

How Deep Are You In?, Romans 3:9-20

Pax Romana #6

◆**Intro:** My oldest brother is a MI State Trooper. He obtained permission for me to ride along with him during one of our visits. Dan is an expert in judging speed, so much so that he is as accurate as their radar equipment, and teaches the courses on their use. So it was no difficulty for him, as we cruised along an endless two lane highway through the MI north, to assess that “that guy is going 74”, referring to a vehicle that passed us going the opposite direction. His next words revealed the adventure we were about to take. He said, “Hang on to something.”

◆Do you know the feeling of suddenly recognizing a police car in your rearview mirror? You know, that feeling of warm peace that floods you with surety that the land is indeed being kept safe? Not that one? Maybe you’ve had a different feeling: slight twinge in your stomach, a rise in blood pressure, a momentary panic that quickly tries to assess if you’ve done anything wrong, because now you just may be in some-kind-of-trouble-what-have-I-done-now?! Yes. That one. Why is *that* the feeling we mostly get when we spot a cop? Isn’t it because every one of us knows down deep inside that we are not as clean as crystal? That we all too frequently put our little pink toes over the line of law, often by accident, and... often on purpose too. The cop is the law, and the law’s original purpose is point out sin! That’s why we feel guilty when we see a cop car behind us!

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◆ *"Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." Romans 3:20, NIV.*

◆ The law isn't a feel good friend. It reminds us where we mess up! That's really not a bad thing when you think about it. At least then we know we have a problem that needs addressing, like a rash, or a cough, or pain in your spine – these are signs that we need to fix something. That's good. It can also make you feel desperate. I'm sorry to tell you, but Paul wants us to feel desperate today. Only the desperate rejoice in a rescue. So how deep are you in the sin problem? Probably deeper than you thought.

◆ **1. I'm more sinful than I thought!**

◆ **A.** Paul has so far moved from "they" in chapter one of immoral pagans, to "you" in chapter two of moral sinners/Jews, to "we" (v9), "we jews", including himself, the teacher of God's truth, the Jesus-follower, the Bible-reader! He concludes we are all citizens of the country of Sin. (v9b "under sin" is a legal term.) Then he quotes the Law, i.e., the Old Testament. He can think of a passage about every part of a person that points to the fact that sin has invaded us! The doctrine declaring that humans are stained in every area by sin is called Total Depravity. Not that there is nothing good, but that even the good has cat-sup stains of bad.

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- ◆ Our minds and thoughts (v11 we lack understanding, don't even look for it.).cf 1:18
 - ◆ Our wills and desires. (v12 we "turn away". We choose other.)
 - ◆ Our speech/words. (v13-14. Jesus said out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks so our language betrays our hearts! We lie, slander, curse)
 - ◆ Our acts, our doings. (v15-17 are full of walking images: feet, way/road of misery, road of peace. We walk the roads of broken relationships.)
 - ◆ Our purpose, our longings. These too are captured by sin. (v18 "no fear of God.") What's that? Honoring the Creator. Being humbly respectful of his center place in all the universe, which includes your house.
- ◆ Do you see what Paul has revealed? Not even the Keepers of the Book, the believers in God, keep the very commands in the Book! Their Book says so! The Scriptures tell us that without the interceding hand of God, we can't even **want** to do the right thing! This is what total depravity means.
- ◆ *"No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:44, NIV.*
 - ◆ Speaking of church leaders Paul writes, "Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth," 2 Timothy 2:25, NIV. (Also see Phil.2:13)

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◆ Do you see? Turning to God, becoming sick of sin, knowing the truth about who we are and who God is - these are not things we do so that God will come and work in us. They are things God does in us so that we can find him. (Keller).

◆ **B.** Suppose we were to take a score card for golf and change it into a score card for the 10 commandments. Golf has nine holes, so we just add one more box. Now in golf you want the fewest possible strokes to get the ball in the hole. Par is a term that describes the number of strokes each hole was designed to take. For nine holes the par is ordinarily 36, or 72 for 18 holes. Professional golfers need to be able to golf par or less, like only 70 strokes for 18 holes. Let's run through the commandments like each hole and do some self-scoring. We'll use 4 as par for the course: not bad, but not good either. Just average, par.

◆ **Command 1.** Have no other gods: How deep are you in on that one? Before you rate, may I remind us that this means you avoid superstition, never knock on wood, you don't even know your astronomical sign. You constantly trust only God. Love, fear, honor him with every ounce of your heart. Prefer worshiping him over watching Netflix. You patiently trust his sovereign plan no matter what goes wrong, responding in humble patience, confident that God will see you through. Score yourself: for most of us it's a question of how far *over par* we are. Let's be generous and give it a bogie: 5.

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◆ **Command 2.** No idols: now before you make you score... a good score rules out say, any tattoo of something other than praise to God. You don't identify yourself with the Yankees, or at least you'd rather wear a Jesus hat. You've never thought that if I wear this cross on my neck the day will go better. Never gone to a church building assuming that because you walked in you'd get power from being there. And certainly don't pray to a statue of Buddha, of Tree God, etc. We might feel a little better on this one, since we don't ordinarily pray to things, but I'll just say as your pastor, I'm gonna not willing to claim par. I'll take a 5.

◆ **Command 3.** Cursing, mentioning God ever in a circumstance that wasn't honor, or prayer. You've stopped others from using OMG. You've never mentioned Jesus when slamming a door on your hand. And your life has made God look really good to everyone you know. Score yourself. Let's assume that everyone one in the room has a really polite mouth. 4 merely par.

