

Flesh

Romans 3:9-24

We saw last week from Romans 1 four facts about all people on earth:

Every Person on Earth:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Knows there is a Creator God2. Chooses to worship other things3. Becomes consumed by their sin4. Knows God is condemning them	<p>“The wrath of God is revealed... against all unrighteousness of men who... suppress the truth... so they are without excuse.” Romans 1:18-20</p>

The bottom line is that those who do not belong to Jesus by faith are controlled and defined by their sin. They are NOT OK. **The 1.8 billion people who have NEVER heard about Jesus are NOT OK.** We must not deceive ourselves into thinking that because God is merciful He will ignore the sinful condition of people outside of Christ. God IS JUSTICE. He cannot look the other way when it comes to sin.

Have you been reading your Bible? Many of us are finishing up the whole Bible in these next two months. Recently we've been reading in Isaiah and Jeremiah. And the part you cannot miss when you read the prophets is one word: **JUDGMENT**. Listen to Jeremiah 51:

“Flee from the midst of Babylon; let every one save his life! Be not cut off in her punishment, for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance, the repayment he is rendering her.” Jeremiah 51:6

“Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish.” Jeremiah 51:17-18

Or **Isaiah 63**:

“I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel.” Isaiah 63:3

Before you think - “Oh, that's the **Old Testament**. Jesus didn't talk like that!” Hold on. In his very first sermon Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61 -

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, **and the day of vengeance of our God.**” Isaiah 61:1-2

Very significantly Jesus stopped at the word “favor” and didn’t quote the rest of the verse. But that illustrates the purpose of his **FIRST coming - to save sinners who repent** in the year of His favor. And the purpose of His **SECOND coming** will be **to judge sinners who don’t repent**, in the year of His vengeance.

The clear teaching of Scripture is that apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ - actually hearing the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection - **NO ONE will repent**. No one. Listen again to Romans 3.

Without hearing the gospel, no one will repent

“As it is written: **None** is righteous, no, **not one**; **no one** understands; **no one** seeks for God.”
Romans 3:10-11

Now, we went ahead and underlined some words. ***Does this leave any room for an exceptional case?*** Well... maybe once in a while... Maybe someone who is really sincere... Maybe a really gentle and kind soul... NO. NOT. ONE.

Why is this true? Why is it that no one will seek after God? The verse right before tells us:

Without hearing the gospel, no one will repent

- Because sin rules over them

“We have already charged that **all**, both Jews and Greeks, **are under sin**. As it is written: **None** is righteous, no, **not one**; **no one** understands; **no one** seeks for God.” Romans 3:10-11

No one will repent and turn from sin because they are UNDER IT. They are controlled by it. Sin reigns over them. Sin is their master. It rules every part of their lives. This is what we will see today in Romans 3 - the doctrine of **TOTAL DEPRAVITY** - that sin saturates everything and everyone. Sin is everywhere. It is all over people. They are under its dominion.

People are a union of body, mind and spirit. And for the non-believer, sin saturates every part of their body, mind and spirit. It controls them. It rules them. They are UNDER SIN - under its authority, under its power, under its direction. Sin is their master. And sin is a terrible master because sin ALWAYS leads to DEATH. “The wages of sin is death.” That is the payment sin always earns. Every time. No exceptions. Sin always pays out. And the payment is death.

Have you ever heard of someone who did not die?

The final proof that a person was a sinner is their funeral. The person who does not have a funeral can claim to be without sin. But whenever you attend a funeral it is a definitive confirmation – the person who just died was a sinner. Death is the final payment for sin.

Everyone dies because everyone sins. Sin is the master. ***Death is the payment.*** Thankfully that's not the whole story. Romans 6:23 is the gospel in one verse:

The Final Proof that all people sin is that all people Die

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 6:23

The book of Romans shows the dramatic **contrast between the non-believer and the believer** in Jesus. Outside of Christ, Romans 1 through 3 show us, there is no hope – there is only sin and death. In Christ there is freedom, life, hope, peace and joy. Let's look at the condition of the person outside of Christ – in their mind, body and spirit. Then we'll see the beautiful contrast for those who are IN CHRIST.

First the bad news.

