



Today I am the man in the mirror. When I look into this mirror it shows me more than I care to see. When I look from the side I see a little more of me than I saw 20 years ago, if you know what I mean. When I look straight on I think, “Wow, who is that old guy with all that gray hair staring back at me?” As I look closer I see a scar on my chin that is a visible reminder of how my Northern European skin tone and the California sun don’t mix well. Julie says the scar makes me look rugged. At least I have that going for me. I notice a couple of rough spots on my forehead that I didn’t have 30 years ago. I have some extra skin according to my dermatologist. Let me make sure I have the scientific name for it. I think she called them, “little thingies that grow on your face when you get older.” I can study my reflection and find lots more imperfections. I think I’ll just turn away from this for a while. It’s uncomfortable.

Why is it uncomfortable to look into a mirror? Because the truth hurts. It’s more fun to pretend we are 24 years old and svelte. It’s more fun to project an image instead of having the truth hanging out for all to see.

God’s Word is like a mirror, a mirror reflecting back to us what really lies deep in our hearts. God’s word can reflect a broken heart, a tender heart, a compassionate heart, a loving heart, but remember it reflects the truth. God’s Word will also reflect back a hardening heart, a rebellious heart, and even an evil heart. As a mirror doesn’t lie about how we look on the outside, so God’s Word doesn’t lie about how we look on the inside.

These last three weeks in Romans are as if God has held up a mega magnifying heart mirror. One with lights all around the perimeter just to make sure we have every dark corner illuminated. And this mirror is God’s Word. And God’s Word reflects back to us the state of our hearts. A lot of stuff we would like to pretend isn’t there. A lot of stuff we want to hide from ourselves and others. *“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like”* (James 1:23-24).

And I think Paul understands that one mark of our sinfulness is to ignore the ugly stuff that lies deep in our hearts. I think that is why he spends almost three entire chapters holding up the mirror of God’s Word so the truth will be reflected back to us about what we are really like and what all of humanity is really like.

The Whole World is Under God’s Wrath

In Chapter 1 verse 18 we saw in the mirror that the whole world is under God’s wrath because people suppress the truth. The natural response to this idea of God’s wrath is, “Oh come on. There has got to be some that don’t deserve wrath. There has got to be some who are pure enough, or holy enough and don’t deserve wrath. What about my grandmother? What about the Dali Lama? What about Tim Tebow? There has got to be some that don’t deserve God’s wrath?” Wrong. In the last 50 verses Paul lays out his case, meticulously presented, not leaving out a single person. All of humanity is being accused. All humanity is being indicted. The Gentiles are guilty (Rom. 1:19-32); the morally self-righteous are guilty (Rom. 2:1-16); the Jews who claimed to be better are guilty (Rom. 2–3:9).

First Paul demonstrates that pagan Gentiles are guilty and without excuse. Then he moves on to the morally self-righteous and he points out how they are quick to point out the faults of others, but in reality they are doing the same things and therefore guilty and without excuse.

Last week we saw how even the religious and devout, in this case the Jews, had been given the law and who looked pretty good in the full-length religious mirror. But when the mirror to the heart was held up, their hearts were found cold and calculating. There was no love for God, only love for their tradition. I guess one could say, “at least God doesn’t play any favorites. Every one of us is in the same sinking boat.”

The good news is that Paul is almost done speaking about sin. The bad news is that what we are faced with today is perhaps the strongest statement on sin in all of Scripture. This vivid description of human depravity will make some of us want to turn away from the mirror. But we can’t and we won’t because the gospel will only become good news when we first understand the bad news. Mercy only makes sense when we commiserate about our state of misery. Grace is only Amazing Grace to those who are annihilated by guilt.

Turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 3 starting in verse 9. Paul gets to the punch line of what he’s been saying for three long chapters. As we move through these scriptures this morning, I want us to think about a courtroom. I want us to enter into a courtroom in our minds. In another life, Paul could have been a lawyer. He lays out his case as a brilliant prosecuting attorney seeking to convince a jury. Piece by piece, each piece of

evidence building upon the next to create a tower of evidence, enough to prove guilt. So airtight that the accused can only do one thing—throw himself upon the mercy of the court.

