

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**Romans 3:1-20**  
**“Under Alien Rule”**

August 7, 2016  
(12<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill  
Main Street UMC  
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646  
Church Office: 864-229-7551  
Church Website: [www.msumc1.org](http://www.msumc1.org)

**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

ROMANS 3:1-20, "UNDER ALIEN RULE"

Shift Again To Diatribe, //2:1-5, 17-24

2') 3:1-20 Five Sets Of Questions/ List Of Supportive Scripture Quotations, Ends With Sin.

Dialog Partner Asks Questions, Paul Responds (e.g. I, vv. 5b, 9c-d)

a) 3:1-9 Five Scholastic Dialogs: Two Questions (Q1, Q2) + Answer (A) + Comment(C).

- 1a 1) Q1 **Then (ti oun) WHAT ADVANTAGE HAS THE JEW?** Pedagogy, Not Polemics, 5 Questions, 5 Pauline Responses  
 b Q2 Or what is the value of the circumcision? 1, 2 = Issue Of Jewish Advantage, God's Faithfulness  
 2a A "Much in every way. We Expect None! //List In 9:4-5 (Advantages), Ps. 147:19-20  
 b C To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with 'the oracles (words) of God.'" p.v., 2:12-13, 9:4-5, Promises  
 2 Has Double Scripture Note, 1' Has A Longer Note  
 3a 2) Q1 For what if (ti gar) some were unfaithful (untrustworthy)? Chap. 9-11, Use Of Link-Words, 15:31?  
 b Q2 Does their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? Human *unfaith, wickedness, falsehood*, 2:17-29  
 4a A "By no means! Core = God's Attributes (vv.3-4 faithful, v.5 just, v.7 true)  
 b C Let **God be true** 'though every man be false,' as it is written, 2 Tim. 2:13, Ps. 115:2 (LXX), 116: 11  
 c 'That thou mayest be justified/ in thy words, v.2b, Invokes David Story, Words (vv.2b, 4c) and prevail/ when thou art **judged**' (Ps. 50:6, LXX, 51:4). *judged* (vv.3c,6b,7b), Ps. 89:2, 33-34  
 "If our sin makes God look good..."  
 5a 3) Q1 But if our wickedness serves to show **the justice (righteousness) of God**, what shall we say?  
 b Q2 That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us?— I speak in a human way. //v.8a, False Inference From v.3b  
 6a A "By no means! me Expects A Negative (vv.5, 8), Expanded In Rom.6:1ff  
 b C For then how could God **judge** the world?" Axiom, Ps. 7:6-8, 9:8, 94:2, 96:13, 110:6  
 3-2' = Issue Of Antinomianism, God's Justice  
 7a 2') Q1 But if through *my* falsehood **God's truthfulness** abounds to his glory, v.4b, 2:24, Put God In My Debt!  
 b why am I still being condemned (**judged**) as a sinner? // 6:1, 15, Is Sin A Good Thing? Sophism  
 8a Q2 And why not do evil that good may come? – as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Absurd!  
 b A,C "Their condemnation (judgment) is just." //v.6b, Answer Omitted, No Argument, A Just Dismissal  
 Forensic Core (v.4c *judged*, v.5b *judge*, v.6b *judge*, v.8b *condemnation*), God Is Impartial  
 9a 1' Q1 **What then (ti oun)?** Dual Function: Ends vv.1-9, Opens vv.9-20  
 b Q2 **ARE WE JEWS DISADVANTAGED?**? At a *disadvantage*? 1' = Return To Jewish Advantage, Opposite Answer: No  
 c A "No, not at all; Paradox: Jews Disadvantaged? No.  
 d C for I have already charged that ALL men, both Jews and Greeks, 1:16, 2:9-10, Division Of Life  
**Verdict** **are under (the power of) Sin,** //3:22-23, 11:32, Impartial Basis, All In A Cruel Prison, //3:20b  
 Precondition: Sin Is Breaking A Relationship, Evil, Verdict of v.9d Leads To A Catena

b) vv.10-18 Ordered Chain Of Scriptural Proofs (Catena) Demonstrates v.9d. Symptoms //1:29-31