Outside of Christ – your Mind is:

- Confused by sin

“No one understands; no one seeks for God.” Rom. 3:11

“Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity... ***the way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths.” Is. 59:7-8; **Rom. 3:17*****

In Romans 3 Paul piles up ***quote after quote from the Old Testament.*** Most of these verses are from the Psalms, but this one is from Isaiah 59. The verse right before “the way of peace they do not know” gives more context on what that phrase means. “Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity.” You can see how interconnected our thinking and acting are. Since people do not KNOW peace there is no justice in their PATHS.

Sin is the most devious disease because of how effectively it hides from those afflicted by it.

Sin, by its very nature, is confusing.

- Who is the last person to know he is PROUD?
- Who is the last person to know she is SELFISH?
- Who is the last person to know he has a PROBLEM?
- Who is the last person to admit she has an ADDICTION?

The sinner. Oh, we see flaws quickly enough in others. But because our hearts are deceitful above all things we do not see those same flaws in ourselves. You know what the best test for sin in your own heart is? Your awareness of that sin in others. Romans 2:1 says

Outside of Christ – your Mind is Under Sin:

- Confused by sin

“In passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.” Romans 2:1

- That person is so materialistic.
- She is so vain – all about her looks.
- He is so arrogant – obsessed with his power and position.
- My neighbor is so rude and insensitive.

Watch these two, married couples:

- My husband is so selfish.
- My wife is so selfish.

You know what the pastor concludes when a couple comes in pointing fingers at each other like this? ***You’re both right.*** Do you know why you’re so aware of the other person’s selfishness? “Because you, the judge, practice the very same things.”

Sin is deceptive. It hides itself to the sinner to protect itself. Look back at Romans 1 again:

Outside of Christ – your Mind is Under Sin:

- Confused by sin

“By their unrighteousness [they] suppress the truth... they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Rom. 1:18,21

The mind of the non-believer is darkened by sin. Their heart is hardened by sin. Their thoughts are corrupted and clouded. They cannot think clearly about God or themselves. They cannot perceive the truth – especially about spiritual things.

I met a young man named **Ryan** at our church in Chicago. He came with the joy of a brand new believer and had a dramatic story of life change. He developed a gambling addiction through his teen years and early 20s, first making small bets but gradually wagering larger and larger amounts. Like all addictions, at first it seemed manageable – and he felt like he could control it.

But ***a gambling addiction is really not about money*** – it’s about the rush. It’s the feeling of winning that gamblers say they crave. The money is a nice by-product. But the craving takes over when any sensible person would stop – after winning, say \$100,000 rolling dice. The addict has this irresistible urge to feel that win again. So they roll again – even though they know the odds are dramatically against them.

At the age of 24 Ryan inherited ***\$250,000 from a deceased relative.*** His family members knew this was terribly dangerous for him. But Ryan was on cloud 9. He spent 9 months living in the nicest Vegas hotels, playing cards and dice at tables with true high rollers. But as you can

imagine, after 9 months pretending he was this wealthy big shot every dollar of that quarter million was gone and he was back on his buddy's couch in the suburbs of Chicago trying to bum a cigarette.

In a desperate low, **Ryan ran into an old disabled veteran who told him about Jesus.**

Responding to this lifeline of hope, Ryan prayed to receive Jesus – and I met him as he followed through on a promise to get into a good church. For three months Ryan attended Bible studies and drove for Uber, trying to manage his gambling addiction and other problems. And he was “high on Jesus.”

I was glad to have Ryan in our church and his story was fun to share. ***But I did not adequately assess the danger he was in.*** I did not really appreciate the power of sin over him. After three months, the “Jesus buzz” began to wear off, and Ryan suddenly disappeared. I later learned that he became a Buddhist and went right back to gambling.

Sin is a controlling power. It is a deceitful master. Like a snake waiting for the right time to strike, it will hide in the shadows and let you think you are in control. Then, when you least suspect it, those old desires will suddenly seize your heart and mind.

- **Men**, this is why you MUST have controls on all of your devices.
- **Parents**, this is why you MUST have protections on every screen in your house.

Covenant Eyes is a great tool but that filtering program or something like it is nowhere near sufficient. You have to be sure you have everything locked down. Sin is deceitful and tricky. And our enemy is crafty - prowling around like a ravenous lion, looking for someone to devour. The mind of the non-believer is CONFUSED by sin. Secondly, the body of the person outside of Christ:

Outside of Christ – your Body is Under Sin:

- Controlled by sin

“None is righteous, no, not one... No one does good, not even one... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from ***this body of death?***” Rom. 3:10,12; 7:24

Outside of Christ people are UNDER SIN. They are controlled by it. Sin is their master. This is true of every part of them but especially in the BODY. Romans 1 showed this graphically – God “gave them over to the passions of their bodies.”

