

Romans 3:9-12

All are under sin

Romans 3:9 *Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.*

1. What is sin?

a. Sin is transgression of the Law

Things such as gambling, cheating, sexual immorality and gossiping are sinful, but sin is more than about just right and wrong. We must find out what Google has to say! Google says sin is, "An immoral act considered to be a transgression against divine law." Biblical words must always be defined in their own context, but this time Google has made a good start! The Bible defines sin like this, *Sin is the transgression of the law* (KJV) (OR *sin is lawlessness* (NIV)) [1John 3:4]. The law here isn't the law of the land, but God's higher law, which can never change.

b. Sin is missing the mark

The Law is the Torah, which contains a legal code but is much more: it is God's manual for living. Torah comes from a root Hebrew word meaning, "to take aim, to shoot," used especially in archery. So the Torah is God's target for us. The opposite of Torah is Chata, which means, "to miss the mark." Chata is translated as "sin" in our Bibles. God said to Cain,

Genesis 4:7 *If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."*

i.e. the possibility of 'missing the mark' is *crouching at the door*. In Romans Paul shows that we have all missed the target, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. [Romans 3:23]

c. Sin is an evil inclination

The Bible also describes sin as an evil inclination (which derives from Genesis 6:5). There are many ways in which God has blessed us, such as with food and drink, a job, financial provision, marriage and family. But that which is good can be corrupted by our evil inclination. The blessing of food becomes gluttony, sex in marriage becomes immorality, financial provision becomes greed, and so on.

But this evil inclination, or sin, seems to have a bit of a personality and mind of its own! God told Cain that sin was *crouching at the door* ready to pounce. And Paul personifies sin in this same way (e.g. Romans 7:20). There is a power in sin which is determined to master us but we must master it. Paul refers to this principle (or law) of sin which is at work in us (e.g. Romans 7:17, 23, 25; 8:2), and calls it the 'sinful nature' (or the 'flesh' KJV).

2. Are we really sinners?

To really accept we are sinners doesn't come easily. In his day, the Apostle Paul knew he needed to convince his readers that sin isn't something that we might do from time to time, but something that has affected or infected each one of us: *both Jews and Gentiles are under sin*. This is what we desperately need to be rescued from. The question is: are you convinced you are a sinner?

In Romans 3:10b-18 Paul strings various verses together to prove his point. Remember, there was no difficulty convincing his readers of the authority of Scripture, but just as how to interpret them in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection. So he begins, *It is written ... none is righteous etc.*

Does this mean there was no-one righteous before Jesus came? No. Scripture speaks of many who were righteous before Christ came. For example: Noah (Genesis 7:1); Abraham (Genesis 15:6); David (Psalm 32:1-2); Job (Job 1:1); Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:6); John the Baptist (Mark 6:20). If all these people, and countless other unnamed saints were righteous before Jesus came, what does the Scripture mean by saying *none is righteous*? It means that all, including the aforementioned, were/are sinners, and

therefore unrighteous ... that is, until we come to God for forgiveness and are justified by faith. This is the whole point of Romans 4, which is about how Abraham was put right with God by faith. Even though OT saints didn't have the measure of faith in Jesus the Messiah (Romans 12:3), the Scripture is clear they were still accepted by God on the basis of faith.

3. What is the root of sin?

Psalm 14, which Paul quotes in Romans 3:10b-12 begins, *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* This helps us to understand the root of sin better. It brings us back to Romans 1 where Paul said *they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened* [Romans 1:21]. The root of sin is our atheism (unbelief). This foolish thinking leading to foolish actions. We are all atheists until the grace of God starts working in our lives.

The Rabbis said that *the wicked are ruled by their hearts* (see Genesis 27:41 – *Esau said in his heart*; Esther 6:6 – *Haman said in his heart*; 1Kings 12:26 – *Jeroboam said in his heart*.)

All these evil actions began with an evil prompting in the heart. But what was this evil prompting? The Psalmist asks the same question, *Why does the wicked man revile God?* The answer: *He says in his heart, "He won't call me to account"?* [Psalm 10:13]. This is our atheism! We don't believe that God will either reward us or ever bring us to account. We rationalize God out of our lives. The British Humanist Society (who are atheists) state on their website their main beliefs: 1. This world and this life are all we have; 2. We should try and live full and happy lives and also make life easier for other people; 3. People deserve to be judged on their merits by the standards of reason; 4. All people are equally important. This may sound commendable, but in rationalizing God out of the picture they abandon themselves to the desires of their hearts. This is the meaning of Proverbs 26:9, *Like a thorn bush in a drunkard's hand is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.* The picture here is of a drunkard staggering around trying to pick a rose, but instead picks thorns. In the same way the atheist comes up with something which seems soul enriching, but it is in fact like thorns.

Religious people can have unbelieving hearts, and a favourite doctrine of theirs the 'doctrine of universalism'. This is the idea that everything is going to work out ok for everyone in the end. But the Bible says that God does and will discriminate (e.g. the sheep and the goats in Matthew 24:31ff.)

The Rabbis said, "It is impossible for one to transgress unless there be in his heart denial of the roots of Torah" (Darashos HaRan Chapter 5.24). Jesus taught, *If you do not believe Moses, how will you believe my words?* [John 5:47]. If in our unbelief we deny that the law / Torah came from God at Sinai with its 10 commandments and everything else, and that it was given by God himself as part of God's saving plan for the whole world, then we are left only to be ruled by our sinful and unbelieving hearts.

The wicked are ruled by their hearts, but the Rabbis also said, *the righteous rule their hearts*. For example: Daniel – Daniel 1:8; Hannah – 1Samuel 1:13. These opposing ideas of being ruled by our (sinful) hearts or ruling our hearts (by the Spirit) feature as a strong theme in Romans: *sin shall not have dominion (lordship) over you* (Romans 6:6); but we will *reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:17).

4. Is sin really that bad?

Unfortunately yes. Sin separates us from God [Isaiah 59:2] and from each other. Sin is a one way track to hell in this world and the next. If sin wasn't really that bad, why did God deem it necessary to send His only Son as a holy sin offering, as the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world? But He did because sin really is that bad. Jesus is our Saviour from ... sin! The angel said to Joseph, *She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.* [Matthew 1:21]. This is the same gospel as in Romans.