

Pastor Kyle Mercer
The Verdict on Humanity

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Series: The Verdict

Romans 3:9-20

BIG IDEA - SIN ISN'T JUST SOMETHING WE DO; IT'S A CONDITION WE LIVE UNDER, AFFECTING OUR HEARTS, OUR WORDS, OUR PATHS, AND ULTIMATELY OUR REVERENCE FOR GOD

Many of you have seen *Breaking Bad* or maybe *Better Call Saul*. Come on. We're in church. Don't lie. You've seen it. Many of you have seen it. Well, the main actor who plays Saul... His name is Bob Odenkirk. I watched an interview with him recently. You know, he's rich. He's successful. He's toward the end of his career. They asked him in this interview, "Who are you jealous of?"

I wasn't only surprised by his answer; I was surprised by how quickly he gave the answer. Here's what he said: "I'm jealous of dads who still have kids in the home." He said, "I'm jealous because that was the one time in my life I knew what I was supposed to be doing." Let me ask you, moms and dads. Do you know what you're supposed to be doing?

The reason we're having a parenting conference... Don't worry. This is the last time I'm talking about it because it's this weekend. We already have 600 adults signed up. We're super pumped about it. Here's the thing. This is kind of the same with marriage. The problem with parenting is you don't have that many examples. Right?

For some of you, the only example of parents you had, unfortunately, were *your* parents, and they weren't great. It was a broken home. The number of people in our church... We have a lot of new believers, a lot of young believers, a lot of people returning to church, and they're like, "No, we never saw a Christian family. We never saw a Christian marriage. We never saw devotionals. We never knew how to have good conversation at dinner. We didn't do repentance and forgiveness."

Here's the problem. If you've never experienced it, and it has never been explained to you, how are *you* going to do it? Well, hopefully, through building relationships in this church, you *will* get to experience some Christian homes. But we're taking an entire weekend to try to explain what the Bible says about parenting. We're bringing Pastor Adam Griffin from Dallas, Texas, up here.

Here's what I want you to know. I know what you're thinking. You know, at this parenting conference, we're going to talk a lot about your kids. Actually, not so much. We're going to talk a lot about *you*. Why are *you* so anxious? We have fewer kids and bigger homes than any of our ancestors, and for some reason, we're way more anxious about parenting.

We're going to talk about how you can deal with a strong-willed child. Anyone have any of those? Yep. Okay. We're going to talk about how you can engage with your kids, which is the principle of the gospel. They're not going to come to you as much. You have to go to them, because they won't come to you. We're going to talk about a lot of things. Here's why: we don't want you to win at work and lose at home.

Your family is your résumé. Your family is your witness to a watching world. If you're a mom and dad, and you love each other, and the kids love each other, and they respect you, everywhere you go people will be completely shocked, and they'll ask you how it happened. You'll have the opportunity in that moment not to give a biography but to give a testimony. A *biography* is about you; a *testimony* is about God.

With that said, it's not too late to sign up. I'm going to pray for us. Welcome, if you are a first-time guest with us on a baptism Sunday. We are just walking through the book of Romans for an entire year. Today, we'll be starting in chapter 3, verse 9. Let's pray together.

Lord, across all of our campuses, we pray for our parents. Many have a great longing to be a Christian home, and they read verses that say, "Raise your kids in the fear and admonition of the Lord." Then they say, "I want to do that, and I don't know how." We want to be a church that helps with "how."

So, we pray for all of the parents, whether they are in the little years or they are at the very end and about to send their kids into college. We know the truth is, as it has been said, the days are long but the years are short. It is such a special and unique time we have when we have our kids in the home. We pray that you would now bless the teaching of your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

There are 8.3 billion people on earth, as of yesterday when I looked. What's interesting is as soon as you start talking about all of the people all over the earth, and you think about

Africa and China and India and Russia and all of these places... As soon as they start talking about the massive number of people, even in our nation, what does everyone want to talk about? Diversity, diversity, diversity, diversity.

Listen. You can't build a community on diversity. Did you know that? *Community* is two words put together. You probably can figure out what they are: *common unity*. Now, we believe in all the good, amoral diversity that is out there. We can talk about skin color, language, culture, food, and personality.

What I want to do for a second is talk to you about what every person on earth has in common. We only have two things in common...every person you'll ever meet, every person in every place. One is found in Genesis, chapter 1, and the other is found in Romans, chapter 3.