Freud called it the “Id,” ***the inner child that wants what it wants when it wants it.*** The “gimme” demands of what Paul calls “the flesh” - the members of your body. Even believers feel the remnants of the flesh. Though we know that old self was crucified with Christ, that old master still calls out to us, that old flesh still tries to raise itself from the dead. We know its voice. We

know its desires. And we obeyed it for so long, sometimes we start to respond out of simple muscle memory.

Pastor Colin Smith describes this visually by **picturing a man in a deep, dark dungeon**. He is locked in a cell, chained to a wall with heavy shackles. And the master of that dungeon yells at him all day, every day. He cannot escape. He knows nothing else. He is bound. He belongs to that master and has no choice but to obey him.

Then one day **a Hero comes who knocks the dungeon master down**, breaks down the door of the cell and breaks off the prisoner's chains. The Hero picks up the man and guides him out of the darkness of the dungeon into the light of the field outside. Suddenly the man is free! He is no longer in the darkness but is now in the light. He is no longer bound by those heavy chains but is free to go where he wants.

But the dungeon master comes out to the man and starts shouting at him. The man looks at the Hero who saved him and the master he had to obey for so many years. **In that moment the man has a choice**. Will he listen to the one who set him free and walk with him in the light? Or will he go back to his old prison cell and submit again to his old bondage?

That is the choice believers make every single day. **Do we walk in the light of our freedom and new life in Christ?** Or do we go back to our old ways, our old sinful, fleshly, selfish, proud ugly ways?

The non-believer has no such choice. He does not know the light and freedom of the field. **He knows only the darkness and bondage of the prison cell**. He does not know the voice of the Hero. He's never heard about a Hero who could save him. He does not know the joy and peace of the field. **He only knows the guilt and shame and hopelessness of his slavery**.

This is the physical condition of the person outside of Christ. They are controlled by sin in their bodies. Sin reigns over them. It is their master. "No one does good, not even one." Notice how this condition expresses itself in the words and actions of the person:

Outside of Christ - your Body is Under Sin:

- **Controlled by sin**

"The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood." Rom. 3:14-15

The non-believer is so governed by sin that **the poison of their selfishness is right under their tongue**, like a snake just waiting to strike. Not every non-Christian is constantly spewing curse words and evil. But for every non-Christian those words are right under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses even if they don't say the words out loud all the time.

Sin controls the non-believer. It is their master. They are under sin. It rules over them. And the biggest problem is that they don't realize it. As Verbal said in the Usual Suspects, "*The best trick the devil every pulled is convincing the world he doesn't exist.*"

Outside of Christ the non-believer's mind is confused by sin, their body is controlled by sin and third:

Outside of Christ – your Spirit is Under Sin:

- Consumed by sin

"All have turned aside; together **they have become worthless...** there is no fear of God before their eyes." Rom. 1:12,18

Sin takes over. It is all consuming – **like FIRE.** It does not just burn a little bit here and color the fringes. It burns until it consumes. Ryan's story gave me a close up look at the carnage that comes from addiction. I'm sure you've seen it in the lives of others who become addicted to alcohol or drugs. Addictions are all consuming.

But that is **the nature of ALL SIN.** *It grows until it takes over every part of you* to the point that it DEFINES WHO YOU ARE. "They have BECOME worthless." In the essence of their being they are worthless.

Those who refused to honor God or give thanks to him in chapter one now are seen to have no fear of God before their eyes at all. They don't even think about God. Verse 13 is a quote of Psalm 5 that says:

Outside of Christ – your Spirit is:

- Consumed by sin

"Their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave" Ps. 5:9; Rom. 3:13

What a graphic picture! ***If you look into someone's mouth, you can peer into their SOUL*** – their inmost being. The non-believer, when he opens his mouth, exposes an OPEN GRAVE. As you hear the words he says, which are an overflow of the heart, you can feel the inner turmoil, anger, selfishness, greed, idolatry and rebellion festering deep inside him.

The first funeral I ever officiated was for a woman I never met – but her son attended our church in North Carolina. She died at the age of 52 of alcohol poisoning. She drank herself to death. When I sat down with her son to talk about her life and plan the funeral he shook his head and said, "Good luck with this one, pastor. There is nothing good to say about this woman."

