

## The Necessity of the Gospel (Part 3)

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Romans: The Gospel of God Series

Romans 3:1-20

There is a famous Peanuts cartoon which had Charlie Brown lying comfortably in bed with his faithful dog, Snoopy, who was snoozing on Charlie Brown's stomach. Charlie Brown was talking to Snoopy and said, "Sometimes I lie awake at night and ask where have I gone wrong? And then a voice comes to me and says, 'This is going to take more than one night.'" Do you ever lie in bed at night like Charlie Brown and ask, "Where have I gone wrong? Where did my child go wrong? Where did my marriage go wrong? Where did the world go wrong? Everyone throughout history has recognized that something has gone wrong with themselves and with the whole world.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century a French philosopher named Rousseau said that what went wrong is society. He imagined places in the world where there wasn't science and education where people lived in happy innocence. He called such people "noble savages." But it is all these influences that corrupt the noble savage people.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Karl Marx said that what went wrong was that some people accumulated too much. And those that had too much were alienated from those who didn't have enough. What went wrong with the world was primarily economics.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century Sigmund Freud said what went wrong with people was traumatic childhood experiences. And these experiences get repressed into the unconscious and people spend their adult lives reacting to these childhood traumas.

Edward Wilson, a socio-biologist said that what's wrong with us is our genes. It's our DNA that has gone haywire.

Virtually, no thoughtful person has said there is nothing wrong. We all struggle with what philosophers call the "here to there" problem. What's the "here to there" problem? We see a cute little baby, who is doted on by his parents. The baby is laughing in his stroller. Everything the baby does is applauded – his first steps, his first words. The baby's name is Ariel Castro and 45 years later he decides to kidnap three young women and treat them as sex slaves in a Cleveland area home before he is finally caught and ends up hanging himself in prison. The "here to there" problem. How do we go from being a cute baby to being a criminal monster?

In Paul's letter to the Romans, chapters 1-3, the Apostle Paul lays out in great detail the biblical analysis of what went wrong and how we understand the "here to there" problem. The Bible calls what went wrong with you and what went wrong with me and what went wrong with the world is something called "sin."

Now, modern therapy scrupulously avoids using the word "sin." Therapists will talk about healthy problem solving behavior, or unhealthy problem creating behavior. They will talk about some behaviors as being adaptive and other behaviors as maladaptive. A client may be comfortable or uncomfortable with certain acts. But in very few places in contemporary society is anyone comfortable with the word "sin."

Back in the 1600's there was a man named Blaise Pascal. He was a mathematician, a scientist and inventor. His father had a business and he watched his father spend long nights adding up columns of numbers. Blaise Pascal invented the world's first adding machine. He was bothered by the problem of getting around Paris and he invented the concept of public transportation, having wagons crisscross Paris at set times, picking up passengers along their routes. Pascal was a brilliant man, who was also a passionate follower of Jesus Christ. He used to jot down random thoughts on scraps of paper about his Christian faith.

One of the things Pascal, the brilliant mathematician and philosopher, said:

***Without a concept of sin, we human beings remain entirely incomprehensible to ourselves.***

Unless we have a robust understanding of sin, we are a mystery to ourselves. Unless we have a deep and robust understanding of sin, we're all Charlie Browns, tossing and turning in bed at night, talking to our dogs, saying, "What went wrong with the world."

I started a series last month from the book of Romans, a series that is going to take us all the way to Christmas, a series that I've titled The Gospel of God. In the first three chapters Paul is laying out his case, his reason why the gospel is the only hope for humankind and for the world. I've called today's message, "The Necessity of the Gospel (Part 3)." Let's pray.

