

### ***Deuteronomy 1:34-40 (Opening)***

<sup>34</sup> *“And the LORD heard your words and was angered, and he swore,*  
<sup>35</sup> *‘Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land*  
*that I swore to give to your fathers, <sup>36</sup> except Caleb the son of*  
*Jephunneh. He shall see it, and to him and to his children I will give the*  
*land on which he has trodden, because he has wholly followed the*  
*LORD!’ <sup>37</sup> Even with me the LORD was angry on your account and said,*  
*‘You also shall not go in there. <sup>38</sup> Joshua the son of Nun, who stands*  
*before you, he shall enter. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to*  
*inherit it. <sup>39</sup> And as for your little ones, who you said would become a*  
*prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil,*  
*they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess*  
*it. <sup>40</sup> But as for you, turn, and journey into the wilderness in the*  
*direction of the Red Sea.’*

Let me paint a picture for you.

Well, let me say that differently. If today's sermon seems disjointed or confused, part of the problem is the scripture we're looking at today, and another part of it is the paint fumes. I wrote the most of this on Saturday morning while a large group of folks were painting the walls here.

Let me start by wishing all of you a happy Mother's Day. And by saying that today's sermon has nothing to do with Mother's Day. But it's an important occasion, so I wanted to mention it. Mothers are important; without mothers, where would we all be?

So, if you want to hear a Mother's Day sermon, come to Gray Birch and the Maine Veteran's home with us this afternoon.

People really can be mean. In fact, some have gone so far as to say that people are by nature evil. There's nothing good about us from the day that we're born.

I partially agree with that comment, but it will take some time to get to the point that I can explain it to you. Many people take the scripture we're talking about today to support their belief that the human race is evil from the point of birth.

Here in Romans chapter 3, Paul is introducing his final argument for his court case against humanity. Over the past two chapters of Romans, Paul has laid out his case, first against the gentiles, then against the Jews. Ignorance is no excuse, because the knowledge of God is available to all. God has made Himself known to everyone, through nature for those who do not know the Law, and through the Law for those that do know it.

Let's read Romans 3:9-20.

## ***Romans 3:9-20***

<sup>9</sup> *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup> as it is written:*

<sup>11</sup> *“None is righteous, no, not one;  
no one understands;  
no one seeks for God.*

<sup>12</sup> *All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;  
no one does good,  
not even one.”*

<sup>13</sup> *“Their throat is an open grave;  
they use their tongues to deceive.”  
“The venom of asps is under their lips.”*

<sup>14</sup> *“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”*

<sup>15</sup> *“Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

<sup>16</sup> *in their paths are ruin and misery,*

<sup>17</sup> *and the way of peace they have not known.”*

<sup>18</sup> *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

<sup>19</sup> *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

Paul seems to be saying here that there’s no hope at all. The human race is entirely flawed, and there’s no saving them from themselves.

And the scary thing, I guess for me, is that he’s right. We can’t save ourselves. But I’m getting ahead of myself, here. Let’s back up a bit before we jump there.

Paul presents his case by sharing what is written. He pulls his accusations out of the Psalms and Isaiah. I want to take a look at where Paul is taking his support from.

Verses 10-12 are taken from Psalm 14. Let's look at the first three verses of that Psalm that David wrote.

***Psalm 14:1-3***

- 1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."  
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds,  
there is none who does good.*
- 2 The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man,  
to see if there are any who understand,  
who seek after God.*
- 3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt;  
there is none who does good,  
not even one.*

David says here that the atheist is a fool. They are all evil and do evil things; even when they do good things they have evil or selfish intentions. They do good things for evil results.

Paul leaves off the atheist part of the Psalm. He's making his point that all men are corrupt. Evil reigns in their hearts. They may have followed God before, but now they've given up on Him, and are more worried about themselves than what God wants them to do.

Paul uses this Psalm also to point out that men's minds are the problem, that they don't understand God and don't even care about Him in any way. Paul's starting his accusation at the top and working his way down.

Paul takes verse 13 from Psalm 5, also written by David. Psalm 5 is David's plea to God to support His people against those who don't believe, those who profess to follow the Law, but have turned away.