The Arraignment

Before every trial there is an arraignment. What is an arraignment? An arraignment is a call to bring out the accusations in a court of law. An arraignment calls for the question: Should charges be filed and blame placed? Is there enough evidence to actually go to a trial where evidence is presented which eventually leads to a verdict that either acquits or convicts? And in this case Paul is asking, “Is there really anyone in the world who is not under the power of sin? Is there really anyone who can escape the wrath of God because of their own works or goodness?”

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 (v. 9).

Paul is saying, “There is Equal Justice Under the Law and that should terrify gentile and Jew alike.” Paul is saying, “I just laid out three chapters of evidence available to support a formal charge that every person is under the power of sin.” It’s a pretty sobering thing to think about. Paul is saying there is enough evidence to proceed with a trial that could result in a guilty verdict for humanity and justice being served against all humanity.

In verse 10 Paul delivers a formal charge. He says, “We have looked at the mirror that reflects all of humanity’s heart and here is what we saw.” For this formal charge, Paul goes right back to the Old Testament Scriptures to support his charge. His charge comes from an authority other than himself. His charge comes from God’s divine authority. His charge comes from God’s Word.

The Formal Charge Against Us

As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; (v. 10).

It doesn’t matter if you are young or old. You might be the secular American who faithfully follows hedonism, consumerism, pantheism, or humanism. You are not righteous. You might be Chinese and faithfully follow Confucius or an Indian who faithfully follows Hinduism or Buddhism. You might be the enlightened who faithfully follow reason and technology. You might be the socialist who faithfully seeks economic utopianism on earth. You might be religious which includes faithful Muslims and faithful Jews. All are helpless under sin. The entire human race is being formally charged.

Then Paul strings together a bunch of verses like pearls onto a necklace, verse after verse from the Old Testament strung together as evidence to make his case against humanity. The first piece of evidence against us is our character. He continues with Psalm 14:2.

Our Character is Evidence Against Us

“... 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” (verses 11-12).

So not only is no one righteous, no one understands. While we can all learn about God, apart from God’s Spirit we cannot understand God. A few years ago when I was in Israel, I sat in on a lecture given by the top Jewish archeologist from Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He gave a two hour lecture on the history of Jerusalem all without notes! As I was listening to this brilliant man, I marveled at how much he knew of the city, the Old Testament and Jesus and he still was not a believer. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, *“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them.”* We would think with all the religion in this world that there would be billions of people who are seeking God, but as we are learning religious systems are attempts to escape the truth of the God of the Bible and seem motivated to make up false gods of man’s own liking. Remember, it’s the Spirit of God that draws someone to him. Jesus said this about himself, “I came to seek and save the lost.”

Paul continues with Psalm 14:3. It reminds me of Isaiah 53 that says, *“We all like sheep have gone astray each of us have turned our own way, become worthless.”* Worthless describes something that has gone rancid like milk left out on the counter that sours and then stinks. Humanity stinks. Just as we are grossed out by rancid milk, God is grossed out by our rancid character. We want to get stinking milk out of our house and as far away as possible from us. We dump what is worthless in the garbage and place it out by the curb. Imagine God wanting to dump us out by the curb as far from him as possible because of worthless character?

After describing our character, Paul turns to our conversations for evidence against us. I think we can look in the mirror held up to our hearts and recall much of our sinfulness expressed in what we say and how we say it.

Our Words are Evidence Against Us

“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” (verses 13-14).