**Romans 3:1-8 (NIV)**

**What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God. What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."**

**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.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, “If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?” Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—“Let us do evil that good may result”? Their condemnation is just!**

In these verses we read about:

### **The faithfulness of God**

The whole Bible teaches the faithfulness of God. Here is what we read in Deuteronomy 32:4:

#### **Deuteronomy 32:4 (NIV)**

**He is the Rock, his works are perfect,  
and all his ways are just.  
A faithful God who does no wrong,  
upright and just is he.**

#### **Psalm 36:5 (NIV)**

**Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,  
your faithfulness to the skies.**

Romans 3:1-8 is all about God’s faithfulness and people’s unfaithfulness. Let’s read again Romans 3:1-2:

#### **Romans 3:1–2 (NIV)**

**What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.**

What do we see in this text? God is:

### **Faithful in his gifts**

In the Book of Romans the Apostle Paul is engaged in an extended argument about the character of God. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we don’t get into arguments about the character of God because God is not our preoccupation. See, we only argue about what we really care about. What do we argue about in 21<sup>st</sup> century America? Politics because politics in our preoccupation. And if you want to get someone’s blood boiling make a political statement concerning some policy or issue that is opposed to the other

person's politics. We argue about politics. We argue about sports because sports are our passion.

But you are not going to get very many people's blood boiling regarding the character of God. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, especially among Jews, there was no greater preoccupation in the life of the community than God. So Paul writes the Book of Romans to vindicate the character of God against the charge that if Christianity is true then the God of the Jews has bad character; he's fickle. He doesn't keep his word. He promises one thing and does another.

You see, if you read the Old Testament, the one thing is clear and said over and over and over again, is that God chose the Jewish people. The Jews were the Chosen People. But if Jesus is, as Paul says, the Jewish Messiah and the mass of Jewish people don't believe in Jesus, then is God going to break his covenant with the Jews? Is he going to reject Jewish people? Are they still his chosen? How will God respond to his own people's lack of faith? Will the Jewish people's unfaithfulness trump God's faithfulness? Romans was an extended argument about the faithfulness of God. How will God relate to his Chosen People, the Jews?

We need to back up and ask why were the Jewish people chosen by God in the beginning? Why does God choose anyone – you, me, the Vineyard, the church across the world – why does God bring anyone into relationship with himself? Remember, Jesus said you did not choose me, I chose you. Why does God choose anyone – us, the Jewish people? If we were to go back to the beginning of God's original calling to the person we call the "first Jew," Father Abraham, who is the father of all who believe, we find the reason for God's invitation of Abraham into relationship with God. Here is what we read in Genesis 12:1-3:

**Genesis 12:1–3 (NIV)**

**The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."**

God called Abraham into relationship with himself; God blessed Abraham for a purpose, so that through Abraham the entire world would be blessed. Every person who is in relationship with God walks in the steps of Father Abraham. The reason why God called you into relationship with himself is not simply to pour blessing on your life. God does do that. But in addition, God wants to pour blessing through you and through me. God blesses us to be a blessing! God wants to bless our community and our world through the Vineyard church. That's why our vision statement reads:

***We seek to be a relevant church that doesn't exist for ourselves, but for Christ and for the world.***

This understanding of being blessed to be a blessing is the absolute opposite of the prosperity teaching, especially the kind that you see on television. The idea of the prosperity teaching is God wants to bless you so that you can reign, so you can be a king, so you can be prosperous. The picture is you can be a cup that God pours his blessing into. You can be a storage locker and store up all of God's blessings. But God says, "I didn't save you to be a cup, or a storage locker. I want you to be a pipe through which my blessing goes out to the world. That's what you are chosen for."

Look at this with me in Psalm 67:

**Psalm 67 (NIV)**

**1 May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face shine on us—**

**2 so that your ways may be known on earth,  
your salvation among all nations.**

**3 May the peoples praise you, God;  
may all the peoples praise you.**

**4 May the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you rule the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations of the earth.**

**5 May the peoples praise you, God;  
may all the peoples praise you.**

**6 The land yields its harvest;  
God, our God, blesses us.**

**7 May God bless us still,  
so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.**

I believe that it breaks the heart of God that many in the church today don't understand the "so that" in their lives that God blesses you, me and this church not just so that we enjoy his blessing, but that we extend his blessing to others.

Let's drill in here for a moment. Why did God give the gift of his commandments to his people? Why does God give us the Bible?

