

Under Sin

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Date: 03 November 2024

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word. This morning, we're continuing our series in the book of Romans, and you'll remember that Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD, and it's called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it's written to the churches in the city of Rome. This letter is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, and Paul's hope in writing this letter, as we saw back in chapter one, is that these churches would be established in the gospel. We're going to see many applications as we go throughout this book, but Paul is especially focused with the mission and the unity of the church. And we're going to go along many different spokes, many different topics and ideas in these 16 chapters, but we're going to constantly and always be returning back to the hub of the gospel. We're now in Romans chapter three, and I've been telling you that as we come to these passages, we are not reading random selections with random points, but instead Paul is really making one point through chapters one through three, and that point is what he sums up. We're going to read in just a few weeks in Romans chapter three, verse 23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So Romans chapter one, he was saying, look, non-religious people have fallen short of God's glory. Chapter two, religious people have fallen short of God in his glory. Chapter three, we saw him answering a few objections, and now we're at the part where he's kind of tying it all together and saying, okay, here is our final conclusion, the case that cannot be refuted. And this week, we're going to be, again, coming to Paul's summary here in chapter three, and we're going to ask a number of questions. One of them is this, in what sense, in what way, is Paul allowed to say that no one does good? That's how this passage is going to end. Verse 12, he will say, no one does good, not even one. And you might be thinking, well, I know all sorts of people who do good. I know Christians who do good. I know people who don't know God, who don't know Jesus, who do all kinds of good. What is Paul talking about? In fact, sometimes it seems, certain instances, non-Christians do more good than Christians. So how can Paul get away with saying these things? There's a lot of rich and basic theology in these, just these few verses, and so we're going to take them from top to bottom. And so as we do that, I invite you to turn with me to God's word. As you turn, you can go to your worship guide, you can go to your phone, you can go to your Bible. No matter where you go, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now Romans chapter three, starting at verse nine. What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. As it is written, none is righteous, no, not one. No one understands.

No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we do thank you and praise you again as we do every week, that you have given us the power and the assistance and the blessing of your word.

[4 : 55] And so we ask that you would bless us with it again, that you would open up our eyes and our minds. We would see and understand what you've written for us. You'd use it to change our hearts, that we would believe and trust and follow you more and more. We thank you this morning

that we don't have to worry about whether we've earned or deserve these things. We know that we haven't. And so we simply ask for them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. Just very recently, I was in the Colorado Springs airport. And as I got through security and I came to the end to put my bins away, I noticed that someone had left something very important in one of the bins at the end. As they had rushed off to their gate, they had left behind their passport. Yeah, you guys know. That, in fact, is a game ender. And I know it's a game ender because when I looked at this passport, it was not blue, it was red. And if you're familiar with passports, you know they come in four different colors. You can have a blue passport, you can have a red passport, you can have a green passport, and very few countries have a black passport. Why did I know they were in trouble? Because they had a red passport? Because red is not the color of the United States passport. Right? And so here is someone who is lost in another country, and they don't have their form of identification. Now I can tell from your gasp that everyone here that everyone here knows this is a big deal. Why, though, is it so important that you have your passport? It's important because there's a sense in which the country you belong to trumps everything else. If you show up to the airport and you are dressed strangely, and you have no money, money, and you are disheveled, but you have your passport, you will probably be okay. If you show up to the airport, and you are extremely well-dressed, and you are rich, and you are savvy in interpersonal interactions, but you have no passport, you will not be okay. Right? There's this sense in which nothing else matters. Paul tells us here in verse 9, he uses an interesting phrase. He says, we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. Now that's actually kind of a strange way of talking. What does Paul mean when he says that we're under sin? I would suggest to you this morning that we often have a very incomplete view of sin. We might think of sin as these particular actions that we commit at particular times, but if you think of that, that's not wrong, right? That is an element of sin. It is, however, incomplete. To be under sin is to be something actually worse than that.

To be under sin means that that's actually the kingdom that you belong to. To be under sin means that sin is more than just individual actions at individual times. No, it's actually sort of like a nation that has ultimate authority. And so when Paul says all people are under sin, he is saying all people live under the power of sin. Sin has a real authority, a real power over you. You might think about it this way.

Why doesn't every human being get the chance that Adam and Eve got? Why has every person outside of Christ born into this world after Adam and Eve, why has every person ended up in sin? I mean, why don't we see, you know, there are a variety of people, some people who followed after Adam and Eve's choices and they have chosen sin. And why don't we see some other people who saw what Adam and Eve did and they realize, man, that's not really the way I want to go.

