

INTRODUCTION

I invite you to open your Bibles to Romans, chapter 3. I heard about a funny chain letter going around. It's being sent to the Chairmen of Deacons of Baptist churches. It's a typical chain letter:

Dear Mr. Deacon:

If you are tired of your preacher, send a copy of this letter to seven other churches who are probably tired of their preachers. Then, send your preacher to the church at the top of this list, and add the name of your church to the bottom of this list.

In 30 days you will have received 2,187 new preachers and out of that many you might find one that you like.

One church broke the chain and got their old preacher back.

The only kind of chain letter the apostle Paul, knew about was the letters he wrote when he was "in chains." He wrote this letter to the church at Rome where one day he would spend several years chained in a prison.

Today the message is pretty strong against sin. After the first service, a man walked by with his wife behind him, and he said, "Man, you beat me up pretty badly today." Before I could say anything, his wife kind of nudged him and said, "That wasn't the preacher; that was the Holy Spirit." Today, if you feel some conviction, I want you to know that's the Holy Spirit honoring his word. Today I want to talk about "Look in the Mirror," because when you read Romans 3, beginning in verse 9, you see a reflection of human nature—and it's not a very pretty picture.

Let's begin reading in Romans 3:9. "What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written." What he is about to do is take eight Old Testament scriptures and link them together, and he is

going to present 13 indictments, or a 13-count indictment against human nature Let's begin in verse 10. "As it is written:"

"There is no righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."

It had been a long day for the cosmetic saleslady. She was on her feet all day in a large department store, and just before closing time a man frantically rushed up and said, "Tomorrow's my wife's birthday. I don't have anything. Now, I want to buy her something." She brought out a nice bottle of perfume worth about \$95. He said, "Oh, that's way too expensive!" So she brought out some \$65 cologne. He said, "That's still too expensive. What do you have that's less expensive?" She brought out a \$30 bottle of perfume, a small one. He said, "That's still too expensive! What else do you have?" She brought out the cheapest thing she had at the counter, a tiny \$15 bottle of cologne. He said, "You don't understand, "I want you to show me something cheap." So, she took a mirror, turned it to him and said, "LOOK!"

Ladies and gentlemen, that's exactly what the Bible is doing today. You and I are going to see our reflection in the word of God today, and it's not a pretty picture. It's like the lady who took her photographs back to the photographer and said, "I want my money back. These pictures don't do me justice!" He looked at the pictures, and looked at her, and said, "Madam, you don't need justice, you need mercy." Today when we look at this passage of scripture, you are going to see none of us needs justice, but we all need mercy.

I. THE CURSE: MY FALLEN NATURE

The message today is real simple. I want to talk to you about, first of all, the curse that we're all under. I call this my guilty nature, because we all have a guilty nature. Then I want to talk about the cure which is God's gracious nature.

The Bible really is a mirror. The founder of the Presbyterian Church, John Calvin, wrote this about the Bible. "The Bible is like a mirror. In it we see our imperfections and the curse that comes with it just as a mirror shows us the spots on our face." Now, you ladies who use these magnified makeup mirrors with the lights on the side of it, you are pretty brave. There have been a couple of times I sat down at Cindy's makeup mirror and turned it on and looked in it, and I'll tell you what, I turned it off real quick because I don't like what I see. It's not a very pretty picture in there because it enhances and it magnifies any little imperfection you might have. I understand why you do that. You want to cover it up, but I promise you the word of God, as John Calvin says, is like a magnified mirror that brings out our imperfections. I want you to see how guilty we all are.

Many of you are familiar with Ann Landers. Every week Ann Landers receives over one thousand letters. When someone asked her recently, "Is there one overriding theme that seems to come out from most of the letters?" She said, "Yes, absolutely! It's guilt." People say, "What's wrong with me?" This is what Ann Landers writes about guilt and I want you to know before I read it, I do not agree with her. She says, "One of the most painful, self-mutilating, time and energy consuming exercises in the human experience is guilt. It can ruin your day, or your week, or your life." She says, "Remember that guilt is like pollution, we don't need any more of it in the world." With that she goes on to another topic. You know how she dismisses guilt? She just says, "It's there, it's bad. Don't deal with it, just deny it."

