standing before God what do you think they would show us. According to the 2022 Ligonier survey dealing with the state of theology, 66% of those individuals, or roughly 1.5 Billion of them say that "everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature...". If we press into this a little more we see that 69% of those individuals would also disagree with the statement that "Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation..."

Of the roughly 32% that are remaining, 6% of them responded that they were not sure of either question, and 14% somewhat disagreed with the first statement and 10% somewhat agreed with the second - each of these basically indicating that they weren't sure but they leaned towards being sure....what does all this tell us, well, unfortunately what it shows is a dismal understanding of our standing before God. Ultimately, at the end of the day only about 14% percent of believers strongly disagreed with the first statement and 15% strongly agreed with the second... which means that out of 2.2 BILLION professing Christians worldwide, only somewhere in the neighborhood of 310 Million of them have an understanding of the position of humanity in the eyes of God that is in agreement with His word.

As we approach this season of celebrating the resurrection of our savior we

do so with approximately 96% of the global population believing that they are mostly good. Do you see the problem? Do you see that for this large majority of the population the resurrection of Christ might be amazing or interesting or down right detestable to many, but that ultimately it is not a big deal and certainly not a life altering event?

All because we do not fully understand God nor do we understand our sinful nature. The old adage that the gospel is only good news when we understand the bad helps to solidify the problem, the majority of the world AND Christianity, cares not for the gospel because it is a lover of self and has no need of a savior. This brings us to Paul's accusatory statement to close out verse 9 "we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks (or Gentiles) are all under sin." This is not a statement of ethnicity, Paul is not confining this statement to these two people groups. For the Jewish people anyone outside of themselves was considered Greek or Gentile, this means that Paul is defining everyone, everywhere, all of humanity, as those under sin.

Its fascinating that even today, there are those who quickly want to point out that when we quote from the writings of Paul we are saying in essence "Paul said" which is not the same as "God said" which apparently was an issue even in the day of Paul. This one of the reasons that Paul clearly, time and again, lays out the source of his authority. It is also the reason why Paul is very faithful to the Old Testament and finally, in all reality, what person, what human would write of themselves and all humanity this way...you just heard the numbers, in a blind survey people were still unwilling or unable to recognize the sinful nature of humanity.

## The Body of Evidence

This is why Paul so masterful opens up verse 10 with the statement, "as it is written". For the average person in today's world this statement carries little weight, in fact, in the world we live in truth is continually questioned and re-imagined in whatever way suits the individual. Real truth however is not subject to change or reinterpretation. The Greek language employed here by Paul is in the perfect tense which emphasizes the authoritative character and permanent nature of the subject. In other words, as it is written points to the following quotes from the Old Testament as authoritative and permanent statements. It grounds Paul's argument, not

in the person of Paul, but in the Eternal, Authoritative, Sufficient Word of God!!

The remaining statement in verse 10 "There is none righteous, not even one" can be seen as a header that is then supported and expanded in the verses that follow. Douglas Moo is helpful as he breaks this passage down for us in the following way:

### **Romans**

Moo takes v. 10 as a heading, vv. 11–12 as five statements on the theme of "there is none righteous," vv. 13–14 as describing sins of words, vv. 15–17 focusing on sins of violence against others, and v. 18 as exposing the root error of the sins of humans (Romans 1–8, 204–5).

## There is None Righteous

Paul employs a widely used rabbinic tool called pearl-stringing in verses 10–18. Pearl-string is the stringing together of several quotes from the Old Testament in support of a statement. In this string we have quotes from Psalms, Isaiah and Ecclesiastes. Paul opens up by quoting from Psalm 14:1–3 "The wicked fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They act corruptly, they commit abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. Yahweh looks down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there is anyone who has insight, Anyone who seeks after God. They have all turned aside, altogether they have become worthless; There is no one who does good, not even one." and Psalm 53:1–3 "The wicked fool says in his heart, "There is no God," They act corruptly, and commit abominable injustice; There is no one who does good. God looks down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there is anyone who has insight, Anyone who seeks after God. Every one of them has turned back; together they have become worthless; There is no one who does good, not even one."

