

The Human Condition
Romans 3:9-20
3-1-2026

“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.” “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.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” 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.” (Romans 3:9–20)

Picture 1 and 2 – Old St. Michaels interior and exterior

Built in 1373, St. Michael’s Cathedral in Coventry was one of the largest and most beautiful churches in England. But in the evening of November 14, 1940, the German Luftwaffe began dropping over 16,000 bombs which destroyed the city while killing and injuring over 1400 people. The bombing lasted for 11 hours, during which time incendiary bombs were dropped on the beautiful and the historic church. After 3 hours of fighting the blaze, it became clear that nothing could be done to save the structure. All the townspeople could do was stand and watch it burn.

Picture 3 - Destruction

One onlooker wrote that the entire building was a seething mass of flame and piled up blazing beams and timbers, interpenetrated and surmounted with dense bronze colored smoke. Through this could be seen the concentrated blaze caused by the burning organ, famous for its long history back to the time when Handel played upon it.

If you go to Coventry today you will find the outer wall and the 300-foot spire of the old St. Michael’s, all that remains of the once glorious structure.

Picture 5 – walls

But right there next to it stands a huge, beautiful cathedral rebuilt out of the ashes.

Picture 4 – New St Michaels

When they rebuilt the cathedral, they connected the two as a reminder of both its former glory that was lost right alongside the glory of the new.

Picture 6 – full picture

In many ways, St. Michaels can serve as a picture of the fall and condition of mankind.

Though we were created in the image of God, because of the fall only a shell of our former glory remains.

But out of the ashes, God raises us up, a new creation in Christ.

And now we live with both the reality of sin and our old nature which stands right alongside the glory of becoming a new creation

as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:18, we are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

You and I were built for beauty and glory! In the image of God, Genesis 1 says.

But something happened at the fall which marred and deformed that image, making it only a shell of what was intended.

To quote JI Packer, Our present condition corresponds to the ruins of a cathedral or palace or castle. The remnants of great dignity are still apparent, but the ruins are useless for their intended purpose until they undergo a rebuilding more radical than anyone contemplating the scene can imagine. Meantime, there is something tragic and deeply saddening about the ruins that sensitive persons cannot but feel. The ground plan of each decayed building gives a sense of how much majesty and structural beauty and with how much potential usefulness, have been lost.

The glory of being created in the image of God, stands in ruin and decay due to sin,

There is still the hint of that majesty, but only a massive rebuilding effort can regain and restore what was lost

That effort is what the cross of Jesus Christ is all about

God restoring what was lost at the fall, dealing with its effects and the consequences of sin

For In Christ, Paul told the Corinthians, God is reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them.

So far in Romans, Paul had spent most of the first 2 chapters making the case for sin, that all are guilty before God, Jew and Gentile alike.

As he says in 3:9, "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." (Romans 3:9)

We all stand like those ruins with just a hint of the majesty remaining and Paul will soon turn his attention to the return to glory, but first he summarizes his argument in chapter 3 and makes one last appeal to prove his case

this one is an appeal to scripture itself, starting with the words in :10, **"As it is written."**

in describing the human condition in the 9 verses which follow he quotes 8 different Old Testament passages, bringing a whole series of charges against all of mankind to describe the human condition, we can place under the general headings of our character, our conversation, and our conduct itself

- I. **looking at all humanity at all times and in all places, Paul begins with a description of human character, :10 begins,**

There is no one righteous, not even one

Here Paul uses a legal term to make his case

No one can claim to be innocent, not guilty before God

None of us, not even one, are right before him

None of us are as we were created to be when man first walked with God in the garden in unbroken fellowship

The effects of the fall are that we became like St Michaels, merely a shell of Gods intent at creation

What is more, **There is no one who even understands**

We are ignorant of both him and His ways and don't even know the seriousness of the condition we are in

If we understood just how serious sin is and its consequences for us, we would not choose it

There is no one who seeks God

choosing ignorance and darkness instead

We are in a state of open rebellion

And rather than seek him out we try to escape and go our own way, to set our own terms and conditions on Him

As one commentator put it, "Judging by the vast number of religions in the world with millions of zealous adherents, one would think that a great many people are diligently seeking after God. But scripture makes clear, in this passage and in many others, that all religious systems and efforts are, in reality, attempts to escape the true God and to discover or manufacture false gods of one's own liking."

All have turned away

It's not by accident, the word here means its intentional

the deliberate avoidance of God and heading in the wrong direction

Like the prophet Isaiah said, all of us are like sheep who have gone stray, each of us has turned to his own way

in a military context, this word would describe a soldier running away and deserting his post.

They have together become worthless, good for nothing

This word used here would be used to describe milk that has turned sour and become rancid

It is unfit to drink or be used to make cheese or butter or anything else that is edible.