You don't have to turn to Genesis 1, but here's what I want you to know. What you and I and every person have in common is that we're made in God's image. This is the exact opposite of "You're an accident." Atheistic, Darwinian evolution tells you it's the survival of the fittest and all that. Being made in the image of God is the only worldview that says every person, whether abled or disabled, rich or poor, white or black, has inherent dignity, value, significance, and worth.

If you'll turn with me to Genesis, chapter 3, it's going to tell us something else: that all of us are sinful, that we're sinful by nature and by choice, that you sin because you're a sinner, and sin isn't just an action; it's a condition. I'll show you this. Romans 3:9: "**What then?**" Paul keeps asking questions. We dealt with 10 questions last week. Now he asks another question.

"Are we Jews any better off?" What he's talking about is in our status and stance before God. His answer is **"No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one...'"** Paul is going to explain to us for the rest of this text what it means to be under sin.

I mean, we're Americans. Come on. We don't want to be under anything. Right? In fact, we like to say that we're on top of things. When we're doing well, we're on top of things. We don't want to be under things. But I can prove to you that you're under sin. Try not sinning. You're like, "All right." You know, we're always told death and taxes are the two realities of life. No. Death, taxes, and that you will sin. Those are the realities of life.

We're under sin, which means literally (it's harder to see this in the English), it's a domain. It has dominion. We're citizens of sin. We're prisoners of sin. You know you're under sin because you feel guilty, you feel dirty, and you feel enslaved. Those are the three things sin does.

Sin makes you feel guilty, and your conscience will condemn you. Sin will make you feel dirty. I've talked to people before, and after they sin, they feel like they need to take a shower. What's *that* about? Or they need to clean their room. They're like, "What? I never..." It is your soul telling your body you're dirty. Then sin enslaves us. Right? The modern word for sin enslaving us is *addiction*.

So, here's what we're going to do. For the rest of the time, Paul is going to... Just get ready. This is the most depressing part of Romans. If you're new, sorry. Come back next week. Next week is all encouraging. It's going to be great. Come back. This is really, really depressing, because Paul is going to say that we are sinful from our head to our toes. Literally. He's going to start with the head, go to the heart, talk about the tongue, and end with the feet.

I'm going to read the whole thing to you. By the way, you're going to notice... Look in your Bible. Verses 9-20 are indented and italicized. It's because Paul is quoting six different Old Testament passages. He's like, "I'm not even going to tell you anything new right now." He's like, "I'm just going to quote all of these Old Testament passages about our sinful condition before God." Here's what he says. Chapter 3, verse 9. I'll start at the beginning.

"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, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one...'" By the way, 13 times, Paul is going to use universal language...*no, not one, all of you, none of you...*that kind of stuff. ***"...no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."***

Then he goes to the mouth. ***"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."*** Then Paul summarizes.

"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. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

Now, what I love about the Bible is the Bible is honest. I think people, especially young people, are tired of hearing that they're okay. They're just tired of it. They're like, "Quit

telling me I'm a snowflake, because I don't feel like a snowflake. Quit writing in my yearbook, 'Never change,' because I need to change."

What I love about the Bible is it comes in and goes, "Okay, look." Paul is not trying to label you; he's trying to diagnose you. Paul is like, "I am a spiritual doctor. I'm coming in. I'm telling you that every person who ever lived has the same spiritual and legal condition before God." It doesn't mean every person is equally sinful. Your grandma (think about whoever she is for a second) is not as sinful as Hitler, but we know your grandmother is still a sinner.

You can't judge how sinful you are by comparing yourself to the nightly news, because then you'll feel really good about yourself. You have to compare yourself to a holy God. With that said, what we're going to do is I'm going to take this apart piece by piece, what I just read to you, and we're going to ask this question: "Really?" We really need that.

I've told you before, "A good Bible reader is a confused Bible reader." We're going to look at each of these and go, "Paul, come on." I always think about modern people. We're all modern people. But I just think about a modern, secular person reading this. They're like, "This is the exact opposite of what you're taught your whole life." Secular humanism tells you that you're a good person.

You know, this is just a real-time moment thing. There may have been a change in this since I last read about it. Savannah Guthrie is right. Her mother was supposedly kidnapped is what we think right now. We're not sure if they're going to come back. I saw what she said recently. She appealed to the kidnappers. In her statement to the kidnappers... She's hoping it's going to get heard by them and they're going to return her mother.

