

## Romans 3:9-18 Fourteen Characteristics of the Natural Man

Romans chapter 3 beginning at verse 9, **What therefore?** Giving you a literal translation. **What therefore? Are we better? Not at all: for we charged before both Jews and Greeks, all to be under sin;** (verse 10) **according as it has been written, There is not a righteous one, not even one:** (verse 11) **there is no one understanding, there is no one seeking God out.** Notice the literal translation. (verse 12) **Everyone turned away, together they became useless; no one is doing goodness, not as many as one.** (verse 13) **Their throat is an opened tomb; with their tongues they were deceiving; the poison of asps** - that is a term for an Egyptian cobra - **the poison of asps is under their lips:** (verse 14) **whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:** (verse 15) **their feet are swift to shed blood:** (verse 16) **destruction and misery are in their ways:** (verse 17) **and they did not know a way of peace:** (verse 18) **there is no fear of God before their eyes.**

We had the privilege of taking one of the great Bible texts in Galatians in the first hour. We have the privilege this morning of taking another great Bible text, one that we make reference to often.

Remember the book of Romans is what is considered to be The Constitution of the Christian Faith. It tells us and teaches us all the doctrine of the Christian faith. He is sending it to the Romans, the Christians in Rome and he is addressing their mind frame or how they think. And they think according to the justice system, they think legal. They process everything through a legal system. So the book of Romans is presented as if it is a legal brief presented to the courts.

In chapter 1 Paul said in this first doctrine that we are still studying, The Doctrine of Condemnation. The word *condemnation*, **κατακρίνω** (katakrinō), is actually a judicial term. It means to have a sentence passed against you, already made. And so Paul is saying a sentence, a judgment, has already been made against every human being. First to the Gentiles in chapter 1. Gentiles do not have the law, so Paul says God convicts them through creation. He manifests that there is a God. And Gentiles, even though they might not be religious or have the law, they are still without excuse.

To the Jews as we got into chapter 2. The Jewish person is standing over looking at the Gentile and the Jewish person is judging that person according to the law. "Look at those corrupt people over there living the way they are. We are Jewish, we have the law." And Paul says, "Just because you are Jewish does not mean you are exempt from God's judgment." Even to this day the Orthodox Jews hold that they are automatically going to heaven because they are Jewish. They are God's chosen people. Not only that, he says, you possess the law. You say we have eternal life because God gave us the law and we are here to spread it and preach it to the Gentiles.

And so last week when we took the first eight verses he asked the Jewish person a question. In chapter 2 he says, The Jewish person is guilty because having the law makes you

more responsible. He asked the question, **You who are teaching others the law, do you teach yourself?** Do you realize that the law is also for you?

And the law, as will see, we will get into it next week, the law has been given to show us and give us the knowledge of sin. You cannot get saved by keeping the law. The Jewish person has missed the message of God's law. It is not the way to salvation in and of itself; it is actually God's proclamation of His holy standards to show us that we have fallen short and that we are sinners. But it is for the Jewish person too. But they did not hold that view.

And then they said, "Well, we keep the law, we keep the law of circumcision." And Paul said, "You need to be circumcised in your heart to be saved." You want to be a Jew, a believing Jew then you need to be circumcised in your heart. All those external laws that you are keeping, all the ritualisms that you are keeping, and the traditions that you are keeping, that is not going to save you.

So when he started Romans chapter 3 he said, **So what advantage is there of being a Jew?** Paul is anticipating the response of the Hebrew or Jewish mind. If both Jew and Gentile are both equally guilty before God then what is the advantage of being Jewish? And he says, **Yes, there is an advantage much in every way. To the Hebrew or Jewish person has been given the word of God.** That is a blessing. That is a privilege. But with it comes responsibility, of course.

So the second question was, "Well, does our disobedience cancel the faithfulness of God?" Now catch this because the Hebrew person says, "Okay, the answer to that question you are going to tell me that God is faithful to keep His promises to His people the Jews. No matter weather they believe or not, He is faithful to keep those promises?" Paul says, "Yes."

"Well, then why am I judged for being a sinner because those promises that God made for us are going to come true no matter what I do. As a matter fact, the more sinner that I am the more it highlights His grace and mercy. So my sin, me living in my sin can be for the glory of God." Paul says, "No. That is not how it works."

In our section today is one of the great presentations of Scripture. Not that you are going to like it, but as far as understanding goes, it is the greatest text in Scripture that just summarizes everything. There are fourteen characteristics of the human being in their natural state without Christ - Jew, Gentile, it does not make any difference.