- 10 1) just as it is written, "none is righteous, no not one;" //v.10-12, 18 = Against God, vv.13-17 Against Others (Speech + Deed)  
 11 "no one understands, no one seeks **God**." //v.4b, No one (5x. vv.10-12, 1x v.18), Added To Replace "Good"  
 12a "ALL have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; 1-2) Ecc. 7:20, Ps. 14:2b-3, Ps. 52b,3  
 b no one is good, not even one."// //1:18-32, 8 Universal Statements  
 Organization Of Texts, 4:2 Concentric + God (Inclusion)  
 "There is no one," (5x, vv.10-12; 1x, v.18)  
 13a 2a) "An open grave/ is their throat,"/ Throat: Grave/Unclean, Deep Within 3) Ps. 5:9b, 53:1-2  
 b "they use their tongues /to deceive."// Tongues: Deceive Inside →Outside: Throat, Tongue, Lips, Mouth  
 2:1, Jewish Condemnations Of Gentiles! Now Reversed!  
 c b "The venom of asps/ is under their lips."/ Lips: Poison 4) Ps. 140:3  
 Body Parts Indicate The Whole Self Is Compromised, Top To Bottom  
 14 c "Their mouth/ is full of curses and bitterness."// Mouth: Curses/Bitterness 5) Ps. 10:7, //Mk. 7:20, Mt. 12:34  
 Mouth Moved Forward To Create Chiasm v.13c  
 15 2'a) "Their feet are swift to shed blood, Feet: Blood, Ruin, Misery, No Peace 6) Is. 59:7-8a, Prov. 1:16  
 16 b in their paths are ruin and misery Is. 59:7b, Words To Deeds To Blindness  
 17 c and the way of peace they do not know."// Is. 59:8, do not know (v.17)/Now we know (v.19a)  
 Entire Body/The Whole Self Is Involved In Sin: No Capacity Is Exempt  
 18 1') "There is no fear of **God** before their eyes."// Eyes: Root Problem: Disregard/Blindness //1:21, 5:6, 7) Ps. 36:1  
 Net Effect = Just How Wrong, Desperate We Are

c) vv.19-20 All Accountable To God, Without Excuse Because Of The Law. We = Our Tradition

- 19a 1 Now we know that whatever **the law** says, it speaks to those who are **UNDER THE LAW**, v.17, 2:2, To Jews, 2:12b  
 b 2 so that "every mouth may be stopped," v.14, No Complaining, Ps. 63:11, 107:42, Job 5:16  
 c and the whole world may be held accountable to God. Rebuts 3:5-7, All Stand Before The Bar  
**Verdict** **Justified = Recognized As Righteous In Relationship, Reward**  
 20a 2' For (dioti) "no flesh will be justified in his sight" by works of the law, Added, Gal. 2:16, 7) Ps. 142:2(LXX), 143:2  
 b 1' for (gar) **THROUGH THE LAW** comes **the knowledge of Sin**. //3:9d, 5:20, 7:7, 13, Diagnosis, Not Cure!  
 We Do Not Come Into A Healed Relationship With God With Any Credits On Our Side To Obligate God

### A Brief Treatment Of IIB2', Romans 3:1-20

The unit falls into three parts: a. vv.1-9, five scholastic dialogues; b. vv.10-18, a catenae of scriptural proofs that *all are under sin* (v.9d); c. vv.19-20, that the law is not a means of righteousness but a standard to reveal sin.

The surface structure of 3:1-9 is a 5:1 ring (1. vv.1-2, 2. vv.3-4, **3. vv.5-6**, 2' vv.7-8, 1' v.9) with *ti oun/what then?* (v.1a/v.9a) and the opposing questions *What advantage has the Jew?* (v.1a) // *Are we Jews disadvantaged?* (v.9b) as inclusions. Each of the five components has a three part structure: 1) a double question (vv.1, 3, 5,7, 9a-b), 2) a brief answer (vv.2a, 4a, 6a, 8b, 9c), 3) a comment (vv.2b, 4b-c, 6b, 8b, 9d). Breaking the pattern in v.8b is for emphasis as the question of our continuing sin to increase God's reputation is too absurd to answer and so, *Their condemnation is just!*

The core of the unit (2-3'-2') is set off from the frames (1/1'). The introductory *For what if* (v.3a, *ti gar*) introduces the first of three conditional sentences (*For what if* [v.3a], *But if* [v.5a] *But if* [v.7a]), each of which plays on the opposition between a human sin and a divine attribute: *their unfaithfulness/the faithfulness of God* (v.3), *our wickedness/ the justice of God* (v.5a), *my falsehood/God's truthfulness* (v.7a). The word *judge(d)* is also found in each of the three (vv.4c, 6b, 7b, 8b). Thus, the core (2-3-2') is forensic; the frames (1//1') deal with questions of Jewish advantage and possible deficit.