Here Paul adds Psalm 5 to his string of pearls. The Living Bible gives a very graphic paraphrase. It says, “Their talk is foul and filthy like the stench of an open grave.” Imagine a partially uncovered grave with a body in it that has been decaying for a few days and the stench it lets off. That’s the picture of our natural speech as heard by God. The throat is like an open grave that omits the stench of decay. People can look down our open throats as we speak and see and smell our decaying hearts. From overt stench to sweet words of deceit. The idea here is smooth

and flattering speech which deceives. Humanity gives speeches making promises, saying things like, "Trust me, I can help you, listen to my advice." But the words deceive. Tongues that practice deceit only care about themselves. The tense means that the tongue continually repeats these words, repeats it enough until people believe the lies. The essence is that humanity becomes very good and very smooth and very natural at lying for its own gain. He inserts the pearl of Psalm 140:3, *"Our lips are like the fangs of a cobra spitting and flicking deadly poison upon the people around us making them sick."*

The idea of cursing is desiring the worst for a person through verbal criticism. The root of bitterness is the same root word for jealousy. Bitterness is the idea of "being pointed or sharp, pricking and cutting out of jealousy." You may be thinking, "This is just too much. Before I became a Christian, I wasn't this bad. I knew a lot of people who were worse than I was. I know a lot of good people who haven't trusted Christ that don't act like this. This total depravity thing is hard to understand. What does it really mean?"

Total depravity doesn't mean people are as bad as they could possibly be. Total depravity means that sin has impacted every human in every aspect of his or her being. Sin not only affects my ability to choose, but it also impacts my capacity to reason, my emotions, my memories, my desires, and so forth. Think of it this way: If sin were the color blue, then total depravity means that every dimension of our personality is some shade of blue. Some areas are more blue than others, and some people are more blue than others, but every part of every person is some shade of blue.

Next Paul continues to pile on the evidence of humanity's blueness by pointing out not just character, not just words, but humanity's actions.

Our Actions are Evidence Against Us

"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know" (verses 15-17).

We are not capable without God of being peacemakers. Why? Why do people choose this destructive way? What is motivating it? Paul's last piece of evidence as he holds up the mirror of God's Word is our motives by stringing on Psalm 36:1.

Our Motives are Evidence Against Us

"There is no fear of God before their eyes" (v. 18).

There is no reverence for God. No respect for his power, his holiness, his truth, his glory, his kingdom. In fact Proverbs 9:10 says fearing God is the beginning of spiritual wisdom. This kind of fear is a necessary element to one surrendering his life and becoming a follower of Christ.

Why do people not fear God? It goes back to the fall in the garden. In the garden, Satan told Eve that when she ate from the fruit of the tree she would not die; in fact, Satan said, "you will

be like God." Ever since that first act of rebellion we have thought an awful lot about ourselves. We liked the idea of being equal to God. But when we elevate ourselves we can't help but diminish in our minds the size of God in our life.

After this piece-by-piece presentation of evidence Paul reaches his verdict with the phrase, Now We Know....

The Verdict: Guilty!

"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" (verses 19-20).

It's plain. It's understood. The 10 Commandments, the Law of Moses, the Old Testament Scriptures, the rule of God written on our hearts, written on our conscience, or in observing nature. Be silenced literally means humanity will stop muttering. There will be absolute silence on that day when the world will be held accountable to God. Humanity will have no answer. Literally mouths will be closed. No more self promotion, no more blaming others, no more rationalizing, no more idol worship. Humanity will stand accountable before God not just for what it has done but for what it has become. When God holds up his mirror, humanity will see shades of blue inside and out, through and through. Our guilt has been exposed. The gavel has come down. Guilty! Humanity will be pronounced guilty and liable for their sin in God's court. And humanity will not be surprised at the verdict on that day.

Why do we take the time these past three weeks to look at the heart? The picture of human depravity makes us want to turn away, but we can't. The gospel will only become good news when we first understand the bad news. So this passage is an indictment of all of humanity for sure. But how do Christians apply this passage? How should I relate to this passage if I have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior? How should I apply this if I know the truth of what Jesus Christ did for me, for all who believe? How should I apply this when I know with confidence the hope that Christ lives in all who believe and that he is in the business of changing hearts? As followers of Christ we should look in the mirror and see glimpses of the living Christ in us changing our character, our words, our actions and our motives.