I'm sad to report to you there are churches today that never talk much about sin anymore. Just as there are "fat-free" foods, there are churches preaching "guilt-free" Christianity. They never talk about sin. They never talk about guilt. They simply ignore it. That's the attitude Ann Landers takes. I tend to agree with John MacArthur, the Bible teacher from California who writes this about guilt. He says, "No matter how often a man tells himself he is good, he inevitably sees that he cannot help thinking, saying, and doing wrong things, and then feeling guilty about it. Guilt drives people to alcohol, drugs, despair, insanity and more, and more frequently to suicide. After playing psychological games about blaming his environment, or other people, or society in general, man still cannot escape the feeling of his own guilt. People want to get rid of their guilty feelings, but they do not know how. The more they probe for solutions, the more guilty they feel." and here's his summary "Men feel guilty because they are guilty. The guilty feeling is only the symptom of the real problem which is sin."

Let me simplify that: You and I struggle with guilt, because we're guilty. The sooner you and I admit we are sinners by nature and by choice, and we are guilty, the sooner we can move on to receive the forgiveness of God. That's what Paul is doing here. He is showing us a reflection of our guilt. Let's notice it in four areas.

1. We all start with sinful minds

We all start with sinful minds! If you'll look at verses, 11 and 12, it says, "No one understands. No one really seeks God." It says, "All have turned away. They have together become worthless." That's a picture of how we all have depraved, degenerate minds.

When I was a kid, Mike, my favorite cousin was and I got in a lot of trouble, but Mike was a lot meaner than I was. He got in a lot more trouble than I did. One day, he played a terrible trick on me. Mike knew I liked drinking cold milk. I still to this day like to drink a nice, tall glass of cold milk. Well, Mike and I had been playing at his house, and we were hot and sweaty, and he said, "Let me get you something to drink." He brought out to me a nice, tall glass of milk and I grabbed it from him and guzzled it down. After I had about two swallows down my throat, all of a sudden I realized my taste buds went crazy. I realized the milk was sour! Mike was standing nearby with his glass of water laughing like crazy. I did what most of you would have done—I spit the milk out in his face and tore into him. We weren't kissing cousins—we were kicking cousins that day. But, because of that one experience drinking sour milk, to this day I do

something that drives my wife crazy. Every time I open the refrigerator and pull out a carton of milk, I smell it, because all it takes is one taste of sour milk until you learn your lesson.

You wonder "What does that have to do with the sermon? What's the point?" Look at verse 12 again. "They have all together become worthless" That word "worthless" literally means "something that has gone sour". It means "something that has spoiled." That's a statement about our hearts, about our character. We all have rotten hearts and rotten minds. Have you ever heard the phrase, "rotten to the core"? That's me and that's you. We all start out with sinful minds. In fact, Paul is so convinced of this, if you look at the last part of verse 12 where he says, "there is no one who does good, not even one," he employs one of the rare uses in the Bible of a triple negative.

Do you remember what a double negative was when you were in school? Your teacher told you, "Don't never use double negatives!" In English a double negative cancels itself out, but in the Greek language it just doubles the intensity, and here he uses a triple negative. That's like saying "Don't not never;" it's three times as strong. He says there is not never no never one person who has ever really done good. That's what he is saying. That's how depraved and sinful our minds are.

2. We all start with sinful mouths

Then, he moves on, number two, and he says, "We also start out with sinful mouths." Paul identifies four of the speech-producing body parts, and he says they are all messed up. Have you discovered the way most people sin is by what they say and how they say it? I have no research to back this up, but I'm convinced people sin more by what they say, than by what they do and what they think. That's why in Proverbs 6 when God mentions six things he hates, three of the six have to do with what you say. Here, Paul just turns the mirror on the way we talk and how we all start out with dirty, sinful mouths. Notice the four parts.

He, first of all, says, "our throats are like open graves" now, I don't want to offend any of you too much here, but you can't avoid it. That's pretty indelicate, a rotting, stinking, putrefying corpse, he says that's what the human throat is about as it speaks. Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of a person's heart, his mouth speaks." If you have bad breath, gargle with Scope, but there is not a mouthwash you can gargle that will take away the bad, sinful heart we all have. He says without Jesus Christ a person's throat is like an open grave.

The second part of the speech-producing body part he talks about is their tongues. Look at verse 13. He says, "Their tongues practice deceit." Have you ever noticed you do not have to teach a baby to lie? We don't have classes on Lying 101, Deceit 201. It's the most natural thing in the world for a little child to just start lying. Nobody had to teach you how to lie. You don't have to teach a child to lie; you have to teach them *not* to lie. We are all deceitful in our human, guilty condition.