Jews are privileged since they are entrusted with Scripture (v.2b) ; they are not disadvantaged to Gentiles because both are *under* the same malevolent reality, *Sin* (v.9d). If God's people are unfaithful, this does not negate God's fidelity and truth, as Scripture testifies (vv.3-4). And if our wickedness serves to highlight God's justice, God still has the right to judge us and the world (vv.5-6). To think our continuing sin someone brings about good for God is blasphemy, and *their condemnation is just* (vv.7-8). So while Jews have the covenant sign of circumcision and Scripture, and while some Gentiles may fulfill the moral law from the heart, we are all in the same dock before an impartial God because *all are under Sin* (v.9d).

The second part (b. vv.10-18) is a longer example of what we found in vv.3-4 where Paul grounds his answer, "By no means!" in his Bible with the formula "as it is written" leading to quotation from Ps. 51:4b (LXX) which invokes the David and Bathsheba story. Here the same formula is used, "as it is written" (v.10a) leading to an ordered chain of quotations to ground the conclusion of v.9d that "all... are under sin."

The catenae of proof texts has a careful ordering. The surface structure is a 4:2 concentric pattern (1. vv.10-12, **2. vv.13-14 // 2' vv.15-17**, 1' v.18). Inclusions are the five uses of *ouk estin* (*there is no*) in vv.10-12 parallel to a single use in v.18 and the word *God* at the beginning and end (v.11/v.18). The double center (2//2') deals first with sinful speech (vv.13-14), then violent deeds (vv.15-17). When God is not sought (v.11), seen or feared (v.18) because of the effects of Sin, the full capacity of depravity is revealed in what we say (vv.13-14) and how we behave (vv.15-17) with one another. And since Jew and Gentile do both in ways that reveal their disobedient hearts, all are clearly under the same power, the awful and debilitating power of Sin.

---

**Romans 3:1-20. . . . . 4**

The final part (c.vv.19-20) begins with a reference to common Christian tradition to which Paul makes regular appeal, “Now we know.....” Here he returns to a Jewish audience in his reference to “those who are under the law” (v.19a) as the ones to whom the Torah is addressed. For Jews the law takes away all excuses before the Judge so that “every mouth may be stopped” (v.19b). It also calls the whole Gentile world to be accountable to God since the law is also written on the heart. With these two groups in mind, Paul then makes a universal statement that “no human being will be justified by works of the law,” the reason being that the law, functioning as it does as a righteous standard in a world where all are compromised by Sin, is not a means of cure but only diagnosis, “since through the law comes the knowledge of Sin.”

Jews have multiple privileges and advantages (e.g. covenant, Scripture, circumcision) but no better performance. The law is given to a people who cannot yet obey it consistently from the heart, thus the turn to externals and appearances. God’s law reveals the deep, underlying, fundamental issue. All are under the blight of an alien power, the pervasive force of Sin and show it through multiple symptoms.

But when the Spirit comes from the risen Jesus to give a new heart of flesh and new desires within, obedience is a fresh possibility, not to earn favor with God but to give evidence of the new internal reality, which is a healed relationship with God brought about by Jesus and energized by the indwelling Spirit. God has come to our rescue; our disease will be cured.



## UNDER ALIEN RULE

*“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

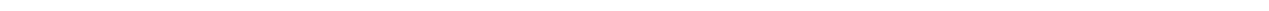
The ultimate loss of sight.

R O M A N S 2 : 1 8

Wherever I look, within or around me, in the present or back across history, I see two opposing powers at work at ground level, really three depending on how you spin the relation between the dangerous twins *Sin* and *Evil*. I see beauty and goodness and creativity and intelligence and love in people, their amazing ability to create families and cultures across the earth through music and storytelling and tool-making and accumulated insight into how life works, the stuff of anthropology. These are human characteristics which Christians—and the Jews before us and alongside us—account for in the idea that human beings, of all creatures in the animal kingdom, uniquely bear *the image of God*.

We humans are not divine, not gods or angels, but God’s reflections and ambassadors in two complementary genders and embedded in creation with special limits and powers. And that image is— I believe— the only secure foundation for an enduring defense of individual dignity and communal human rights, the best brief statement of which are the opening lines of the second paragraph of our own Declaration of Independence:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident (a bold philosophical assertion), that 1) all men (including women!) are created equal (passive voice; we did not make ourselves), 2) that they are endowed (again the passive voice) by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...” (meaning that if you seek to take them away



from another, you are the one diminished).”<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Jefferson, for all his ambiguity about Christian faith, knew the new political project he and the founders envisioned must be minimally secured in a transcendent moral source and guarantor, the Creator God who put us here. To use a fancy name, *Creational Monotheism* is the religious grounding of our national experiment. Not many gods, not polytheism, but the one God who made it all and made us as personal representatives to explore and develop human culture under God. And while there’s no footnote in the Declaration of where that idea came from, they all knew. It’s Genesis 1 and 2, with a nod at ancient Greek political philosophers.

