

1. **Introduction:** Paul says, no one is by nature righteous, not even one. Without God’s intervention, no one in the fallen state can choose righteous behavior, thoughts, words, or emotions.
 - The “fall” did not cause people to lose the ability to make choices. Making choices is a natural ability of all people. Fallen people can make moral choices. **What they can’t do is make godly choices.** Why? They lack the inclination to do so.
 - A major consequence of the “fall” was the spiritual death of desire for God.
 - Following Johnathon Edwards analysis, the process of choosing utilizes faculties of the mind (memory, attitudes, knowledge, emotions, and sensory input) to form inclinations.
 - As inputs from all faculties are brought to bear on an issue, choices are made.
 - Though choices can be almost instantaneous, choosing is not a simple process.
 - The time available to make the choice, the degree and type of external and internal distractions, and perceived importance of the choice all affect the degree that each faculty (like memory, emotions, or intellect) can contribute to generating inclinations.
 - The strongest inclination at the instant of decision determines the choice.
 - Inability to make godly choices is **not** a result of a defective natural faculty for choosing.
 - The inability to make godly choices is a consequence of a defective spiritual faculty, a faculty originally intended to produce godly motives enabling godly choices. That enabling faculty was lost in the “fall.”
 - Paul says the spiritual faculty that should produce godly motives is “*dead in trespasses and sin.*” (Eph. 2:1).
 - When ungodly motives provide inclinations, choices in the decision process will inevitably be ungodly. Only God’s intervention can fix the problem.
 - As we have seen, God’s “fix” involves - spiritual rebirth, a pronouncement of righteous legal standing before God, a long process of sanctification (making holy) during which godly choices can be made but so can ungodly choices, and glorification (completing the sanctification process so that all choices are godly – incapable of sin).
 - We will begin today with Paul’s summary (3:10-20) and conclusion of the state of people “apart from Christ.”
2. **Romans 3:10-20:** *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one;¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”¹³ “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of*

asps is under their lips.”¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.”¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

- Having given in his own words a description of the depravity of the people he saw in the world about him (1:18-32), Paul now quotes from the Psalms and Isaiah in verses 10b – 20 citing God’s own description of the depravity of humanity as it stands apart from Christ. It is a frightening description.
- In 10b-12, God indicts every person who stands apart from Christ saying they are ungodly and immoral. *“None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”*
- Isaiah 53:6a addresses the “turning away” issue. He says, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – everyone – to his own way.”* This is an important insight.
- Not only do people fail to follow God’s way, but the driver in each person’s life is their own **self** as they choose to follow their own desires and inclinations.
- The only possibility of people getting back on the “right way” is through the salvation paid for by Christ and offered freely through the gospel to those who believe.
- Continuing to use OT quotes (13-14), Paul points out that when people have turned from God, their words can do terrible harm. Venomous, deceitful words, as well as curses and bitterness, have deadly impact on human personalities, both the speaker and the hearer.
- Perhaps the most sinful use of human speech is false teaching about God and His salvation, particularly where the teacher has authority and position.
- *“They use their tongues to deceive”* (3:13) applies to many situations but certainly applies to teaching deceptive doctrine. Isaiah reminds us that, apart from Christ, we often yearn to hear pleasing but false doctrine. *“Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions.”* (Is. 30:10b).
- Smooth doctrine is easy to listen to but extremely dangerous to spiritual health. A final comment on danger of believing false speech comes best from Paul in Rm. 2:8-9: *“But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury ... tribulation and distress.”*

- Deceptive and smooth but untruth speech is but a short step from curses, bitterness, and blasphemy and further. Human wickedness seldom stops with mere words (15-17).
- Apart from Christ, people know not the way of peace; their way is the way of ruin and misery both to themselves and to others.
- They tend to be quick to turn to violence and the shedding of blood if there is no other convenient way to achieve their goals.
- Paul reiterates the source of all sin in verse 18 – **“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”** This statement answers the question of what happens to a person’s view of God when people “turn aside.”
- The word “fear” in this verse doesn’t have the common meaning of fright or terror. “Fear” as the correct human condition before God signifies a right and reverential attitude or frame of mind before Him.
- It means recognizing God for who He truly is, worshipping Him, being obedient to Him, and turning aside from evil. Proverbs 9:10 says, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”**
- The chief problem of humanity, discussed by Paul, is failing to approach God rightly. When we do approach God rightly, everything else is put into its proper place.
- Suppressing the truth about God leads to darkened minds. People who suppress the truth about God think they are wise. Their imagined wisdom is foolishness (1:22).
- Both the physical and spiritual eyes are intended to look up to the heavenly reality and beyond to God.
- If we keep our “eyes” on Jesus, we will become increasingly like a true image of Christ.
- The alternative is to look downward and become increasingly like the lower life of beasts.
- There is no other alternative. One or the other. What (or whom) are we to fear? Ps. 128:1 says, **“Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!”**
- Paul ends this major section of the letter (verses 19-20) with the conclusion that every person is accountable to God for what they have done. Unfortunately, every person is guilty of having done a multitude of sinful things, and no one can ever “stand in the right” before God based on what they think of as their “good works.”
- No one can fully obey the Law. No one will be declared righteous for Law obedience.
- What then is the function of the Law? Inability to keep the Law allows people to become conscious of their disobedient sin. Without Law as reference, people might imagine they are upright and good.

- Failure to keep the Law enables the Law to function as a mirror revealing the lack of uprightness. Everyone has some awareness of the Law through God’s writing of the precepts of the Law on every heart.
 - Verse 19 reminds us that “...*whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped.*”
 - The principal function of the Law is to show people that they are sinners through their inability to obey every nuance of the Law all the time.
3. **New Section of The Letter:** Verse 3:21 begins a new section of the letter. In 1:16-17, Paul provided the theme of his letter. He said, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes., to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’*”
- Then in 1:18-3:20 he established the truth that, without the intervention of God, all of humanity is “in the wrong” before God and under His wrath. That situation continues.
 - Even in their fallen state, at minimum everyone has been provided with sufficient knowledge through what was created and from the writing of God’s Law on their hearts to recognize God’s eternal power and divine nature.
 - That should cause them to glorify, thank, and worship Him.
 - However, apart from God’s intervention, that simply doesn’t happen. Paul says in 3:11-12 that “*no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, no not even one.*”
 - For this reason, humanity is under God’s wrath, both now and at the end. The only shield is to accept the gospel offer and become “in Christ.”
 - Because the full misery of God’s wrath will not be poured out until the end, many people feel good about themselves and their life apart from God.
 - Though they see the spiritual and moral decline within themselves and the people around them, they fail to recognize that what they see is the result of the present manifestation of God’s just wrath. The status of humanity before God is full of warning.
 - But there is good news! Though people are not in themselves capable of fixing their sin problems, God has supplied a solution.
 - That is what Paul talks about next.
4. **Next:** Begin with 3:21 (the righteousness of God through faith).