

Intro:

In our study we have been working our way through Paul's **foundational teaching** about the gospel.

He starts with a proposition:

Rom 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

What Paul means by this is that *all men are sinners who need to be saved*. This is the **foundation** of the gospel.

Most of what we have seen so far is propositional:

- 1.18-32 – the proposition: the Pagan man is under wrath (natural rev)
- 2.1-16 – the proposition: the Moral man is under condemnation (conscience)
- 2.17-32 – the proposition: the Religious man is subject to judgement (special revelation)

A **proposition** is “the point to be discussed or maintained in argument usually stated in sentence form near the outset; a theorem or problem to be demonstrated or performed.”¹

In other words, it is a statement boldly proclaimed, a fact that is maintained.

Everything from 1.18-2.32 is essentially the declaration of the proposition in full: *all men are under the wrath of God and need to be saved*.

In chapter three, we have been dealing with **argumentation**. Paul imagines certain objections from some religious quarters and dismisses them. Now we are at the “no excuses” stage.

And finally, the section we are about to enter is *the proof*.

Paul has declared a position, he has argued for the position, now he offers **proof**, and the matter is settled.

Where does he turn for proof? To the Word of God.

(By the way, one of the reasons I believe the Word of God is because it so accurately describes the human condition. No other so-called sacred book does this, in my opinion.)

¹ Merriam-Webster, Inc. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 10th ed. Springfield, Mass., U.S.A.: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1993.

Read Rm 3.9-20

Now, this whole section proves Paul's case by appealing to the court of last resort: God's Holy Word.

But before he sets forth his proof, Paul sums it all up in one last restatement of the proposition, and that is our text today, Rm 3.9

Proposition: Man is not only a sinner; he is dominated and ruled by his sin.

I. The question of advantage

A. Two summary questions – bring the argument to conclusion

1. What then?
2. Are we better than they?

B. The meaning of the questions is somewhat ambiguous

1. Much discussion in the commentaries on this point
2. Form of the verb is somewhat unusual
3. Meaning uncertain:

- a. Is it saying, "Are we (the Jews) better than they (the Gentiles)?"
- b. Or, "Are we (the Jews) excelled by they (the Gentiles)?" [Are we worse off?]

1) Whole summary of the argument could come down to this idea: since the Jews have the revelation of God and rebelled, does that make them worse off than the Gentiles?

2) This is a possible meaning, but the translators seem to go with the first option

4. "Are we better than they?"

- a. In other words, Paul sums up all the arguments from v. 1 to v. 8 with this question
- b. The Jews supposed that they *were* better than the Gentiles, so they reacted to Paul's propositions about their sin
- c. In putting this question in their mouths, Paul is asking whether it is possible that Jews have any better standing before God than Gentiles

Now, as we have said, there are two possible meanings to this question — but precision isn't that important because the answer is the same either way.

C. The answer is entirely unambiguous – no one has an advantage

“The original at this point consists of the word ‘no’ and the word ‘all’ fashioned into an adverb. Perhaps it could be translated, ‘No, completely,’ or ‘not at all.’ It sweeps away any possibility for the most minute excuse for being preferred above the Gentile. After the indictment of 2.17-3.8, it leaves the Jew in exactly the same place as the Gentile — subject to the wrath of God. Not any one of the special blessings bestowed on Jews clears him of guilt before God.”²

1. Are Jews surpassed or excelled by Gentiles? “No, completely!”
2. Are Jews better than the Gentiles? “No, completely!”

The thing Paul has been getting at is that no person or class of persons in the world has any advantage.

- All are sinners who need to be saved.
- That is the constant proposition.

II. The universal charge

A. The language is the language of the courtroom

1. This word “before proved” KJV (“previously charged”) is used only here in the Bible
2. Related to other words that refer to courtrooms and charges
 - a. Acts 25.7 – the Jews brought *charges* against Paul (“causes”)
 - b. Word group also refers to “a cause”, something that “causes” something else
 - c. Even in our court room language, a charge against someone can be described as “a cause” against him
 - d. Prov 19.3 – the foolish man rages against God (NAS)

^{KJV} **Pr 19.3** The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.