But when I gaze within and around and back across time with the help of a set of lenses that come from the Bible and the Creeds, I see another power at work in the opposing direction. It’s an alien thing, not properly a part of creation, a dark, perverse power that’s universal in its effects. It weakens and spoils and twists and deceives and torments and finally kills everything it touches. Death is its executioner, misery its constant companion.

A dark, noxious cloud has descended on the entire project, a shadow which hides the sun and is not just outside the human person as an impediment to sight but in each person as a willful blindness. And no one is exempt from its influence and its infection and the array of symptoms that go with this universal malady that corrupts the heart and darkens the mind and makes us allergic and resistant to God and the good. By it we create systems to oppress one another, and with it we live all our days.

That this world continues to function, broken as it is, pain-filled as it is, corrupted as it is, is a tribute to the durability of what God made good and how God upholds and sustains the entire project. Things are not always as bad or as wicked as could be imagined, but sometimes they are, aren’t they? Auschwitz, Orlando, Nice, Charlie Hebdo, Ground Zero, international drug cartels, child abuse, human trafficking, lynchings. Make your own list. And then the next

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_transcript](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript).

---

**Romans 3:1-20. . . . . 7**

morning, we start all over again. And it will never end until God punches the pause button and history as we know it comes to a sudden halt.<sup>2</sup>

This is us, and we are in it together with no action being purely private and every action having public consequences. A private decision, a deliberate violation of a known command of God— in other words *a sin*— makes me a different kind of person in all my subsequent interactions because my character is now changed; I have again cooperated with forces opposing God and am lessened in the process and well on my way to being a lightweight with less and less moral substance.<sup>3</sup> Sin robs us and shrinks us and makes us small and turned inward and petty and mean and duplicitous, and if not opposed, it is a binding and blinding addiction. To look into the eyes of a person in whom the candle of conscience has been blown out is frightening. You must resist, but you cannot win without a healed relationship with the risen Lord and his immediate help every moment. You are just not strong enough or smart enough to wise enough or good enough or pure enough. You cannot save yourself with any of the means at hand. None of them work, and yet we keep at it.

And if you had to use only a single word for this awful reality, it would be the word *Sin* with a capital *S*.<sup>4</sup> Not the plural *sins* with a small *s*, meaning the individual acts of transgression and rebellion we commit, but the underlying

---

<sup>2</sup> Paul’s metaphors, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52) imply a sudden event *between blinks*.

<sup>3</sup> This is the basic contrast in Psalm 1 between those who obey God’s law and the lightweights who are “like chaff which the wind drives away.”

<sup>4</sup> For a brief article, see “Sin” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1985), 955-956. Also Charles Talbert, *Romans* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), “Sin,” 102-103. For an accessible treatment by a Christian philosopher, see Cornelius Plantinga, *Not The Way Its Supposed To Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995). This sermon is in the lineage of John Wesley’s Standard Sermon 44, “Original Sin,” [www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-44-Original-Sin](http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-44-Original-Sin). For a summary of U.M. teaching on sin as found in our Articles and Confession, see the appendix of this manuscript (p. 15).

---

**Romans 3:1-20. . . . . 8**

condition from which the particulars flow, a nearly personal power that holds us in bondage and from which we cannot free ourselves. And it is universal, as Paul acknowledged at the end of verse 9, “... for I have already charged that all humans, both Jews and Greeks, *are under the power of Sin.*”

The Hebrew word means “rebel” or “to transgress/ to cross a line.” The Greek word means “to miss the mark” like an arrow that never hits the target but seems to have a mind of its own. The archer is expert, the bow perfect, but the arrow never flies straight, and the arrow is us. We live under alien rule, a power which means us no good at all. We’re born in jail, and beyond that born sick, even if the symptoms don’t reach full force till later on. Newborns are not guilty because there is— as yet— no willful transgression, but just give them time and they show themselves soon enough to be just like the rest of us. The moral disease has already passed on; it’s just in the short hidden period of incubation.