She said, "We..." Speaking of her siblings. She said, "We believe in the inherent goodness of every person, and we believe it's never too late to do the right thing." The Bible does not believe in the inherent goodness of every person. What Savannah Guthrie... And I'm not making fun of her suffering. They're obviously going through a terrible tragedy. I mean, that sounds great on a Hallmark card, but that is not the human condition.

Let's take it apart. The first thing we're told is no one seeks God, and no one does good. Look here. **"...no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."** Okay. When I say to you... Maybe you're new for a baptism Sunday, and you've never been in church, or you're de-churched or unchurched, or whatever, and I say, "No one seeks God."

You're like, "That's not true. I'm going to get on ChatGPT, because there are Mormons and Muslims and Jews and the Buddhists and the Hindu, and then there's my friend, and

he's not religious..." Here's the favorite phrase. Are you ready for it? You can finish it. "He's not religious, but he's spiritual." "I've got this girlfriend, and she does yoga, and it helps her connect to God. I've got this guy, and he goes into the woods to hunt, and he says that's how he meets with God."

Here's what this means. When it says, "Nobody seeks God," it means nobody seeks the God of the Bible, and nobody seeks the God of the Bible for the right reasons. Let me give you other things people seek instead of God and, if you're not paying attention, you might think they're seeking God. They're not seeking the God of the Bible.

Here's the first one. They're not seeking the God of the Bible; they're seeking the god of their own imagination. There's a guy named Christian Smith. You should look him up sometime. He's a famous PhD guy, and he does all of these sociological studies. He did this decade-long study on high schoolers, maybe middle schoolers too. This was about 20 years ago. He was trying to figure out what the average American high schooler believes about God. So, he'd ask a bunch of questions.

Well, when he was done with the whole study, he had a phrase to describe how high schoolers viewed God. He was like, "This phrase is so clunky, and the words are so big that no one is even going to remember it, and I might not even write it down." But he wrote it down, and it went viral. Here was the phrase: *moralistic therapeutic deism*.

Moralistic: "God wants me to be a good person." This is what people think. *Therapeutic*: "God wants me to be happy." *Deist*: "God exists, but he's not very involved in my life." Now, do you know what's interesting that American teenagers would say that about God? Because it's probably how they view their dad. "My dad wants me to be a good person, he wants me to be happy, and he's not very involved in my life."

Some people say they're seeking God, but they're actually seeking the god of their imagination. Some people aren't seeking God; they're seeking spiritual experiences, which is not the same. Meeting God *is* a spiritual experience, but some people are seeking spiritual experiences.

Now, we're not against... If you know me, I'm a big fan of camps and retreats and conferences and mission trips and events and all that. But what happens is a lot of people look back to a point in their life, and they had some spiritual experience at a retreat, but it never was fruitful, never bore fruit in their life. It's because they were seeking spiritual experiences, not seeking God.

I don't talk about this a lot. When I was at Duke, I took some classes at Duke Divinity. It's a long story. My seminary degree is not from there, but I took some classes while I was

there. It taught me that people aren't seeking God, oftentimes; they're seeking knowledge or philosophy.

I would be in this classroom... And I can't play junior varsity Holy Spirit, but I think I was one of the only believers in any of my classes at Duke Divinity. I just couldn't understand it. I'm like, "These people don't even believe in the Bible, but they're studying the Bible. They're not really seeking God. They're just interested in anthropology and the history of religion and how people view God."

Some people aren't seeking the God of the Bible; they're seeking blessings or they're seeking God's hand. By the way, this is why people get mad at God when God doesn't answer their prayers. They're seeking God's hand, not God's heart. What's the old saying? You don't meet somebody until you tell them "No." Tell somebody "No," then you'll meet the real them, whoever they are.

The final one is a lot of people aren't seeking God; they're seeking a community or a cause to be a part of. I'll just speak really directly about this for a second. I had to learn, in my years of college ministry, that insecure people will come with you to Christian events because they have no other friends.

I would have these guys show up. I'm like, "I don't think they believe. I don't think they want a relationship with Jesus Christ. I don't think they want to repent of their sins. I don't think they have any friends." Because Christians are uniquely kind, and we want to love people, and we want to welcome the stranger and the least and the last, and all that, then you have all of these people who sometimes are in the church and are like, "This is where I belong." Yeah, but you really can't fully belong if you don't believe.

