Sermon 1 December 2024 Romans 3:9-20

The form of the sermon is to prove that all are under the power of sin, the proof of which is in the evidence presented by the texts from the Psalms and Isaiah. The conclusion or verdict is the only one that can be reached based on the evidence presented.

Romans 3:9-20 Read the scripture portion.

Introduction:

Let me provide some context for the message this morning. This letter was addressed to the Christian community in Rome a diverse group made up of Jewish and Gentile believers. Christians. Understand that Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire. It was the epicentre of political power, commerce and culture. It was a melting pot of ethnicities, languages and religions. The Jewish community represented a significant presence and was well established. Tensions between the Jews and the Gentiles were not uncommon. Pastor Mark has already alluded to the edict passed by the emperor Claudius who expelled the Jews from Rome due to religious disturbances. By the time Paul writes this letter the edict had been lifted and the Jews were returning to Rome, however the scars of the division still remained. The Jews brought with them a rich heritage of the Hebrew scriptures, the Law and the prophets. The Gentiles on the other hand came from a variety of pagan backgrounds with diverse practices. This diversity in the church led to practical and theological challenges. The Jewish Christians struggled with the integration of the Gentile Christians who did not observe the Mosaic law which included circumcision and dietary restrictions. Gentile Christians sometime viewed Jewish customs as obsolete and irrelevant in the light of the new covenant in Christ. It's into this cultural and religious mix that Paul writes to address these tensions, emphasizing the unity of all believers in Christ.

Chapter 2 of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act 108 of 1996 entrenches the fundamental rights to which every person is entitled. The presumption of innocence or the right of the accused person to be presumed innocent until proven guilty is embodied in section 35(3)(h) cited above, is one of the rights so entrenched. In terms of this section the onus in a criminal case is on the state to prove the accused guilty of the crime with which he is charged. Furthermore, no duty is placed on the accused to say anything during plea proceedings or trial, nor is he obliged to testify during his trial. It also states that "The onus of proof in a criminal case is discharged by the State if the evidence establishes the guilt of the accused beyond reasonable doubt. The corollary is that the accused is entitled to be acquitted if it is reasonably possible that he might be innocent."

As we come to this portion of scripture this morning, I would like to unpack it using this legal framework. This portion of scripture is the conclusion of everything Paul has been writing about from chapter 1 verse 18 through to chapter 3 verse 8 regarding sin, its application to the Jews, the religious leaders and the Gentiles.

A. THE ACCUSATION

Paul begins with a question. 9 What then? What can we conclude from what I have just written. Are we any better off? Paul is addresses the Jewish believers using the word we. His answer is immediate and simple 'Not at all'. And he clarifies his answer. "For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin." The use of grammar here is important, it is not that Jews and Gentiles are alike they cannot be considering their religious

beliefs and cultural differences in addition to their traditions. No, rather we are all alike under the power of sin. In chapter 2 verse 9 through to 11 we read “There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory honour and peace for everyone who does good; first for the Jew and then for the Gentile. For God does not show favouritism. So, the charge is brought that all are alike under the power of sin and this charge is not just applicable to all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people it very much applies to all of us who are loved by God and called to be his holy people.

B. THE EVIDENCE

The burden of proof rests with the prosecution, (Paul in this case), and so he applies evidence from the Hebrew scriptures beginning with the phrase “as it is written” and refers his readers to the Psalms, Ecclesiastes and Isaiah. Paul want to drive home his accusation that all men alike are under sin and merit God’s wrath and so he lists three types of sin.

1. We sin against God.
2. We sin against each other by the words that we speak and
3. we sin against each other through violence

We sin against God.