Do you remember the player George Steinbrenner, an owner of the New York Yankees, did not get along very well with? *Sports Illustrated* interviewed this baseball player. The ballplayer said you couldn't trust what George Steinbrenner said. When asked "When could you tell that George

Steinbrenner was lying?" the ballplayer said, "When his lips were moving." In other words it is our tendency just to deceive people. That's our human nature. That's our guilty nature.

Look at the third body part there. It says in verse 13, "Their lips are like poison vipers." That's a very graphic phrase. Back then there was a poisonous snake called an Eastern Adder, much like our rattlesnake. In its throat was a sac full of venom. As long as the snake was calm, the sac of venom was there safe and the fangs were up against the roof of the snake's mouth, but whenever the snake was provoked, and it struck at something, those hollow fangs extended and pressure was placed on the poison sac and the venom went up through those fangs into whatever the snake was biting. We've all been around rattlesnakes. We know about them.

Could you imagine how destructive it would be to take a few rattlesnakes and throw them into a playground where little toddlers were playing? You say, "That's just beyond imagination!" The Bible says you and I have two things on our face right now, our lips, that by what we say and how we say it, are more destructive than rattlesnakes! We all have learned that what we learned as kids is not true. Do you remember when they told us, "Sticks and stones will break your bones, but words can never hurt you"? I hope you didn't believe that, because when they use sticks and stones to injure you, those injuries will heal. But, some of you right now have been hurt by things said to you that are still an open wound. There are others of you who have said things to people, unkind, hateful, hurtful things, and it has not healed. You have to understand in our own human, fallen nature, what we say and how we say it can be very destructive.

3. We all start with sinful manners

In verse 14 he says, "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." We live in a vulgar, profane society, don't we? I have said this before, but it blows my mind. My dad tells me when he first went to the movie, "Gone With The Wind," and Rhett Butler uttered that final line, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a d***." (and you know what he didn't give) My dad said people were appalled at that, a word which now is considered a very benign, mild expletive was spoken through the media outraged! We've come a long way, baby and all in the wrong direction. We are a vulgar, profane society.

What really hurts is that a lot of people name the name of Jesus Christ. You get them outside the walls of this church, and I'll guarantee you they are just as profane and vulgar as people who don't even claim to be Christians. You say, "Where does that come from?" I'll tell you where it comes from. It comes from a fallen, sinful, wicked heart. That's what the Bible says. "Sinful minds, sinful mouth." We act wickedly because we have sinful hearts and we speak evil. Look at verse 15. It says, "Their feet are swift to shed blood." I've said it before, but America has never been more advanced technologically, and we have never been more retarded morally than we are today. We think we are going to advance. We think we're going to get better. All you have to do to see how wicked the human heart still is today is go down to Jasper, Texas, and see where a couple of rednecks dragged a man behind their pickup truck. Be careful that you don't look in judgment upon those men for there is in every human heart the capacity to do the most heinous crime you can imagine. That's just the way we are. We are a violent society, and getting more violent by the day.

One of the problems we are facing today is so bad the government has undertaken a study to try to come up with a resolution. It is called “road rage.” It’s the phenomenon we see happen on the streets and highways when somebody is cut off or when somebody runs a red light in front of somebody else. There are people driving them down, stopping them, getting out and pounding on them. This “road rage” is a phenomenon we are experiencing today because we are a violent society. “Our feet are swift to shed blood.” We run toward violence.

Are you ready for this staggering statistic? Dr. Alan Barnett, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology statistician, says a child born in America in the 1990s has a greater statistical probability of being murdered than did an American soldier who left for World War II. That is unbelievable!

4. We all start with sinful misery

People are so miserable because they haven’t dealt with the guilt of sin in their life. Look at verse 16, “Ruin and misery mark their ways.” There are a lot of people today who are absolutely miserable! The sad thing is there are a lot of people who claim to be Christians who are miserable. When I look over the congregation on Sunday mornings, I would say there are more pleasant faces on a bottle of poison than there are on most people who name the name of Jesus. In Baptist churches we have cultivated the “holy look” which is kind of a cross between acid indigestion and a migraine headache. Sometimes I feel like saying, “If Jesus is in your heart, why don’t you tell your face about it?” There is so much misery today because people have not unloaded the guilt that comes along with sin.