Okay. Here's what I want you to understand: we don't seek God; God seeks us. You can check me on this. There's not one command... I learned this this week, and I was like, "Whoa." There is not one command in the Bible for non-Christians to seek God. Now, I know what you're thinking. You're going to go back to the Old Testament, "Seek me while I may be found." That's all God speaking to Israel. He's basically talking to rebellious Israel.

If you only remember one thing I say this morning, maybe this will be it: God is not lost; *you* are. People are like... You know, I get it. Remember that song by The Fray? "I found God on the corner of..." Okay. I'm not going to sing it for you. Look. It's not like God lost his cell phone, and he didn't have a flashlight, but I found him.

Now, let me explain this. Here's what this means. If somebody is seeking God, it's because God is first seeking them. Jesus says this. He says it like this. You've probably

heard this verse before. "No one can come to me unless the Father draws them." That's what he's saying.

I'm going to give you some new theological words today. You can learn them. If you can order your venti caramel macchiato, you can remember these words: *monergism* and *synergism*. *Synergism* says work together. *Monergism* says one work. The picture of us before coming to Christ is not that we're treading water, but about to fall under, but we're screaming for God to throw us a raft or a lifesaver; it's that we are dead at the bottom of the ocean, and God comes and seeks after us.

Now, here's the thing. Once you *are* a Christian, there are a ton of commands for *you* to seek God. "Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened." "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and everything else will be added unto you."

So, Christian in here, are you seeking God? Next time you're doing your Bible Recap, next time you're doing your... There are so many different names for it...devotional, quiet time, Bible reading, personal worship. What if before you did it, you just said, "Lord..." Maybe you're going to read the Bible for five minutes, whatever you're going to read.

I was in Luke, chapter 1, early this morning. That's where I was in my Bible reading. I just took a moment, and I said, "Lord, I want to seek you this morning." What would it look like for you, before you did your Bible reading, to say, "Lord, my heart posture toward you is I'm chasing after you. I'm passionate about getting to know you better."

What if...? And I know it's crazy. I know you get here late, and the parking lot is full, and you fought with your spouse on the way here. But what if you just pulled into the parking lot and said to your whole family, "Hold on, guys. Hold on. Can we just take 30 seconds right now before we walk in here and just remind ourselves that the reason we're coming to church today is to uniquely seek God together?" It's powerful.

So, he says, "No one seeks God," but then he says a second thing. You might go, "Okay, Kyle. Because you told me there are other things people seek, that makes sense." But the second thing might be even more hard for you to believe, because the second thing says, "No one does good."

You're like, "That's not true. I've got this non-Christian neighbor, and she waters my plants when I'm gone. Our best babysitter isn't a believer. I've got a great boss, and he doesn't know the Lord, but he is the best boss ever." In fact, John Calvin wrestled with this. John Calvin was a famous Christian. He wrote a two-volume set called *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Very famous.

He wrestled with this idea, because he knew history. He was like, "Man, there are so many great things, and so many blessings and resources and inventions and discoveries that non-Christians have made that have benefited humanity." See, it doesn't say people don't *want* to be good. We *want* to be good. In fact, here's what's interesting. I learned *this* this week as well.

There's a famous family psychologist named John Gottman. In all of his research on social dynamics, here's what he noticed. You're going to know this is true as soon as I say it. For every bad interaction you have with somebody, you have to have five good interactions to make up for it.

This is why marriages get in trouble. You do one thing wrong, and then you try to do one thing right, and you go, "Why didn't the one thing right make up for the one thing wrong?" It's because that's not how humans work, unfortunately. This is why if you've ever had a bad first impression with somebody...like, you didn't like them...you don't have one good one, and you're like, "Oh, they're not a bad person." You're like, "I need him to do that four more times."

See, we want to be seen as a good person so much. Have you heard of slacktivism? It's lazy activism. *Slacktivism*. They give examples. It's basically when you change your profile picture to communicate you're for the current thing. You know I can't go more than one or two sermons without talking about COVID. Here we go. Get ready.

Everybody, overnight, with the whole COVID thing, got the COVID-19 smiley thing over them. "Get the vaccine. I got the vaccine. I'm a good person. I'm for the current thing." Then, you know, put the Ukraine flag up as soon as something happens, because you're a good person and you're for the current thing.

Here's another thing people love to do online: have selective outrage. Don't be consistent in your outrage; be selective. Make sure you're a good person and you're for the current thing. See, to be a good person is very hard, because in the Bible, to be a good person means your action is good (here's what the theologians say) in form and in motive, which is just a way to say outside and inside or external and internal.