But, once examined, you’ll soon find it necessary to add a second word beyond *Sin* to fill out the account of what’s wrong with us and our world, and that word would be *Evil*, written with a capital *E* because of its inherent malignity and malignancy. And both concepts are found in the briefest and best of prayers, the Lord’s Prayer from Jesus, who— after putting the Father and his holy name and his coming kingdom first, quickly touches on our physical need for bread and then on to two related spiritual needs concerning what ails us, “Forgive us our sins, and help us pass it on to those who sin against us,” then a desperate plea for protection, “And lead us not into the fiery trial of temptation because we will fail, but deliver us from Evil and the Evil One.”<sup>5</sup>

To grasp our desperate situation, Jesus used not one but two related terms, *Sin* and *Evil*, as dual descriptors. And since the word *Sin* in recent days has been

---

<sup>5</sup> The Greek for evil in the Lord’s Prayer, *poneros*, can be translated as either neuter (thus, deliver us from *evil*, understood as an anti-God force, which is the translation most often used in the Latin West) or as masculine (thus, deliver us from *the Evil One*, understood as Satan- the personal focus of evil, which is the preferred translation in the Eastern Churches. It is clear from the Gospel accounts that Jesus understood that evil found its focus and origin in Satan, the Evil One as the wilderness temptation stories indicate, e.g. Mt. 4:1-11.

---



**Romans 3:1-20. . . . . 9**

trivialized and reduced to individual actions that are *naughty but fun*, Michael Bird thinks we should use the word *Sin* less often and instead use the stronger word *Evil* while still has edge and which all sane people are frightened of. People wink at *Sin* but stop cold at *Evil* because it's such a threat, and these days we feel it keenly in a pervasive social anxiety.

The fact that the motto of one of the world's hippest companies, Google, is "Don't be Evil," may be an indicator of cultural traction the church should build on.<sup>6</sup> Our new leading questions might be, "What do you think is wrong with our world?" and "What is your personal plan to resist evil, and how are you doing?" then listen as they unfold their world view in stories and sighs, contradictions and conundrums. Let the Spirit help you, and if they— in turn— ask the same of you, tell them your story and ours. One problem in two parts: human sin and trans-human evil, including real angels and a fallen Lucifer.<sup>7</sup> Then ask, Which account has more explanatory power and offers more hope?

The Lord's Prayer says we need bread and all that goes with it to sustain us physically, and we also need two-way forgiveness and a divine protector to shield us from the full effects of what ails us and attacks us. It's not a pretty picture, but it is a true one and highly realistic. Life is not a naive spiritual Disney; life is an unending moral and spiritual battlefield with casualties all around us, and we all exit feet first. Your pastor is a sergeant, not a therapist. So don't ask me to make you feel good or give you four nifty ideas for immediate life improvement as if what God wants is *an improved you*. No, what God's offers is *a new you*, a you with the Spirit of the Risen Jesus at the center, not just a better version of the old self. To trivialize this faith and its immense resources is a sin of the first order and highly popular in our day, so beware!

Life improvement keeps me at the center, and with Jesus we die and are born again into a new world and a new life. Do you see the difference? Jesus

---

<sup>6</sup> Michael Bird, *Romans: The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 104-105

<sup>7</sup> For a defense, see Richard Beck, *Reviving Old Scratch: Demons And The Devil For Doubters And The Disengaged* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2016).

---

**Romans 3:1-20. . . . . 10**

is not an American pragmatist; his method is not that of a self-help guru. We all know we need a change, but our chosen methods do not go deep enough. It's finally not about self-esteem and getting the right techniques in place. The make-over we need is not exterior, not merely decorative or cosmetic; it's a demolition and re-creation project from the ground up and from the inside-out.

Now on a good creation from God and the universal corrupting powers of Sin and Evil the churches agree. What we disagree on is how it precisely happened. The doctrine of Original Sin as we know it is an Early Catholic and later a Protestant thing. We got the bad seed of Sin from our first parents Adam and Eve in a quite literal way, as if sin was a disease gene passed on in human reproduction.<sup>8</sup>

But the churches of the East, the Orthodox churches, have a bit different read. Genesis 3, the fall story in the Garden with the lying snake, is not just about what happened *once upon a time in the ancient bliss of Eden* but what happens *every time with every human being* except one, and that— as you know— is Jesus. It's not *once-for-all in a now lost perfect world* but *once-and-again* in this one as it is. All are naked and vulnerable; all are naive children; all wonder if God's holding out on something good; all believe the seductive lie of a better, independent way; all transgress and involve others; all discover the bitter consequences of a life alienated from God at every level; all hide in shame and guilt; all die East of Eden in a world of thistles and thorns, dreaming of a better world through two little words, "If only...."

Who can argue with that? It's our common human story, and this reading is a gift from our ancestors in the faith who told and preserved the true stories that came from God and that explained who they were, where they lived, what's wrong, and is there hope?

Now if you want a literal Adam and Eve, the physical parents from which the entire modern family comes, they've been found with fresh precision only three years ago, and guess what? Both are African. I'm sure you're all

---

<sup>8</sup> The proposal of Augustine of Hippo.