◆ **Command 6.** No murder: How do you score on never killing anyone. But let me remind us that Jesus said hating your brother is murder. Same seed in the heart. So this one includes insults, glares, fights, dreams of fights, revenge, envy, anger. Cut to the chase. Most of us will have to take a snowman, 8.

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- ◆ **Command 7.** Do not commit adultery. One would mean you've never slept with anyone but your spouse, and you waited until marriage. But Jesus said in Matthew 5 that looking at another person lustfully was the same sin in the heart. Ouch. So that means no double takes at the pool. No enjoying Victoria and whatever her secret is. Never a porn picture. Never were nice to someone just because they were hot. Never looked at someone and imagined taking off their clothes. You know how generous golfers will sometimes say, "We don't count anything over 10?" Well, let's just stop the blood flow at 10, shall we?
- ◆ Now we've pondered just five of God's Ten Commandments. Shall we go on and look at stealing, lying, coveting, failing to honor parents and authority? We haven't even peeked into the positive things of each that we're NOT doing in the world. Whatdawe got? 32 points already. We're on course to score 64 on nine holes, assuming things will only get better! Guess what. Entrance requirements to the Heavenly Tour is not par; it's 10 strokes. No sins. Not one. The biblical word for sin means to "miss". Every ball you ever hit needs to land in the cup or you're outta luck. That's how it is in heaven. No sins ever! Ok. How deep are you in at this point? Our score card is like the Law. It doesn't show us how to earn the green jacket. It only shows us how bad we are! Hence v19-20. You don't talk about your game when you golf way over par.

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◆ Since a lot of folks think that the marginal amount of seemingly good things they've done will somehow balance the demerits, let's look at the good.

◆ **2. Good is harder than I thought!**

Why doesn't keeping the law create a backpack full of righteousness to claim when the need arises? Well for one,

◆ **A.** A truly good deed is good in form and motive. The Heidelberg Catechism puts it like this. "What do we do that is good? Only that which arises out of true faith, conforms to God's law, and is done for his glory." That is, it's not really good in the eyes of heaven if it didn't start in a heart that is responding to God's love, if it doesn't match of with what he has revealed in the Scriptures, or if it isn't motivated by a desire to thank, or please our Father in heaven. Now that's a mouthful, isn't it? That would mean then, that if you are doing something good in order to get God's grace, you are really doing it for yourself, to get something. See how hard pure good actually is? Tim Keller put it, "Without faith in Christ, good deeds are not truly done for God, but for ourselves—and thus are not truly good." The Bible says,

◆ "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31, NIV.

◆ **B.** One writer has observed that the main difference between a Christian and a religious person is not so much their

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attitudes toward their sins, but their attitude toward their good deeds. A religious person, like a Christian, will repent of sins, but only the Christian will repent of wrongly motivated good. The religious person will rely on them. But we cannot. The prophet Isaiah put it.

"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. No-one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you..." Isaiah 64:6, 7, NIV.

◆ There's one reason why self-righteousness is actually no righteousness at all! To truly be righteous and do good requires being sick of yourself and utterly desperate for God. Sin then is the opposite of fearing or desiring God. The fear of God (18) is to live in constant awareness and honor of him. If you cannot part with the things you think give you credit, your virtues, then you cannot know grace. If you are impressed with yourself for being a pretty good person, then you have no grasp of the Gospel of Jesus. (pause)

◆ **3. God is greater than I thought!**

◆ Now then, are you starting to feel some desperation? I hope so. Because you are. We all are. We are swimmers swimming from Hawaii to Japan. I may drown before you, but you ain't gonna make it either, no matter how nice you think you are. We are all high jumpers wearing the weight belts of sin. We are lost in the

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mountains of depravity during the blizzard and without a cloak of righteousness.

◆ But Jesus has come with a coat for you. The coat of his righteousness. Jesus has come to wear your weight belt so you can run and jump. Jesus has come to swim you to heaven and he's more powerful than Aqua-man. He's stronger than Superman, he faster than the Flash, and what's more he's a real person! None of us sought him out. He's the one who came to us. We decide to put our faith in him only because he has decided to give us faith.

◆ *"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference," Romans 3:21, 22, NIV.*

◆ "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith.'" Romans 1:17, NIV.

◆ You can rejoice that God is not hiding. That if you know or feel anything, it is because he has revealed himself to you. Everything you have you were given by him (1Cor.4:7). It's all grace, friends. You can be sure you're his because he chose you, and not the other way around.

◆ **Conclusion:** I was telling you earlier about riding with my brother the State Trooper. Remember when he said "Hang on to something."? With the other car speeding into the horizon in the opposite direction, Dan slammed on the brakes quickly com-

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ing to a halt. With that he threw squad car into reverse and slammed on the gas going backwards in our lane! At approximately 30mph, and before I knew what was happening, he yanked the steering wheel down on one side. As the car began to spin out in the middle of the road, and at just the right moment, he switched gears into drive and pressed the gas. Within seconds we were traveling at 110mph and ended up pulling the guy over and giving him a ticket. It was better than a roller-coaster! When Dan returned to the cruiser he told me about the conversation he had with the speeder. Once he has received his ticket from my brother, he said, "Um, Officer... *that* was so cool!"

◆I want to suggest to you that this is how a saved person will experience Judgment Day, when every one of us is caught red-handed, and every one of us deserves an eternal ticket we could never pay. But if you will bow your head to the Living God, Jesus Christ, it will not be guilt that is your final emotion, but awe! Love-inspiring awe at the perfection, and beauty of his power and speed with which he has pursued us in order to restore righteousness. By his life, his death, and his resurrection he has taken our tickets! He was good for us, and he is still good for you. Turn to him, now!