

Criminality & Responsibility of Sin

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[0:00] Open your Bibles, would you, to Romans chapter 3.

! But, you know, we can't have every sermon about Christmas.

Got to save some for next season, too, you know. I mean, after a while, you know, preachers just, you know, pull out of the Bible every possible text that would deal with Christmas.

And so I've got to save some. So we'll stick with Romans tonight. Listen as I read, starting with verse 13. Now, we got all the way up to verse 10. Excuse me, through verse 12.

And now we're ready to start with verse 13. And I'm going to read all the way through verse 20.

Okay? Their throat is an open tomb.

[1:11] That's just a great way, great place to start, isn't it? It's not funny, but I just thought of something funny, but I'm not going to tell you what it is.

Their throat is an open tomb. With their tongues they have practiced deceit. The poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.

Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways. In the way of peace they have not known. 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, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God.

Therefore, by the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. For by the law is the knowledge of sin. All right. Certainly not one of those warm, fuzzy texts of Scripture.

[2:17] Very little of the first few chapters of Romans would be considered that. Though the very next verse, and when we get to the end here, I'm going to go ahead and read on into verses 21 and following.

Then, boy, now we have some wonderful things said there. But we're still here on the subject of God's condemnation of the sinner. The unrepentant sinner.

The unregenerate sinner. And his justification for that condemnation upon all lost humanity. And God is just in his condemnation of lost humanity.

And here we are kind of coming to the end of that part of chapter 3, or really the first part of the book of Romans.

That part of this letter that deals with God's condemnation. You know, as a preacher, preachers know this. And I think probably most of you would agree with me.

[3:22] But there are basically two subjects that, you know, most people do not want to hear about. That is to hear from preachers.

You imagine what they are. Now, there are more than two, by the way. Some of you are thinking it's money. You know, tithing. No, no, there are two that people just don't want you to preach on.

Sin. Right? And not just sin in general. In fact, we don't mind so much generalities when it comes to teaching or preaching on sin.

But specifically, personal sinfulness. And the other subject, of course, is hell. All right?

And not just necessarily teaching how the Bible describes the place and such. Some of that is kind of interesting to hear about and consider.

[4:25] But specifically, hell in the context of God's judgment upon sin. His righteous judgment upon sin. Most people don't want to hear those subjects.

They just don't. And so, you know, that's why there are so many who flock to churches and to preachers who do not touch on those subjects.

Especially on the subject of sin. And by the way, there are some churches today whose pastor and ministers never touch on the issue of sin.

Never deal with that at all. In fact, if they do, they minimize its importance. Don't they? And people flock to their churches. I won't mention any names.

You probably have a name that just comes right to your head. All right? So you can just think about that one that comes to your mind. And so, you know, so if the preacher starts to preach on the sinfulness of man.

[5:33] And God's righteous judgment of all sinfulness. Right off, you have people up in arms. At the very least, you have people, most people will tune you out.

I say most people. I don't think that would include this group. What would you say if I were to suggest to you that within this room, right here, seated in this section.

I've got to include the guys back here in the booth too. Sorry. What would you say? If I were to say that within this room tonight, there's enough sin to condemn every one of us to a devil's hell for all eternity.

What would you say to that? It's true, isn't it? You would agree with that. I mean, really, let's just consider how much sin does it take.

Just one, or as I've heard Adrian Rogers say many times, one quarter of one sin is enough to condemn you to hell. But what if I were to say, because we would accept that.

[6:43] We would say, well, you know, that's true, preacher. But what if I were to say that if we were to replace in this room, every one of you, and replace every person in this room with career prostitutes and child pornographers and others that you might think of that are desperately wicked.

What if I were to say, what if I were to say, what if I were to say, what if I were to suggest to you that the sin level in this room, in God's eyes, would not change? Now, that's different, preacher.

That's something different. Is that true? I believe it is. But someone invariably is going to object and say, now, Brother Don, I know I commit sin.

I mean, I'm with you on that first thing you said. I know I commit sin, but my sin could not be compared, surely, not be compared to the sin of a prostitute or a child pornographer.