This man and his sister went on to talk about their traumatic childhood with a mom who was verbally abusive and constantly self-medicating with alcohol. Her throat was an open grave. Her words spewed out of the inner turmoil and destruction that was her spirit.

Sin consumes people. **Maybe this is why hell is pictured as a fire:** because people are consumed by their own sin – forever.

- **Selfishness** is a person collapsing in on himself – demanding more and more of others without giving anything to them.
- **Addiction** is desire unrestrained – the lust for more and more raging out of control.
- **Bitterness** is anger festering, boiling over in resentment.
- **Pride** is the worship of self – the exaltation of me, insisting on my rights and demanding attention and recognition. Imagine that for eternity – with no audience.

Hell is a place of fiery torment. Sin consumes people there in the unending torture of being with themselves. Outside of Christ people are UNDER SIN. They are trapped in the whirlpool of death.

	Outside of Christ People are <i>under sin</i>	
Mind	Confused by sin	“He will render to each one according to his works: for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury ... For the wages of sin is death.” Rom. 2:5,8-9; 6:23
Body	Controlled by sin	
Spirit	Consumed by sin	
Destiny	Eternal Death	

Their darkened thinking keeps them from escaping the powerful currents of their own passions, which draw them ever deeper into their slavery to sin and idolatry. As sin gains more control it gradually consumes the person until it defines every part of their being. And of course, this determines their destiny both in life and eternity. Paul sums it up in Romans 2: “He will render to each one according to his works: for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be **wrath and fury**.” Then he concludes in chapter 6, “for the wages of sin is death.”

Those who are defined and consumed by sin cannot end up in the holy and glorious presence of God. God could not, even if He wanted to, let sinners into His heaven. They would be vaporized by His glory - just as you and I would be right now if God showed up in His unveiled majesty. Their destiny is to live UNDER their sin forever. Their destiny is eternal death: age after age of unending suffering, agony and regret. Their own sin will continually consume them and there is no way they can escape.

Thankfully that is not the whole message of the Bible! Paul tells the good and bad news in chapter 5:

	Outside of Christ People are <i>under sin</i>	In Christ People are <i>under grace</i>
Mind	Confused by sin	"Just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." 5:21
Body	Controlled by sin	
Spirit	Consumed by sin	
Destiny	Eternal Death	Eternal Life

For those outside of Christ, their destiny is eternal death – which the Bible calls hell. And so, for non-believers, ***"SIN REIGNS IN DEATH."*** Sin is the master. Death is the victor. And his victory is all or nothing. ***Once claimed by death there is no escape from his domain.***

But the good news of Romans is that though sin reigns over those outside of Christ, there is another alternative – **another joyful, wonderful reality for those who are IN CHRIST.** "Grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Remember, the term **JUSTIFICATION** is the verbal form of righteousness. To be justified is to be declared righteous in Christ – to be RIGHTEOUS-I-FIED. That is the transformation Jesus offers. He alone can transfer someone from the domain of death into the domain of LIFE. He alone can transform them in body, mind and spirit. Jesus alone can justify – not only declaring you righteous through His finished work on the cross but actually INFUSING HIS OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS into you!

We'll get into justification in more detail next Sunday – but for now just notice ***the threefold transformation:***

	Outside of Christ People are <i>under sin</i>	In Christ People are <i>under grace</i>
Mind	Confused by sin	Renewed – Clear about truth
Body	Controlled by sin	Redeemed - Free from sin
Spirit	Consumed by sin	Righteous – United with God

At the moment a sinner repents and calls on Jesus in faith, ***they move from being UNDER SIN to being UNDER GRACE.*** Their position changes from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. It's

like they were drowning in the swamp of their own filth and Jesus picked them up out of it, washed them off and placed them on the shore.

Or to come back to our **dungeon illustration** – the Hero, Jesus, walked into the domain of sin and death. When Jesus died on the cross he stepped right into death’s kingdom. And when Jesus rose again, he conquered death by disarming him – “the sting of death is sin.” That is death’s main weapon. By dealing with sin, Jesus made death a harmless enemy. Scary still – for sure. But to the believer, ***death CANNOT HARM YOU – it can only SEND YOU HOME.***

Remember what **Billy Graham** said before he died. “*Soon you will hear the rumor that Billy Graham has died. Don’t believe it for a second. I will be more alive than I have ever been!*”

For the Christian, **death is our true birth.** It is our gateway directly into the arms of Jesus. You close your eyes in this world and open them in the world we were truly made for – with the veil removed, all sin forever purged from your heart and life, so you can live with Jesus directly, joyfully, FOREVER.