He says in verse 9, that sort of sets the scene for us, **What therefore? Are we better?** *We being the Jews.* **Are we better? Not at all! For we charged you before** - that is a legal term that means we have already presented to you the charges against you. **For we charged before both Jews and Greeks all to be under sin.** Very important in the Greek text, *under sin.* Not *in sin*, not *participating with sin*, but **under sin.** In the Greek text it denotes control and domination over a person's life. Control. That indeed the principle of sin is in control of every person's life that does not know Christ.

In Ephesians chapter 2 Paul said that those who are without Christ are *energized* - that is the Greek word. Energized by Satan who is prince and power of the air, and he energizes people's flesh in order for them to fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind. So he is placing the things of the world and the things of sin in front of every human being and then he energizes them and participates in it because it is a destructive process. When Jesus saves me, He literally saves me from the principle of sin; whom John says in I John chapter 3 verse 8, the principle of sin he says that Satan is the sinner. He is the sinner and his influence is over me. Not just influence over me, if I do not have Christ I am under his influence all the time. I have to come out from underneath that influence and control of my life.

He says, **Both Jews and Greeks, all are under sin.**

From verses 10 through 18 there are fourteen characteristics of the nonbeliever. If you are a believer today, if you belong to Christ, this will open eyes in the sense that it will summarize the natural man, the believer who is without Christ. He now lists some six Psalms and one Scripture from Isaiah and they are all connected together. Some of the Psalms are taken apart and other Scriptures are put in between the verses. But verses 10 through 18 of our text is all produced from the Old Testament. He is doing it to show that his presentation that all are under sin is not just his doctrine, it is produced by the Old Testament; it is actually in the Old Testament.

First of all we have The Characteristics of Man in verses 10 through 12. We have six characteristics. Here they are:

1) Verse 10, **According as it has been written, There is not a righteous person, not even one!** The word *righteous*, again, is a judicial term. It means *to line up with* or *be right with the law*. When it comes to the things of the Lord it means there is nobody who is right with God.

2) Verse 11, **There is no one understanding.** Notice the literal translation. That is a participle, that means a person in a position or state or condition of continually understanding the things of God. Nobody. Zero. In my natural state without Christ I do not understand the things of God. I could not if I tried.

Paul says in I Corinthians chapter 2 verse 14, **But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they, (that is, *the things of God*) are spiritually discerned.** You cannot discern them, know them, or understand the things of God, they are spiritual and the natural man without Christ cannot understand them. We cannot even research and come to the proper conclusions.

Paul says in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 8, **Unto me, Paul says, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.** They are unsearchable. With my human capacity without Christ I cannot even search out. I can study the Bible as

a textbook, I can read commentaries and hear messages about the things of God, but putting it all together and understanding it properly, cannot do it.

Romans chapter 11 verse 33 Paul says, **O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!**

Deuteronomy chapter 29 verse 29 is a favorite amongst the Jews and becoming a favorite amongst the believers, where God says, **All of His things are secret except for what He has revealed.** That is amazing. That is amazing. Is that people come to a conclusion and they go, "You know, we only know what God let us know. And there is so much more that we do not know." I said, "Bingo!" He has given us enough for us to trust Him. If He gives us too much information we will not have to trust Him. His ways are unsearchable. His ways are past finding out.

Through the prophet Isaiah God says, **My ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.** (Isaiah 55:8-9)

As matter of fact the book of Proverbs says, **There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.** (Proverbs 14:12) Be careful in your human if you decide you are right, it is the ways of death.

So then Paul, again, back in I Corinthians chapter 2 verses 9 and 10 he says, **Eye hath not seen, neither ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us through His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.**

I know that you have probably experienced much of the frustration that even I experience in belonging to Christ, that no matter how hard you study, how hard you pray, and how much research you do, you are only going to know what God's Spirit reveals to you for you to know at this particular time. So you see, I tried to outfox Him. One of my favorite books is the Gospel of John, right? I have taught it maybe twelve, thirteen times. So I figure as I go through and study it for myself and even go through and teach it there has got to be so much more there that God's Spirit did not make me see. So I figure if I keep teaching it, He is going to keep teaching me new things, so I just keep teaching it over and over again. Depending on where we are at right now in life, physical age has a lot to do with it. Youthful flesh is always on the go or trying to be. Sometimes God has to wait for us to be older.