**Romans 3:1–2 (NIV)**

**What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.**

Why did God give Jews his law? It wasn't that the Jewish people could feel special, not to build up their self-esteem, not to make them feel morally superior to the Gentile world. Here is the reason why God gave his law to the Jewish people:

**Deuteronomy 4:5–8 (NIV)**

**See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? (NIV)**

God was making the Jewish people his showroom window so that the nations would look at the Jews and as they observed the national life of Israel, they would say, "Israel has the greatest God of any of the gods of the nations." As the rest of the world looked at Israel obeying the law of God, they would say, "No other God is this truthful, this fair, this merciful to the downtrodden, this generous to the poor and the weak, this concerned about the widow, the orphan and the immigrant." God gave his law to the Jewish people so that the attributes of the invisible God would be made visible as people observed the lives of the Jewish people. And as a result of seeing the Jews obeying their God, the rest of the world would turn to God in worship and repentance.

Seems like a good plan. God chooses people to be his showroom window, to put God's character on display so that the rest of the world would be blessed and converted. What's the problem? The problem is Romans 2:23-24:

**Romans 2:23–24 (NIV)**

**You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."**

God wants people to praise him because you exist. But instead, as the outside world looks at the people of God, they blaspheme God, they mock God. Think about this with me, friends. How often is the name of Jesus Christ mocked, and his name dragged through the mud because of what we Christians do? People at work might look at a Christian, might look at us and say, "So, that's what Christians are like? That's what Christians do? They talk about the Bible and the difference Jesus makes, but look at their work habits. Look at the problems they have relating to other people. Look at their attitudes towards authority. Look at the mess their marriages are in. Listen to their speech. Look at how angry they sound."

Friends, it doesn't matter what little plaque you have on your wall, or what bumper sticker you put on your car, or the fact that you have a Bible on the corner of your desk.

Those aren't the things that matter. The thing that matters is your life. You are God's display window. If you claim the name Christian, then people are supposed to pick up from you what your God is like.

That's why God gives you the Bible and his Spirit. If you are humble, if you are kind, if you are forgiving, you are a giving person, if people see that God really does change human lives, so that we make the invisible God visible, then they will not mock God because of you, they will praise God because of you. Is there anything better that could be said of your life than someone coming up to you and saying, "I praise God because you exist."

By the way, that's what the name "Jew" literally meant. It comes from the word "Judah," one of Jacob's sons and it means "praise." The Jews were called to bring praise to God and blessings to the nations. Can you imagine, friend, someone saying, "I praise God because of you." That's something that could happen in your life. If it's never happened, it could happen. That's where God wants to take your life – God has blessed you to be a blessing so that others will praise God because of you.

Well, where is God's faithfulness when we don't live in a way that brings him praise, when we abuse the privileges that he's given us, when we are not lights to the world, when we confirm everyone's prejudices that Christians are just hypocrites?

Paul argues that God is still faithful when his people are unfaithful.

### **God is faithful in his warnings**

#### **Romans 3:3–4 (NIV)**

**What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."**

See, God in the Old Testament didn't just make promises to people. Paul is quoting a verse in verse 4 that expresses the faithfulness of God when he judges sin because part of the words of God in the Old Testament were God's warnings. The Word of God includes warnings that God will judge sin as well as promises that he will bless his people. God keeps his word in both blessing and judgment.

See, friends, when we draw near to God we need to understand that we're not just drawing near to a blessing machine. The God that we read about in the Bible is not Santa Clause that gives gifts. He does give gifts, but drawing near to God is not simply privilege. There is also responsibility and accountability. God's people are not just first in privilege, first in knowing God's love, first in knowing God's answers to prayer, first in knowing God's comfort. We are first of all in the whole world know God's favor.

