

The Law Shows Sin

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[0 : 0 0] You may be seated. Good morning. My name's 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 as I mentioned that, I should say, we started Romans at the very beginning in chapter 1. I was good about saying, hey, we're going to break at some point and take a pause, and we're coming up to that.

So we're going to finish Romans chapter 3, which is sort of this concise argument that I've been telling you. It goes together. Paul's trying to say one thing in Romans chapters 1 through 3.

[1 : 1 2] We're going to break, and then we probably will not come back to Romans chapter 4 until sometime in 2025. So I don't want you to be caught off guard by that. But we are in Romans this morning, and you'll remember that Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD, and it is called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it is 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 it, as we saw in chapter 1, is that these people in these churches would be established in the gospel.

Paul has many applications. We have already and we will explore many different topics. And yet he always returns back to, he has a special focus on the mission and the unity of the church.

And so there are many spokes, many different things we're going to explore. We're going to be constantly, even this morning, coming back to the hub of the gospel. In these verses, verses 19 through 20, Paul is going to put the last nail in the coffin, the summary of the argument that he's been making in these three chapters in Romans.

He's going to bring to conclusion, in a sense, preparing us for next week, where he explains again the good news of the gospel, the conclusion that everyone, Jews and Gentiles, deserve God's judgment.

[2 : 4 7] Everyone needs God's mercy. And so it's with that that I invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 3. You can turn in your Bible.

You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5 tells us, every word of God proves true.

He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 3, starting at verse 19. Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you as we do every Sunday, that you have given us your words, that you speak to us, that you instruct us, that you haven't abandoned us or left us alone.

[4 : 04] But instead, you're a good father who cares for his children, who guides them, who comforts them, who directs them. And so we ask that you would do that again this morning, that you would help us to understand and believe what you've written here in Romans chapter 3.

And most of all, that you would help us to see Jesus Christ, that we would grow in our love and our affection, our reverence and our all, our obedience to him. And we ask these things in his mighty name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. In 1998 or 1999, my family decided to finally become a dog family.

And we adopted a dog from our local humane society. We had had two guinea pigs before that who quickly became very boring and were greatly ignored. And we took the name that the shelter had already given to this dog, which was Tramp.

And Tramp had presumably, we think, escaped from his previous owners because he tried many times to escape from us. He liked trying to get out from under the fence and climb over all sorts of things, which I think was just kind of genetic in him.

[5 : 18] But was one great advantage that we had with Tramp adopting him when he was already a year old, and it was this, his previous owners had already housebroken him.

And so we didn't have to worry about training Tramp to go outside to use the bathroom. Although, as you know, if you're a pet owner, whether it's a cat or a dog, you may have that problem.

You may have that problem if your pet is young, and you may have that problem if your pet is old. And this is something that carpet cleaning companies have figured out.

And so they have a technique that they use to show you your deep need for deep cleaning. There's a pastor in Idaho named Stephen Kingsley, who at one point ran a carpet cleaning business.

And he says this, In our family carpet cleaning business, we offered a special service for removing pet urine odors to show potential customers their need for the service.

[6 : 20] I would darken the room and then turn on a powerful black light. The black light caused urine crystals to glow brightly. To the horror of the homeowner, every drop and dribble could be seen, not only on the carpet, but usually on the walls, drapes, furniture, and even on lampshades.

One homeowner begged me to shut off the light. They said, I can't bear to see any more. I don't care what it costs. Please clean it up.

Another woman said, I'll never be comfortable in my home again. Now speaking of that, we are picking up where we left off last week.

And remember, Paul tells us these passages from the Old Testament, and his point there, which he sums up here, the law does not save you.

It exposes you. It reveals you. We might say it another way. The Ten Commandments are the black light, which reveal the urine of your sin.

[7 : 37] And if you think that it's inappropriate, if it's scandalous to talk about urine in church, I'll tell you what's more scandalous.

What's more scandalous is our sin against a holy God. That's what's more scandalous. That's what's more shocking. One pastor puts it this way, The law is not a checklist we keep.

It is a benchmark we fail. The law is not a checklist we keep. It's a benchmark we fail. That raises the question, though, what do we mean when we say the law?

Paul tells us here, verse 19, Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law. Well, thankfully, this is in context.