- 1) “Fretteth” or “rages” = “charges”
- 2) The foolish goes so far as to bring charges against God

² Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology*, p. 54.

This is exactly where the Jew has been going in his argumentation!

3. Our word in v. 9 has the pronoun “pro” attached – “charged before”
 - a. When before?
 - b. 1.18-2.32: his entire propositional declaration that all men are sinners, both Jews and Gentiles

B. The language is universal: no one escapes “Jews and Gentiles”

“The language at this point is clearly that of the courtroom. ... [Our word] describes the act of placing a charge in the courtroom. Paul is insisting that he has already done that in the preceding argument. And this charge was leveled against both Jews and Gentiles, thus taking in all humanity.”³

1. We have heard this over and over again in these chapters
2. Perhaps you are tired of hearing it, but God revealed his Word to us in exactly this way

All men are sinners. That includes you. That includes me. All men need to be saved.

- This proposition is the *foundation* of the gospel.

But even in making that statement once again, Paul turns the heat up a notch...

III. The damning condition

A. All are *under sin*

“All alike are under — that is, slaves to — sin.”⁴

1. “To be under sin is to be under its way and condemnation.”⁵
2. “The idea is that of being under the power of sin, as well as simply sinful: men are both guilty and unable to escape from that condition.”⁶

³ Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology*, p. 54.

⁴ H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*, p. 43.

⁵ Everett F. Harrison, “Romans” in *Expositors*, vol. 10, p. 38.

⁶ James Denney, “St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, W.

B. The whole man is dominated by sin

“This includes its nature, its action, its power, its guilt, its condemnation, its doom. As a nature, it is not subject to God; in its fruitage, it gives birth to an unending brood of sins; as to power, it sweeps on with devastating force to destroy all in its path; as to its doom, even when confined at last in a lake of fire, there will be gnashing of teeth. All — not few, or some, or many, or most — but all are under sin.”⁷

“‘All things *under sin*’ is a larger expression than ‘guilty of sin,’ or, ‘in bondage to sin.’ It is a general state described, as of convicts in a prison, or disease-stricken people ‘under quarantine.’”⁸

C. Illustrated by a personal testimony (a bit long)

A fortuneteller once told me I had a curse hanging over my head and only she could lift it. "What kind of curse?" I asked, pressing for details. She wouldn't specify until I'd paid \$50 up front and booked more sessions with her. I laughed, but cringed inside. While I didn't return to see the woman, I already knew what the curse was. I was 27, and I'd been drinking almost every day for nine years.

A few months before that 1994 visit to the fortuneteller, I'd had a blackout after one of my customary drinking binges. I don't recall how I got back to my building, but I remember looking up at a mountain of stairs leading to my third-story apartment. I gripped the rail and walked unsteadily up each step. When I got to the top, I lost my balance and fell backward to the bottom of the last flight of stairs. Stunned, I examined myself. Instead of the broken neck I should've had, I'd merely banged an elbow. With no idea how I got there, I awoke in my bed the next day with the sun intruding on my drunken slumber.

The fortuneteller was right. I had a curse hanging over my head—alcoholism.

Robertson Nicoll, ed., p. 606.

⁷ Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology*, p. 55.

⁸ William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, p. 79.

I barely remember what life was like before I started drinking. I grew up in a marginally Christian home and believed the good I did outweighed the bad. As one of the "good" girls in high school, I didn't have sex, drink, or do drugs. But after my senior prom, a month before my eighteenth birthday, I had my first drink. I thought, *I deserve it. I've been good for 18 years!* After a few sips, my whole body reacted. The feeling was more gratifying than anything I'd ever known. The more I drank, the more pleasant the world looked. I spent the summer getting drunk—as well as the following four years.

Nearly every day of my college career was filled with drinking-related activities. Practically everyone drank, and I had all sorts of "friends." Days were filled with fun and frolic; nights with emptiness. Drinking caused my inhibitions to fall away, and I became promiscuous. Trying to recapture that first "buzz," I went through a series of relationships, jobs, and schools—even law school—in an alcoholic fog. I blamed my appalling behavior on drunken blackouts.