But the Bible also teaches, and this is what Paul is getting at concerning the Jewish people, that God's people are also first in accountability, first in responsibility, first in judgment. The whole Bible teaches this. Look with me at Romans 2:9-10:

**Romans 2:9–10 (NIV)**

**There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.**

And here is what we read in 1 Peter 4:17-18

**1 Peter 4:17–18 (NIV)**

**For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"**

Let me apply this before we move on. Have you personally been given a lot by God? Have you been given a great job? A happy home? A good education? A good mind? Good genes? Are you aware of God's blessing in your life? We American Christians have been given so many blessings. The American church is the wealthiest in all of human history. We American Christians have been given a lot of freedom. We've been given an abundance of teaching. We have more Christian books than any other Christians in all of human history.

We have so much to give thanks to God for, but remember to whom much is given much will be required. We're not only first in privilege, but God's people are always first in being disciplined.

This is Paul's argument. God is not being unfaithful when he disciplines you or me. He is being completely consistent with what he said. If we American Christians are first in privilege, we are also first in being disciplined by God. Let's look at:

**The sinfulness of people**

Here is what we read in Romans 3:7:

**Romans 3:7 (NIV)**

**Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?"**

Calling Jewish people "sinners" would have been offensive to God's people back in Paul's day. The Jewish people knew that Gentiles were sinners, but they themselves?

They were the Chosen Ones. It would be like someone sitting down with a therapist today and saying, “You know, I just don’t know why I lashed out like that at my daughter, or my son. I don’t know why I said what I said. I wonder if it is the pressure that I’ve been under at work? I’m sure that’s why I exploded in anger. Sometimes I wonder if I’m just following in the pattern of my mother, who used to lash out at me? My mother was a screamer. I wonder if I have a genetic predisposition to screaming?” The therapist looks at you and says with a smile, “Yes, all those things may be a factor. But here is the real problem. You are a sinner.”

You were born with a tendency to sin. You were born with a sinful capacity. How and to what degree that capacity is realized in the world is shaped by lots of different factors. But every human being is born with a predisposition to sin. Protestant Reformers used to talk about all of us having in ourselves kindling wood. The kindling inside that can be set on fire by a little spark. You don’t have to teach a child to hit their brother, or to grab something and say, “mine!” Or to lie, or to throw a tantrum. These things are in the child. Sin explains the “here to there” phenomenon. Psalm 51:5 says this:

**Psalm 51:5 (NIV)**

**Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**

And Jeremiah 17:9 echoes this by saying:

**Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)**

**The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?**

Now the way your sin and my sin is expressed is very much shaped by the pattern that our lives have taken by our families, by our life experiences, by our community, by our friends, by our choices. But nothing from the outside put the kindling wood inside of us. We are born with this kindling. Do you believe that about yourself? Are you willing to call yourself a sinner? Not just that you make mistakes and that you don’t do everything perfect. You are just human. Do you see that within yourself is this innate capacity to sin? That’s why we are selfish with the people we love, that’s our innate sinfulness that causes us to cut corners regarding the truth and cut corners in our finances and rationalize away our self-centeredness.

Well, maybe you don’t know what it means to be a sinner. Paul lays it out for us. He tells us first of all that sin is religious and irreligious.

**Sin is religious and irreligious**

**Romans 3:9–11 (NIV)**

**What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the**

**power of sin. As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.”**

It is not just the irreligious Gentiles that avoid God through their partying, immorality, their drunkenness and greed. It is not just the irreligious Gentiles that avoid God. It is also the religious Jews who avoid God by their religion. Tim Keller, a Presbyterian pastor in NY, who I frequently quote; I really admire his writing and thinking, said this:

***Irreligion is avoiding God as Lord and Savior by ignoring him all together. “Religion,” or moralism, is avoiding God as Lord and Savior by developing a moral righteousness and then presenting it to God in an effort to show that he “owes” you. You can reject God by rejecting his law and living any way you see fit. And you can also reject God by embracing and obeying God’s law so as to earn your salvation.***

Throughout the gospel we see these two groups of people – the irreligious and religious – and both avoid God. In Jesus’ famous parable, The Prodigal Son, it wasn’t just the irreligious younger son, the party-er, the man who took off with friends and wasted his fortune in wild living – he wasn’t the only one who was avoiding relationship with his father. There was an older brother who worked hard on his father’s farm, but substituted working for his father with relationship with his father. He believed that his father owed him for all of his work. And he self-righteously judged his younger brother.