[9 : 33] Why isn't it a coin toss for every person who's born into this world? It's not a coin toss because every person is born under sin.

Okay, you can think about it this way. When I was born in Waco, Texas, sometime in the late 80s, I became an American citizen. Right? You might say I was born under America.

Did I get to choose in that? No. Why not? Because Beverly and Chuck Capone were American citizens.

Right? I was born an American because my parents were Americans. Why is every human being born into this world under sin? Because our father Adam chose the kingdom of sin.

And so that's why you might look back certain moments in your life and think, man, I remember doing that, that thing that was actually pretty terrible. What was I thinking?

[10 : 47] What had possession of my mind at that point? How did I not realize that was such a terrible idea? I'm going to suggest to you this morning that you did that perhaps because you were under sin.

Because sin had a power over you. You might think to yourself, why is it that I do things that are wrong even though I know that they're wrong?

Why do I not, why is no better not equal do better? Why do I know the right way but I don't choose it? And we'll talk about that more in Romans chapter 7.

And I'm going to suggest to you, perhaps that's because sin had a power over you. Perhaps it's because you were under sin.

Now I say perhaps, because as we'll go on to talk about, if you're in Christ, you're actually no longer under sin. Although you still fight against it, right?

[11 : 51] Galatians chapter 5, Paul talks about the spirit is at war with the flesh. You'll see this on page 8 of your worship guide. To be under sin is a legal term.

We are citizens of sin. It is as though we all have a spiritual passport which shows our legal citizenship.

It is either stamped under sin or under grace. In Paul's astounding statement, it does Jews and Gentiles, religious and unreligious, are all under sin.

Now, the man who wrote that, Tim Keller, was deeply influenced by the great 20th century preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones, who said something very interestingly similar, which you'll find on the back of your worship guide.

And so Keller got it from Lloyd-Jones. And I think both of them at some point actually got it from the Bible itself. Because Paul, in the letter to the Colossians, says something very similar.

[13 : 01] Talking about what God has done for his people, says Colossians chapter 1, verse 13. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son.

The domain of, there's two places, Paul's saying. There's two realms as a human being that you can belong to. And in fact, only two realms. You are either in the domain of darkness or you're in the kingdom of the son.

There are not four different colors for your passport. Spiritually, there are only two colors. There's only two options. You belong to the kingdom of this world.

You belong to the kingdom of God. If you belong to the kingdom of this world, you are, Paul is saying here, under sin. That's what that means.

Sin is not simply or merely individual actions. No, sin is a power and a presence and a domain and a reality. Paul gives this idea also in his letter to the Philippians.

[14 : 11] Philippians chapter 3, he says, our citizenship is in heaven. Which is a way of saying, hey, if you're a Christian, your passport is no longer a passport of the domain of darkness.

That's not the power, the rule, the reign that is most important. No, your passport is now a passport for the kingdom of the son. I had a pastor many years ago who explained it this way.

When we think about sin, sin has three different Ps. It has a power, it has a presence, and it has a penalty. If you are under sin, you are under all three of those things.

You're under the power of sin. It's the ruling force in your life. You're under the penalty of sin. That is, you deserve God's wrath and his judgment. And you have the presence of sin.

It's actually real. It's acted out in your life. When we change our spiritual passport, when we're transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of the son, two of those Ps go away.

[15 : 22] You are no longer under the power of sin, and you are no longer under the penalty of sin. You have one left. You still struggle with the presence of sin.

And we wait. Philippians 3 says this, The citizenship is from heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We wait until his return, or until our death, for the presence of sin to be removed.

So what does it mean to be under sin? It means that sin has a real power and a real penalty in your life. That's what Paul is saying here.

He's saying, look, I'm summing up everything I've told you in Romans chapter 1 and Romans chapter 2. Romans chapter 1, religious people, Jews, are under sin. It has a real power and a real penalty.

Romans chapter 2, non-religious people are also under sin. They're also in the domain of darkness. They have a real penalty and a real power. And so, Paul's bringing it all to this final conclusion.

[16 : 31] Chapter 3, he's telling us, he's restating it yet again, everyone in this world, outside of Christ, under the power of sin.

If you're in the domain of darkness, you have a power, a penalty, and a presence. If you're in the kingdom of the sun, the power and the penalty have been removed.

You struggle with the presence for now. Are Jews any better off? No, not at all. Both Jews and Greeks are under sin.