From these verses Paul pulls 5 statements from scripture that initially undergird the truth of the initial statement:

1. There is none who understands - this is not a simple understanding but one of fullness, there are none who fully understand the reality either the Holiness of God or the real consequences of sin.
2. There is none who seeks God - our very nature, described in scripture as being at enmity with God, will never seek after Him, we will always turn



away

3. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless - the world would have us believe that our worth is immeasurable, it is only by the work of the Spirit within the life of a believer that we are deemed worthy, contrary to popular opinion and statement...you are not enough
4. There is none who does good - this is a major hurdle for many, it defies everything that our sinful nature has shown us, we are good, after all we do good things...but do we really
5. There is not even one - lest there is a singular person that believes that they have accomplished the unaccomplishable, Paul reminds us of what the Psalmist said in both passages above, there is not even one

As we have previously demonstrated there are plenty of people, unbelievers and those who profess to be believers alike who would argue against these statements. Again they would cite their "good works" and their desire to seek God as their "spiritual journey to peace or enlightenment or search for a higher power" as evidence to the contrary, however Robert Mounce nicely sums it up for us when he writes:

**Romans 3. All People (3:9–20)**

It is true that they may be seeking some sort of religious experience, but that is not at all the same as seeking God. Scriptures teach that it is God who takes the initiative. He is the one who seeks us; not the other way around. All have "swerved from the right path" (v. 12; Montgomery). That their failure to seek God is more than an accidental omission is seen in the fact that they have deliberately turned away from God.<sup>174</sup> In the end their lives turn out to be useless and unprofitable. "Not one of them acts honourably, no, not one" (Knox).

and as William Barclay concludes "Human nature without Christ is a soured and useless thing."

## Speech as Evidence

After these initial 5 statements Paul then moves to his second evidentiary point, which is somewhat of an echo of the words of Christ in Matthew 12:34 ""You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good?

For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart." Paul's use of Psalm 5:9 "There is nothing reliable in their mouth; Their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave; They flatter with their tongue." Psalm 140:3 "They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; Poison of an asp is under their lips. Selah." and Psalm 10:7 "His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is mischief and wickedness." points to the reality that our true nature is proven by our speech. John Murray writes:

### **Romans**

the concentration upon organs of speech in verses 13, 14 shows how, in the apostle's esteem, the depravity of man is exemplified in his words and how diverse are the ways in which speech betrays the wickedness of the heart"

Often times we confuse this passage with what we deem here in America as cuss or curse words. This is NOT what Paul is referring to here, to be sure they play somewhat of a role, however, to limit this verse to this specific action is to cut the teeth out of these verses so that they do not hurt us. The truth is that this is any type of ungodly speech; derogatory or degrading remarks towards another, lies, gossip, slander, road rage, walmart rage, etc. etc. etc. When we faithfully view this verse in reality we can quickly see that it is a problem, even for believers, if for us, how much more so for those who do not have the indwelling of the Spirit to hold our tongue and rein in our vile speech.

## Violence and Lack of Fear

The final three verses of this body of evidence, vv. 15-18, points to our propensity towards violence and our lack of right understanding of God. Paul starts with quoting from the prophet Isaiah 59:7-8 "Their feet run to evil, And they are quick to shed innocent blood; Their thoughts are thoughts of wickedness; Devastation and destruction are in their highways. They do not know the way of peace, And there is no justice in their tracks; They have made their paths crooked, Whoever treads on them does not know peace." Our very nature drives us to succeed, survival of the fittest, look our for number one, etc. We are taught through culture from an early stage to eat or be eaten, but worse than that our own nature seeks this. In William Golding's famous novel that depicts the instinctual survival of humanity, "Lord of the Flies", Golding tells the story of a group of boys whose plane crashes on a deserted island and only the children survive. In

this situation Golding upholds the very nature of humanity that ultimately we desire to win at all costs.

In verse 18 Paul turns back to the book of Psalm and gives us the true root of the problem. Quoting from Psalm 36:1 "Transgression declares to the ungodly within his heart; There is no dread of God before his eyes." Paul writes, "there is no fear of God before their eyes". This word fear here can mean two things, first it can mean reverence or awe secondly it can mean terror. Different theologians prefer different interpretations, however, I am left with the question of why not both. Certainly in our world today both has merit. We, as a general statement of humanity, do not honor or treat God with any sort of reverence, we do not hold Him in any amount of esteem, and, it should only take one look at the world around us its vile happenings to know that we CERTAINLY are not terrified of Him in any way. This speaks to the same fundamental lack of understanding that I mentioned earlier, the absolute reality that most believers and all unbelievers do not have a right understanding of God.

## The Courtroom and the Verdict

As we enter verse 19 Paul brings this the conversation to a very vivid point.  
Romans 3:19-20

### **Romans 3:19–20 LSB**

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are in the Law, so that every mouth may be shut 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.

He first points to the Jews, who would have known and understood that the law was only applicable to those under its jurisdiction. Unfortunately and completely misunderstood by them, the law placed them in a position that was absolutely indefensible. The argument that a Jewish person would make is that they are being obedient to the law by obeying to the letter the word of the law. This is what Paul referred to when he said in Philippians 3:4-6

### **Philippians 3:4–6 LSB**

although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

This is how the Jewish people saw themselves, blameless because they had been diligently seeking to be blameless according to that righteousness (or right standing before God) that the law could provide. But notice what Paul says in verse 20, as he refers to the second clause in Psalm 143:2 "For no one living is righteous in Your sight." This is pointing to the fact that perfect obedience to the law is simply not possible. Mounce again is helpful:

### **Romans 3. All People (3:9–20)**

No human being can be brought into a right standing with God on the basis of doing what the law requires. Why? Because the law makes a person conscious of sin. It reveals that we are unable to live up to the righteous requirements of a holy God. Law encourages effort. But human effort inevitably falls short of the divine standard.