Friends, we see these two ways of avoiding God all the time, but we church people only focus on one. We say the way you avoid God is by being irreligious, but never going to church, by never opening the Bible, by not getting baptized, by not praying before you eat your food. But the New Testament tells us that there is another, more subtle, and in many ways more deadly way to avoid God. And that is by being religious, going to church, getting baptized, dragging your kids to church, by sending your kids to Christian schools, by being active in service, by having the title “leader” or even “pastor,” by working like crazy in the church and never turning to God. Some of the people who avoid God the most are the busiest working for God.

Does any of this apply to any of you? See, religion is so different than the gospel. Religion says, “I will be good and therefore God will accept me.” The gospel says, “God accepts me; and, as a result of his acceptance, I become a good person.” Religion says, “My self worth is based on how hard I am working for God and how moral I am. So I have a right to look down on everyone else, who doesn’t work as hard as me, or is not as moral as me.” The gospel says, “My self worth is based on the one who died on a cross for his enemies including me. The only reason why I have a relationship with God is sheer grace, utterly unearned merit. So I have no right to look down on anyone else because I know the depth of my own sinfulness.”

Sin can be religious; sin can be irreligious. And,

### Sin is universal

#### Romans 3:9–12 (NIV)

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

#### Romans 3:19–20 (NIV)

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

Paul couldn’t be clearer that sin is universal, that it affects everyone. Look at vv. 10-12 again:

#### Romans 3:10–12 (NIV)

As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Look at how many times Paul uses the words “no one” or “all.” If this was math, the set of people who don’t sin would be called an empty set. It would be called a null-set. There are no items in this set, Paul says. The set of people who can squeeze through to God and don’t have to rely on his grace and mercy, the set of people who are not enemies of God for whom Christ died, is an empty set. God has to save every single person. Christ needed to die for every single human being. There is no one who can get to God on their own. Sin is universal. It is in the heart of every person – the religious and the irreligious.

And,

### Sin is total

#### Romans 3:13–17 (NIV)

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

What Paul is saying is that sin touches every part of our beings. That's what the Christian doctrine of total depravity means. That phrase "total depravity" has been sadly misunderstood. Many well-intentioned Christians say, "I don't believe in the total depravity of people," because they think by total depravity Christians are referring to the idea that people are as bad as they possibly can be. That there is no goodness in us. That the image of God has been totally obliterated. That people are as bad as demons. Total depravity doesn't mean that we are as bad as we can possibly be. Total depravity doesn't deny the fact that non-Christians, as well as Christians do many good and charitable things. Total depravity doesn't mean that that you don't see lots of acts of kindness coming from really unexpected places. In every person the image of God still shines. We still see something of God in even the most evil of people. There is something in human beings that give us dignity and worth.

All total depravity means and what Paul is saying here is that every part of us is stained with sin. The way we reason is stained by sin. Our thinking is stained. Our motives are twisted. Our actions are inconsistent. Our speech is stained with sin. What we do is stained with sin. We are like white shirts that have been washed with a brand new red sock and when we're pulled out of the washer every fiber of our being is pink. Every part of us is stained. Our emotions are stained. Our will is stained. Our reason is stained. Total depravity means sin runs through us completely.

TS Eliot said that total depravity is like a house that has leaky plumbing and the sewage from the pipes is dripping out. And any way that you go into the house you smell the stench of the leaky pipes. That's what we're like. The stench of our sins pervades our entire beings – how we relate, how we think, what we're after, what our goals and motives are. Here is what we read in Genesis 6:5,

**Genesis 6:5 (NIV)**

**The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.**

The Bible uses lots of words to describe sin. The Hebrew Bible has at least 50 different terms to describe the problem of sin. It describes sin in terms of being unclean, being filthy, carrying a burden that weighs you down. Sin is described as decay, corruption, something that eats away at your inner being like leprosy eats away at someone's flesh. Sin is described as missing the mark, an arrow that doesn't hit dead center, but goes astray. We sin when we don't use something in our life for the purpose for which God created it. We don't use our bodies for the purpose that God created our bodies. The arrow goes off target. Sin is described as twisting something, bending. The idea is that we are involved in crooked behavior. Sin is described as rebellion, being a traitor, being disloyal to God.