### ***Psalm 5:9-10***

- <sup>9</sup>     *For there is no truth in their mouth;  
          their inmost self is destruction;  
          their throat is an open grave;  
          they flatter with their tongue.*
- <sup>10</sup>    *Make them bear their guilt, O God;  
          let them fall by their own counsels;  
          because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out,  
          for they have rebelled against you.*

Paul is working his way down the body. He says that our mouths can't follow God either. He uses David's comparison of the mouth to an open grave; not that their breath is like an open grave, but that what they say causes the same result as opening a tomb; revulsion and disgust.

Because these people are rebellious, David says, they carry their own guilt from God. They try to paint a good picture, by saying good things about people and about God, but they are doing it for their own benefit.

Have you ever noticed that people who don't believe in God don't take advice from people who do believe in God? Or at least they don't do it very often. They run in their own circles, and try to do things to help themselves, not help others. Even when they do help others, it's because they will eventually benefit from it. Self-serving good works is the rule of the day for them.

Paul finishes what we've marked as verse 13 with a quote from Psalm 140. Specifically, Paul uses verse 3 from Psalm 140, but let's look at the first three verses.

### ***Psalm 140:1-3***

- <sup>1</sup>     *Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men;  
          preserve me from violent men,*

<sup>2</sup>     *who plan evil things in their heart  
          and stir up wars continually.*  
<sup>3</sup>     *They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's,  
          and under their lips is the venom of asps.*

Now Paul has moved from the throat to the lips as another part of the body that fights against God.

David, in this Psalm, is asking God for safety from his enemies. David was a warrior all his life, constantly fighting against first Saul who was unjustly trying to kill him, and then many of the neighboring tribes and nations, constantly trying to take the nation of Israel out.

Thinking about these verses from this Psalm from the standpoint of a leader, what I see is a leader who is dealing with people who are saying one thing and doing something else; spreading rumors and lies, trying to cause problems simply by talking.

Paul, using the last line of verse three here, supports his closing argument against mankind by showing that no matter what they say, there's a lie involved. As Jesus said, when the father of lies speaks, he speaks his native language. Paul is pointing out that these people are children of the father of lies.

Paul rounds out his discussion about people being evil from the neck up with verse 7 from Psalm 10. But let's look at verses 2 through 11 of Psalm 10, to get a better understanding of the context Paul is pulling from.

***Psalm 10:2-11***

<sup>2</sup>     *In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor;  
          let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.*  
<sup>3</sup>     *For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul,  
          and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD.*  
<sup>4</sup>     *In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him;*

*all his thoughts are, "There is no God."  
5 His ways prosper at all times;  
your judgments are on high, out of his sight;  
as for all his foes, he puffs at them.  
6 He says in his heart, "I shall not be moved;  
throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity."  
7 His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;  
under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.  
8 He sits in ambush in the villages;  
in hiding places he murders the innocent.  
His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;  
9 he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket;  
he lurks that he may seize the poor;  
he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net.  
10 The helpless are crushed, sink down,  
and fall by his might.  
11 He says in his heart, "God has forgotten,  
he has hidden his face, he will never see it."*

The Psalmist here is saying again that those who do evil things either don't believe in God, or believe the God isn't looking because they get away with it.

I think this is a really good description of what we see today; people doing evil things and thinking that they can get away with it because God isn't looking. So many people are doing things that God doesn't approve of, and yet still prosper.

The Psalmist finishes this Psalm on a positive note, saying that God listens to the afflicted, those people that the evil people in the beginning of this Psalm are taking advantage of.

Paul uses only half of a verse from this Psalm, the first part of verse 7; but it's important to understand the context of what the Psalmist is

talking about. He's talking about people taking advantage of those who can't defend themselves.

Now Paul moves to the feet of the wicked people. To describe that, Paul goes to both Proverbs chapter 1 and Isaiah chapter 59. Let's look at the Isaiah scripture.

### ***Isaiah 59:7-8***

*7 Their feet run to evil,  
and they are swift to shed innocent blood;  
their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;  
desolation and destruction are in their highways.*

*8 The way of peace they do not know,  
and there is no justice in their paths;  
they have made their roads crooked;  
no one who treads on them knows peace.*

Isaiah is saying that these evil people run toward violence; they are in a hurry to do evil things, especially if they can hurt someone. They run around finding ways to hurt people, physically.