The Jews therefore, just as the Gentiles or Greeks are held accountable, the Word is proclaimed, Paul has made his case that people have turned from the knowledge of God in creation, degraded themselves, the Jew, seeking perfection in the law has failed to uphold that very law and is no better off than the rest of the world. All, as we will see next week are subject to Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," .

## **Conclusion: Silenced Before the Throne**

We have walked through some of the most sobering words ever penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Romans 3:1–20 has left no room for human boasting, no shadow of moral neutrality, and no corner of creation where sin has not left its stain. Paul has drawn the curtain back—not to reveal hope yet, but to reveal truth. And truth, when rightly grasped, humbles. It levels. It strips away illusions and lays us bare before the all-seeing eyes of God.

There is no more damning verdict than the one we've heard: **"There is none righteous, no, not one."** The repetition isn't poetic fluff; it is divine finality. Not one. Not even the most devout. Not the Jew with the Law. Not the Gentile with conscience. Not the outwardly moral. Not the theologically articulate. Not the emotionally sincere. Every mouth is stopped. Every defense disarmed. Every self-justifying thought laid low.

We are silenced.

This is not the silence of peace, but the silence of guilt. It is the silence of the courtroom when the gavel strikes and the verdict is rendered. It is the silence of Adam in the garden, hiding behind fig leaves, when God says, *"Where are you?"* It is the silence of the Pharisee when confronted by the mirror of the Law, realizing his outward obedience masked an inward corruption.

This is the silence of every man, woman, and child who has ever lived—apart from one.

And that is where the glory of this series begins to rise like the first rays of resurrection light. Because the point of this passage is not despair, but preparation. The point is not to crush you without purpose, but to till the soil of your heart for gospel seed.

## **The Law's Holy Design**

Paul has not misused Scripture in his indictment. Each Old Testament citation is precise, purposeful, and perfectly placed. Psalm 14, Psalm 5, Isaiah 59, Proverbs 1—all of them are woven into a singular tapestry: the total moral collapse of humanity.

But why does Paul do this? Why all this weight? Why this hammering down of depravity?

He answers us in verse 19:

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"...so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God."

He is not merely making a theological argument—he is issuing a divine summons. We are not spectators in Paul's courtroom; we are defendants.

This isn't just an exposé on ancient Jews or Gentiles. This is the Spirit's x-ray on your soul and mine.

And yet, even in this thunderous judgment, we see a gracious purpose: to expose sin in order to lead us to salvation. The Law speaks to those under it—not to justify them, but to silence them. It shuts the mouth. It cancels the self-defense. It does not counsel us to try harder—it convicts us that we *cannot*.

The Law does not tell you how to be saved. It tells you why you need to be.

And this is the doorway through which the gospel must be heard. You cannot ascend to grace without first descending into truth. And the truth is this: *"By works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin"* (Romans 3:20).

Knowledge of sin. Not forgiveness. Not life. Not righteousness. But sin.

So, why is this the opening note of a series titled "Risen to Reign"? Shouldn't we begin with hope? With resurrection? With glory?

Beloved, we **are** beginning with glory—because the glory of the gospel is only as bright as the darkness it overcomes.

You cannot appreciate the rising until you understand the fall.

## **The Gospel Is Not for the Righteous**

Jesus Himself declared, *"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"* (Luke 5:32). The gospel is not for people who think they're good. It's not for the respectable. It's not for the culturally upright. It's not for the religious who perform well and compare themselves favorably to others.

The gospel is for sinners.

And this passage confronts us with the terrifying reality that **we are all sinners**.

The doctrine of total depravity is not a theological abstraction—it is a diagnosis. And until you accept this diagnosis, you will never cry out for the cure. You will never see Christ as precious until you see yourself as perishing.

Let me speak plainly: if you are still making excuses for your sin—still pointing to your intentions, your background, your circumstances, your ignorance—you have not yet been silenced by the Law. Your mouth is not yet stopped.

If you are still trying to justify yourself before God—still relying on your church attendance, your good deeds, your doctrinal accuracy—you have not yet stood in the courtroom of Romans 3.

If you have not seen yourself in these verses—not just your past, but your present, your nature, your inclinations—then you are not yet ready for resurrection. Because resurrection is for the dead. Not for the sick. Not for the struggling. For the dead.