Its effects are devastating. It alienates us from God. It disrupts our relationships with others. It separates us from creation. It causes psychological problems, health problems, national problems, international problems. Sin affects every one of us, every part of us, and every stage of our lives from birth to death.

The Apostle Paul says that:

**Sin is seen in words**

**Romans 3:13–14 (NIV)**

**“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”**

Friends, our words are so important. Paul here is talking about “death” words – open graves, poison of vipers is on their lips. He is talking about words that cause death. Words are so powerful. Proverbs 18:21 says this:

**Proverbs 18:21 (NIV)**

**The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.**

Do you understand that by your words you have the power to kill, or to give life? We sin when we speak death words. Death words destroy; death words hurt other people. Death words create a feeling of resentment. Death words humiliate others. Life words build up and increase confidence. They strengthen someone. They set people free to be who God intended them to be.

I will bet every one of us can think back to a time maybe many years ago when as a child someone spoke death words to you, brought shame into your life. Maybe some kid at school mocked you for your physical appearance. Or the fact that you spoke with a lisp or walked with a limp, or wore glasses, or weren't great in sports, or made a mistake in class, or something about you. Some of us had parents who spoke death words into us. And if you think about it too long you can still feel the shame and the sting of their words. And I bet every one of us can think of times when we spoke death words to someone else. And our death words created shame.

One of the saddest stories I ever read concerned bullying in our schools. There was a young woman in Mentor, Ohio. Maybe you read this story. Her name was Sladjana Vidovic. Her family moved to Cleveland from Croatia. By all accounts Sladjana was a wonderful girl. Back in Croatia she was always smiling; she loved to cook for her family; she danced.

She stopped smiling when they moved to the US. Kids made fun of her because she didn't speak English and when she did, she spoke with an accent. She was tormented by

other girls in Middle School. And then in 10<sup>th</sup> grade a few students went after her because Sladjana had a couple of moles on her face. She began dating a boy and the other girls in school made fun of her and called her a slut and a whore. The principal was told repeatedly that Sladjana was being bullied, that she was being made fun of. The administration said that there was really very little that they could do.

Sladjana became more and more depressed and at age 16 she went into her bedroom and hung herself.

I can't emphasize enough how important our words are as moms and dads concerning what we say to our children and what we say to each other. We can curse our kids and curse those around us, or we can bless them. Life and death are in the power of the tongue. And if you want to get a really quick gauge of your spiritual condition, focus on your words. Think back on what came out of your mouth over the last day or two days or week. Jesus says from the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. If you want to know your spiritual condition, where you really are with God, just pay attention to what comes out of your mouth? What's flowing out in your home? To your friends? In your workplace with your colleagues, with your customers?

Paul says sin is seen in our words and:

### **Sin is seen in violence**

#### **Romans 3:15–18 (NIV)**

**“Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”**

We entertain ourselves in the US by so much violence. The FCC regulates sex in network TV and curse words, but there is virtually no regulation on the amount of violence we expose ourselves to. I can't imagine what the body count is regarding the number of people that I have watched in movies and on TV who get shot, stabbed, and blown up. And this is all entertainment.

We entertain ourselves with violence. We are verbally violent with each other. Talk with any police officer, or anyone involved in the criminal justice system, about the amount of domestic violence that they encounter. And not just men against women. That is the most serious part of domestic violence; for sure. But study after study indicates that one of the least reported crimes in America is violence against men by women. Men are embarrassed to report it. Many law enforcement agencies don't take it seriously.

Sin is seen in violence, in entertainment, in our schools, in our homes, internationally. Just go online and read the Amnesty International report for this past year. You don't think that human beings are sinful? Just read the Amnesty International report from

2013 that lists the violence that is perpetrated against people by other people in every country on our planet.