Paul's quotation from Isaiah isn't exactly what we read, but it ties together both verses 7 and 8 from Isaiah 59. The point he's making is that not only do they plot evil things with their minds, and speak evil with their mouths, they run to evil with their feet. They're in a hurry to do what they can to hurt people.

The final part of the supporting evidence for Paul's closing argument here is taken from Psalm 36.

### ***Psalm 36:1-4***

*1 Transgression speaks to the wicked  
deep in his heart;  
there is no fear of God  
before his eyes.*

<sup>2</sup> *For he flatters himself in his own eyes  
that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.*  
<sup>3</sup> *The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit;  
he has ceased to act wisely and do good.*  
<sup>4</sup> *He plots trouble while on his bed;  
he sets himself in a way that is not good;  
he does not reject evil.*

David is saying in this part of this Psalm that evil people are self-serving, and have no fear of God because they don't understand Him and what He does for everyone.

Paul simply uses the fact that wicked people don't fear God in his argument. If people don't fear God, they don't obey God, and they do whatever they want to do, rather than trying to please God.

I think something that's important to point out in the scripture that Paul uses to support his argument, is they're all talking about people that can make decisions and form arguments for themselves; they're talking about adults.

Taking into account the context of the argument that Paul is making, I don't see how you can make the argument that people are sinful from birth. Yes, we have a tendency toward sin, but we don't start out that way.

I have yet to see a baby that is evil, or does evil; outside of horror movies, that is. Yes, babies are selfish, but that's how they survive. If they weren't selfish, they'd starve to death, right?

As babies grow up, they learn. We all do. Hopefully we never stop learning. But there comes a time in everyone's life that they start to realize that they have a choice to do the right thing or to do the wrong thing, those things that their parents told them not to do. Once we realize that the choice exists, that's when we start to sin.

As far as Eve was concerned, there was no choice but to follow God's will, until the serpent identified the fact that she could choose to disobey. There's a point in our lives that we do the same thing.

In our opening scripture, from Deuteronomy chapter 1, Moses points out that God didn't hold a group of the Israelites responsible for the sins that kept the adults from entering the Promised Land. Let's look at verse 39 from Deuteronomy 1 again.

### ***Deuteronomy 1:39***

*<sup>39</sup> And as for your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.*

God declared that the people under age 20, those who hadn't been counted in the census after leaving Egypt, would survive. Moses points out that they "have no knowledge of good or evil". The Hebrew in this verse is the same as the Hebrew in Genesis 2:17 when God tells Adam which tree he's not supposed to eat from. To me, that says that the knowledge of good and evil is the key to being held responsible for your actions.

Now, don't get me wrong here, I'm not saying that if you're under 20 years old, you're not accountable for your actions. In fact, I think people today are getting the knowledge of good and evil at younger ages, because of the constant exposure to evil. The longer we're exposed to evil, the more we tend toward doing evil.

So, once we understand the difference between good and evil, and we realize we have the ability to disobey, then we're held accountable for our actions.

If children are inherently evil, why would Jesus have used them an example for how we must be when we come to him? Take a look at Mark 10:13-15.

### **Mark 10:13-15**

*<sup>13</sup> And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup> But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. <sup>15</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."*

Jesus says if we don't accept God's kingdom the same way a child would, we won't get it. How do children accept things? Innocently, trustingly, meekly, and without any pretense or falsehood.

But isn't that how we should approach becoming a Christian, anyway? We should understand the consequences of our actions, but be fully trusting that God knows what's best for us and totally willing to accept His plan for our lives. We need to come with a total surrender to His will, accepting the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins.

Paul explains in Galatians 2:15 and 16

### **Galatians 2:15-16**

*<sup>15</sup> We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup> yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*

Paul, in Romans 3:9-20, presents his closing arguments convicting both Jew and Gentile of sin, and saying that neither Jew nor Gentile are righteous, and cannot become righteous on their own. We are all in need of a savior to be righteousness for us, so we can be God's children; be acceptable to Him. And we need to accept it like children do, totally trusting His will for us and that He will save us from our sins.

**Romans 3:21-26 (Closing)**

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—<sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.