My sin couldn't compare to that. But wait now. You're looking at sin from your vantage point.

[8:04] And not God's. I said, in God's eyes. Because God looks at sin differently. I mean, without any qualification, God said that to him, our righteousness is as filthy rags.

I told you this wasn't a Christmas message here tonight. That's what the Bible says. That's what God's Word says about our righteousness.

Righteousness. What do you think God thinks about our sin? No matter what that sin may be. And we just, see, do not realize the sinfulness of our sin.

And that's not just being redundant. The utter sinfulness of our sin. And the wickedness of our hearts. That is certainly compared to the absolute perfection of God.

Now, it is, I would say to a degree, impossible for us to see sin exactly the way God sees it. The Word of God says that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

[9:22] Who can know it? Because we just do not know. Because we just do not know, really, the depth of the sinfulness of the heart.

But we do know something, though, don't we? Before we get into the text, let me, before we just really go off on the deep end of, into the doldrums of, oh, how sinful I am and we are.

But on a positive note, though we may not know the depth of our own sinfulness. We do know that God's grace is greater than all our sin.

Don't we? And there we can rejoice. We do know, as Steve Green sang a number of years ago, that the deepest sin cannot rise above Calvary's love.

Praise God for that. And I think it's safe to say that all of us in this room understand that and have experienced that.

[10:26] We're looking at this seriousness of sin, though it's still serious and still the potential and the capacity for sin in each one of us.

It goes way beyond anything we could imagine or would be willing to imagine. And yet we all know, hopefully, know about God's grace, His saving grace.

All right. So now getting to the text, we've seen the universality of human sin and therefore God's just condemnation of lost man.

Tonight, we're going to look at two other aspects of human sin, the criminality of human sin. It's criminal in relation to God's laws.

And then also the responsibility will end with that, the responsibility of human sin. All right. The criminality of human sin. You see, not only is mankind guilty before God, but may I say that mankind is deeply guilty.

[11 : 34] Deeply guilty. And Paul proves that. How does he do it? Well, by revealing what God thinks. This is what he reveals in this text. By revealing what God thinks about the things sinners say.

Their words. And what sinners do. Their works. That's how he proves this to be true. That we are deeply.

Man is deeply, deeply guilty before God. By the things that are said and things that are done.

Words and works. And so let's look at these two here under the criminality of human sin.

First of all, man's work. Words, rather. Start to say works. We'll get to that. His words. His wicked words. His sinful words. Now, Paul here is still quoting from Psalm.

From the Old Testament. And he says here in verse 13. Look at it. Their throat. This is where I began. Their throat is an open tomb.

[12 : 39] An open tomb. Can you imagine that? What an expression. An open, literally an open grave.

And the implication is that we're not talking about an empty tomb. We're talking about a tomb that has a corpse in it. A rotting corpse.

So he's describing man's wicked words here. And using an expression that is very profound. Very, very, very. I mean, we can maybe begin to imagine that.

You know, to God, that is. And this is what Paul is saying. That a lot of our human speech is. It stinks.

And that's to put it mildly. It's like the smell coming from, out from an open grave. Can you imagine that?

[13 : 42] The stench of that. The rottenness. The putrefying smell. But he's. But now he's not talking about dead bodies. He's talking about words.

Talking about speech. Unclean words. Unkind words. Untrue words. Ungodly words. And we could go on and on.

Describing the kinds of words. And Paul uses another image. In verse 13. The latter part.

The second part of it. With their tongues. They have practiced deceit. The poison of asps. Is under their lips.

Whose mouth is full of cursing. And bitterness. He's describing. Lost man. Lost mankind. God is righteous in his condemnation.

[14 : 42] Because of their words. And though the image there. Is maybe not as vivid. As you know. The image of an open. Open tomb.

Open grave. Here the image kind of shifts. In some sense. To the poison of a snake. The fangs of a snake.

You know. You've seen. Hopefully not firsthand. But you've seen on the Discovery Channel. Or something. And they'll use. Slow motion photography. And we'll see that.

