

## Romans 3:9-31

Paul has proven that the heathen (Romans 1:18-32), the moral man (Romans 2:1-16), and the Jew (Romans 2:17-3:8) can be lost and in need of a Savior. Man's only hope is to have God save him once he (while depraved) exercises personal repentance and faith in Christ. Paul next condemns the whole world in Romans 3:9-18, that is, all people who refuse to repent and believe.

### *Both Jews and Greeks Under Sin*

Paul begins by writing:

*What then? Are we better than they?... (Romans 3:9)*

Paul, a Jew, asks his Gentile readers who have accepted Christ if they (along with him) are better than the Jews who have rejected Christ. These questions must be interpreted in context or they generate confusion. Romans 3:9 provides the proper context:

*...Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; (Romans 3:9)*

The apostle emphasizes that everyone, regardless of nationality, is born "*under sin*." All Jews and Gentiles ("*Greeks*") are born with a need for a Savior. Consequently, Paul and his Gentile readers, prior to receiving Christ, were no "*better*" than the unbelieving Jews—nor anyone else as far as salvation was concerned. Thus, Jews cannot claim that they are part of God's family when they exit their mother's womb. They are born with a nature that loves sin, a nature that makes them "*children of wrath*" (Ephesians 2:3). God eradicates this nature when the depraved during the church age repent and believe, for He makes them "*new*" creations (2Corinthians 5:17)—a subject addressed in depth in Romans 5.

Verses 10-18 of Romans 3, some of the most controversial verses of our day, describe the condition of a society that does not know Christ. Paul's words are chilling, for his description of lost mankind parallels the world of today. When man refuses to fear God, destruction is inevitable, no matter what stage of history he experiences.

Some individuals use Romans 3:10-18 in an attempt to prove that the depraved are incapable of exercising personal repentance and faith. These passages teach no such thing, for they are general statements regarding the depraved rather than a precise description of every moment of their existence. Romans 3:10-12:

*as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." (Romans 3:10-12)*

When taken through the full counsel of God's Word, Romans 3:10 teaches that everyone is born unrighteous due to Adam's sin. Romans 5:18 verifies this fact:

*So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, (Romans 5:18)*

Some people perceive Romans 3:11-12 as teaching that the depraved are incapable of repenting and believing—that God (prior to salvation) must spiritually regenerate the depraved (those who make up the elect, in their opinion), and give them repentance and faith, before they can repent, believe, and be saved. They also, due to their view of man's depravity and God's sovereignty, perceive God as choosing/electing from eternity past who will be saved, yet condemning the non-elect to damnation (or giving them over to the consequence of their sin). Romans 3:11-12 is then perceived as communicating that the depraved are totally "*useless*"—spiritual corpses, incapable of choosing Christ.

Paul's words to his Jewish opponents in Romans 3:1-8 prove that he did not perceive the depraved as incapable of repenting and believing. Should God elect some individuals to salvation, giving them no choice as to where they would spend eternity, He would, by default, later judge the non-elect who had no opportunity to believe. This scenario would make Him totally unjust. The answer to what Paul is communicating is extremely simple when all of the verses in God's Word are considered rather than a select few.

Paul, in Romans 3:11-12, is stressing that the depraved will never seek God without the Father's drawing (John 6:44) and the Spirit's convicting (John 16:8). Yet, he also viewed man as capable of repenting and exercising personal faith while depraved (read Acts 16:31, Acts 26:18, and Romans 10:9-10).

No verse is to be isolated and interpreted as an island. Neither are a few verses to be insulated from what the Scriptures teach overall. All of the verses in God's Word are required for proper, contextual understanding—that is, if you adopt Paul's method of interpretation:

*For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. (Acts 20:27 KJV)*

Without the aid of "*all the counsel of God,*" we could conclude that Paul taught error in stating:

*if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. (Romans 11:14)*

Paul did not view himself as possessing the power to "*save*"—which would have been heretical and, thus, totally void of truth. He believed that God alone saves the depraved, repentant sinner, as confirmed by a hoard of passages in the apostle's epistles! Therefore, the proper meaning of Romans 11:14 is determined by taking Paul's thought through all of what he writes rather than isolating it. He viewed his teaching of the truth as a vehicle through which the depraved could be persuaded to exercise personal faith in Christ, faith that God requires before granting salvation.

The following passages confirm that the depraved can pursue the Lord, with the assistance of the Father's drawing (John 6:44) and the Spirit's conviction (John 16:8),

prior to being spiritually regenerated. Additional verses could be cited, but for the sake of time and space, a limited number are included. Just these few passages, however, are more than sufficient to validate that the depraved can exercise repentance and faith prior to spiritual regeneration. Our *God's Heart* series examines the subject in much greater depth.