## **A Question That Demands a Response**

So here is the question I must press upon your soul, not just for reflection, but for response:

### **Have you been silenced before God?**

Has your heart stopped offering rebuttals? Has your mouth ceased its boasting? Has your conscience finally come to rest under the full weight of the Law? Or are you still trying to speak—still pleading your case—still assuming that somehow, you're different, you're better, you're not *that* bad?

Because until you are silenced, you will not hear the voice of grace.

Until you are silenced, Christ's righteousness will not be sweet to you.

Until you are silenced, His resurrection will not be your victory.

Silence is not the end—it is the beginning. It is where the journey of redemption begins. It is where we move from blindness to sight, from self to Savior, from law to grace. It is where the gospel doesn't just sound like a theological proposition, but becomes the music of your soul.

This is what Romans 3 is doing—it is silencing us to prepare us for singing.

## **The Curtain Is Rising**

In the next verses (Romans 3:21–26), Paul will turn a glorious corner:

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“But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...”

But not yet.

Not today.

Today we sit in the ashes. We feel the dust on our heads. We weep at the brokenness. We confess the ruin. We admit the rebellion. We let the Law do its work.

Because only then can we marvel when grace steps in.

We are at the base of the mountain, and from here, we will ascend. We will follow the risen Christ, who did what we could not. Who was what we were not. Who bore what we deserved. Who conquered what we feared. Who reigns where we once rebelled.

But to get there, we must pass through this narrow gate of humility. We must be stripped of all self-righteousness. We must go through Romans 3:1–20 not just with our minds, but with our hearts.

Brothers and sisters, if we rush past this text, we rush past the cross. If we soften the verdict, we cheapen the victory. If we dilute the diagnosis, we diminish the cure.

Let this Word cut you—so that Christ may bind you.

Let it crush your pride—so that Christ may crown your soul.

Let it silence your mouth—so that Christ may give you a new song.

## **A Final Plea**

So again I ask: *Have you been silenced before God?*

Don't evade the question. Don't pass it off. Don't think of someone else. Let it pierce you.

If you have never been brought low by the Law, then you have never been lifted up by the gospel.

If you have never seen yourself as utterly condemned, then you have never



seen Christ as utterly sufficient.

And if you have, then rejoice! For this silencing is the work of grace. This crushing is not the end—it is the prelude to resurrection. You are being made ready to rise. To reign. To live. To sing.

Let the cry of the tax collector become your own:

*"God, be merciful to me, a sinner."*

And from that place, we will walk together in the weeks ahead. From death to life. From law to love. From wrath to righteousness. From silence to song.

The tomb is still sealed in Romans 3—but Easter is coming.

And when that stone rolls away, it will not be rolled away by the hands of man—but by the power of God, for the people of God, through the risen Son of God.

But first—let every mouth be stopped.

## Closing Prayer

Gracious and Holy Father,

We bow before You in silence—not from apathy, but from awe. Your Word has spoken clearly, and we are undone. Like Isaiah before the throne, we say, "Woe is me," for we are a people of unclean lips, and we dwell among a people just as unclean.

Your Word has exposed our sin and stripped us of every defense. There is none righteous. Not one. We have not sought You. We have turned aside. We have become worthless. Our mouths have spoken deception. Our paths have not known peace. And we have not feared You as we ought. Lord, Your Law has stopped our mouths, and rightly so.

We confess, Father, that we are not basically good people who occasionally do wrong—we are sinners to the core, and apart from Your mercy, we stand condemned. We do not seek to lessen the weight of Your truth; we submit to it. We do not justify ourselves; we throw ourselves on Your mercy.

And yet, even in this courtroom of condemnation, we thank You for grace. We thank You that this silence is not the end, but the beginning. That this conviction is not hopelessness, but preparation. That You silence us by the

Law so You may speak to us by the gospel.

So we ask, Lord, that You would soften hard hearts. For those still justifying themselves—bring them low. And for those already humbled by their sin—comfort them. Let them see that this silence is the soil in which grace will grow.

Let us be a church that lives in gospel humility—where mouths are stopped before You but opened before the world to proclaim not our righteousness, but Christ's. Let our worship be fueled not by pride but by gratitude. Let our unity be formed not by superiority but by shared grace.

As we continue this journey toward Resurrection Sunday, fix our eyes on Jesus. The One who was silent before His accusers so that we might be forgiven. The One who bore our guilt and gave us His righteousness. The One who was condemned in our place, crucified for our sin, and raised for our justification.

Thank You, Lord, that the tomb is empty. Thank You that grace abounds where sin abounded. Thank You that though we were silenced by our guilt, we now have a song of praise.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ—our righteousness, our Redeemer, our risen and reigning King.

Amen.