That snake. Raise its head. And that mouth opens. And those fangs. Come. Come. Bearing out. Almost kind of. Like a switchblade. They come. Come out like that.

And. And. And then they bite their victim. And we understand. If we understand anything. About snakes. Some of you are really grimacing. Some of you don't like snakes. Do you? I don't.

[15 : 36] I hurt myself. Getting away from them. But. But. Those fangs. You know. Those hollow fangs. And as soon as they. Bite their victim. The. There. There are poison sacks.

Up there. Right inside. Those fangs. And when they bite the victim. Those. Those sacks. Those poison sacks. Are. Are. Are. Are. Squeezed. And the poison. The venom.

Comes through. Those. Tubular. Fangs. Into the victim. It's. Grizzly. Gives me. Shivers. To think about it.

That's the imagery. That he's using. And. Of course. The point is. That. That. We're all capable. Of doing that. That is.

We're all. All of us. Because we're born. With. As sinners. We're born sinners. We. All have. In. Using the same. Same illustration. We. Are born.

[16 : 32] With poison sacks. In a sense. That we can use. We can. Inject. Into victims. Just. With our words. The things we say.

Venomous words. Just. You know. Think for a moment. How. How we use words. And we're good at it. We really are.

I know I'm talking. I know Paul's talking about. Lost humanity. But. But we. Once. Were a part of that. Pool. And we still have. The same.

Capacities. And. We can be venomous. In our. Words. And not a single. Word. We use. Can be taken back. Can't take it back.

We can hope people. Will forget about them. If we. Truly. Repentant of them. We can. Can try. Try to reconcile. With. With our victims.

[17:31] That we have used words against. And. Poison. Because of our words. Not a single word though. Can be taken back. And. Let's not forget. That every word.

We speak. Is under the scrutiny. Of God. Every word. In fact. Jesus said. In Matthew. Chapter 12. In verse 36. Just listen to what he said. We know these words. But I say to you. That. For every idle. Word. Men may speak. They will give account.

Of it. In the day of judgment. For by. And here's the. The clincher. For by your. Words. You will be justified. And by your words. You will be condemned.

That's pretty serious. Isn't it? And we thought. Actions were the main thing. With God. And what we do. Words.

[18:28] I tell you. Really. Words can be. More damaging. Than anything. We would ever do. Physically. And we know that.

So. Paul. Describes. Wicked words. And then he also. Says that God is justified. In his condemnation. Of. The sinner.

The wicked. The unredeemed. Unrepentant. Because of his. Works as well. His or her. And her. Works. Not just words. But works.

And so he deals with works. Interesting. He deals with words first. And then. Works. And I'm not. Suggesting that. I know for sure. That there is a priority. Suggested here.

In the text. But. It does seem so. That words. Are the first thing. Dealt with. And then the works. And so. It's not. Just what we say.

[19:22] But it is also. What we do. And he. Mentions. Several things. Here. I think. Three. In all. That deal with. Or.

Come to us. In the context. Of works. First. Murderous. Works. He deals with murder. First. Verse 15. Their feet are swift.

To shed. Blood. Swift. To shed. Blood. That's murder. That's the idea. Here. And. I think. It's kind of interesting.

That. The first. Sin. Recorded. After. Adam and Eve. Sin. In the garden. The first. Sin. Recorded. After. That. Or. We might. Say. The second. Sin. Recorded.

In scripture. Was what? Murder. Where Cain. Killed. His brother Abel. And so. Some. Have kind of. Suggested.

[20:19] That. That. There's. An interesting. Point. Being made. In scripture. That. Man's. First. Sin. Separated. Man.

From God. Man. Man. Second. Sin. Separated. Man. From man. And things. Have gone downhill. Ever since. That's. In the United States.

And. I'm not sure. How. How. Up to date. This figure is. Didn't check. The date. The statistic.

But in the United States. A murder. Occurs. Every. Forty minutes. In the United States. And a lot of places.

Where. You know. You can go a whole day. And there's no murder. Some places. Maybe. Believe it or not. Of. You know. Some small towns.

