

**ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH**  
**GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS & MAN’S REBELLION – Chapters 1-3**

**LESSON 12 – THE FINAL ARGUMENT – Romans 3:9-20**

Where is the evidence of sin and depravity in the lives of those who do good and generous deeds for others? Do they really need a Savior?

Paul is clear and states simply that regardless of our actions, our spiritual condition separates us from God. Only a personal relationship with Christ will allow us to escape God’s wrath and punishment for sin.

“According to the Bible, man may do good things but even his good is actually bad, because it is designed to maintain his rebellion against the only sovereign God.”

James Montgomery Boice

In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul has acted like a prosecuting attorney to bring the whole world before God in judgment. Here in these last verses of the third chapter, he makes this argument...the whole world is guilty before God...the entire human race!

What Paul gives here is the most explicit description of the total depravity of mankind in all the Scripture.

Total depravity is a very misunderstood term. It does NOT mean that we are as bad as we could be. All of us know unsaved people who do good things. What it means is that we are as bad off as we could be.

The doctrine of total depravity doesn’t measure one person against another to see who is good or bad...it measures everyone next to God. And with that standard of measure, we are all as bad off as we can be because we have all failed to measure up to the standard of the glory of God.

To prove that everyone is guilty and needs God’s salvation, Paul uses statements taken from the Old Testament. All of these passages drive home the point of human depravity.

**The Character of Human Depravity**

In verses 9-12 of chapter 3, Paul uses the phrase, “no one” five different times. Paul’s words from the Old Testament wipe away any hope mankind has apart from God.

Two questions in verse 9 make Paul’s point. “What shall we conclude then?” and “Do we have any advantage?”

As we’ve seen in Romans up to this point, no one is more or less guilty than anyone else. Everyone is guilty in their sin before God regardless of their heritage or religion. Outside a relationship with Christ, ALL are under the condemnation of sin.

Paul points out four things about the character of mankind in relation to their depravity.

**Unrighteous** – Verse 10, “There is no one righteous, not even one.”

There are no exceptions. No one can be classified as righteous in the sight of God. Mankind is incapable of doing anything right in the sight of God. Paul quotes Psalm 14:3 as proof, “All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

**Unreasonable** – Verse 11 “There is no one who understands...”

Apart from God mankind cannot understand spiritual things. Paul makes this point clearly in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.”

**Unresponsive** – Verse 11 “There is no one who seeks God.”

No one will seek after God without the prompting of the Holy Spirit. No one seeks after God on their own. Psalm 14:2, “The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.”

**Unrepentant** – Verse 12 “All have turned away...”

Instead of turning around...repenting...mankind turns to their own way, going further from God in the process. Isaiah 53:6, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way.”

### **The Conduct of Human Depravity**

“This section demonstrates the corruption of the human personality, especially as it is expressed in human speech. It describes the pervasiveness of sin. Sin affects every part of our human constitution, every faculty, every function, including our mind, emotions, sexuality, conscience and will.”

John Stott

### **The Wicked Words of the Depraved**

In verses 13 and 14, Paul lists the different parts of the body which combine to form the speech of depraved mankind...throats, tongues, lips and mouths.

He says, “Their throats are open graves.” The horrible stench from an open grave is not from the grave itself but from what is inside. In just the same way the unclean, unkind, untrue words of depraved mankind show a defiled, spiteful and deceitful heart.

Psalm 5:9, “Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with malice. Their throat is an open grave.”

### **The Wicked Ways of the Depraved**

Verses 15-18 reveal the depraved actions of the feet and eyes of mankind. He expresses our rebellion against God in three different ways...

- **The ways of death** – Verse 15, “Their feet are swift to shed blood.”

In the US, even with its Christian heritage, since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century twice as many people have been killed by acts of murder that in all the wars of its history combined. According to researcher Arnold Barnett of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a child born today in any one of the fifty largest cities in the US has a one in fifty chance of being murdered.

- **The ways of destruction** – Verse 16, “Ruin and misery mark their ways.”

The very word “destruction” brings to mind the cruelty and pain that human being inflict on each other. This verse describes the stain of depravity that marks everything mankind does.

- **The ways of division** – Verse 17, “The way of peace they do not know.”

Of course, not all human beings are felons, adulterers, or murderers. Remember that total depravity doesn’t make us as bad as we could be but it does affect us in every area of our being, corrupting every part of our humanity.

### **The Cause of Human Depravity**

Verse 18, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” This eliminates any possibility of a right relationship with God on our own. Without Jesus we are doomed.

### **The Condemnation of Human Depravity**

#### **Our Condition is Helpless**

First we are convicted by the law and then we are condemned by the law. Everyone is guilty...without excuse before God. Mankind stands guilty before God condemned because of their sin.

#### **Our Condition is Hopeless**

Paul gives the most devastating analysis of the human condition found anywhere. Verse 20, “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law.”

I’m glad Paul doesn’t stop at verse 20. As we will discuss in the next lesson, with verse 21 Paul begins to explain how God has intervened through Christ and the cross of Calvary for our salvation.