---

**Romans 3:1-20. . . . . 11**

familiar with the work of G. David Poznik in his 2013 article, “Sequencing Y Chromosomes Resolves Discrepancy in Time to Common Ancestor of Males Versus Females,” as confirmed in the parallel research of Paolo Fancalacci in his article of the same year, “Low-Pass DNA Sequencing of 1200 Sardinians Reconstructs European Y-Chromosome Phylogeny.”<sup>9</sup> The female lived between 99,000 and 148,000 years ago, the male 125,000 to 156,000 years ago. It’s a fascinating analysis, and the fine folks at the Greenwood Genetics Center will be happy to explain the technical terms.

We also know that the guy and the girl did not know each other and that they were not the only ones alive at the time but part of a larger population, which poses some challenges to a naive reading of the Genesis story. Our first parents were not a couple if the science is right, and they didn’t live in Eden but in a world of tooth and claw, and yet their DNA is our own. There is continuity. Uncle Dusty and Aunt Evie! But then Genesis is not a science text, is it? It’s something much more important. It’s a book about the basics of God and us, and the Christian doctrine of Creation claims that whatever proper science finds in the world was put there by God and needs to be folded into our thinking.

But if this is a true insight of evolutionary biology, then we may have to reread our traditional reading of the doctrine of sin. The Bible asserts the reality of Sin and Evil and their universal reach, but the Scriptures do not do a lot of speculation about the precise origins, so we have some wiggle room for new information from our friends in the anthropology and genetics departments.<sup>10</sup>

At whatever point the word *sapient* was applied to *hominids* so that we

---

<sup>9</sup> As referenced in Joel Green, “Reframing ‘Original Sin’: Part 2,” *Catalyst*, [www.catalystresources.org/reframing-original-sin-a-frontier-for-theology-and-science-part-2](http://www.catalystresources.org/reframing-original-sin-a-frontier-for-theology-and-science-part-2). For a summary, see Ewen Callaway, “Adam and Eve did not live too far apart in time,” *Nature*, Aug. 6, 2013, [www.nature.com/news/genetic-adam-and-eve-did-not-live-too-far-apart-in-time-1.13478](http://www.nature.com/news/genetic-adam-and-eve-did-not-live-too-far-apart-in-time-1.13478).

<sup>10</sup> Joel Green, “The Old Testament, Gen. 3 in particular, does not contemplate much the etiology of sin, nor the consequences of Adam and Eve’s mistrust and disobedience in Eden” (“Reframing.... Part 1).

---

**Romans 3:1-20. . . . . 12**

became *homo sapiens*— which is Latin for *wise guys*— there the gift of the image and knowledge of God was corrupted, and only at the end will have the fuller picture. Wherever the image was added to the rough hairy draft of a human being with a prominent brow, there we became accountable to the God we could now know and whom we could betray. It was the crown of our long creation, and we blew it, one and all and everyone since. When the crown of the image was added, we soon committed treason and were banished from innocence.

Two things you know about everyone you meet, really three: they are a beloved human being just like you; the shine of the original image will still peek through from time to time, but it is now compromised and defaced by a pair of vandals, *Sin* and *Evil*, who'd love to spray the Mona Lisa with Krylon and spoil every party you attend. The problem is they don't live next door or around the corner; the live inside the house, and the house is you! No wonder its so hard for us sinners to live together! We are all *under the influence*.

I am fascinated with the insights and analogies we can draw from other fields of study to help folk be curious about our ancient modern faith. In 2009 a German scientist, Jan Souman, took a group of subjects out to empty parking lots and open fields, blindfolded and then told them to walk in a straight line. Some kept a straight course for ten or twenty paces; a few lasted fifty or a hundred, but in the end all wound up circling back toward their points of origin. Not many. Not most. But all.

"And they have no idea," Dr. Souman told the NPR interviewer. "They thought they were walking in a straight line all the time." His team then explored alternative explanations. Some turned right, others left, but no pattern. Neither the left nor right-handed showed any predisposition for turning one way more than the other, nor did subjects tested for right or left brain dominance. The team tried gluing a rubber soul to the bottom of one shoe to make one leg longer than the other. "It didn't make any difference," said Souman, "If you ask people to swim blindfolded or drive a car blindfolded, no matter how determined they may be to go straight, they quickly begin to inscribe peculiar

---

looping circles in one direction or the other.<sup>11</sup>

And so, to make the connection, if our natural GPS is this unreliable if sight is withdrawn, what if we've been damaged by powers we don't fully understand, powers that blocked our inward eyes so that, as Paul said in verse 18, "There is no fear of God *before their eyes.*" Is this why we always *miss the mark* just as the old Greek word for sin indicates. Are we so inwardly bent we cannot stay on course? The answer of the Bible and the faith is Yes; our eyes need to be opened, our trajectory towards God reset. We cannot fix ourselves; we need outside help, and since all of us are implicated, we need help from beyond. Only God can heal us, and he has come close in Jesus to do just that.