Luke, the physician, points that out to us about the humanity of Christ in the Gospel of Luke. He is always putting in comments about the Lord's growth, and His relationship, and what He did at twelve years old, and what He did at various ages. For us physical age has a lot to do with what God does in our lives. A lot of times we crave for the things of God and the work of

God's Spirit in our life but we are not ready for it. Sometimes He waits for years, till we get to a position where we just do not want to go anymore and we just want to sit and meditate or think about and seek the things of the Lord. Do whatever we have to do to continue to live, but the flesh just does not want to go out in the world anymore. I just do not want to do the things that I used to do.

It seems to be always the cycle that when you get married, and you have a lot of kids, you get this big house, right? Yeah, dad is always out there Saturday trimming the bushes and mowing the lawn and getting the whole thing ready. And rounding everybody up on a Sunday and going to church and picnics and whatever. So the kids grow up and they leave home. And you stand there and you look at this big yard. Ah. The wife from inside is going, "This house is too big to keep up." And you are on the outside going, "This yard is way too much for me to keep up, just for the two of us." So just like all of us, you scale down. Find a condo and make sure they have good gardeners. Pay your subscription fee and let them do it. So we start out small and we get bigger and then we try to scale back down again. The same way with life, the older you get the more you try to just narrow things down. Concentrate on the important things in life. Sometimes it is even through maturity, physical maturity, mental and emotional maturity that God works in our lives.

But a human being in their natural state does not understand the things of God. There is not one person who is righteous. None. Zero.

3) Verse 11, the third thing. **There is no one seeking God out.** Do not forget the word *out* in there. It is a very important part of the Greek text. Nobody is looking for God.

In hindsight, for the few months before the Lord saved me, when I was going to a Bible study in someone's home, I look back on it now and see that that was the Lord. In the natural, in the human, I am not interested. No human being is.

I am also aware of over forty years of ministry of people whom God draws to come either to church or Bible study just so they can find out that they reject Christ. Or He can draw people, give them the hunger so that they learn. But we should know, **No one seeks God out.** So when we are worried about different friends and people that stay home and they profess to be Christians and they do not study the word - they cannot study it if somebody calls them up and harps at them about it. Like Jesus said in John chapter 6, **You can't come to me unless the Father draws you,** so a human being in their natural state. You say, "Well that lets people off the hook." No, it does not. God sees our hearts, if our hearts are not towards the Lord and interested in the things of God at all, He will not draw us, simple as that. It is not a matter of not attending. It is a matter of why did God not draw you? There is a reason.

Luke says in Luke chapter 19 verse 10 that Jesus came to seek and to save those which are lost. You see, He seeks us. We do not seek Him. He seeks us out and draws us to Himself.

4) Verse 12, the fourth thing. **Everyone has turned away.** That means, "Right over there in that direction are the things of God."

"Okay. . ." [gestures heading in the opposite direction.] People turn away from the things of God in the natural.

5) Fifthly, **Together they became useless.** That is the literal translation. You say, "Well, wait a minute, that is getting pretty personal. I do not think I am useless." Well, I have the happy privilege this morning of telling you, "You are." Part of my job. The word *useless* has to do with useless as far as the things of God are concerned. He looks at the natural person who is unsaved, living under sin, and He says, "I created you for My purposes and you are useless, I cannot use you." Useless.

6) The sixth thing in verse 12, **There is no one is doing goodness, not as many as one.** You say, "Well, wait a minute, there are people that do good." Interesting this word also comes from the root of *useless*. This is good in the broader sense. I can do human good for you, but I cannot do spiritual good for you. In fact, some of the human good that I do for you might be interfering in God bringing you to Himself. Have you ever thought of that? Sometimes people have to go through difficult times for God to get their attention and draw them to Himself. And here I am going, "I will help!" Not everybody in a difficult situation God wants me to jump in there and rescue them. We need to pray. This might be a time when God's drawing them to Himself. So in the broadest sense of there is no one who is doing goodness, no one is beneficial, and profitable for other people. Not even as many as one.

Then in verses 13 and 14, the conversation. We saw six things about their character, now about the conversation.

7) He says, **Their throat is an opened grave.** Notice how I translated it: *opened*. It is already open. He is not talking about bad breath. He is talking about the words coming out of a person's mouth bringing death and corruption to the other person, contributing to their destruction.

8) Continuing on, secondly, **With their tongues they were deceiving.** We live in a country of deceiving and deceit. Anytime you have a capitalistic situation you have lots of salesman trying to make you give you their money. Sell you a reason why. **With their tongues they were deceiving.**

9) Thirdly, **The poison of asps is under their lips.** Kind of a strange phrase. Again, it is making reference to the Egyptian cobra. Special word and it has a do with the fangs that are actually folded back, but when it wants to bite the fangs fold out. It bites or grips whatever object it wants to and from underneath its front - what looks like a lip, there is a bag there, a sac that has poison in it and that poison runs through the fangs. And he says, "That is just the way people are in their natural without Christ."