So, at one level, to be a good person... You know, if you've been raised in a decent home, to be a good person in form, in public, is not that hard. That basically means my life is conforming externally to God's law on the outside from what people see. What's hard is to have the form and also, internally, the motive, that the reason I'm doing something is because I genuinely want to please God and I genuinely love people.

I'll tell you a story from my life. I'm going to lose my reward in heaven for doing this, but that's okay. It wasn't a big reward. A couple of months ago (it may have been longer than

that), I'm at the grocery store with my boys, and I see this young guy in front of me in line. He looked rough. He was buying some groceries, and he just looked like he was not doing well.

I don't do this a lot, so don't think I'm a good person. I just thought to myself, "You know what? I'm going to buy this guy his groceries." I promise, part of what I thought was "I'm going to buy this guy's groceries because I'm a Christian and Christians care about the needy. God has blessed me, and I can help this guy." I thought that.

But here's what else I thought: "And my boys will watch me do it." And here's what else I thought: "He doesn't have that many groceries in his grocery cart." I thought all that. True story. So, I buy his groceries. You know, it doesn't always... I *have* done this a couple of times. It doesn't always go well. Sometimes people are offended by that. In this case, it went well. He was like, "Dude, this is amazing. Thank you. I needed this."

Then he asked, "What do you do for a living?" I thought, "This is awesome." I was like, "I happen to be a pastor." He said, "What church?" I said, "Two Cities Church." He said, "I'm coming this Sunday." I had two thoughts. I thought, "Man, this is how the gospel goes forward. You meet people's needs in Jesus' name, and you look for an opportunity to extend hope." I thought this. "This is how the gospel goes forward."

Do you know what else I thought? "Maybe he'll come to church and tell everybody what I did. That way, I don't have to get up onstage and tell everyone what I did. This guy will just go tell people. They'll think I'm the best. They'll probably think I do this all the time." It's hard to be a good person. I really wanted to do the right thing for the right reason, but sin was there to tempt me as well.

Paul starts with our head and our heart. He moves to our tongue. Let me show you this. Verse 13: ***"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."*** He spends the most time talking about the tongue. Four different words...*lips, mouth, throat, tongue*...all for speech.

Now, many of us grew up in a time where our parents told us, "Sticks and stones will break your bones, but words will never hurt you." That's a lie. The first time some middle schooler said something mean, you were like, "Ow!" In fact, watch this. Some of you can still remember what your ex said about you five years ago. I have talked to people before who are mad at what their dad said to them 15 years ago. Do you know what the saddest part of that is? Their dad has been dead for 10.

See, here's the interesting thing about humans. Much of me is invisible to you, and much of you is invisible to me. You know, I can see you, but I only see you right now, and I only

see the front of you. Most times, I see you apart from your family. I don't see what you do in private, and I don't see your childhood. So, there's so much we don't know about each other.

One of the only ways we can take what is invisible and make it visible is through words. The book of James and Proverbs and other places talk a ton about words. The first thing I want you to see is it says we *deceive* with our words. Let's talk about lying for a second.

It's interesting, because when you follow secular people who emphasize childhood development, they'll talk about lying as a strategic moment in growth in the life of your child. It's actually a sign of intellect. Because think about what has to happen for someone to lie.

You get up in the morning. You're like, "There were Oreos out last night, and now the Oreos are gone, and my 6-year-old has Oreo dust on her sheets." Then your 6-year-old will tell you that they didn't do it, that the dog... And here's what they say. Here's what's so amazing about that. When you lie... We all have to do this, and the bigger the lie, the more we have to do this.

We have to create a second reality that didn't happen that we hope is more believable than what really happened. That's why, when your 3-year-old lies to you, you're like, "You little sinner!" and you're also kind of impressed. "I'm not going to let you know that, but wow!" By the way... A lot of you have young kids. You want to teach your kids the difference between secrets and surprises.

You shouldn't lie. You tell them that. Also, we shouldn't keep secrets. A secret is something we're never going to tell anybody. By the way, the reason you do that is that's what pedophiles do. "This will be our secret. You'll never tell anybody. This will just be our secret." We don't keep secrets. We have surprises. We don't tell Mom or Dad what we're getting them for Christmas yet, but it's not a secret; it's a surprise.