Verse 9 here, Paul has laid the groundwork.

He's told us about our citizenship. Now he goes on in the next few verses to show us how it plays out in real life. So verse 9 gives us the foundation.

[17 : 32] You have a citizenship. You belong to a kingdom with a reign and a power. And now we're going to see how that actually shows itself Sunday through Saturday. First verse 10, he tells us, And so we see the first consequence of being under sin.

If the domain of darkness is the kingdom we belong to, then of course we have no right standing with God. We have no relationship, no fellowship with him.

That righteousness term means we have no standing before God. We belong to a different country. It doesn't matter. This helps explain where we're going.

This question of how can we say no one does any good. It doesn't matter what good things you do if you do them for the wrong kingdom. Okay?

Think about two nations that are at war with each other. Let's thought maybe it's Ukraine and Russia. It doesn't matter what great and morally good things a Russian soldier does.

[18 : 41] Because his standing, he has no standing in Ukraine. Right? He belongs to the wrong kingdom. And so his actions are pointed in the wrong direction.

We think about it that way. It makes sense. Of course, none is righteous. No, not one. For under the power of the presence of the penalty of sin, there is nothing we can do that gives us any standing in the other kingdom.

In one sense, the passport illustration is good. In another sense, it isn't. Because there is no traveling between these kingdoms.

You don't show your passport at one to get into the other. No, the only way to go from one to the other is to get a new passport. He goes on to tell us.

So that's verse 10. None is righteous. No, not one. And then we get to see some more of the consequences in verse 11. We're told, no one understands. Which is Paul's way of telling us that our minds are affected by sin.

[19 : 43] The fact that sin has this real power. It's not a theoretical, abstract power. No, it's something that actually plays itself out in our day-to-day lives. One of the ways it plays itself out is that our minds don't actually work as well as we think they do.

No one understands means that your brain, your mind, your logic have been affected by sin. I'm sure you've met someone.

Maybe you are this person. Talks about how they're an independent thinker. Or they're a free thinker. You know, they don't listen to what the majority of people say or the culture around them says.

They're kind of charting their own path, heading in their own direction. Now, that's true of some people. It's not true of as many people as they claim to be true. But what Paul is saying is this. That may be true. You might be a free thinker. Or you might be an independent thinker. Your thinking, however, is never free of or independent from sin.

[20 : 55] Your thinking is never as clear as you think it is. You'll see this on page 7 of your worship guide. This is, in fact, one of my favorite, most succinct quotes of all time.

What the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. What the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies.

Which is a way of saying that when we look at the teaching of the Bible about the thinking inside our heads, it is not our logic that's running the program.

It's our sin. The tail is, in fact, truly wagging the dog. The heart decides what we want, what we love, and the mind goes to work justifying it.

And so that's why we exaggerate the sins of other people around us, and then we minimize our own sins. That's why we're blind to our own faults and our own prejudices.

[22 : 09] That's why, if we're wise, on the one hand, we might prepare well for the future, whether it's education or retirement, but somehow we fail to prepare for standing before the judgment seat of God.

Because no one understands. Sin has a real power. It has a real presence. It plays out into the way that we think.

Paul then tells us in that same verse, verse 11, no one seeks for God. Remember we talked in Romans chapter 1 that the creation itself gives us enough information for us to know there is a God that we should be looking after.

But instead, Paul's reminding us we don't take that information and do with it what we ought to. We receive that information and then we go pursue whatever it was we were going to pursue all along.

We're seeking not God's glory, but our own glory.

Now you might think, okay, that's great, but no one told me, right? No one told me that I was supposed to be seeking after God. Okay. Okay. But were you looking?

[23 : 29] Were you looking? Because Romans chapter 1 says the creation itself gives us enough information that we know that we should be looking for God.

Not a God who is there to help us pursue our own comfort and peace. You might say, man, I know many people who are looking and searching spiritually.

Great. What are they looking and searching for? Are they looking and searching for a God of mercy and grace and judgment and wrath?

Or are they looking for a God who will give them peace and comfort and prosperity? You might say, I'm a Christian.

I was looking. How can Paul say that no one seeks for him when I found myself here in this church building on Sunday morning, right?

[24 : 31] I'm proof that Paul is wrong. And you know you might be here because you were truly seeking after God.

But here's the catch. You were only seeking after God because God was seeking after you.

Romans is the fifth gospel.

Everything Paul teaches, Jesus taught first. What does Jesus tell us in John chapter 6? No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father. You sought God? That's because and only because God was seeking you.