In Christ – your Mind is Under Grace:

- Renewed – Clear about truth

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” Ezek. 36:26

At the moment you trusted in Christ, ***He gave you a new heart with new desires and the ability to think new thoughts.*** In the Bible the heart is more than just feelings – it is the center of a person, the director of their thoughts and actions. Jesus changes us on the inside - giving us new desires and new thoughts; filling us with His own Spirit. The believer begins to hunger and thirst after righteousness where before his desires were only after the flesh and the world. Look at how Paul expresses this transformation of the mind in 1 Corinthians 2:

In Christ – your Mind is Under Grace:

- Renewed – Clear about truth

“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned... ***But we have the mind of Christ.***” 1 Cor. 2:14,16

Outside of Christ people CANNOT understand the truth about God, the world or themselves. But we have the MIND OF CHRIST. We have the Spirit of Christ to guide us into all truth - to fill us and lead us; to correct us when we stray. Our minds are UNDER GRACE, where the non-believer’s mind is UNDER SIN - clouded, confused.

The believer’s body is also under grace:

In Christ – your Body is Under Grace:

- Redeemed – free from sin

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through *the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*” Rom. 3:23-24

Jesus paid the price to buy us out of our slavery to sin. He redeemed us. The price of our redemption was his own life. This is the grace of God’s infinite gift to us in Christ – freedom from the penalty and power of sin!

In Christ – your Body is Under Grace:

- Redeemed – free from sin

“The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” Rom. 8:2

For the non-believer, sin is their master. They are bound by the LAW of sin and death. They cannot disobey their own desires – they are enslaved to those desires and thoughts. But for the believer, *that governing power has been overthrown*. Oh, you still hear your old master’s voice – but you don’t live in that dungeon of slavery anymore! So don’t go back there!

- Don’t go back to your old ways of lust and greed and selfishness
- Don’t go back to your old ways to vanity and ego and materialism
- Don’t go back to your old ways of resentment, anger and jealousy.

You’re out in the light of the field. You are breathing the free air of new life in Christ! At the end of Romans 7, Paul writes:

In Christ – your Body is Under Grace:

- Redeemed – free from sin

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Rom. 7:24-25

There is only one Hero who can deliver people from their body of death. Jesus Christ. He is the one who set us free so we can say, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” the very next verse.

And Jesus is the only one who can save your non-believing family member, friend, neighbor or co-worker. Apart from Christ, they are living in a body of death that is controlled by sin. They live in that cold, dark dungeon and sin is their master. *Jesus alone holds the key to unlock that cell.* Oh, how He wants to open prison doors and set the captives free!

But we have to GO! We have to get out there to tell our neighbors and the nations about the Hero who came to set us free! He redeemed our bodies and he renewed our minds:

Finally:

In Christ – your Spirit is Under Grace:

- Righteous – United with God

“But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” 8:10

To be justified is to be declared righteous. That is only possible because we have been united with Christ. He takes our sin and gives us His righteousness. He takes our death and gives us His own Spirit. And so Christ Himself lives in us through His Spirit who gives LIFE.

	Outside of Christ People are <i>under sin</i>	In Christ People are <i>under grace</i>
Mind	Confused by sin	Renewed – Clear about truth
Body	Controlled by sin	Redeemed - Free from sin
Spirit	Consumed by sin	Righteous – United with God
Destiny	Eternal Death	Eternal Life

As we close, **let’s reflect on what we used to be before Jesus**. Outside of Christ we were controlled, confused and consumed by sin. Only because of Jesus, we have been redeemed in body, renewed in mind and righteous in spirit. United with Him, our old body of flesh was crucified, dead and buried. United with Jesus, we rose from the grave victorious over sin and death. In Christ we have freedom, understanding and eternal life. We are no longer under sin but we live – now and forever – under grace.

But let’s also reflect on those who live right now outside of Christ. Think of those people we’ve been praying for – the people we know. Lift them up in prayer right now. And pray for those we have never met – but **who have never heard the gospel even once**. Pray that gospel workers would go and bring the light of Jesus to them soon.

Let’s also remember the fact that 1.8 billion people have not even heard that this transforming grace is available to them. They are dying of spiritual starvation with no access to the bread of life – with no access to the wine of the new covenant. Rather, they are living and dying under the dominion of sin.

ALIVE