So, let's talk about lying. Let me say it this way. Lying is the sin that lets every other sin live. If you are going to be free from your besetting sins, you're going to have to do two things. You're going to have to stop lying to yourself. You're going to have to stop telling yourself your marriage is okay when it's not. You're going to have to stop telling yourself that your teenage daughter is doing well when she isn't.

You're going to have to stop telling yourself you're not addicted when you are. You have to stop saying you're okay when you're not okay. So, that's the first thing. Then you have to tell somebody else. We don't want to do that, because then we'll see that Romans 3 is right, and we'll see our own sinfulness.

Okay. We need to learn, as a church, the difference between sharing and truly being vulnerable. Let me show you the difference. Here's sharing: "Work is really hard right now." It's like, "You're so vulnerable to share." That's not vulnerable. Here would be the same person being honest: "I am so jealous of two of my coworkers that they keep getting promoted and I don't, and I'm now hoping they get fired or something. I want to find them doing something wrong so I can tell on them." Oh. Okay, that's real.

Here's sharing: "The wife and I are going through a hard time." Well, everybody goes through a hard time. I don't know what that means. Here's vulnerable: "For the last week, my wife and I have been sleeping in two different bedrooms. I hate to tell you this, but one of us used the *D*-word last week, and I'm scared." Okay. All of a sudden, we got to the place where we're not lying. We're not covering. You don't do that with everybody, but you do that with a few people.

Now, we lie for four reasons. Maybe we lie for more, but let me give you the four main reasons. The first one is kind of silly, but it's true. We lie to be polite. You know, "Does this dress make me look fat?" "No." Right? "Do you like my haircut? Does my breath stink?" We lie to be polite. Let's put that aside for a second.

Here are the other three reasons we lie. We lie to protect ourselves. We lie so we don't look as bad as we really are. I read some stuff on this. There was actually an interesting *National Geographic* article on this a while ago. They say about 40 percent of the time we lie to protect ourselves (it's hard to pull them apart), and about 40 percent of the time we lie to promote ourselves.

You have to understand that some people's entire Instagram account is a lie. It's who they wish they were. It's who they want you to think they are. I read something, and I'm like, "I think this is true." It said the more a married couple takes pictures of themselves and puts them on social media, the worse their marriage is.

I've seen that before. Someone's life will fall apart in our church, and I'm like, "No, not them. They take selfies together all the time and smile in the pictures." Someone tells us about what's going on with their kids and stuff like that. "Not *your* family. You guys are always on vacation, and everyone always looks so happy in all of your pictures."

One of the main ways we promote ourselves is online. We protect ourselves. Right? We don't tell the full story. We don't tell our part. We blame somebody. The other one is we punish people. This is the darker part of us with lying. There was a movement. I don't even know if it lasted really long. It said, "Believe all women." I don't know if you remember this. It was connected to the #MeToo movement.

Well, I wouldn't say, "Believe all women," and I wouldn't say, "Believe all men." I mean, we know this from the Duke lacrosse story. Read about that if you've never read about that. Years later, after destroying three Duke lacrosse players' reputation, the accuser finally said, "I lied about the whole thing." Some people are naive. "Well, no one would ever lie to get someone else in trouble." It's like, "You don't know people." I hope you never meet some malevolent person, because you'll get PTSD real quick.

He says that people deceive, and then he says their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. As soon as you talk to American evangelical Christians about cursing, they're like, "Don't worry, Kyle. I don't say those four-letter words...except for when I do, but I don't normally. If I hit my hand with a hammer, or something, but I don't normally. I actually have committed that I don't use the Lord's name in vain."

Well, that's "Don't curse" 101. This is... The same person who would say, "You know what? I would never say *that* word..." Yes, but you will belittle people. You will constantly have the conversation after the conversation. You will use the church prayer chain to gossip.

By the way, *confession* is I tell people my sins; *gossip* is I tell everybody everybody else's sins. There's no easier way for me to look good than to make somebody else look bad. This is the rise of cyberbullying. This is slander. This is cancel culture. It's all there. We don't have time to get into it.

He moves now from the head and the heart and the mouth to the feet. Let's look here. He says, "***Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.***" In the Bible, feet are the most earthly part of you. It's the most creaturely part of you. It's the part of you that touches the earth.

To state the absolute obvious, your feet are that which take you places. You're like, "Okay. I get that, Kyle. That makes sense, and you would know." Well, in *that* culture, everybody walked everywhere. No one had to work on getting their 10,000 steps. Everyone got their 10,000 steps all the time, because unless you were wealthy, you didn't have an animal to ride, and there was no car and no plane. The only way you got someplace was walking.