In chapters 1-3 the Apostle Paul has offered a sweeping indictment against the entire human race including each of you and including me. He has shown us what we're like. He says, "Here is where you stand, friend." VV. 19-20:

**Romans 3:19–20 (NIV)**

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

He has now closed his case and the prosecution rests. He is picturing a great courtroom and we're standing before the Judgment Seat of God. We've been indicted as sinners. We hear all of the evidence; God has heard it. Now, God turns to me and he turns to you and he says, "What do you have to say on your behalf? What do you have to say in your own defense to this charge, friend, that you are a sinner and that sin touches every part of your being; that you regularly avoid me by irreligion, by your words, by your violence?" When you are asked the question, "What do you say in your own defense," Paul's answer is we say nothing. We have no excuse. We place our hands on our mouths, hang out heads, as we hear the verdict pronounced on our lives, "Guilty." Guilty before God. Guilty in our own eyes.

The Lord says, "What witness can you produce to defend your righteousness? Who will stand up and say about us that we never sin? And we say we have no witnesses; we have nothing to offer for evidence. We are sinners.

Let me close with this thought. There is a blessing in seeing ourselves as sinners. It is a good thing.

You know, there is story from the Old Testament that I want to finish out with. In Genesis 32 [and by the way, I got this insight from Zacharias' book, *Can Man Live Without God?*]. God is wrestling with Jacob and he says to Jacob, "What is your name?" Now, it is a strange question for an omniscient being to ask. Someone who knows everything to turn to a man and say, "What is your name?" But in that moment of being confronted by God, his father, and being asked his name, Jacob, I believe, flashed back to the other time in his life when he was asked by his earthly father the same question. Years before Isaac, Jacob's earthly father, said to Jacob, "What is your name? Who are you?" And when Jacob was asked years before what his name was, he lied. He said, "I am Esau. I am your first born son." And in so doing, he stole the blessing that God wanted to give him, but he stole it. And that led to years of unhappiness for Jacob.

Well, now he is confronted again with the same question: What is your name? Only this time the question is asked by God, the father. And this time, he answered the question honestly. He said, “My name is Jacob.” The name “Jacob” means “deceiver”, “grabber”. And what Jacob is saying is God, I have come to see who I am and I am going to be honest about it. I am a deceiver. I am a grabber. My whole life has been lived by twisting the truth and turning things to my own advantage. And now I am going to be honest before you and tell you what I really am.

And God says, “Now that you are willing to be honest, Jacob, you have come to a clear self-understanding, I am going to call you “Israel”. I am going to give you a new name. You are going to be a person who overcomes sin in your life. You are going to be an overcomer, one who is victorious.

Friends, I believe that all God is looking for at this moment is just that honesty of confession. Where we come before the Lord and say, “God, I am a sinner. My name is Jacob. I am an addict. I have done these things in my marriage. These things with your Word and with what you have given me.”

God says, “Well, then, I will name you Israel, overcomer. I will change you.”

Ultimately, the answer to Charlie Brown’s question, where did my life go wrong, is that we are sinners. The beauty of seeing ourselves as sinners is that we come to the end of ourselves. To the end of all of our striving. We come to the end of our rope and it is there, at the end of our rope, that we look for the only source of life, a life-line, the cross of Jesus. It ought to be no great fear to disclose fully what we are and what we have done. Because that is the way that we can, then, find the cross of Christ fully and the grace of God that is able to rescue us. Let’s pray.

## The Necessity of the Gospel (Part 3)

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Rich Nathan

October 6, 2013

Romans: The Gospel of God Series

Romans 3:1-20

- I. The faithfulness of God (Romans 3:1-8)
  - A. Faithful in his gifts
  - B. Faithful in his warnings
  
- II. The sinfulness of people (Romans 3:9-20)
  - A. Sin is religious and irreligious
  - B. Sin is universal
  - C. Sin is total
    - 1. Sin is seen in words
    - 2. Sin is seen in violence