Paul has just given us these quotations from the Old Testament, mostly from the Psalms, in verses 13 through 18. That's what we saw last week. He gave us these quotations. That's why, by the way, if you are using an ESV Bible, if you look at verses 13 through 18, you'll see a bunch of quotation marks.

[8 : 51] The reason you see those quotation marks is because Paul has simply been giving a list of passages from the Old Testament. Those words in verses 13 and 18 are not really his. They're the words of those who came before him, most of them from the Psalms.

And so when he says, we know what the law says, he's meaning by the law the entire Old Testament. Look at these things I've just quoted from the Psalms, from the prophets.

Those things that I reminded you of, that is what applies to you. We even saw this at the beginning of chapter 3.

Remember, chapter 3, verses 1 through 2, he says, the oracles of God are the great blessing that the Jewish people have been given. And yet those same oracles, again, this is last week, show, they reveal our sin.

They show our sin in our mouth or our words for all of us, and they show violence for some of this. Paul then is saying once again and what he has said many times in the last couple chapters, which is this.

[10 : 03] You think having the Old Testament gives you a pass? You think the blessing of possessing the law is enough? No.

It's the very opposite. It doesn't give you a pass. It doesn't cover your sin. It shows your sin. It doesn't excuse your sin.

It reveals your sin. Reveals the sins of Jewish people who think they're okay because they're Jews. Reveals the sins of religious people who think they're okay because they're religious.

Paul is saying this. You know from the Old Testament what God requires. But have you done it?

We might say, Christian, you know from the Old and New Testaments what God requires. But have we done it?

[11 : 14] All of it. Paul then goes on to say that whatever the law speaks, it speaks to those who are under the law. Under the law here literally means in the law.

In other words, those who have access to God's commands. In other words, he's saying whoever's been given what God says, whether it's Jews or religious people, those people are accountable, as we saw in chapter two, for what they've been given.

And what happens when we see this clearly? Well, he goes on to tell us that same verse, verse 19, so that every mouth may be stopped.

The illustration here is of someone who's in a courtroom. They're being accused. All the evidence has been presented. And the evidence is so clear, so irrefutable, so damning, that when they're asked, how do you plead, they don't say innocent or guilty.

They can't say anything. That's how overwhelming it is. That's what the Christian, what the Jew, what the reader of this passage is meant to feel after verses 13 through 18.

[12 : 36] That's what they're meant to feel as they review everything that God has given in his word, that as we stand against the standard of God's holy law, there is no response.

Remember, Paul's been closing every door. He's been cinching every loophole so that there is no way to get out. There is burning clarity about the guilt of every human being.

He's saying when you compare yourself to God's law, the case is so devastating that it's what we might call an open and shut case. No one should make it through chapter one, chapter two, and chapter three of Romans and get to this point and think, you know, actually I'm good.

None of what Paul says applies to me. No, he says even more than that. It's not just that it applies to you. Again, verse 19, the whole world may be held accountable to God.

That phrase held accountable actually means guilty here. Remember we talked last week about what Paul says in verse 18. He says there's no fear of God before their eyes.

[14 : 00] And I told you having the fear of God means having a right view of God. It means understanding that God is in fact the judge of all the earth. And so Paul is saying as all of humanity stands before God and he functions as judge, our mouths are stopped.

Because the black light of God's law reveals our sin. It might have looked good before we looked at the law.

We might have thought we were great people before we understood the Ten Commandments. Now our mouths are stopped. What Paul teaches Jesus taught first.

Remember Jesus' Sermon on the Mount Matthew chapter 5. He takes the Ten Commandments and says, hey, you might think that you're good. You might think you've kept all of these. You actually haven't.

Because it's not just about the action but about the heart. And so Jesus gives some specific examples. You think you're good? You've never murdered anyone? Well, guess what?

[15 : 17] If you've ever cursed your brother then you're guilty of murder. You've never committed adultery? You think you're good? Guess what? If you've ever lusted after someone you've committed adultery.

Of course, those are just a couple of examples. The law exposes us in so many places. We are commanded to honor God with our wealth but we honor ourselves instead.

The fourth commandment tells us rest is a non-negotiable. And yet somehow we don't trust God enough to take a break. The Psalms tell us over and over again that we run to God first in prayer.