Well, if I said to you today, "Guys, how would this..." You know, this is what I do when I'm reading the Bible. I'm like, "What does this mean for us? Because we don't walk many places anymore. What does he mean *our* feet? How do *we* do this?" If I asked, "How do we travel places today?" you would be like, "Kyle, this is so easy. A car, a plane, maybe Uber." That's right.

But if you want to know the vehicle on which you travel all over, the answer is your fingers and your thumb online. As soon as you realize, "Actually, I'm pretty quick..." Because what he says here is "Your feet are swift to do evil." Part of what you realize is "Wait a second. What I'm doing on a device..." It can be in real life too. I'm just saying it happens much more for people today.

Most of us don't travel very far. We're very sedentary. We work from home. Most of you drive to pick your kids up. How are you swift...? By the way, notice part of the human condition is that we're eager to do evil. What happens is every once in a while... I know all the Christianese. I know all the Christian lingo.

People love to say they're struggling with sin, because it makes you feel compassionate. "I'm just really struggling." Like, "You're struggling? What if I had a camera there? Let me record what actually happened. Nope. As soon as your parents left, you opened up the incognito browser. That doesn't sound or look like somebody who's struggling."

By the way, it says what you do with your feet is create paths. Did you see that? You create paths, and you create ways. What are the paths and ways today? Your algorithm. Isn't it interesting that modern science... I love when science and psychology, and all that stuff, catches up to the Bible.

Modern psychology, modern medicine, neurosurgeons... They're now talking about neural pathways. Isn't that interesting? What it says is when you do the same thing again and again and again, you create grooves and ruts in your brain. You create neural pathways. You create ways of walking, metaphorically speaking, in your brain that make it easier for you to do the same thing again, whether it be good or bad.

Paul is like, "Guys, here's the thing. There are things we don't do (seek God). There are things we say that reveal our hearts (our words). There are places we go and ways that we are eager to sin that show our depravity." Then he sums it up with this verse at the end. Here's what we'll look at. Verse 18: ***"There is no fear of God before their eyes."***

Now, that's interesting. At first, we're told, "You don't seek God." Okay. You might admit that. "I don't seek God." By the way, he begins and ends with God. He says, "Here's the other thing: we don't fear God." It's so interesting, because I was thinking about how in our culture there's so much talk. There are certain topics that every time I talk about them, it gets quiet and I know I'm hitting a nerve.

Anytime we talk about anxiety, anytime we talk about fear, anytime we talk about worry, everyone is like, "Yeah, what's going on? Why is that such a big issue?" People are wondering particularly, "Why is that such a big issue among young people? Why is that

such a big issue in our generation?" Here's why: because we now fear everything but God.

When you don't fear God, you start to fear everything else. We live in this strange time where we're afraid of everything. People are afraid of flying. People are afraid of traveling. People are afraid of other people. People are afraid of all of the horrible things that could happen to them in the future. People are afraid of getting sick. Guess what they *don't* fear. They don't fear God.

It's a lack of reverence, lack of respect for who God is. It shows up... We don't respect police. We don't respect politicians. We don't respect pastors. We don't respect professors. We don't respect parents. It's all that. Here's what's interesting. I did some research this week, and I was looking into what are signs... Because I was convinced that we are living in a society that doesn't fear God.

I was doing some research on "What does it look like in a society or a culture not to fear God?" As much as I don't always love all the therapeutic language, they said there's actually a condition that happens among people when they don't believe in God, and it's called *main character syndrome*. That's what they call it now. It makes sense. When there's no God above you, you are the main character in your life, which means you are the most important person you know.

This is why everyone is like, "I have to find the perfect spouse. I have to get the perfect home. I have to have the perfect job, and I also have to have a ton of autonomy in my life." The other interesting thing it said was in a society that doesn't fear God... There's main character syndrome. That's what happens at a personal level. Then, at a society level, the state takes on theological importance in people's lives. That makes total sense.

When you get rid of the theological, what happens is the political collapses into the theological. Things that were supposed to be somewhat important in politics become unbelievably important, which is why every totalitarian dictator government ever doesn't believe in God.

So, Paul says, "There's no fear of God." Here's the thing, guys. You and I were created to fear God. In fact, it's kind of strange, but sometimes we like to be afraid. You go, "Kyle, that doesn't make any sense." Why do people go see scary movies? It's not easy to explain why people see scary movies.