[21:14] And such. Might not. Ever see a murder. I'm telling you. When we lived in Memphis. It was. Ranked way up there. One of the. You know. Top cities. For murder.

But on the average. In our country. There's a murder. Every 40 minutes. There's going to be one. Before we get finished. Here tonight. Probably more than one. But now.

Again. Someone will object. And say. Well you know. Most Americans. And by far. The majority of Americans. Do not commit murder. Right. In fact. I'm probably looking at.

A group of people. Who've never committed murder. I hope. Just remember. Mike. Made you move. And not me. Okay. And so. There would be the objection.

You know. A person would say. But I am not a murderer. Even from. Most lost people. Most lost people. Would. Would. Would object. And say. Now wait.

[22:08] I'm not a murderer. Well. Good. That's not the point here. Really. The point is.

That the human heart. The lost. Unregenerate heart. Is. Heir. To every. Every. Imaginable. Sin. Sin. That you. You. You may never. A person may never. Commit in life. And yet. The heart is. Heir. To it. Including murder. In fact. Jesus.

Traced. Murder. Back. To angry thoughts. Didn't he. Didn't he. Well. How about. Matthew. Chapter 5. Verse 21. You've heard. That it was said. In those. To those of old. You shall not murder. And whoever murders. Will be in danger. Of the judgment. But I say to you. That whoever is angry.

[23:01] With his brother. Without a cause. Shall be in danger. Of the judgment. The implication. Being that. You can murder. Someone. In your heart.

A little bit later. He's going to say. That adultery. Can be traced back. To just a simple look. You look upon a woman. To lust after her. You've committed adultery.

Already in your heart. You see. It's the heart. Is the issue here. It's not. Not so much. The activity. I mean. That's certainly so. But in God's eyes. The.

The. Heart. Can act this out. And you are guilty. Of that sin. So at the root. Then I. Think we're to. Understand. From Jesus.

That at the root. Of all. Lustful looks. Is an adulterous. Desire. And so then. At the root. Of every. Of all. Angry. Hateful thoughts. And words.

[23:57] Is a murderous. Desire. And. Brothers and sisters. It is only God's. Restraining grace. That keeps. Those angry thoughts. From becoming. Full-blown murder.

And so. We must admit. That every one of us. At some point. Have been guilty. Of murder. Next. Paul points.

Not only to. Murderous works. But. What. I want to call. Pernicious works. That is. Works that. That are harmful. That destroy. That are destructive.

Works. And that's what he says. In verse 16. 16 and 17. Look. Again. Added. Destruction and misery. Are in their ways. And the way of peace.

They have not known. This is the way. Of lost humanity. Pernicious works. That destroy. And. And.

[24:55] Harm people. And. And. You know. Whether it's the. Desire to. Climb the ladder. In your vocation. And. Doesn't make any difference.

To you. Who you may step on. On the way up. You know. Destruction. Or maybe. You know. The. The sinful desire.

To promote self. And. To be. To. Promote self. At the expense. Of someone else. So. We. We do things.

That. That. Would harm people. So that. We can. Maybe. Reach a place. Of. More. Popularity. Or. Maybe. Reach a place. Of more success.

Or whatever it may be. On the larger scale. After World War II. After the fall of Nazi Germany. The Nuremberg trials. You remember those? Where the.

[25:50] The Nazi war. Criminals. Were tried. And I was reading this. Just earlier today. That the world said. Almost in unison. That is the civilized world.

Said. Never again. Will this kind of thing happen. These kind of atrocities. Will never take place again. Never again. And yet. That didn't last long. We look to.

Communist Russia. The Soviet Union. In years. Years past. And under the. Leadership of Stalin. You know. Stalin. Made Adolf Hitler.

Look like a schoolboy. And the countless. Millions. That he. Murdered. Destroyed. Today.

In our world today. We hear a lot about China. And. Apparently we're borrowing. A lot of money from them. But they. You know. China operates. One of the most extensive. And merciless.

[26:49] Slave labor. Operations. In their country. I mean. Civil rights is just. There's not anything. That concerns them at all. I mean.