There are two reasons for misery. First of all, there is no peace and there is no fear. Look at verse 17. “The way of peace they do not know, and there is no fear of God before their eyes.” I loved my dad and my dad loved me. He was a man’s man, but I am not ashamed or embarrassed to tell you I feared my dad too. I was not frightened of him, but I had a profound respect for him and his authority over me, such that there were some things he told me to do, and if I didn’t do them, he was going to pull off his belt, and we were going to go round and round. There were some things I did because I feared my dad’s punishment. There were some things I did not do because I was afraid of my dad’s punishment. You say, “Did you tremble in fear before your daddy?” No, not one time, but I had a profound respect for him. When it says we ought to fear God, and it says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, that doesn’t mean you are frightened of God. It doesn’t mean you cringe in terror before God. It means you have such a profound respect for God you take his judgment seriously, and it causes you to do things you would not ordinarily do, and it causes you to refrain from doing things you would do if you did not fear God. That’s the problem. That, my friends, is the picture of a human heart without Jesus Christ. Yes, that’s the curse. The curse of sin, our guilty nature.

II. THE CURE: GOD’S FORGIVING NATURE

Since all of this has been so bad and so negative, now I want to talk about the good news. I want to talk about the cure, and that’s God’s gracious nature. We have a problem. We’re sinners by nature and by choice. That’s the curse of sin. The good news is God loves us and he has made a way of forgiveness and that’s his gracious nature.

1. God's law makes me see my faults

It is God's law that makes me see my failure. Look at verse 19, "so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable." Look at the last part of verse 20 "it's through the law that we become conscious of sin." In Galatians 3:24 it says, "So the law was put in charge" that means in the Old Testament "to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." Now, I want to commit a great oversimplification. If you want to know what the whole message of the Bible is all about, take the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament God revealed His righteous law so we could see we are sinners. Here are the Ten Commandments and the commandments of the Old Testament. People tried to keep them, and they said, "We just can't keep them. It's impossible." God gave the law so people would say, "I'm guilty, I cannot obey the law." God's law is to prove our sin.

Here's the New Testament: God's love so he could provide our salvation. If we didn't know there was a law making us sinners, how would we know we needed a Savior? That's why God sent his son, Jesus. The only thing the law does is make us realize we are failures. Some of you have heard about Chuck Colson. He was involved in the Watergate Affair in 1974, and served time in prison because of his involvement. He became a born-again Christian and wrote a book called, "Born Again." For many years he has been involved in a prison ministry around America. Chuck Colson goes into Federal Pens, State Pens, County Jails and ministers to prisoners. He has sat down face to face and interacted with thousands of inmates. He makes an amazing observation. "Of all the inmates I have ever talked to, nine out of ten declare their innocence. They say, "I shouldn't be in here! I didn't do it! I was framed. The system got me. Somebody was out to get me. I shouldn't be in this place!" He said only one out of ten inmates admit, "Hey, I'm guilty. I did the crime. I'm going to do the time." Chuck Colson said he has heard every kind of excuse imaginable throughout the years from these people who claim innocence. He says he has listened to so many of them that many, many times while these people are talking to him justifying their behavior, trying to excuse their crime he wanted to look them in the eye and point his finger and say, "Why don't you just shut up!," but he says he never did it because he tries to show the kindness and love the New Testament teaches.

One day every sinner who is guilty who has never received God's forgiveness will stand before God and they will be ready to make a lot of excuses. "I never became a Christian because of all those hypocrites down at Green Acres Baptist Church." or, "I never became a Christian because I went once, and all he talked about was money." or, "I didn't understand the Bible." They're going to make all those excuses, or they're going to be ready to make all those excuses, but I want you to look at verse 19. Did you notice it says "every mouth may be silenced"? For every person who is going to try to excuse their sin before God, he is going to say in His holy righteousness, "You shut your mouth!" When God says, "Shut your mouth" your mouth will shut! There will be no person who can make one acceptable excuse before God. The only reason God gave the law was to make us realize we are sinners. We are failures.

Have you come to that point in your life? Our tendency is to say, "Well, I'm not as bad as Charles Manson. I'm not as bad as Jeffrey Dahmer. I'm not as bad as those guys in Jasper. I'm not as bad as McVeigh—quit trying to compare yourself with other people, and just admit it: I am

a sinner by nature and by choice. There is no way I can ever be good enough to earn God's acceptance. You will never be saved until you admit that you are a moral failure.