No one understands. No one seeks for God. Paul's saying man by himself, man in his natural state, man without supernatural intervention, is blinded by his current allegiance to the wrong kingdom.

[25 : 57] John goes on to tell us the same thing in 1 John chapter 4. We love because he first loved us.

No one understands. No one seeks for God. Paul gives us the last piece here in chapter 12 or verse 12.

All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one.

Paul's saying again what he said in the previous verse.

No one's headed towards God. In their natural state, everyone is headed away from God. We're just a few weeks away from Advent.

And so you're going to hear this probably many times in the Christian world as we're in that season. Isaiah chapter 53. All we like sheep have gone astray.

[27 : 06] We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Outside of God and his grace in the lives and hearts of individual believers that he's calling to faith and trust and salvation in himself.

No one seeks God alone. If you seek God, it is because God is seeking you.

If your heart is soft towards God, that is because God has softened you. Man by himself does not run towards God.

He runs away from God. And that explains for us the last piece here of verse 12.

[28 : 19] No one does good, not even one. And again, you read that with a common sense understanding. You can think of many people who have done all sorts of good.

You can think of people who are Christians who have done good. You can think of people who are non-Christians who you've done good. And so what gives Paul the gall, the audacity, the arrogance here to say no one does good?

Well, one thing that gives him that audacity is he's actually quoting the Old Testament. John already read it for us in Psalm 14. Remember, part of what Paul's doing here is he's trying to tell the Jews, hey, you actually don't understand everything you received in the Old Testament.

You disagree with me here? Well, then you disagree with the scriptures that you revere. And so I got you. I've cornered you.

Next week, we're going to continue with what's called this chain. Commentators call it, I think, a katina is there. I'm sure I mispronounced that. Their technical word for a chain of verses where he comes at them over and over again from the Old Testament to prove to them from their book that he's right.

[29 : 35] But no one does good in this sense, that their good is pointed in the wrong direction, that their good is done as they have the wrong allegiance.

Their good is done as they hold the wrong passport. Their good is done as they're under the power and the penalty of sin.

And so no one has done good in this sense, that no one has done good in the direction of the kingdom of God. Again, Paul's not saying anything that Jesus has not taught first.

Remember the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 6. Jesus says this, When you give to the needy, sound no trumpets before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.

Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. He's saying they've done good in one sense.

[30 : 48] They haven't done good in another sense. They've done it for the wrong reason in the wrong direction. Jesus says something similar. Luke chapter 16, he says this, You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.

For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The short answer then is this, How can Paul say that no one does good when we see good being done all around us?

The answer is that we have the wrong definition of good. Good done for the wrong reason pointed in the wrong direction.

Paul here is giving us his closing argument from chapters 1 through 3. I've told you before, he's coming at this from so many different angles because he wants to close every door of escape.

Any direction someone might want to run to get away from Paul's conclusion that everyone has sinned in the sight of God and everyone's deserving of God's punishment.

[32 : 00] Any way we could wiggle out, Paul wants to stop us. And he's saying this, in this final argument here, he's saying, look, sin is so bad that it is like a power or a rain.

Sin is so bad that it is like an infection that's taken over your whole body. It's even worse than that. In fact, it's not just an infection, it's a cancer. It is a new and powerful presence within you.

So Paul closes all the doors. He refutes all the excuses so that we would see this, how desperate our condition is. And as I've told you before, the gospel is the news that we must change and we cannot change ourselves.

We need salvation from somewhere else. In fact, it is so bad, we can't even seek it without God's help.

And so he's going to go on and we're going to look at this in just a couple weeks. Paul will say this. This is what he's preparing us for. Romans chapter 3, verse 22. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

[33 : 24] We have no righteousness. There must be righteousness from somewhere else. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.

Do you know that you need to change? Do you know that you're broken even in your ability to think clearly?

Because what the heart loves, the will chooses and the mind justifies. Do you know that by yourself, you cannot and will not seek God?

There is, in fact, only one way out. And we're going to sing about it now.

In other words, You bore the wrath reserved for me.

[34 : 55] Now all I know is grace. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you for your word, which tells us the bad news that we can't wiggle out of your judgment and our sin and reminds us of the good news, that you do come and change hearts and minds of stone to hearts and minds of flesh.

We ask that you would do that for us this morning, that you'd fill us again with an understanding of our great need for the gospel, and you'd show us your mercy as you meet us at that very same point of need.

And we ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. I invite you to stand for our...