Firstly beginning with Psalm 14 and 53 these two Psalms that are almost carbon copies of the other. Psalm 14 Of David, in the CSB is titled A PORTRAIT OF SINNERS. -- Psalms 14:1-3 (CSB) The fool says in his heart, “There’s no God.” They are corrupt; they do vile deeds. There is no one who does good. 2 The Lord looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God. 3 All have turned away; all alike have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one. The word fool here refers to one who is morally deficient. So we could say. The morally deficient person says in his heart, “There is no God.” Ecclesiastes 7:20 20 There is certainly no one righteous on the earth, who does good and never sins. The first four commandments of God’s law, the ten commandments, are all about what God expects of us in our relationship with him. First, You shall have no other gods before me. Second, you shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven or on the earth or under the sea and bow down to it. Third, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Fourth, remember the sabbath day by keeping it holy. As God looks down from heaven today, He sees a morally deficient world with the same characteristics that David observed and wrote about. How can we say we understand, how can we say we seek God, how can we say we have not turned away, how can we say we are not corrupt, there is no one who does good not even one. In Genesis chapter 1 verse 27 SO God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. The world embraces the woke movement that embraces a whole host of genders, do we think we know better than the creator? The world is accepting of same sex marriage, but God declares marriage should be between a natural man and a natural woman. There are churches have abandoned God’s Word in favour of political correctness. The fourth commandment tells us, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” We have turned the Sabbath into just another day of the week. We work on the Sabbath, we play sport on the Sabbath, we go shopping on the sabbath, it seems we do anything but what God said we should do. Genesis chapter 2 tells us, Thus the heavens, and the earth were completed in their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing, so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. In the world today, the sabbath is not being remembered nor is it being kept holy. Sin against God is very much in evidence today still.

Secondly we sin against others with our speech and the sins our tongues
Psalm 5: 8-9. 8 Lord, lead me in your righteousness because of my adversaries; make your way straight before me. 9 For there is nothing reliable in what they say; destruction is within them; their throat is an open grave;
they flatter with their tongues.
Psalm 140: 1-3 Rescue me, Lord, from evil men.... 3 They make their tongues as sharp as a snake's bite; viper's venom is under their lips.
Psalm 10:4- 4 In all his scheming, the wicked person arrogantly thinks, "There's no accountability, since there's no God." 5 His ways are always secure; your lofty judgments have no effect on him; he scoffs at all his adversaries. 6 He says to himself, "I will never be moved — from generation to generation I will be without calamity." 7 Cursing, deceit, and violence fill his mouth; trouble and malice are under his tongue.
Matthew 12:34 Jesus addresses the pharisees 34 Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.
Matthew 15: 11" It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth — this defiles a person."
James 3:3-6 3 Now if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we direct their whole bodies. 4 And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how a small fire sets ablaze a large forest. 6 And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among our members. It stains the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

Is there comparative evidence of this type of sin in the world today, does anyone remember Nkandla? Firefighters with hoses putting on a demonstration trying to convince the public that a decorated swimming pool was actually a fire pool and not for swimming in. Not long ago we were being told of the suspicion that the coronavirus may have escaped, accidentally or otherwise, from a laboratory in the central Chinese city of Wuhan where the virus was first recorded. Its supporters point to the presence of a major biological research facility in the city. The Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) has been studying coronaviruses in bats for over a decade. The institute is a 40-minute drive from the Huanan wet market where the first cluster of infections emerged. What about Dr Anthony Fauci in 2021 he said he was "not convinced" the virus originated naturally. That was a shift from a year earlier, when he thought it most likely Covid had spread from animals to humans. Yes, and it's called the "natural origin" theory.
This argues the virus spread naturally from animals, without the involvement of any scientists or laboratories. Supporters of the natural origin hypothesis say Covid-19 emerged in bats and then jumped to humans, most likely through another animal, or "intermediary host". That idea was backed by the WHO report, which said it was "likely to very likely" that Covid had made it to humans through an intermediate host. This hypothesis was widely accepted at the start of the pandemic, but as time has worn on, scientists have not found a virus in either bats or another animal that matches the genetic make-up of Covid-19, leading some to doubt the theory. Add to this is an unsubstantiated conspiracy theory pushed by Chinese propagandists and repeated by Mao Ning at the foreign ministry briefing on 1 March 2023, suggesting the coronavirus was made and leaked from Fort Detrick in Frederick, Maryland, about 80km (50 miles) north of Washington DC it was once the centre of the US biological weapons programme. We were forced to wear masks that had no way of protecting us from the virus and many people vaccinated with an experimental shot that was supposed to save us from this virus, on top of that we were told that multiple booster shots were necessary after having the vaccine. Shutdowns were enforced

through disinformation and falsehoods and news channels were reporting narratives in support of the lies. Lies and deceit still abound today to the detriment of mankind.

