

**The Book of Romans  
Not Even One! (Part 4)**

Romans 3:9-20

November 8, 2015

*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher  
Countryside Bible Church*

Several months ago I read one of the most tragic books that I have ever read. In fact, it's a book that when it was published, literally rocked an entire nation. It's entitled *Neighbors*, an ominous title once you know the contents of the book, *Neighbors*, written by Jan Gross. It's a true story, pieced together from historical records, of what happened in a small Polish town called Jedwabne. Jedwabne was a town of about 3,000 citizens. About half of the citizens were Polish and about half of them were Jewish. These people had lived as neighbors for their entire lives, as had their ancestors before them, for more than 200 years. But all of that changed on a day in 1941 when the Nazis came to town. The Nazis took over the town, not in force, not in mass, just a few men rode into town to claim it for Nazi Germany. But shortly after they arrived, they gave, simply, permission to the Polish leadership of the town to kill the Jews who lived there and to take their property.

On July 10th 1941, just over two weeks after the Nazis gave their permission to the Polish leadership of the town, the townspeople, incited by others who came from nearby towns, murdered the Jews who lived in Jedwabne. In fact, the estimates range between, at the most conservative, 350 Jews were burned alive in a barn in town that day, up to as many as 1,600 Jews were killed. And these people were not killed by the Nazis. This is what has come to light. It's not that the Nazis showed up in force and took the life of these Jewish people. Instead, these people were killed by their own neighbors, simply receiving permission to do so from Nazi Germany. It's a tragic story, but it's a story of human depravity at its worst.

Although, obviously, that is an extreme example of human depravity, it is nevertheless true that wherever human beings go they leave broken and shattered human relationships in their wake. That's a perfect reflection of human depravity. And it's the powerful lesson that we come to, in the next part of Romans 3, this morning. Let me read for you again the paragraph that we're studying as we make our way through Paul's letter to the Roman churches. Romans 3, we're looking at the paragraph that begins in verse 9.

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;  
THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,  
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

Available online at [www.countrysidebible.org](http://www.countrysidebible.org)  
Copyright © 2015 Tom Pennington. All rights reserved.  
*Unedited transcript for personal use only.*

ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;  
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,  
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”  
“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,  
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,”  
“THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;  
“WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;  
“THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,  
DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,  
AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”  
“THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

This is Paul’s summary indictment, not merely of the Gentiles, as in chapter 1, or the Jews in chapter 2 and the first part of chapter 3, but rather here a summary indictment of all humanity. Now beginning in chapter 3 verse 21, the very next paragraph, Paul is going to explain the heart of the gospel, which is justification by faith alone. But here, as he wraps up the first portion of this letter, he shows us why salvation must be by grace alone, through faith alone, based on the work of Christ alone. And the reason is simple, it’s because all of us utterly lack personal righteousness. We have nothing that God would approve of when we stand before Him at the final day of judgment. Our only hope is for God to act in grace, for Him to take the initiative, for Him to make us right with Himself, when we deserve only His wrath and His eternal punishment, when we deserve to be separated from Him and from all good forever. You see, Romans 3:9-20 strips away all hope in ourselves. And frankly, all hope in anyone but Jesus Christ. And that’s the point.

Now, as we’ve noted, Paul begins this section with what I’ve called the formal indictment of man’s depravity. Verse 9, “What then? Are we Christians somehow inherently better than everyone I’ve indicted so far? Not at all,” he says, “for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks,” comprehensively, “are all under sin.” There are no exceptions. You see, Paul here summarizes what he’s written so far in this letter as a formal indictment. See the word charged? He says, I am making a formal indictment that all human beings are under sin. Now having laid out that indictment, Paul proceeds, or proceeds secondly I should say, to present the biblical evidence for man’s depravity. This is in verses 10 to 18. Here he introduces the proof, the proof from Scripture, that all men are under sin, with that familiar expression, verse 10, “as it is written.” And the verses that follow, as you can see from the all caps in your Bible, verses 10 to 18, this section consists entirely of quotes from seven different Old Testament passages. The

biblical evidence that he presents begins with a summary of depravity, a summary statement. Notice verse 10, “as it is written, ‘THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE’”. This is a summary of our condition, of our state. The word righteous simply means to conform to a standard. Not one person, except our Lord Jesus Christ, has ever met God’s standard. That’s what Paul is saying. That’s what the Old Testament writer was saying.

Now Paul next uses a string of Old Testament references, having given us that overarching summary of our condition, he uses a string of references to show us the depth of human depravity in verses 11 to 17. You see, sin and depravity produce devastating results in our lives. We have, as verse 11 points out, darkened minds, “‘THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS.’” We have enslaved wills, “‘THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD.’” We have, according to verse 12, rebellious lifestyles, “‘ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS.’” All of us have turned aside from the path that God has set out for us to walk and we’ve turned to our own way, we’ve pursued our own path, rebellious lifestyles. Fourthly, we engage in sinful behavior. Notice verse 12 adds at the end, “‘THERE IS NONE WHO DOES,’” that is, who practices, “‘GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.’”

Now, last week we looked at a fifth illustration of the depth of our depravity and that has to do with our toxic speech. In verses 13 and 14 Paul points out that our words reveal the decay and death that’s in our hearts. Verse 13 says, “‘THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE.’” What comes out of our mouths is a perfect mirror and reflection of the decay and death that is within our souls.

Our words are also filled with deceit. Verse 13 says, “‘WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP ON DECEIVING.’” They lie. Human beings lie, they deceive, they distort the truth. They use the truth to mislead in order to gain their own advantage. They flatter. All sorts of ways to either contradict the truth or to give half-truths, or to use the real truth to mislead. They keep on deceiving.

Our words kill and destroy, “‘THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS.’” Paul says, in the same way that a venomous snake strikes its victim and injects its poison, in the same way, when fallen human beings speak they inject poison with their words into the lives of others, poison that eventually kills and destroys. And the end of verse, or, excuse me, verse 14 says that our words, our mouths, are “‘FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS.’” That’s our toxic speech.

Now, in the text that we come to this morning, man’s toxic speech spills out, it spills over into angry destructive acts. The sixth expression of the depth of our depravity here in this passage we’ll call destructive relationships, destructive relationships. This is in verses 15 to 17.

Now, before we look at these verses together, let me set the biblical context for you. I hope you understand that you were made for relationship. You were made for relationship. We were not created to be an island. Instead, part of what it means to be made in the image of God is to be made for relationship. Think about this for a moment. The members of the Trinity have, for

eternity, enjoyed among themselves perfect, loving, edifying, gracious, relationship. You see this illustrated, by the way, in the way Jesus, as a human being, interacts with His Father. This is the same type of communion and fellowship that Jesus, in His deity, enjoyed with the Father forever. Relationship, we were made to reflect that perfect relationship in our human relationships.

Tragically, one of the primary ways that our fallenness expresses itself is that we begin to act in ways that damage, maim, and eventually destroy our relationships. I mean, that's certainly true and obvious of our relationship with God, right? I mean, what's the very first thing Adam and Eve did when they sinned? They hid from the second person of the Trinity. They hid from the One with whom they had enjoyed wonderful communion in the garden in the cool of the day. They ran and hid. This is how sin affects our relationship with God. We are dead to God, as Paul puts it. We hide. We flee. Or, in the words here in Romans 3, we don't seek Him.

But sin doesn't just destroy our relationship with God, sin also injects misery and destruction into every human relationship. Do you realize that the first casualties of sin in Scripture are relationship, human relationship? Go back to Genesis for a moment; let me show you this. Genesis 2:25, there is a description of the relationship Adam and Eve enjoyed before the fall, "And the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed." There was an openness, there was a communion between them that nothing came between. That's the idea of that text. They weren't shielding themselves from each other. There was a physical openness that mirrored the spiritual openness that existed between them, but sin destroyed the relationship of marriage.

Turn over to chapter 3 and notice verse 7. Once they sinned, it says, "the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings." They not only hid themselves from God, but they began to hide themselves from each other, and the physical clothes merely represent the spiritual distance that's now growing. You see it pour out in verse 12, "The man said, 'The woman whom You gave me,'" God, "'she is the one who gave me from the tree and I ate.'" It's her fault. Blame shifting began and has continued, an art form, until our day.

Sin also destroyed not only the relationship in marriage, but sin destroyed the relationship within family. Notice chapter 4 verse 5. You remember the story of Cain and Abel, the two sons of Adam and Eve. They presented offerings. Cain didn't present his offering in the way God prescribed and so verse 5 says, "for Cain and for his offering God had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell." Look down at verse 8. Here was the effect on the human relationship. "Cain told Abel is brother," about his conversation with God. "And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." Now folks, there's only one family on the planet. There are only two kids. And one of them

kills the other. What could be more, a better illustration, a more appropriate illustration of the reality of the destructive power of sin in family relationships than that?

But the destruction spread to relationships in society. Turn to chapter 4 and verse 19, we meet the first polygamist, a man named Lamech who “took to himself two wives” and you see the destruction that wreaks in the Old Testament. Our Lord said it was never intended to be this way; it was supposed to be one man, one woman, for life. But he takes two wives. But he also writes a poem. This is the second poem in human history and it’s about revenge. Verse 23, he says,

“Listen to my voice,  
You wives of Lamech,  
Give heed to my speech,  
For I have killed a man for wounding me;  
And a boy for striking me;  
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
Then Lamech seventy-seven fold.”

You see, the sin that destroys relationship began filtering out, outside the family, outside of marriage, and destroying other relationships as well. And eventually sin spread its devastation across all the relationships on the planet. Turn over to chapter 6 verse 11, “Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with,” what? “Violence.” You see what sin does? Sin destroys.

Now, go back to Romans 3 because it is sin’s destructive power in relationships that Paul addresses next in Romans 3. Let me read for you the three lines, three verses, three simple lines of poetry, that present this idea in Paul’s writing here. Notice verse 15,

“THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD.  
DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS.  
AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”

Now in these three verses Paul quotes the Septuagint translation of one Old Testament passage. It’s Isaiah 59:7-8. It’s a passage that targets unbelievers in Israel and so it certainly works for Isaiah as he presents his case in context. But it also works for Paul to use these verses to demonstrate that sin doesn’t merely destroy our relationship with God and even our own soul, tragically the sin within our hearts also leaks out and it infects and it destroys all human relationships, even those that are the most precious to us.

Now, Paul here, in quoting Isaiah, identifies in these verses three reasons behind our destructive relationships, three reasons behind this destruction that accompanies human beings without Christ. There is, first of all, within us, the first reason, there is within us a predisposition to

violent anger. Notice verse 15, “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD.” The reference to feet here is probably a sort of Hebrew idiom. It’s an allusion to walking, which, in the Hebrew way of thinking, talks about the habitual pattern of one’s life. In other words, this violent anger is a constant problem. And notice, it’s not just a constant problem that manifests itself, but it’s one that human beings get to quickly, eagerly. By “swift” Isaiah means that humans are quick to walk in the path of violent anger. Their feet are swift to pursue this. It’s not like human beings get angry or use violence as a, sort of, last resort. Instead, Paul says, they become violently angry with the slightest provocation. Proverbs 1:16, “For their feet run to evil and they hasten to shed blood.” By the way, God hates this. Proverbs 6:18 says, God hates “A heart that devises wicked plans, and feet that run rapidly to evil.”

Now, this predisposition to angry violence manifests itself, shows itself, in a variety of ways in our world, let me just give you a little list. First of all, obviously, it shows itself in the reality of war. Our planet is filled with war. Historians Will and Ariel Durant, in their book, *The Lessons of History*, write this, “War is one of the constants of history and has not diminished with civilization and democracy. In the last 3,421 years of recorded history only 268 of those years have seen no war.” Think about that for a moment. In 3,500 years of recorded history, as historians look back, they only find 268 years when there wasn’t a war raging. And that’s based solely on what we know. Historians estimate, now think about this with me, historians estimate that since the time of Christ, 2,000 years, there have been almost 15,000 wars.

As they’ve tried to reproduce how many casualties have come from all of the wars of human history, all the ones that are recorded for us, historians estimate that it was likely a billion plus, a billion people have been killed in the context of war. Close to 150 million people died in just the wars of the twentieth century. Right now, as you sit here this morning, there are 15 wars raging on this planet in which more than 1,000 people every year are dying. And if you lower that threshold, if you take into account those wars where fewer than 1,000 people die every year, there are 35 wars raging right now on this planet.

We can also see man’s propensity to violent anger in murder, the murder, the taking of another life interpersonally. According to the F.B.I.’s Uniform Crime Report, in the year 2012, which is the latest, the most recent year available, just here in the U.S. there were almost 15,000 murders in a single year. And the tragic part about that, you read about this in the newspaper, often it’s for nothing.

I don’t know if you saw the article in *The Dallas Morning News* just this week, out of Houston, tragic story, here’s how the article read, “A man in Houston, Texas has been arrested and charged for allegedly stabbing a friend to death,” and I’m not making this up, “for taking the last piece of chicken at dinner.” You know, I like fried chicken, but... “According to police, five men were eating and drinking in an apartment when Gonzales took the last piece of chicken. Rivera then became angry, started an argument, and eventually both men went outside to have a

fistfight. During the fight, police say, Rivera pulled out a knife and fatally stabbed Gonzales. He then fled the scene, but later returned and admitted to police what he had done.” “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD.””

Now, in addition to war and to murder, there are also, of course, physical acts of violence. Again, the F.B.I. report states that, in 2012, here in the U.S. there were nearly eight million people who were the victims of violent crimes. And that’s only the ones that were reported. Five million cases of assault. One million cases of aggravated assault. And two million cases of domestic violence.

We are also guilty, however, of being swift to shed blood, if we do none of those things but we simply harbor hatred in the heart. Listen to the Apostle John, 1 John 3:15, “Everyone,” no exceptions, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.” “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer,” and he goes on to say, “and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Listen, if you have ever hated someone, if you have ever harbored anger and bitterness and resentment and hatred toward another person so that you wanted to see them hurt, you’re a murderer, that’s what John says. Your feet were swift to shed blood.

But perhaps you’ve never begun a war (I hope not). Perhaps you’ve never committed murder. Perhaps you’ve never been physically violent towards someone else. Maybe you’ve even tried never to allow hatred to, sort of, fester in your heart because you understood how destructive that would be to your own soul. Even if all of that were true, and frankly I doubt it for most of us, we are still not exempt from Paul’s indictment here that we’re swift to shed blood, because it also includes sinful anger.

Turn with me to Matthew 5. Our Lord has some very sobering words here. You remember, in the Sermon on the Mount He is taking the wrong teaching of the Pharisees, how they have distorted the meaning of the Old Testament, and He’s correcting it for His own disciples. In Matthew 5:21, He begins to reinterpret, to properly interpret, the Old Testament. He says in verse 21, “You have heard,” this is what the Pharisees have taught you, “that the ancients were told, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER,”” that’s true, that’s the sixth commandment, “and,” you’ve also been told that, ““Whoever commits murder shall be liable,”” or guilty, ““before the court.”” Now, that is true. That’s not explicitly taught in the Old Testament. The Old Testament didn’t link murder and the court system. However, the Old Testament Law did set up a legal system, including local courts and the idea of a larger corporate body that eventually became the Sanhedrin. And so, there is a court system that’s spelled out in God’s Law.

However, when the Pharisees tied the two together they did a couple of things. One, they made the sixth commandment all about the act of murder and made themselves feel pretty good about themselves because most of them had never committed murder. And, they made it about a legal issue with the court rather than an issue with God. And so Jesus sets out to correct that. Notice verse 22, that’s what you’ve been told, ““But I say to you,”” Jesus said let me tell you the divine

intention behind the sixth commandment, “that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, “You good-for-nothing,”” or stupid, “shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says “You fool,”” that is, a scoundrel is the idea, “shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.”

Now, what’s going on here? Is there some difference between being angry in your heart with someone or in anger saying, you fool or you empty headed person, you stupid, you idiot? Is there any difference between those in terms of guilt? No, that’s not the idea at all. He’s talking merely about anger and how it manifests itself. And He’s talking about the moral guilt of anger related to the sixth commandment. Jesus is, He does have a progression here in the court system. Notice, in verse 22, He first of all says, if you simply get angry in your heart with your brother (Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever gotten angry?), Jesus said, if the sixth commandment were interpreted properly you could be taken before the local court in your city and convicted of violating the sixth commandment.

Not only that, He says, if you’re angry, and let’s say your anger spills out in words, you don’t physically attack them, you just call them names in anger (Ever done that?), Jesus says, if that happens, the conviction at the local court, that’s the first stage, could be taken to the supreme court, the Sanhedrin, and the conviction would stand. In other words, the Supreme Court of Israel, if they really interpreted God’s Law the way God intended, you could be put to death for one display of anger, name-calling somebody.

But it gets worse. And, verse 22 goes on to say, “Whoever says, “You fool,”” again, anger in the heart expressed in words, “shall be guilty enough to go into *Gehenna*.” Wow, Jesus says not only could you be convicted before a human court of violating the sixth commandment, of being guilty for murder, by being angry and by yelling at somebody, by using language that curses them or attacks them, but when you stand before God, if all that’s ever happened is that you’ve gotten angry with someone in your heart and you poured out words of anger, then God will find you guilty before His court, of murder, and He’ll send you to hell, that’s what Jesus says.

Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever been angry in your heart at someone? Have you ever used words like stupid, idiot, in anger or worse? Jesus said, just one time and you could be declared guilty of murder in human courts and you will be declared guilty of murder in God’s court, and you will be sent to hell. Do you see why we need the gospel? Because there isn’t one person in here, who in here can say, I have never been angry in my heart with someone else? Who can say, I have never spoken in anger to someone else? If that’s true of you, that alone will send you to hell in the day of judgment. That’s what Jesus said. We don’t have any hope but Christ.

You see, Jesus says here that anger is the mental equivalent of murder. That means, if you have been sinfully angry with someone else, by Jesus’ standard you have committed murder. Your



feet have been swift to shed blood. In the same way that a mature oak tree is within an acorn, the act of murder is within the thought of anger. You see why these verses are a universal indictment. Romans 3, these verses are a universal indictment of all mankind, without exception, because there is no one who escapes this. We naturally destroy relationships because we have a predisposition to violent anger.

There's a second reason for this indictment, back in Romans 3, it's because we have a pattern of destroying relationships, a lifelong pattern of destroying relationships. Look at verse 16, Romans 3:16, "DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS." Now, the word destruction refers to destructive actions and misery refers to the misery that results from those actions. "MISERY AND DESTRUCTION ARE IN THEIR PATHS." That's a Hebrew expression that's similar to our English expression "in their trail" or "in their wake." You understand this if you've ever seen a tornado and the path of destruction that it leaves. Or, I grew up on the Gulf Coast and I remember on a couple of occasions driving for mile after mile and seeing the destruction of hurricane Frederick, and seeing just how it leveled everything in its path. That's the picture behind this expression.

Paul's point, and ultimately Isaiah's point, is that if you will just get in the path and follow the path of a fallen human being, in their trail, or in their path, everywhere you look you will find the debris of broken and shattered, devastated relationships. As one author put it, "Man damages and destroys everything he touches, leaving a trail of pain and suffering in his wake." Just follow a fallen human being and you will find marriages that have ended in bitter separation and in divorce. You will find many who have stayed together in marriage, but who are absolutely miserable, who are at war with each other. They're living under the same roof as roommates, or worse, enemies. You'll find families where there's no contact between parents and children or between siblings. You'll find courts filled with civil lawsuits between former neighbors and partners and even family members. You'll find business partnerships destroyed. You'll find neighbors who refuse to speak with one another. You'll find friendships, long intimate friendships, that have been permanently severed. And you'll even find complete strangers who within five minutes of running into each other become bitter enemies and even give way to violence.

Why is this pattern of broken and shattered relationships so pervasive in humanity? Paul tells us. Let me show you. Turn over to Galatians 5. Galatians 5, here we learn why this is so pervasive. It's because of what comes along with our fallenness. Look at verse 19,

Now the deeds of the flesh, [*that is, here's how fallenness acts*] it's evident, [*and then he gives a list, it's not a comprehensive list, it's a representative list, sexual sin, fallenness acts in*] immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, [*and here are the relational sins that come along with our fallenness*] enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying,

drunkenness, [*and we could add, any sort of addiction to a substance*] carousing, and things like these, [*this isn't a full list*] of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you already, that those who practice, as a habit of life, such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In other words, if your life is described by one or more of these things, you're not a Christian, that's what Paul says.

Now look at that list, in verses 19 to 21. Those are the things that come with our fallenness and those are the things that destroy relationships. On the other hand, look at the next verse, verse 22, "the fruit of the Spirit," what the Spirit produces, are all the necessary qualities to ensure lasting relationships: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." So you can see why fallen man, left to himself, destroys every relationship he touches. Because this is how he acts. And every time he acts, he wreaks havoc on his relationships.

So Galatians 5 insists that by nature we were all born with a propensity for personal conflict. By the way, if you doubt me, let me just give you a little field trip. After the service is over, I just want you to go by the toddler nursery and I want you to look in the window and just watch what happens as those cute, innocent, little children battle to the death over a plastic toy, and one that has slobber all over it, and one that doesn't belong to either of them; it's just the principle of the thing, you've got it, so I want it.

By the way, that is exactly why there is conflict. In James 4, James says, why are there wars and quarrels, and why is there strife, and why is there fighting among you? It comes from your lusts. In other words, some self-centered desire, some self-centered expectation that I'm trying to protect and you're not letting me have, that's where conflict comes from. Just as it does with the toddlers in the nursery. So this is why we have conflict, because by nature, in our fallenness, we manifest the propensities and we pursue and practice the sins that create conflict and ultimately destroy relationships. So it should come as no surprise that Paul says, "DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS."

Now, Paul identifies a third reason that lies behind the destruction of our relationships, it's that there's no perception of the path of peace, no perception of the path of peace. Verse 17, "AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." The path of peace is the path that is characterized by peace in our relationships, that leads to the end of conflict in our relationships. Paul says, they haven't known it. They have no personal experience of walking on that path and they don't even know where to find it. It's foreign to them. You understand this; I mean even as we study this, this passage is written on every page of human history. It's also written on every page of every person's individual story. Like a contagious disease, we carry conflict in our souls and that conflict oozes out into every relationship we touch.

As one commentator put it, Godet, he writes, “No peace can exist either in the heart of such a man or in their neighborhood.” Contrast that with believers. Although we certainly still have the flesh with us and we do have conflict, we do get involved in conflict, there has still been, as we read this morning in 2 Corinthians 5, a serious change in our nature. Before Christ conflict characterized us, but in Christ conflict becomes less common. And it’s not an expression of who we really are. In fact, we want to see peace with God and peace with others, because we have peace with God and peace with others through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Turn over to Ephesians 2. Ephesians 2, Paul makes this very point, verse 14, I love this, he says, “For Jesus Himself is our peace.” He’s not talking about a feeling of peace. He’s talking about objective end of the conflict, “He is our peace.” And notice, He’s our peace with God. Look at verse 16, Christ, in His death, reconciled both Jews and Gentiles “in one body,” but He reconciled us “to God through the cross, by having put to death the enmity,” that was the Law calling for our death. In other words, God, in Christ, made peace between our souls and God. The war is over between us and God because of what Jesus did at the cross.

But notice, He also is our peace, verse 14, with other people, and here he’s talking specifically about Jews and Gentiles who spent history battling. He “made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity,” the conflict, “which existed because of the Law,” which separated the Jews and the Gentiles from each other, and He reconciled us. You see the point? Jesus is our peace. He brings the end of conflict, the end of conflict between us and God, and the end of conflict between us and others. “He is our peace.”

Believers listen, Romans 3:15-17 is not how our relationship should be now. We have peace with God and peace with others through our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, in the Beatitudes our Lord says, this is how we’re described, we are “peacemakers,” Matthew 5:9. That means we actively seek now to resolve conflict whereas before we were content to let it lie. We were content to produce it. If you’re in Christ, you’re now a peacemaker. You want to see conflict resolved. Obviously, you want to see it resolved between God and sinners and so you pray for their salvation. You share the gospel with them. As we saw this morning, we’re ambassadors for Christ, pleading for sinners to be reconciled to God. We’re peacemakers.

But we’re also pursuing peace with one another. Romans 12:18 says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” Hebrews 12:14, “Pursue peace with all men.” This is who we are. This is just an expression of our hearts now that we’re in Christ. We even pursue peace between others who are in conflict with each other. We don’t go meddling in others’ affairs uninvited, but if they’re a brother or sister in Christ, we have a good relationship with them, if we’re invited to be a part of that solution, we try to bring cessation of the conflict. We’re peacemakers because we have peace, peace with God and peace with others.

Now, let me just say that if you read Romans 3, if you read the passage we’ve looked at this morning, and you are not yet willing to admit that this passage describes you, if you’re sitting

there saying, you know what, that may be somebody else, but that's not me, then let me just tell you, you are not a genuine Christian, because you've never been brought to the place of the first Beatitude, "Blessed are the beggars in spirit." True Christians read Romans 3 and raise their hand and say, that's who I am. That's who I am, that's who I was, that's who I am apart from grace.

Martin Lloyd Jones writes this, "Let me put it plainly, if you do not accept this description of yourself apart from the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, then there is no need to argue about it, you are just not a Christian. If you resent all of this, you are not a Christian, you are not yet convinced and convicted of sin, and you are not a believer in Christ, though you may have thought you were. If you in any way object to this, you are automatically putting yourself outside the kingdom of God and the Christian faith."

On the other hand, if you've heard what we've studied this morning and you realize that your path, the path of your life, is strewn with the debris and the carnage of destroyed relationships, and you desperately want that to change, you want peace between you and God, and peace between you and others, you need to know that that is possible in what Paul calls the gospel of peace. What Jesus did at the cross made it possible for us to be reconciled to God. He paid the price of the sins of everyone who would ever believe so that we could be reconciled to God our creator, so that God could accept us and forgive us in Christ. And it's only when we make peace with God that we can be at peace with others.

The question for you this morning is, will you be reconciled to God? Are you willing to turn from your sin and to bow your knees to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Listen, I'm like that passage we read this morning, "I beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" this morning. Turn from your sin and bow your knee to Him. And if you will do so, through His death on the cross He will reconcile you to God and He will reconcile you to the people in your life. "He is our peace."

Let's pray together. Father, I pray for those here this morning who still live with destructive relationships in their path. Lord, help them to see the reality, regardless of what they profess. Father, if that's true, help them to see that they are lost, without hope, apart from Christ and may they be willing this morning to end the conflict, to lay down their weapons of rebellion and to confess Jesus Christ as Lord.

Father, I pray for those of us here who are believers. Lord, don't let us be content with conflict in our lives. Don't let us think that that's acceptable. Father, help us to see that if we're in Christ this is a part of who we used to be, not who we should be. And by Your grace, by the working of Your Word and Your Spirit and godly counsel, Father, help us to put off these sins and to live in a way that honors You. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.