

## Romans 3:9-20

Romans 3:9-20 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. (10) As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; (11) there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. (12) They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. (13) Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practised deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; (14) whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. (15) Their feet are swift to shed blood; (16) destruction and misery are in their ways; (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 says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (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.

### Questions On The Text

#### Will Jews be better off than Gentiles in the judgment?

Verse 9: Paul’s question actually sounds very similar to the question he asked in verse 1: What advantage then has the Jew? In that case, he answered that the Jew had great advantages, primarily because he has received God’s Word.

Now Paul says that they are not better off at all. This seemingly contradicts his previous answer, but in fact, he is talking about something very different. Whereas in verse 1 he was referring to the advantages Jews had in having a covenant with God, now he is referring to relationship with God and that Jews will also come under the judgment of God because of sin.

#### How are all humans – both Jew and Gentile – described?

Verses 10-18: Paul quotes a number of Old Testament Scriptures that describe the sinful state of all humanity. First, there is not a single righteous human. Second, no one understands.

Third, no one seeks after God. Naturally, this is talking about the human condition without the intervention of God. Any person who seeks after God is only responding to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. (See John 6:44 and 1 John 4:19)

Fourth, they have all turned aside. The words “turned aside” mean to deviate from the right way, and is referring to the fact that all humanity has chosen to reject God and His ways.

Fifth, they have become unprofitable, the word meaning useless. It is the same word Jesus used in Luke 17:10. Compare this also with John 15:5.

Sixth, no one does any good. Jesus went a step further and said that no one is good except God. See Matthew 19:17.

Seventh, Paul describes their speech. Their throat is an open tomb (highlighting the inner corruption), their tongues practise deceit, their speech is poison and full of cursing and bitterness. This is not a flattering description of the use that people’s tongues are generally put to.

Eighth, their feet are swift to shed blood, referring to humanity’s general propensity towards violence. Violence was the characteristic that God highlighted in Genesis 6:11-13 before He brought judgment on the earth with the Flood.

Ninth, instead of the way of peace, they walk in the ways of destruction and misery.

Tenth, they lack the fear of God. Of course, if they feared God, then they would hate evil (Proverbs 8:13) and that would go a long way towards dealing with the rebellious sins in this list.

### **What is the purpose of the Mosaic Law?**

Verses 19-20: The purpose of the Mosaic Law is not to bring people to a condition of righteousness. Instead, Paul says that no one will be justified in God's sight by adhering to the law.

Rather, two functions of the law are described in these verses. First, the law brings the knowledge of sin. In saying, "You shall not murder", the law reveals that murder is a sin. In saying, "You shall not commit adultery", the law reveals that adultery is a sin.

The second function of the law is to make everyone guilty before God. The word "guilty" means liable to prosecution and refers to accountability. Without the knowledge of sin, there is no guilt. Now that there is the law, there is the knowledge of sin, and therefore every person is aware of their failure to live up to God's expectations.

When Paul says, "that every mouth may be stopped," he is picturing a defendant's inability to refute charges brought against him.

### **Further Questions For Discussion:**

Why do the Jews come under the judgment of God even though they have a covenant with Him?

Do you remember the term "prevenient grace"? How do John 6:44 and 1 John 4:19 fit in with this concept?

Why do you think that all of humanity has become useless to God? Compare what Paul said with what Jesus said in John 6:63.

We have seen that no one does good. Discuss what Jesus meant when He called His disciples "evil" in Luke 11:13.

Given Paul's description of the tongue, compare this with what Jesus said in Mark 12:34.

How does the law make everyone under it accountable to God?