

Paul spends this chapter showing that all of mankind, whether Jew or Gentile, are in the same predicament. We are sinful by nature and therefore guilty before God. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves and God gave the law specifically to show us our desperate situation with no possibility of escape in order to lead us to faith in Jesus Christ.

**Verses 1-8:** Paul established in chapter 2 that being circumcised did not excuse the Jew in his sin and that in fact he was just as guilty before God as the sinning Gentile. Paul then begins chapter 3 asking the question of what advantage there was to being a Jew. He answers the question by pointing out that the chief advantage of the Jews was that God had used them to reveal Himself through the scriptures. The fact that some Jews did not believe did not negate God's faithfulness to fulfill the promises that He had made to Abraham and his descendants. Also, God is just to judge our sins despite the fact that our sin helps reveal God's righteousness (Rom. 1:17-18).

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9 What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;

**“What then? are we better [to surpass; to excel] *than they*?”** – Paul returns to the topic of Jew vs. Gentile and asks what conclusion can be drawn from the facts he's set forth so far. Does being given the “oracles of God” (v. 2) give the Jews (“we”) an advantage over the Gentiles (“they”)? Does this make them automatically closer to God than the Gentiles?

**“No, in no wise: for we have before proved [charged; accused] both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin”** – Paul again answers his own question. He has spent the first two chapters of Romans making the case that Jews and Gentiles alike are guilty of sin. Thus Jews have no advantage over Gentiles despite being given the scriptures because they both have the same weakness of having a sin nature. Knowing the will of God (as specified in the law) does not give you the ability to keep it and the Jews were just as guilty of violating God's law as the Gentiles.

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10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

**“As it is written”** – Paul now begins a lengthy section of quotations (vs. 10-18) from various OT passages that describe the sinful state of mankind.

**“There is none righteous, no, not one...”** – Paul loosely quotes from **Psa. 14:1-3** *“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”* Mankind does not naturally seek after God and it's only by God's grace that He opens our eyes and gives us the gift of faith so that we may repent and seek Him. Mankind has rebelled against God (“gone out of the way”) and our sin has made us filthy. None of us naturally seek God unless He intervenes in our lives.

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13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

**“Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit”** – **Psa. 5:9** *“For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.”* Tombs were sealed in order to hide the sight and stench of the decaying bodies, but this passage from Psalms expresses how that the mouths of sinful men reveal the death and decay that is in their hearts.

**“the poison of asps is under their lips”** – **Psa. 140:3** *“They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.”* The words coming out of the mouths of sinful men are like the venom of a snake. Their purpose is to inflict harm on others.

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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 have they not known: 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

**“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness”** – Quoted from **Psa. 10:7** (speaking of the wicked expressing their hatred of others) *“His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity.”*

**“Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known”** – Paul now loosely quotes from a passage in Isaiah speaking of how Israel had rebelled against God: **Isa. 59:7-8** *“Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.”*

**“There is no fear of God before their eyes”** – **Psa. 36:1** *“The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes.”* The transgressions of the wicked tells us that they do not fear God, or else they would not do the things they do.

19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

**“Now we know that what things soever the law saith”** – The moral law, as God gave it to Israel through Moses, specifies the will of God for mankind. It describes how we should treat one another (“thou shalt not kill,” “thou shalt not steal,” etc.) and identifies how justice should be meted out when offenses happen between people. Most importantly, it stipulates what our relationship with God should be and how we are to worship and honor Him.

**“it saith to them who are under the law”** – The Jews are obviously under the moral law *“because that unto them were committed the oracles of God”* (Rom. 3:2b). God had it written down for the Jews. However, Gentiles are also under the moral law because God has given to men a conscience so that they inherently know right and wrong (**Rom. 2:15** (speaking of Gentiles) *“Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another”*). Notice that Paul is not talking about the ceremonial law (the sacrifices, feasts, sabbaths, etc.) because that was given exclusively to Israel and has never been universally mandated. Paul is here stating that the moral law of God is something that all of mankind is responsible to God to obey.

**“that every mouth may be stopped [to block; to close; to put to silence]”** – The moral law informs us of God’s standard of righteousness and does not allow for any excuses or exceptions. The law leaves no room for us to open our mouths and complain about fairness or make any excuses because the standard of righteousness it declares is right. **Rom. 7:12** *“Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.”* Any attempt to justify ourselves is pointless because we cannot find fault in God’s moral law.

**“and all the world may become guilty before God”** – Here we see the purpose behind God’s law: “that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God.” The law was never intended to be a means of salvation for mankind. If it were, then no one could ever be saved because no one could ever maintain the standard of righteousness that the law requires. Instead, God’s law purposely shows us that we are guilty of sin and are unable to redeem ourselves.

**Rom. 7:13** (Paul is speaking of how the law condemned him to death because of his sin) *“Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.”*

**Gal. 3:21-22, 24** *“Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe... Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”*

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

**“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified [to make righteous] in his sight”** – The requirements of the law are righteous and if we were able to keep it perfectly then we would be justified in the sight of God. However, we are unable to keep God’s law perfectly because even the slightest sin would condemn us. Even if we were able to never sin from this point on to the end of our lives, we still could not atone for the sins we’ve already committed. Thus Paul has shown us that keeping the law is not a viable means of being justified in God’s eyes. It is beyond our ability.

**“for by the law is the knowledge of sin”** – This is the purpose of the law: not to save us from our sin but to inform us of our sin. It is in our nature to attempt to justify our actions and/or blame them on someone else. We do not want to take responsibility for our actions but the law gives us the knowledge of how sinful our actions truly are. It is our schoolmaster (Gal. 3:24) to show us our sin and our guilt before God so that we can see that we need to seek salvation through Jesus Christ.

**Verses 21-31:** Paul states that the righteousness that God requires from us is revealed (exposed) now that we see that it cannot be attained through attempting to obey the law. This righteousness is “without” (apart from) the law and comes only through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, regardless if they are Jew or Gentile. When we come to faith in Christ, we are freely justified through faith in the blood He shed on the cross as our “propitiation” (one who satisfies the requirements) for our sins. These facts leave us no room for boasting because it is not by our works but by faith in Christ that we are justified. Paul points out that the Lord is not only the God of the Jews and but also of the Gentiles and that faith is the conduit through which both are justified. Lastly, Paul makes the point that faith does not negate the law but in fact establishes (supports; strengthens; makes firm) the law. That’s because faith acknowledges that the law is righteous and is not in contradiction of it.