### **Genesis 3:6-7**

*When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.*

The fact that the term “death” in Scripture can mean separation is critical. Cain’s birth in Genesis 4:1, after Adam and Eve’s sin in Genesis 3:6, confirms this truth. Adam’s sin, therefore, caused him to experience spiritual death (Genesis 2:17), a spiritual separation from God, leaving him depraved. As a result, all of Adam’s offspring are born depraved (Romans 5:12-19), separated from God. That Adam realized his nakedness subsequent to sinning confirms that he recognized his lost condition while depraved. He also desired to please God while depraved, for he “*sewed fig leaves together*” for a covering due to his shame. He, likewise, feared God and heard God’s voice while depraved (Genesis 3:10). After Adam responded in this manner, God provided covering for Adam and Eve through shedding the first blood from the animal kingdom (read Genesis 3:21).

*Conclusion:* Adam recognized his lost condition and need for forgiveness after becoming depraved. He was not a spiritual corpse.

### **Psalm 10:4**

*The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. (KJV)*

Inability to believe in the midst of their depravity is not what prevents the “wicked” from seeking the Lord. Their “*pride*” leads to an unwillingness to pursue God’s heart. The Scriptures teach clearly that the depraved are to humble themselves (Matthew 23:12). The Scriptures also stress that God opposes “*the proud, but gives grace to the humble*” (James 4:6). For this reason the Law was given to the depraved (1 Timothy 1:9) so they might repent of their pride and come to Christ (Romans 3:19).

### **1Chronicles 28:9**

*“As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.*

David, the man after God's own heart, told Solomon (his son) that the Lord would allow him (Solomon) to find Him should Solomon "*seek Him.*" Therefore, God must be sought before He can be found. In other words, the Lord is found by the depraved who "*seek Him.*"

## **2Chronicles 15:1-4**

*Now the Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded, and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. And for many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. But in their distress they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him.*

These words were not directed toward Asa alone, but toward "*all Judah and Benjamin,*" many of whom were not (at this juncture at least) followers of Jehovah—one of many examples where the Lord urges the unregenerate (the depraved) to "*seek*" Him. When "*they turned to the Lord*" in their depravity, "*and...sought Him*" in their depravity, God allowed them to "*find Him.*"

## **Isaiah 55:6-7**

*Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.*

The "*wicked*" man is to "*forsake his way,*" meaning that the depraved are to make a choice to submit to the Lord before they can be pardoned (saved). They are to "*Seek*" and "*Call upon*" God prior to being spiritually regenerated.

## **Jeremiah 29:13**

*'And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*

One must "*seek*" the Lord before finding the Lord, Who alone, can save (spiritually regenerate). Thus, seeking, prior to spiritual regeneration, precedes finding.

## **Acts 26:16-18**

*'But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'*

Having realized that God appointed him to preach the gospel (not to be saved), Paul attempted to persuade the depraved, the spiritually unregenerated, to believe (Acts 18:4; 26:28; 28:23; 2Corinthians 5:11). Therefore, he understood that the depraved can “*turn from darkness to light*” (Acts 26:18) prior to spiritual regeneration.

### **2Corinthians 5:11**

*Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.*

Paul spoke of his attempt to “*persuade men*” to come to Christ, realizing that a choice was required on their part (in the midst of their depravity) before God would bestow salvation (spiritual regeneration).

### **Philippians 2:8-11**

*And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

These verses refute the contradictory teaching that portrays the depraved (the spiritually unregenerated) as incapable of believing (incapable of confessing “*that Jesus Christ is Lord*”). This erroneous mindset views the depraved as spiritually dead corpses, incapable of responding to any spiritual stimulus. However, the lost (depraved) present in Philippians 2:8-11 (all the lost, of all the ages) will not be spiritually regenerated, yet confess Jesus as Lord. This confession will not result in salvation, for they will receive God’s wrath for failing to repent and believe while depraved while on earth (Revelation 20:11-15). (Our *God’s Heart* series, distributed by this ministry, has much more to say regarding this topic.)

As we address Romans 3:13-14, keep in mind that Romans 3:10-18 contains general statements regarding the depraved rather than a precise description of every moment of their existence.

*“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”; “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”; (Romans 3:13-14)*

The spiritually unregenerated (depraved) find it extremely difficult to control what proceeds from their mouths; that is, until they turn to Christ and are made new.