Why do you see romantic comedies? Because you want to fall in love. Why do you see funny movies? Because you want to laugh. Right? Why do you see adventure movies? Because you're built for adventure, and you want an adventure with your life, and you don't have one, so you watch other people have them.

Why do you watch scary movies? Because you want to be scared but also know you're safe. Why do we ride roller coasters? It makes no sense. It's like, "Put this massive vest on, take me 300 feet up the hill, and let's go 90 miles an hour." Why? Because you want to be afraid, but you want to know you're safe.

You know, fear and awe are cousins. What happens when you fear something is it becomes big and you become small. Now, here's what's interesting. A couple of years ago, my family and I went for the first time... I had never been to the Grand Canyon. What's interesting is when you go to the... I couldn't have shown you a picture. It wouldn't matter. You have to go there.

What's weird about the Grand Canyon, or any of these things you do... When you stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon and see it...it's involuntary...you feel awe. Here's what someone said: when you stand in front of the Grand Canyon, you feel small, and that feels good.

Paul lays out this courtroom case, and look at how he ends in verse 19. **"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.** Paul says, "The reason I'm doing all this and I'm telling you what God's Word says is so that you will shut your mouth." That's what he's saying.

He's saying the purpose of the law of God is to shut every person's mouth. Basically, to silence you. Now, it's interesting. Microsoft built a silent room years ago. It's the most silent place on earth, they say. I don't know how they did it. You go inside of this room. They say no one can stand to be in the room for more than 45 minutes.

You go in there alone, and they say after you're in there for a minute, you hear your heart beating. You're in there for a couple more minutes, and you start to notice your own breathing. Then they said... I don't know how all this works. Your ears start to ring. Here was their observation: when you go into a silent room, you become the noise.

Why are we silent? We're silent when we need to think. We're silent when we're in awe. I remember going to see *The Passion of the Christ*. The movie ended and... I'd never seen anything like this before. The whole movie theater... No one left. No one talked to each other. We just sat there in awe. Also, you're silent when you're under conviction.

I want to end with a holy hush. Let me read to you from Revelation 8:1. **"When the Lamb opened the seventh seal..."** I won't get into all this, but there were six seals before this. There were war and famine and plague, and the seventh seal... *Seven* is the number of completion. This is the final seal. This is a picture of what's going to happen in heaven at judgment day. The final seal was God's judgment.

Here's what it says: **"When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."** When God judges the earth, even the angels are silent. Even the perfect, holy angels don't know what to say. How much more us?

In verse 20, Paul ends with this: **"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."** Next week we get to the good news, but Paul ends and says, "Here's what happens. The law points the finger and silences you." Then he says, "Grace and the gospel extends the hand."

Let me say it another way. You have to be found out before you can be found by the Father. You have to be found out. You have to go, "It was me. You caught me, God." He goes, "I caught you, and I'm also seeking you." This is the story of the prodigal son. This is the story of coming home to the Father.

See, when you understand the gospel, you realize, "Wait a second. Our brains are broken, but you know what? We now can have the mind of Christ. We can be transformed by the renewing of our minds." You can be honest about who you are. "Yeah, I have a sinful heart," and Jesus says, "You know what? I want to take that heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." As soon as you can admit, "My feet run to evil," Jesus says, "Well, how about I call your feet beautiful, and how about I now use them to share the good news?"

So, here's what I want to do. In just a minute, we're going to cut the piano at all of our campuses. At all of our campuses, I just want you to take 30 seconds and be silent. Now, here's what sociologists tell us. Things get awkward after four seconds of silence. The average modern person can't handle four seconds of no one talking because it gets loud on the inside.

I want to give you 30 seconds, and I want you to understand three things. First, you're made in God's image. Second, you are sinful by nature and choice. Third, God is seeking you in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and because of what he has done, we don't just have to point the finger; God in Christ extends the hand. Let's be silent for about 30 seconds, and I'll pray for us.

[Pause]

For some of us, that might have been the longest we have been silent, and nobody else or nothing else was making noise around us, Lord. The Bible says, "Be still and know that I am God." Lord, we're about to go from silence to singing, because we do need to be silent as we are shocked by our sin, as we repent, but then we must sing the great truths of the gospel, and we must celebrate changed lives in baptism. That's what we're going

to do, and we're going to do it for your glory and our good. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.