Then to sum up what he has just written, Paul continues

There is no one who does good, not even one

Mankind has become totally corrupt

We can't say we are different, that he's talking about someone else, some other group or people

That we, our family and friends are spared from his description and not included

We cannot say we don't need Christ or to tell others about Jesus and encourage them to accept his saving work, thinking we will all be okay in the end regardless of what we believe

9 times in just verses 9-12 Paul uses words like all and no one to say we are all in the same boat, all stand guilty before God
As he will say in verse 23, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God

II. after describing our character, he then turns his attention to our conversation

how the human condition is seen through our words and language
for as Jesus said, it is out of the overflow of the heart that our mouths speak
James 3:8 calls the tongue a restless evil, full of deadly poison

:13 says their throats are open graves

Never satisfied or content
Instead of building up we too often tear down others
Instead of encouraging and being life giving, our words destroy

Their tongues practice deceit

This word deceit refers to treachery, it means to lure away
It was used to refer to baiting a hook, covering it up and hiding the danger with something attractive, like a fisherman does when they bait their hooks
the fish thinks they are getting a meal but instead become one

The poison of vipers is on their lips

They become the source of death and destruction through careless words, words that cut and hurt, words that slander and deceive

Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness

Open hostility which desires the worst for others as seen in publicly criticizing, demeaning, and defaming, open hostility and gossip, lies and half-truths meant to cut and do harm

Most of us don't give nearly enough thought to the words we use and things we say and where they come from deep down within us

How easy it is to tear down, ignoring Paul's words in Eph 4:29 that we are not to let and unwholesome talk come out of our mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen

How we need more of that in social media and the public sphere which have become so openly hostile and abusive with no accountability

Paul's words here reveal just how much of our hearts and our sin is revealed through our words, the things we say and how we say them.

Colossians 4:6 says we are to let our conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that we may know how to respond to everyone

III. Paul went from character in verses 10-12, to our conversation in verses 13-14, and now in verses 15-18 he turns to our conduct itself

Their feet are swift to shed blood

Violence and divisiveness and tearing down become a way of life
Something embraced rather than rejected

Scottish evangelist Robert Aldene said, the most savage animals do not destroy so many of their own species to appease their hunger, as man destroys his fellows to satiate his ambitions, his revenge, or his greed.

And the result is that **ruin and misery mark their ways**

It only gets worse because it becomes acceptable and a way of life leaving only damage in their wake

So, the way of peace they don't even know

we don't really know it because we haven't experienced it
It's become a strange and foreign concept

And the reason is, there is no fear of God before their eyes

Yet it is the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding, Proverbs 9:10 tells us

What a dark and pessimistic view of mankind!

One rejected by so many in denial

Insisting that we are basically good at heart

That he isn't talking about us but only the worst of the worst

GK Chesterton was certainly correct when he said, original sin is the one Christian truth that can be verified by observation anywhere in our world, any day of the week.

We may make excuses but God doesn't and his standards are far higher than ours

There's a story of the Psychiatrist who once had a patient that thought he was dead. After spending hours in futile attempts to convince the patient that he was alive, the psychiatrist finally came up with what he thought was a foolproof plan. He gave the patient several medical books and asked him to read the sections showing that dead men don't bleed. The man agreed to do the reading and a few days later the two met again.

The psychiatrist asked, What did you learn from the books I lent you? I am convinced, he replied, dead men don't bleed.

As that point the psychiatrist brought out a pin and pricked the man's finger who stared back in shock as the blood began to flow. My gosh, he cried out, dead men do bleed

Sometimes the best arguments, the most solid reasoning, and the strongest evidence can do little to sway the opinion or change a mind that is firmly set

Which is why, despite all the evidence and photos to the contrary, 6% of the American population still believe that man has never been to the moon, many of these insisting that we have never even left the earth's atmosphere

And why there continues to be many who deny the Holocaust ever happened

The world is often in denial about many things but most serious of all is the denial of sin, that we live in a fallen world and every one of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and THEREFORE NEED A SAVIOR

unless we accept this, we will never see a need for Jesus in our lives.

He is our hope and salvation, Psalm 46:1 says **God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble.**

Both the wrath of God which is being poured out, which Paul described in chapter 1, and His righteous judgement that he writes about in chapter 2, are not the result of a few sins and slip ups, breaking a few laws, doing a few bad things.

They are the consequence of our fallen nature

Sin is a part of our lives, and like St Michaels Cathedral, the glory we were created with, is just a ruined shell of what it had been, in need of radical renovation which comes only through Jesus and the cross He paid the penalty for our sin so that he could raise us up make us into a new creation

While Paul describes a very low and negative view of the human condition, he was not, in the end, discouraged about it at all

For this is just the beginning of his message to the Romans

If you don't realize you are sick, you are very unlikely to seek out a doctor and take care of what is ailing you

Like a doctor, Paul has given the diagnosis and now, as he continues, he is about to give the prescription to get better

Until we recognize the state we are in, we will not seek the only one who can truly do something about our human condition and fallen nature

In many churches, there is a weekly tradition where the pastor will step up to the pulpit and says, The Lord be with you. To which the congregation responds, and also with you.

There is a story of a pastor who, as he stepped up to the pulpit, tapped the microphone to make sure it was on. When he heard nothing, he assumed it just wasn't turned on but when he looked, he saw that it was. He then muttered under his breathe, Oh Lord, something's wrong with you. But the microphone was working and it was on and the congregation heard what he said and without thinking they all responded, and also with you.

There is something wrong with you.

There is something wrong with me

There is something wrong with all people everywhere, clergy and laypeople, missionaries and monks, believers and unbelievers.

It's called sin and until we come to the place where we confess that there is something wrong with us, we will not call out to the one who stands ready to do something about it.

The one who died and rose again

As Paul finishes up with his description of the human condition he writes,

“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.” (Romans 3:19–20)

The law was never intended to transform sinners into righteous people, but to reveal God’s righteous standard

It shows us our sinfulness by revealing His standard

And it shows us just how far short we fall and how much we need a savior

So that we might call out to him and be saved

Like old St Michaels, the image of God may have been marred at the fall but not without hope

God seeks to undertake a rebuilding project to restore and rebuild what was lost.