So what if Paul is right in his complex reasoning as I believe? What if the God of the Jews and Jesus is faithful and true and just and loving and because of the divine character holds us all accountable for our inward impulses and outward actions. And what if his chosen people were blessed to be entrusted with divine revelation and preserved it in a book? Is that an advantage? Yes, but only if you take the light to the world, and they resisted that call. But does their failure change God's character? Not a whit. God remains true when we are false. "But is God fair?" some ask, "Does not our sin make his light all the brighter and our sin highlight his mercy." In other words, does not God need us to be this way to enhance his reputation? Is it not the depth of the valley that enhances the height of the peak? And with all such moral foolishness, Paul has only one thing to say, "Their condemnation is just." "God likes to forgive; I like to sin; how cool is that?" Only a blind fool, young or old, could think such; they are legion and will be rudely surprised when they find God is not an old indulgent grandfather but a vigorous Father who resists everything in his children that distorts their character and ability to love what is true. Silly chatter will cease, mouths hang open in horror, and they will go away.

Now if you want to make your case with Jews and Christians, it's not enough to argue from history or reason or experience; you have to make your

---

<sup>11</sup> Yonason Goldson, *Proverbial Beauty* (St. Louis, MO: Timewise Press, 2015), 136.

---

**Romans 3:1-20. . . . . 14**

case from The Book as well, and that is what Paul does in verses 10 through 18. He sets his magnet on *Sin* and passes it over his Bible; what sticks he arranges in a memorable list around two topics: words and deeds. Paul listened to people talk, and he heard— as you will if you try his experiment— that much of what comes out of their heart and up their throat and over their tongues and across their lips and out their mouth is pure poison and distilled deceit. And if you track their steps over time— where they go and what they do— you’ll find a trail of blood: *ruin and misery in their path; the ways of peace they have not known*. They simply do not know the God under whose gaze they live. Richard Niebuhr was not wide of the mark when he quipped in 1965 that “the doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith,”<sup>12</sup> and by that he meant you could view it every day in yourself and others.

Friends, we cannot fix what’s wrong with us and our world. One person may be a bit better than another on a relative scale, but all are imprisoned inside the same cruel camp of Sin and Evil and Death. God’s law is diagnostic; it names what’s wrong but cannot cure it. You can’t be good enough or sincere enough or religious enough or give enough to cure the dual diagnosis of Sin and Evil that effects us all. Unless you meet with the Great Physician for an IV of medicine only he carries, unless you put your full trust in him, you will die as you are, and that is a frightening proposition. Commenting on his performance in the gangster drama *Black Mass*, actor Johnny Depp said, "I found the evil in myself a long time ago, and I've accepted it. We're old friends."<sup>13</sup>

“Mr. Depp, what you need is a new friend.”

You are ill and dying of a plague. I see it from here and in my mirror. But there is One who can help, and it is to his table that all sinners are invited this day. This is not negative teaching; this is true teaching and full of hope. Come and take what Jesus has to give, and come with an open heart.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Man’s Nature And His Communities* (New York, NY: Scribners, 1965), 24.

<sup>13</sup> PreachingToday.com search under *Original Sin*.

---

THE TEACHING OF THE U.M. *ARTICLES OF RELIGION* ON SIN & EVIL  
(The *U.M. Book of Discipline* 2012: 65-70)

**Article VII: Of Original or Birth Sin** (We enter the world as rebels against God with a continual bent to evil)  
**Original sin** standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature **inclined to evil, and that continually.**

**Article VIII: Of Free Will** (Sinners cannot turn to God on their own, but only with God’s constant help)  
 The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

**Article IX: Of the Justification of Man** (We make no addition to the grounds of salvation; we only trust)  
 We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith, only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.

**Article X: Of Good Works** (The goods works that follow faith as its fruit have no power to remove sin)  
 Although good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, **cannot put away our sins**, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

**Article XI: Of Works of Supererogation** (You cannot do more than God requires or put God in debt)  
 Voluntary works—besides, over and above God's commandments—which they call works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for his sake than of bounden duty is required; whereas Christ saith plainly: When you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘**We are unprofitable servants.**’

**Article XII: Of Sin After Justification** (Those who fall into sin may- by God’s grace- turn back to God)  
 Not every **sin** willingly committed after justification is the **sin** against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore, the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as **fall into sin** after justification. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and **fall into sin**, and, by the grace of God, rise again and amend our lives. **And therefore they are to be condemned who say they can no more sin as long as they live here;** or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

**Article XX: Of the One Oblation of Christ, Finished upon the Cross** (Chris’s offering alone is sufficient for sin)  
 The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction **for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual;** and there is **none other satisfaction for sin but that alone.** Wherefore the sacrifice of masses, in the which it is commonly said that the priest doth offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, is a blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit.