China. Is. You know. Someone has said. One vast prison. And. And in that sense. They. They dwarf. Nazi Germany.

But let me mention. A different kind of. Holocaust. How about the. One. That. I think. Dwarfs. Nazi Germany. And. Stalinist.

Russia. And. Communist. China. And that would be. Abortion. I'll tell you the prime example. Millions.

And millions. Millions. Of babies. Per year. Worldwide. Leaving countless. Millions. Of women. And families. Marred.

[27 : 44] For life. And we're. You know. We're kind of. Considering this on the grand scale. But. It comes from. The pernicious.

Sinful heart. The murderous. Heart. So there. Murderous works. And pernicious works. He deals with. And then finally. He deals with. Rebellious.

Works. Rebellious. Works. Look at verse 18. There is no fear of God. Before their eyes. No fear of God. Can. Can you imagine that?

That makes sense to you. I mean. You know. Really. God. God. By his very nature. Should. Inspire. Mankind. To fear him. You would think. That is from our. Our reasoning. That. That everyone would be afraid.

[28 : 44] To do wrong. Before God. And fear to. Of offending almighty God. But in reality. God is almost completely ignored.

I'm talking about the one true God. Certainly sinful man. Does not ignore God. In that sense. Because. Everyone has their God.

I'm talking about the one true God. The one that man ought to fear. In fact. Lost humanity. Ought to fear him. Every single day.

They're in big trouble. With God. But it's not the case. No fear of God. Before their eyes. And so. Man. Completely ignores him. And I. You know. I. I would even suggest to you. That. Even in hell. Today. Even in hell. There will be no fear of God.

[29 : 44] You say. Are you kidding? I really believe this. Be angry in hell. God. I think we misunderstand. Those passages.

That speak of hell. Using. This idea. That there shall be. Weeping. And gnashing. Of teeth. It's an old English.

Expression. And it typically. Does not. Does not. Picture. Does not illustrate. For us. A person in pain. And gnashing.

Of teeth. Anger. Anger. Rage. For eternity. Imagine. So God's judgment.

Is just. Upon sinful mankind. Time. Because. As we. Saw last week. The universality. Of man's sin. A little bit later. He's.

[30 : 41] Going to kind of. Sum that up. In verse 23. That all. Have sinned. And come short. Of the glory of God. The universality. Of man's sin. And. Just to remind you.

Of verses 10. And following. There is none. Righteous. No. Not one. There is none. Who understands. None. Who seeks after God. They have all.

Turned aside. They have all. They have together. Become unprofitable. There is none. Who does good. No. Not one. The universality. Of sin. And then also.

Because of the criminality. Of man's sin. His wicked. Words. And his wicked. Works. And then finally. The responsibility. Of man's sin.

Lost man's sin. And. I need to remind you. Especially you ladies. When I say man. I'm just talking about. The male. Gender. Mankind. Responsibility.

[31 : 38] Man is responsible. For his sin. Every sin. And apart from the grace of God. And the sacrifices of Jesus.

There's the key. We'll. Mention that a little bit later. But apart from that. Man is responsible. Man's condition.

According to Paul here. Is helpless. Lost man's condition. Is helpless. Utterly helpless. Look at verse 19. Now we know that.

Whatever the law says. It says to those. Who are under the law. That every mouth. Now this is. This is a. Poignant. Phrase.

Every mouth. May be stopped. And all the world. May become guilty. Before God. Well that's. That's serious.

[32 : 34] Because. Because. You see. In a sense. It pictures. Standing before a judge. Guilty of a crime.

And. You know. In. Our world. And it's. Right. That it would be this way. When. A man is accused. And he stands. Before a judge.

He. Has the right. To counsel. Someone to defend him. But. In eternity. Because of who God is. There will be no defense. Every mouth. Will be shut. In fact. Ultimately. Lost humanity. As they stand.

Before. The judgment. Of God. The great. White throne. Judgment. Will not be a time. Where any defense. Will be allowed.

