

DISCUSSION GUIDE: ROMANS 3:9-20
APRIL 2, 2017

In Romans 3:9-20, Paul wraps up his case against all humanity before a holy and righteous God. Understanding Romans 1-3 and Paul's summary argument are vital to our understanding the good news of the gospel that comes in v21 and following. Read Romans 3:9-20 again in your group before you go over the questions below.

1). Paul's imagery is vivid in this passage as he strings together quotes from the Old Testament. He says mankind is "under sin." In other words, sin is the master of fallen man. For Paul, sin was not something mankind could manage or cope with, but rather a cruel task master.

—Discuss contemporary perceptions of the problems of mankind. How does our culture view our predicament compared to the picture the Bible paints?

—Read Ephesians 2:1-3 and 1 John 5:19. What is mankind's natural condition before God?

—Read Colossians 1:13-14. Discuss the implications of the imagery of this passage that says we have been delivered and transferred from the kingdom of darkness to God's Kingdom.

2). One of the more central doctrines in the history of the church is the doctrine of the total depravity of mankind. The phrase "total depravity" does not mean that man is necessarily as bad as he could be, rather, it means that every aspect of our personhood (in total) is fallen and in need of salvation. In vv 13-17, Paul continues to quote various OT passages that mention parts of the body (throat, tongue, mouth, feet, eyes). It seems as though Paul is wanting to show that every part of man is fallen and tainted by sin.

—Read through vv13-17. The language may seem jarring to our ears. Why is this?

—What does it say about us if our default is to think the language of this passage is "over the top" or describing other people who are really bad and not us?

—If mankind by nature is totally depraved, what implications does this have for our understanding of salvation? (Think in terms of how certain church cultures minimize salvation as merely a prayer to pray or simply spiritual fire insurance).

3). In vv19-20, Paul sums up the argument of the last few chapters by saying that all people are accountable to God and no one has any excuses to make.

—Discuss the word “accountable.” What does it mean for mankind to be accountable to God?

—In v20 Paul says the law cannot justify us, rather, its purpose is to illuminate sin. In other words, the law is meant to drive us to our need for Christ, not make us self-righteous. What effect should this have on our tendency toward legalism?

—If all people are guilty before God with mouths shut, what impact should this have on how we view other people (especially those from other cultures who we may be tempted to view as more “lost” than ours)?