10) Verse 14, the fourth thing. **Of whom their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.** The word *cursing* does not mean *to swear*. It means to pray to the gods and wish destruction on people. To put a curse on you. You know, I wish you bad luck. **And bitterness.** People are just bitter, about life, other people.

Then their conduct verses 15 to 17. We saw four things with their conversation; six things with their character; now their conduct.

11) **Their feet are swift to shed blood.** To fight and to kill seems to be the predominant method for handling the world's situations in the natural man.

12) Verse 16, the second thing. **Destruction and misery are in their ways.** The word for *destruction* means *to rub together*. **And misery.** In case you have not noticed it, misery loves company. If you are around a miserable person they are going to try to make you miserable.

13) Thirdly, verse 17, **And they did not know a way of peace.** There is no way. They do not know.

14) And lastly in verse 18, **There is no fear of God before their eyes.** The word *fear* means *respect* or *reverence*. It is a healthy fear.

When we studied on Thursday night in Acts chapter 6 Ananias and Sapphira who lied about the amount of money that they were bringing for the sale of their property to the church. They died, on the spot. And Peter said, "You did not lie to men, you lied to God. Why did you tempt the Holy Spirit?" How did he tempt? Because they came and they said, "We can fool human beings. We can make it look like we sold the property for five thousand and we gave it all to the church, when we really sold it for ten thousand and we kept five thousand back." Peter said, "When you did sell it, were you not in control of how much you gave to the church?" There is no rule or regulation that says you have to give it all but they wanted appear to people like, "We are sacrificing like everybody else is doing." Why did they have this deceptive approach and philosophy that I can fool my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and look good. But are we not tempting God? Is not that kind of saying, "I do not believe God sees what I am doing." Why are you tempting God like that? Why are you lying to the Holy Spirit? You are not lying to us. The natural man without Christ has no respect and reverence for the things of God. None.

Now, that is you and me in the natural. You and me in the natural. None of us understands. None of us is righteous in and of himself. None of us seeks God out in the natural. The natural mind is blocked off. We use our words, like James says in James chapter 3, **Out of your mouth you speak blessings towards God and cursings toward your fellow man.** The tongue is a dangerous destructive thing. It can bless. It can build up. It can praise. And it can turn right around and destroy. Come out of the same mouth. How does that happen? Our conversations are corrupt and bring death and destruction to people's lives. Our conduct is violent and destructive. Now that is who I am in the natural.

I look at my life and realize that if there is anything in my life that is drawn to the things of Christ, or that helps me understand the things of the Lord, it is not me. It is the Spirit of God. It was the Spirit of God that drew me to a Bible study for nine months before God saved me. I thought I was just going and God met my faith somewhere, you know. But in the natural I am not interested. I do not seek God out and I do not understand.

And to tell you the truth, during those nine months of sitting in the Bible study, like I have told you before, I did not understand what the guy was talking about. They had free coffee and donuts. So I was I was more than happy to sit and listen to somebody teach. Coffee and donuts in a relaxed atmosphere in someone's home. I did not have to understand with my mind with the human understanding. God's Spirit was ministering to my mind and my heart, prepared me to receive Christ. It is all Him and none of me.

Whenever we talk to one another and say, "Well, you know, you ought to be in study," or, "You need to be this." No, I should not. That is just the natural way. Nobody should ever be there. I get bummed out when people do not show up. How can you not show up? You are a Christian! Christ first, right? You cannot show up if the Lord is not drawing you. It is just natural. It is of the Lord and it is a blessing when God does draw them. Because in the human man is not interested.

That is why when I come across those who profess to be Christians I appeal to God's Spirit in them. You know, lights are on but nobody is home. Not appeal to them, but if God's Spirit is in them I pray that God's Spirit will stir them up and draw them to Christ. Draw them to His word because that is God's will for their life. And if He is not, there is a reason for it. So I pray. And God begins to change my heart. And I begin to thank God for the ones who do come. That is a blessing. It is a miracle. Especially for out here, it is a miracle. What are you doing here? We do not have any programs. We do not have any entertainment. Well, maybe I will take that back. There is not anything here but Christ, and the blessing of His Spirit, and fellowship in the word. That is it. There is no program. Praise God.

Let's close with prayer.