2. God's love makes me seek His forgiveness

God's love makes me seek his forgiveness. That's why I need to be forgiven because God loves me so much he's willing to provide forgiveness to every sinner who will trust him. I love Romans 5:8. "But God demonstrated his own love for us in this while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Aren't you glad God didn't say, "Ok, when you guys clean up your act, I'll forgive you." No, he said, while we're still sinners Christ died for us.

One of the classic books in the Christian community today is *Peace With God* by Billy Graham. In the book, Billy Graham writes about going to the largest mental institution in England when he was doing a crusade there. There were hundreds of people in this mental institution. He asked the director, "What's the main problem here?" The director said, "We could empty half the beds in this place if these people knew they could be forgiven, and then they could forgive themselves."

You may have one of two forgiveness problems here today. You may not have ever sought God's forgiveness. If you haven't done that, do it today! Some of you who have been forgiven by God though, have not forgiven yourself. You don't realize you are clean and pure before God because of the cross of Jesus. Remember, I talked about those makeup mirrors before, ladies. Do you know what these "makeovers" are? There is a "before" picture (you have to think they try to make them ugly) and then, after all these cosmetics and everything are applied, you look at the next picture, and say, "Wow, it's hard to believe that's the same person!" That's a picture of salvation. The first picture we looked at today is pretty ugly, but a sinner saved by Jesus Christ when God looks at you, you are just as pure as Jesus was. Isn't that great?

CONCLUSION

Before I came to Texas, I had read about a Texan I developed some admiration for who died in the early 1900s. His name was R.C. Buckner. R. C. was a typical Texan caricature. He was a big, loud, bold, brash man who wore cowboy boots. But, he had a tender heart for children. That's why he started Buckner's Children's Homes all across the state. The kids used to call him "Papa Buckner," and he would frequently visit these children's homes for orphans. When he visited these homes, the children gathered around Papa Buckner, pulling on his pants and tugging on his sleeves. He would take the time to pick up every child and hug them. Every one of the children in those orphan homes was hugged every time he went.

One day he was in one of the homes and as he was hugging the children crowded around him, he glanced over and noticed a little girl who was standing with her face toward the wall. She had been hideously burned in an accident, and had a terrible scar on her face. He went over to her and he said, "Sweetheart, don't you want Papa Buckner to hug you?" She said, "No, I'm too ugly." So he swept her right into his arms, looked her right in the eye, bent over and planted a tender kiss right in the burned portion of her face. He said, "Sweetheart, you are beautiful to me, and you are beautiful to God." She never forgot that. You may say, "Well, that's a tender story."

It's a million times more tender to think of a holy God who loves you so much he was willing to send his son to come down to the cross in spite of all our imperfections, in spite of the hideous deformities in our nature when Jesus died on the cross, it was God wrapping his arms of love around us. When he paid for our sins, it was the kiss of God upon our sins saying, "That's how much I love you." If you are without Jesus Christ, (I don't know how you can reject that kind of love) if you are so hard-hearted you reject that kind of offer of love, well, truly, *may God have mercy on your soul!*

OUTLINE

I. THE CURSE: MY FALLEN NATURE

We all start with sinful:

1. Minds (11-12)
2. Mouths (13-14)
3. Manners (15)
4. Misery (16-18)
 - * No peace *
 - * No fear *

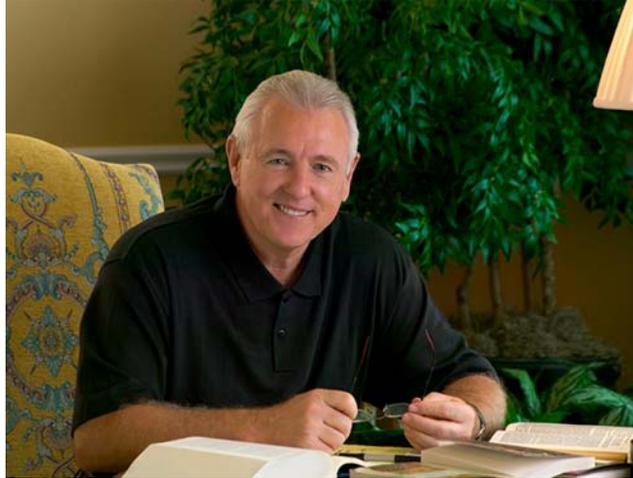
II. THE CURE: GOD'S FORGIVING NATURE

1. God's law makes me see my faults

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. *Galatians 3:24*

2. God's love makes me seek His forgiveness

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes