**Lesson 7: Guilty As Charged**

Text: Romans 3:9-20

**Introduction**

America has become infatuated with courtroom scenes. Many enjoy watching everything from Perry Mason to Judge Judy. It is rare to watch the news without some reference to the courtroom proceedings. Our nation’s history is marked with many publicized trials. We want to know if the judge is going to condemn or pardon the person on trial. Our passage today deals with a very important matter. Paul uses numerous judicial terms to consider man’s guilt or innocence. It is as though he ushered those in Rome to the courtroom to see how they would fair before the holy God.

Paul began his case against mankind in Romans 1:18. He has anticipated and effectively dismissed objections from the Jews. In this passage, we are reading his closing arguments. The mounting evidence from God’s Word leads to one conclusion: We are all guilty as charged.

1. **Evidence from God’s Word points to a guilty verdict. (v. 9-18)**
   1. Paul’s primary purpose to this point of his letter to the Romans has been to prove that both Jews and Gentiles are equally sinners and subject to the judgment of God.
   2. Despite all of their advantages, the Jews are no better off since they too are under the bondage and penalty of sin. (v. 9)
   3. The verb translated *before proved* means “previously convicted or already charged” (Friberg).
   4. Just as a prosecuting attorney would call witnesses and present evidence leading to the indictment of a criminal, Paul calls Scripture after Scripture to witness against humanity. Each description of man’s sin is tied to a passage of the Old Testament.
   5. It is significant that Paul used passages that pointed to the sins of the Jews and not simply humanity as a whole. He is presenting additional evidence to convince the self-righteous Jews that their verdict has already been decided.
2. **A guilty verdict is presented in the following exhibits.**
   1. Exhibit A – They lack righteousness. (v. 10-12; Psalm 14:1-3) No one is naturally righteous!
      1. Since they lack spiritual understanding, they do not seek God. (v. 11)
      2. They have deviated from the path of righteousness. (v. 12) Therefore, they are *unprofitable* (worthless). They do not do that which is right.
   2. Exhibit B - They sin with their speech. (v. 13-14)
      1. Their throat is like an open tomb revealing their inner corrupt nature and the deadly effect of their words (v. 13a; Psa. 5:9).
      2. Their words are filled with deadly venom (v. 13b; Psalm 140:3).
      3. They reveal their bitterness in the way they speak to others (v. 14; Psalm 10:7).
      4. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” (Matt. 12:34)
   3. Exhibit C – They are on a path of self-destruction. (v. 15-17; Isa. 59:7-8)
      1. They quickly resort to sinful practices to fulfill their desires. (v. 15)
      2. They are headed for ruin and trouble. (v. 16)
      3. They do not know true peace. (v. 17)
   4. Exhibit D - They live without reverence for God. (v. 18; Psa. 36:1) This verse works with verse 10 to frame this unit together. “There is none righteous….There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

* 1. The words and actions of man reveal his depraved state.
  2. Human history provides the best commentary on the accuracy of Paul’s statements in Romans 3.

1. **The guilty verdict leaves man without a defense. (v. 19-20)** 
   1. The law causes every mouth to be *stopped*. (v. 19a)
      1. This verb literally means “to block the mouth.” In this context, it means “to cause someone not to have anything to say; to silence; to remove any reason to speak” (Low and Nida).
      2. There is nothing man can say. He has been proven guilty!
   2. The word *guilty* indicates that man is answerable to God. (v. 19b)
      1. Friberg’s lexicon says that it is “a legal technical term, of one who has lost all possibility of disproving a charge against him and thus has already lost his case.”
      2. Therefore, we are liable to judgment.
   3. It would be foolish to turn to the very law that testifies against man as a source that might be able to acquit him! (v. 20a)
      1. The law doesn’t free you. It cannot justifiably release you. It can only witness against you.
      2. The law is like a good friend who will not lie to get you out of trouble. Such is a true friend; not one who tells you what you want to hear or covers for you when you have done wrong, but one who tells you what you need to hear.
   4. The law provides the *knowledge* (consciousness, awareness, realization) of sin. (v. 20b)
      1. The law shows how crooked we are. If you try to freehand a straight line on a piece of paper, the straight edge of a ruler will reveal where your line was not straight. This is the function of the law.
      2. It reveals where we have deviated from God’s plan.
      3. The inability of man to meet the demands of God is at the heart of Romans 3.
2. **Central Idea: Paul used the record of God’s Word to prove the guilt of all mankind.**
3. **Application: The record of God’s Word proves your guilt.** 
   1. Everyone is answerable to God. Someday YOU will stand before God!
   2. If you stood before God at this very moment, would you be considered innocent or guilty? If innocent, on what grounds?
   3. This prepares the readers for the divine solution. There is a way to be righteous with God, but it is not found through human means.
   4. We must help even the self-righteous face the fact of their sin and accountability before God.

**Conclusion**

Paul rested his case. The courtroom is silent. There is no one who can offer any legitimate defense to the Judge of the Universe. Thank the Lord it doesn’t end with Romans 3:20. There is a way to be acquitted! The same Bible that presents our guilt, also presents the plan of salvation. We will begin this wonderful part of our study in the coming weeks.