In early 1997, I was almost 30, unemployed, and living with my mother. Unknown to her, I drank myself to sleep every night and often feared I'd drink myself to death. I saw myself at age 50 still drinking—or dead—and realized I couldn't continue this lifestyle. I never was able to recapture that high from my initial drinking experience. For the first time in almost 12 years, I wanted to stop trying.

Although I wrestled with the decision, I decided to get sober by age 30. I couldn't imagine life without alcohol—my god, my savior, my friend. To no longer worship at its altar seemed unbearable, but *something* beyond me was pulling me away. At the time, I thought it was sobriety. Suddenly, I didn't want to wake up with a hangover anymore. I was tired of waiting until everyone left the house before I threw empty beer cans into the outside garbage bin. On the night of March 18, 1997—two months shy of my thirtieth birthday—I had my last drink.

The next morning, I tossed my empty cans for the last time. The whole day I was tempted to give up. Alcohol occupied my every thought, and my thirst was strong and deep, like itching flesh under a cast. But I was determined to finish what I'd started.

At the end of the first week, I saw tangible evidence of my decision to stop drinking: A slight tremor in my right hand—an alcohol-withdrawal symptom that was my companion whenever I went more than a few hours between drinks—was gone. For the first time in years, I could hold a glass with one hand. I decided at that moment I didn't want mentors, meetings, or support; I wanted to do it on my own and get all the glory! In September 1997—after six months of sobriety—I believed I'd obtained that glory. The months had been tough, but with a new outlook on life, I made plans for the future. Next to go was my sexual activity. I became abstinent—the perfect complement to my sobriety. I felt physically clean and believed I was becoming a good and moral person.

When I'd been sober almost a year, I moved to a different state, found a job, and got my own apartment. I felt confident and invincible. People called me the "Black Dr. Laura" because I sounded like her and listened to her faithfully. I told anyone who'd listen that they, too, could be moral if only they'd make the effort. A walking self-help book, I preached my new religion: "You have the power to change your own life!" Everything in my life was coming together because of my own efforts—or so I thought.

Toward the end of 1998, however, I came crashing down from my high. Although I was a sober, moral person, I was disheartened. I still was thirsty for alcohol, and remained frustrated, bitter, and ashamed about my past. My life didn't seem much better than it had been while I was drinking. I wondered why I didn't feel "good." Then, the hollow feeling that made me put down the bottle two years before returned.

My search for something to fill that empty space inside led me to my youngest sister, a Christian. I told her about my disillusionment, and she convinced me to buy a Bible. Reluctantly I did so. The book sat on my coffee table for months before I removed the plastic wrapper. God was a stranger, and I didn't think I needed him. Whenever my sister told me she was praying for me, I laughed to cover my hostility.

...

Several months later, on December 23, 1999, I told God I knew sobriety and abstinence weren't enough to save me. I dedicated my life to *him*. I asked Jesus Christ to forgive me of my sins, to release me from the burdens of bitterness and fear, and to fill my heart with trust. I surrendered my will to the Lord that night, finding comfort in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

...

Since my conversion, I've found fellowship with other believers in church and Bible study groups. While I'm not involved in a support group for alcoholics, one of my current goals is to speak to those battling addiction—Christians and non-Christians—and to share my story of hope. Our works are futile; in a thousand lifetimes, we never can be good enough to save ourselves. Only God's grace frees us from the bondage of sin and addiction. Even sobriety can become a form of bondage when it's worshiped as a god. Its "saving grace" is deceptive.⁹

- D. This is the condemnation all men are under and they can't get out of: they are all *under sin*
1. In the illustration, when we think of being dominated by sin, we think of something like alcoholism described by this young woman
 2. But did you get her testimony? Her sobriety was just as much a life dominating sin to her

"For the problem with people is not just that they commit sins; their problem is that they are enslaved to sin. What is needed, therefore, is a new power to break in and set people free from sin — a power found in, *and only in*, the gospel of Jesus Christ."¹⁰

Conclusion:

Proposition: Man is not only a sinner; he is dominated and ruled by his sin.

Have you been freed from sin by Jesus Christ?

⁹ La Shawn Barber, "A Sobering Truth" *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/2003/003/19.26.html> (Accessed 5/18/2004).

¹⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 201.