[33 : 34] Now that may. Seem unfair. To us. But you see. There's a difference. Between a. Human judge. And. Almighty God.

The. Omniscient. Judge. Yahweh God. Because he knows. And under the law. We stand. We stand. Before him.

Without any defense. That is. Lost humanity. So. That's why I say. Man's condition.

Is helpless. Helpless. But also. Man's. Condition. Or his case. Is hopeless. Therefore. Verse 20. Therefore.

By the deeds. Of the law. No flesh. Will be justified. In his sight. For by the law. Is the knowledge. Of sin. Now. It's interesting.

[34 : 29] The order here. The idea here. In verse 20. Is that. Or in verse 19. Is that. Ultimately. When. Unregenerate.

An unregenerate. Man. Stands. Before. The supreme. Eternal. Judge. Because. He has broken. The law. There is no defense. No. Word.

Every mouth. Will be shut. And so. In that sense. It utter. Helplessness. At that point. And then. Verse 20. Really brings us back. To what's going on now. Before that day comes. And he says. That. It's hopeless. Hopeless.

Hopeless. In this sense. That. Okay. Since. Ultimately. I'm going to be judged. And I have broken. God's laws. And so. Therefore. My mouth.

[35 : 30] Will be shut. And I'll have. No defense. Then. I guess. What I need to do now. Is start obeying his law. So that. That won't happen to me. And so.

I'm going to get familiar. With God's law. And I'm going to make sure. That every. Every T is crossed. And every I is dotted. And I am going to. To be.

Perfect. And obey God's law. And Paul's point is. That's hopeless. It's hopeless.

Won't work. It is. Absolutely vain. Worthless. For anyone. To think. That somehow. Their. Their good deeds.

Will outweigh. The bad. Ones. And. And somehow. Make them acceptable. Before God. It's kind of like. The illustration. I learned years ago. When I.

[36 : 28] Learned. Evangelism. Explosion. One of the many. Illustrations. Was. You know. If you bake a cake. I don't remember.

Exactly. The wording. I've been. Some of you. Been through E. You may remember. Let's say your cake. Requires. Three eggs. And you get. Three eggs. And two of them are good.

And one of them is rotten. How's the cake. Going to turn out. Going to be rotten. Well. I had two eggs. Two good eggs. In there. One rotten egg.

Is enough. To make the whole cake. See. You're not going to. Be able. To make it. If. If your desire is. Or your thinking is.

That if I will just simply. Obey God's law. Then. Then I hope. I'll be able. To make it. Through the judgment.

[37 : 23] It will not work. That. That way is hopeless. And. All are condemned. You see. By God's law. The chief function. Though it's not the only function.

But the chief function. The initial function. I guess we might say. Of the law. God's law. Is to condemn. The basis. Of just condemnation.

Upon God's. Law. And. And. And so. The most. Strenuous. And sincere. Attempt. To please God. By keeping.

His law. Will. Fail. Man is. Hopeless. Apart. From Christ. Hopeless. Any other way. Apart from. God's grace. Through Christ.

It. It. It's. It's. Hopeless. Man is. Condemned. Apart. From Christ. Man is. Lost. Apart. From Christ. And so. Jesus Christ. Is the only answer.

[38 : 16] Christ. And so. Let me conclude. By reading. Verses. Twenty. One. To twenty. Three. But.

Here's the transition. Here comes the good news. But now. The righteousness. Of God. Apart.

From the law. Is revealed. That's what Christmas. Is all about. By the way. Or should be. The righteousness.

Of God. Apart. From the law. Is revealed. Being witnessed. By the law. And the prophets. Even. The righteousness. Of God.

Through. Faith. Not. Through. Keeping. Of the law. Not. Through. Works. Of. Righteousness. Not. [39 : 12] Through. Any. Kind. Of. Meritorious. Activity. But. Through. Faith. Not. Just. Faith. In. Some. All-knowing.

God. Not. Just. Faith. In. Some. Higher. Power. But. Through. Faith. In. Jesus. Christ. to all in all, on all, who believe there's no difference. Amen. Amen.