Thirdly we sin against each other through violence, man's propensity to shed blood and resolve issues through bloodshed and war.
Psalm 140: 1-2 Rescue me, Lord, from evil men. Keep me safe from violent men 2 who plan evil in their hearts. They stir up wars all day long.
Isaiah 59:6b-9 Their works are sinful works, and violent acts are in their hands. 7 Their feet run after evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are sinful thoughts; ruin and wretchedness are in their paths. 8 They have not known the path of peace, and there is no justice in their ways. They have made their roads crooked; no one who walks on them will know peace. 9 Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We hope for light, but there is darkness; for brightness, but we live in the night.

Can we apply these words to the world today? Without even thinking or applying my mind I can think of a number of conflicts around the world that are on-going
The war in Gaza has been ongoing since October 2023,
The war in the Ukraine has been ongoing since February 2022.
The civil war in Sudan civil war has been ongoing since April 2023.
The conflict in Myanmar has been ongoing since 2017, it was stopped in 2021 when a coup returned the country to military rule. But in 2023 various groups and militias began fighting against the government.
Civil war in Syria has been waged for over a decade.
The stories of hardship and loss abound, and we see the streams of refugees fleeing from these conflicts into other countries. Closer to home here in South Africa we find people fighting for positions in local government. Elected councilors are gunned down, as people compete for turf in an endeavor to enhance their lifestyles. Most of these councilors are victims of internal political battles for power and control over municipal budgets. We learn of extortion through violence around the construction industry as the construction mafia disrupt and close building sites when their demands are not met. Whistle blowers on corruption have been assassinated. The holocaust during the second world war, the Rwandan genocide between Hutus and Tutsis in the 1990's. Gender based violence that disproportionately affects woman and girls is a widespread problem that is systemic and deeply entrenched in institutions, cultures and traditions in our country. During the days of turmoil and unrest in South Africa in the late eighties and nineties we heard of and saw people publicly executed by "necklacing."
Psalm 5:5-6 says 5 The boastful cannot stand in your sight; you hate all evildoers. 6 You destroy those who tell lies; the Lord abhors violent and treacherous people. In the NIV it reads The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong; **6** you destroy those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, Lord, detest.

Paul concludes with Psalm 36: 1 An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked person: Dread of God has no effect on him. In the (NIV) I have a message from God in my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked; There is no fear of God before their eyes.
Proverbs 1:7 tells us the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the holy One is understanding.
Galatians 6: 7-8 7 Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap, 8 because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit

The boldness that is exhibited in the world continuing in sin is fueled by the fact that we have lost our fear of the Lord. It was evident then it is still very much in evidence today and it underscores everything Paul has said.

THE VERDICT

Paul, having presented the evidence of man's sinfulness reaches his verdict in verses 19 and 20.
19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are subject to the law, so that every mouth may be shut and the whole world may become subject to God's judgment. 20 For no one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law.
There is no way for us to attain a right standing before God through the works of the law. Paul concludes his argument aimed at the Gentiles in chapter 1 from verse 18 and then the Jews from chapter 2 verse 1 through to chapter 3 verse 8.
The *works of the law* cannot not justify a person because the purpose of the law is not to justify, our works, no matter what merit we think they may deserve, we can never measure up to the standard set out in the law. The law was never intended to justify us; it has no power to help us in this way. Rather, it condemns us, because it reveals the fact of our sin and sin's evil and condemnatory character. When we hold our lives and our conduct up in comparison to God's holy law, we gain personal, meaningful knowledge of our sin.

Unlike my introduction and the point made about the principle that we are innocent until proven guilty. Paul is telling us in plain and simple language that we are sinful and incapable of righteousness, we are guilty until proven innocent. The accusation has been brought and the evidence has been presented and proves our guilt beyond reasonable doubt, there is no defence to offer and there is no possibility of reasonable doubt. We are all alike under sin and are completely fallen in God's eyes. There is no argument in mitigation that can be brought to change that.

As I draw this to a close let me say that we are not without hope, and you will have to come back next Sunday as pastor Mark continues in Romans chapter 3 to learn more.

Here's the thing, all of us, whether we are believers or unbelievers in our individual capacity stand condemned without hope and without a defence. If you are not a believer this morning that is where you stand right now and from an eternal perspective you are in trouble and in need of God's grace and love. I will be happy to help you change that if you would like to, please speak to me after the service this morning.
If you are a believer this morning rejoice, God has done a magnificent work through his son the Lord Jesus Christ, the price that you should pay for your sin has already been paid and you are justified through faith in Him.

Lets pray.

Benediction Revelation 1:5-6 (CSB)

To him who loves us and has set us free from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father — to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.