You may be thinking, I still see so much sin in my life. I'm pretty dark blue, even purple when I look in a mirror. I remember one Sunday I was coming home from church in the middle of the afternoon. We lived in the foothills in Southern California. As I walked up the path next to my house, I saw blood stains on the sidewalk. I hurried in to ask Julie. She said that she had seen a rattlesnake when she got home and she called our neighbor over. He was an LA sheriff and he took one look and called his

people. Julie said there were three cop cars in our cul de sac and they came with guns drawn. Not sure what to do, they made the rookie take a shovel and chop off the snake's head! That reminds me of the story of the farmer who killed the snake and said, "You can kill a snake, but hours later it can still be wiggling around and nerves still twitching." The saying goes, "The snake keeps twitching until sundown." The old nature that Paul described was crucified to death once and for all with Christ, but it's still twitching. Praise God that a sundown is coming when sin will be gone forever.

I remember one chapter of The Story series where we looked at a time in Israel's history when they had become very familiar with their depravity. It was 600 years before Christ, and the Babylonians had sacked Jerusalem and exiled the Jews. The people were reaping the consequences of disobeying God and worshipping false gods and they suffered for it. The ones who survived the attack were eventually taken into bondage because of their sin. And they mourned. They mourned their sin. They mourned over the pain they had caused God and their fellow Israelites. It says they sat in ashes. They grieved death. To the Israelites the ashes represented that everything they valued was dead and would never be brought back to life. They didn't just sit in the ashes; they dumped these ashes on their heads as a sign of a desire to repent and humble themselves before God.

Soon these Israelites would receive a prophecy from God through the prophet Isaiah, that one day they would see their land restored, they would be able to go home because a Savior would come and restore them. Six hundred years later, with Jerusalem under Roman control, Jesus Christ entered his local synagogue in Nazareth as a 30-year-old man and he was handed the scroll of Isaiah and he went to read it as part of their Sabbath worship. He turned to Isaiah 61 and read the following words as recorded in Luke 4:18-19, "***The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.***"

The people were silent, but then they began asking, "Who was this young man? Wasn't this Joseph the carpenter's son? Jesus is applying this prophecy to himself! This is blasphemy! Jesus of Nazareth is claiming to be Israel's Savior." If you read further in Isaiah the prophet goes on to say, "***.... and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead***

of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isa. 61:3).

Next week we will see in detail the answer for man. We will hold up a mirror and instead of seeing blue, we will see Christ shining white in glory looking back at us. Sure, my old nature rears itself up regularly. But this I know....

Right before Christ came into my life, when I held up a mirror to my heart, I saw the ashes left over. I knew I was dead in my sin. I saw death reflecting back at me.

Right before Christ came into my life, when I held up a mirror to my heart, I saw my mourning over my sin and the effects my sin had on me and those I love reflecting back at me.

Right before Christ came into my life, when I held up a mirror to my heart, I saw hopelessness and despair reflecting back at me.

But now, because Christ came into my life, I look in the mirror held up to my heart and I see Christ accepting me, not the law condemning me reflecting back at me.

But now, because Christ came into my life, I can look in the mirror held up to my heart and I see Christ gracing me with a crown of beauty full of hope and life forever instead of a defeated man sitting in his ashes staring back at me.

But now, because Christ came into my life, I can look in the mirror held up to my heart and I see Christ gracing me with the joy of being forgiven and set free from the controlling power of sin instead of a man in bondage and under the penalty of sin staring back at me.

But now, because Christ came into my life, I can look in the mirror held up to my heart and see a man compelled to praise Jesus Christ his savior instead of a man trapped in despair staring back at me.

Mirrors don't lie do they? I want to leave you with this thought this morning. When you leave this service, I want you to go home and look in a mirror. What do you see staring back at you in the reflection? I hope you see someone who was fatally flawed, but now is fully forgiven. I hope you can look in that mirror and smile and say, "I still blow it, but I'm beautiful to you anyway God." I hope you can look in that mirror held up to your heart and see Jesus, your Savior. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal savior, I know what he sees when he looks at you. He sees a child of God.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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