**Of Sanctification** (It is expected that we grow in Christ as the power of sin is broken and cancelled)  
 Sanctification is that renewal of our fallen nature by the Holy Ghost, received through faith in Jesus Christ, whose blood of atonement **cleanseth from all sin;**

3 Dimensions Of Cleansing From Sin

- (-) whereby we are not only *delivered* from the guilt of sin, Sin as objective guilt. Delivered. (1)  
 but are *washed* from its pollution (i.e. its defilement, stain), Sin as corruption. Washed. (2)  
 saved from its power, Sin as an alien and potent personal force. Saved. (3)
- (+) and are enabled, through grace, God strengthen us in grace to love and walk in a new life.  
 to love God with all our hearts and to walk in his holy commandments blameless. Love & Live!

**2') 3:1-20 FIVE SETS OF QUESTIONS AND SUPPORTIVE SCRIPTURE.**

**a) vv.1-9 Five Scholastic Dialogs, Form: 2 Questions(Q) + Answer(A) + Comment©.**

1. vv.1-2 What Advantage Has The Jew?

Frame/Inclusion, v.1a//v.9a: *ti oun = Then what?*

a. v.1 Two Questions, Q1 = *What then?* Q2 = *Or what?*

b. v.2a Answer: *Much in every way*

c. v.2b Comment: Jews have Scripture and its promised entrusted to them by God.

2. vv.3-4 Opposition: Human Faithlessness And God's Faithfulness

Echo 2': **true**

Link word: **judged** (v.4c)

a. v.3 Two Questions, Q1 = Conditional, *For what if*, Q2 = *Does their?*

b. v.4a Answer: *By no means*

c. vv.4b,c Comment + Scripture (Ps. 51:4b LXX)

3. vv.5-6 Opposition: Human Wickedness And God's Righteousness

Link word: **judge** (v.6b), **by no means** (v.6a)

a. v.5 Two Questions, Q1 = Conditional, *But if*, Q2 = *That God is?*

b. v.6a Answer: *By no means*

---



c. v.6b Comment As Question? Assumes God Judges The

World

2' vv.7-8 Opposition: Human Falsehood and God's Truthfulness

Echo 2: **truthfulness**

Link word: **judged/condemnation** (v.7b, 8b)

why not?

a. vv.7-8a Two Questions, Q1 = Conditional, *But if*, Q2 = *And*

b. Pattern Broken, Answer Omitted For Emphasis

c. v.8b Comment: *Just Condemnation*

1' v.9 What Disadvantage Has The Jew?

Frame/Inclusion, v.9a//v.1a: *ti oun = What then?*

a. v.9a,b Two Questions, Q1 = *What then?* Q2 = *Are we?*

b. v.9c Answer: *No, not at all*

c. v.9d Comment, "*for... ALL (Jews/Greeks) are under Sin*" (//v.20b)

End: *all are under sin*

**b. vv.10-18 An Ordered Chain Of Scriptural Proofs (Catena), Demonstrates v.9d.**

Introductory formula, "As it is written..." (//v.4b)

1. vv.10-12 Thesis = Universal Sin

Ecc. 7:20,  
Ps. 14:2-3

Inclusion: ***ouk estin* (5x), *God***

Link word: ***ALL*** (v.9d)

---

**Romans 3:1-20..... 18**

2. vv.13-14 Three Examples Of Corrupt Speech (Uses 3 different psalms, 4 parts)

- a. v.13 Throat/tongue Ps. 53:1-2, 5:9b
- b. v.13c Lips Ps. 140:3b
- c. v.14 Mouth Ps. 10:7

2' vv.15-17 Three Examples Of Corrupt, Violent Actions

- a. v.15 Feet Is. 59:7-8a
- b. v.16 Paths Ps. 59:7b
- c. v.17 Way Ps. 59:8a

1' v.18 Thesis = Universal Sin: Eyes

Inclusion: *ouk estin* (1x), **God**

**c. vv.19-20 All Accountable To God, Without Excuse Because Of**

**The Law.**

1. v.19a Law Speaks To Jews *under the law.*

2. v.19b Jews Silenced, Gentiles Accountable

2' v.20a *For, No One In Right Relationship By works of the law.*

Ps. 142:3

1' v.20b *For, Law Reveals Sin, through the law*

End: *through the law is the knowledge of sin*

---