The “*feet*” of the spiritually unregenerated (depraved) are “*swift to shed blood*” due to their possessing a nature that enjoys sin:

*“THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, (Romans 3:15)*

As a result of their sin:

*Destruction and misery are in their paths, AND THE PATH OF PEACE HAVE THEY NOT KNOWN.” (Romans 3:16-17)*

The depraved live a miserable existence, never finding “*peace*”—that is, unless they choose to repent and believe and receive God’s salvation.

Romans 3:18 is another highly debated verse due to the theological shift that has occurred within Christendom.

*“THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.” (Romans 3:18)*

Individuals who view the depraved as incapable of exercising repentance and faith cite this passage in an attempt to prove that the depraved can never “*fear...God*”—that the depraved are unable to repent and believe. Their theology stems from their improper view of God’s sovereignty, which they perceive as compromised should the depraved be capable of choosing their own destiny. After all, should the depraved possess the capacity to choose Christ, no need would exist for God to determine man’s destiny from eternity past. Paul, however, as was stated earlier, is making a general statement regarding the depraved rather than a precise description of every moment of their existence. Remember, he has already proven that should God’s choice from eternity past determine who will or will not be saved, He would be a God who condemns those who have no opportunity to believe—making Him totally unjust (review notes on Romans 3:1-8). Consequently, Romans 3:18 does not teach that the depraved are incapable of fearing God and exercising personal repentance and faith.

### ***The Law’s Function***

Even more good news is forthcoming in Romans 3:19, regarding the freedom granted to the depraved to repent and believe!

*Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; (Romans 3:19)*

The Law “*speaks*” to those “*who are under the Law.*” Purposefully, Paul uses the present active indicative verb “*speaks*”—which points to action that is occurring (indicative mood) at the present time (the present tense). Would an all-wise God generate a Law which “*speaks*” to those “*under the Law*” (the depraved) should “*those under the Law*” (the depraved) be incapable of comprehending what the Law is speaking? Never! Consequently, the depraved can understand what the Law is saying—confirming that the depraved can comprehend spiritual truth, for the Law “*is spiritual*” (Romans 7:14):

*For we know that the Law is spiritual; (Romans 7:14)*

We also know that only the spiritually unregenerated (depraved) are under the Law:

*But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. (1Timothy 1:8-11)*

These verses from 1Timothy 1:8-11 confirm what is taught in Romans 3:19, that the Law “*speaks to those who are under the Law*”—the spiritually unregenerated (the depraved):

*...it [the Law] speaks to those who are under the Law... (Romans 3:19)*

Romans 3:19 does not say that the Law speaks to those under the Law who have previously been spiritually regenerated. Because the depraved are capable of understanding the Law while yet unregenerated, the Law is given as a “*tutor to lead*” them “*to Christ*” so they might “*be justified by faith*”:

*Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)*

A “*tutor*” is hired only for the purpose of a student understanding the subject matter. God would never generate a Law for the purpose of leading the depraved to Christ should the depraved be incapable of comprehending what the Law is speaking. Such an endeavor would be a waste of God’s time.

Paul taught that the New Testament believer is “*not under Law, but under grace*”:

*For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)*

Only the depraved who reject Christ's provision live under the Law. Once they exercise personal repentance and faith while depraved, they are made new and live "under grace." For this reason Paul wrote to the Galatians, who erroneously believed that they were saved by grace but kept by Law:

*You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Galatians 3:1-3)*

*Conclusion:*

The Lord used the Law to allow us to see our need for a Savior while we were spiritually unregenerated (depraved).

We were under Law only so long as we were spiritually unregenerated (depraved).

Once we were saved (spiritually regenerated), through exercising personal repentance and faith while depraved, we were forever freed from the Law to live under grace.

The depraved can comprehend ample truth to realize their need for a Savior. God, therefore, spoke "the Law" into existence to shut man's "mouth" and make him "accountable to God" (Romans 3:19).

*Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; (Romans 3:19)*

To put it simply, the Law was given to reveal to all of the depraved (not just the depraved who will be saved) their need for a Savior, "for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin":

*because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)*

Of course, the depraved must exercise personal repentance and faith before receiving God's salvation from the penalty of sin.

The Law's function remains the same today. It was given so man would cease trying to please God by his own efforts ("works") and submit to His saving grace, grace granted to all who exercise personal repentance and faith while depraved:

*because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight;*  
(Romans 3:20a)

We have proven from a Scriptural basis that the depraved can recognize their need for a Savior, repent and believe, and receive God's salvation. The depraved, most definitely, do not need to be spiritually regenerated by God before they can turn to Christ.