But instead we run first to addictions and distractions. Jesus tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves but instead we mock them and discount them.

The black light reveals so much. For by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

[16 : 49] I mentioned this phrase earlier in our worship service during our confession of faith. This idea that no human being will be justified in God's sight. And so you already have a sense of what it means to be justified.

It means to have this right standing before God that you and God are in relationship with one another. Sort of what I talk about when we take communion that if God has invited us to a table that means we're at peace with him.

Our sins have been forgiven. Christ's righteousness has been credited to us. And Paul tells us here that's not going to happen through works of the law. In other words there is nothing we can do to earn anything from God or to prove anything to God.

And the works of the law certainly won't help. Our behavior certainly won't help and we find out exactly why. Verse 20 again since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

And Paul's highlighting here a critical point. Shows up in other letters that he's written. The law can show sin.

[18 : 06] It cannot heal sin. The law can expose the heart. It cannot change the heart. The black light shows the urine.

The black light will never clean the urine. The problem isn't the black light right? The problem is the stain.

The problem is not the law. There's nothing wrong with the law. The problem with sin. The law is never intended to heal or restore.

The law will show us our need. It will not meet our need. The law will show us the problem. It will not fix the problem. We see this phrase too in verse 20.

It says no human being will be justified in his sight. Literally there it says no flesh will be justified. And so Paul's highlighting again the weakness of humanity.

[19 : 11] We could think of Elrond the elf and the lord of the rings when he says that short sentence men are weak. That's what Paul's saying here.

Men are weak. Men are weak. They need something greater than the law. Now I've been telling you for many weeks now that in chapters 1 through 3 Paul is saying one thing.

And the one thing he's saying will come next week in verse 23. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That raises a question though. Why does it take three chapters?

Why couldn't Paul have told us verse 23 right up front? Right? Why could we not have heard you know the righteousness of God? It's from faith for faith to all who believe. And then we just jump.

We could skip basically two chapters and go to verse 23. The reason is this. Paul wants us to understand with burning clarity the bad news of the gospel.

[20 : 23] And Paul wants us to understand the bad news of the gospel with that sort of clarity so that we can finally and fully see the good news of the gospel.

It makes no sense what verse 24 will tell us if we don't understand and embrace and admit verse 23. There is no point in telling us Jesus offers you his righteousness if we don't understand our need.

And so Paul goes verse by verse, argument by argument for three chapters so that we would not miss this. that our only hope in life and in death is that we are saved by our Lord Jesus Christ.

He wants us to know Jesus is the only option, he's the only way of escape. That's why he answers every excuse refutes every argument.

That's why he spends chapter one speaking about the lack of excuses for the non-religious. That's why he spends chapter two speaking about the lack of excuses for the religious so that in chapter three he can show us the great beauty and clarity of the gospel so that we cannot escape our great need.

[21 : 57] Stephen Kingsley, the pastor from Idaho who cleaned carpets, goes on to say this, the offense was there all the time but it was invisible until the right light exposed it.

It would have been cruel to show customers the extent of their problem and then say too bad for you and then walk away. I brought the light so they might desperately want my cleaning services.

brothers and sisters, Paul has spent three chapters explaining the extent of human sin so that we would want the gospel.

Paul has spent verse after verse unfolding how bad it is so that we would see our need for Jesus Christ.

carpets can't clean themselves. They need the power and mercy of someone else. Christian, or if you're not a Christian, you cannot clean yourself.

[23 : 17] You need the power and mercy of someone else. to there is one who offers to cleanse us. There is one who offers to make us right with God, and it is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

He's the one who lived the life that we should have lived and credits that to our account. He's the one who dies the death that we should have died and removes the punishment that we deserve.

In his sermon on these verses, Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones ends by quoting the hymn, The Solid Rock, because that's what Paul is driving us towards.

On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you.

and thank you that you do not gloss over the truth, you don't quickly pass it by, you don't mutter it under your breath, but instead you make it clear and plain to us.

[24 : 33] We ask that you would do that again, that we would see with great clarity our desperate need for you, and that would move us to embrace you and follow you like we have never before.

and we ask these things in Jesus' name, amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. Pete bin mission rise into prix