

# ROMANS 1-4: What Makes a Man a Believer

## Learning About Sin the Hard Way

Rough Transcript

Brett Clemmer

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Hey guys, welcome to the Man in The Mirror Bible study. Our topic today is we're learning about sin the hard way. As we continue in our series in Romans, we're going to be looking at Romans 3:9-20. Getting ready for today I was looking up deadly poisons on the internet. I hope nothing happens to anybody around me because the police go look at my Google search history and see that I was looking up deadly poisons. I thought the deadliest poison might be arsenic or cyanide but it turns out that it's botulinum toxin. Botulism. We know that Botox is based on that tiny amounts.

In fact, if you're a 175-pound man, it takes less than 10 to the negative seventh grams of botulism to be deadly for a 175-pound man. If I gave you a glass of water and I said, "Hey, don't worry about it. There's 10th to the negative eighth grams of botulism toxin in this water," you would never drink that, right? You don't want to die, you don't want to have that poison in your system. Why am I talking about poison when we're talking about, learning about sin the hard way. I'm talking about sin this way because I don't think most of us really understand sin and how sin works.

### **WE DON'T UNDERSTAND SIN**

I think a lot of times what we think about sin is it's the actions, that we do sin. Sin is something that we do, it's an action that we take. But sin is a lot more than that. Let me give you a metaphor. Let's say I'm driving down the road and I rear-end the car in front of me. I did that, I ran into the car and in front of me, that was my action. When the police come, they're going to give me the ticket. They're going to say, "You're the one at fault. You're the one that ran into the back of the car in front of you." Now I might make excuses. I might say, "Well, the road was wet or the person stopped short."

But even in those circumstances, the police are going to say, "No, you ran into the person in front of you, you committed the action, it's your responsibility." And so I can try to prevent that, right? I can make sure that my brakes work and I can make sure that I'm following at a safe distance and I can keep my hands at 10 and 2 and keep my eyes on the road so that I don't get distracted. But what if all I did all of those things but I had a poison in my system that made me unconscious? It wouldn't matter how well-maintained my car was, it wouldn't matter how far back I was following, it wouldn't matter how much I was trying to pay attention.

If I lose consciousness, I'm going to rear-end the car in front of me. There's nothing I can do about it. Sin is like that poison. Sin is not just the actions that we take, that's kind of the end of the line with sin. Sin is actually what taints our consciousness. It's an underlying taint on our souls, on who we are, that ends up in and that results in these sinful actions that we take. When we read Romans 3, Paul sort of explains sin to us in maybe a way that we hadn't thought of. Turn to Romans three chapter nine, excuse me, Romans three verse nine and read along with me. "What then, are we Jews any better off now? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all both Jews and Greeks are under sin, as it is written."

Then Paul proceeds to give a bunch of verses or teachings from verses in the old Testament. "None is righteous, no, not one. 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 listen to this sequence, "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."

Paul is explaining here what sin really is. He says three things and I love John Stott, I've told you I'm using John Stott's commentary on Romans and he gives a great breakdown of what Paul is teaching us here. He's really teaching us three things about sin. The first thing he's teaching us about sin is that **sin is ungodly**. Sin is ungodly. He says in verse 11, "No one seeks for God," and in verse 18, he said, "There is no fear of God." He brackets this teaching with these passages that talk about the ungodliness of sin.

The second thing he teaches us is that **sin is pervasive**. It affects every part of us. Look at this sequence, he talks about the throat, the tongue, the lips, the mouth, the feet, right? He's basically saying from head to toe, sin affects us. And what does it cause? It causes death and deception and hate and curses and bitterness and violence and ruin and misery. This is the effect of sin. It pervades us, it's all through us and it creates misery throughout our lives.

Sometimes people talk about the idea or the concept of total depravity and there are people that don't like that term, total depravity, but it really is a theologically sound concept, if you understand what it really means and let me read what John Stott says about this. He says, "The totality of our corruption refers to its extent. Twisting and tainting every part of our humanness, not to its degree depriving every part of us absolutely."

In other words, he says that to think that total depravity means that human beings are as deprived as they could possibly be, such a notion is manifestly absurd and untrue and it's contradicted by our everyday observations. Not all human beings are drunkards, felons, adulterers or murderers and Paul has even shown in chapter two verses 14 and 27, that sometimes we're able by nature to obey the law. The totality is the extent of our corruption, it taints every part of us.

I love this quote by J.I. Packer. He says, "On the one hand, no one is as bad as he or she might be but on the other hand, no action of ours is as good as it should be." This is what total depravity is about. It's not that you're as bad as you could possibly be, it's that there is no part of you that is not tainted by sin. That's the second thing that we learned about sin, that it's pervasive, it taints every part of us.

The third thing that we learn about sin is that it's universal. Looking at verses 10 and 11 again, he says, "None is righteous. Not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God." Here we see that sin is ungodly, sin is pervasive, and **sin is universal**. We are all infected. We all have the poison in our system of sin and we're all feeling the devastating effects of sin in our lives. That brings us to the Big Idea. If sin is a poison that taints every single part of our system, everything about who we are, what are we going to do about that?

Well, the Big Idea is this is that **Jesus' sacrifice is the antidote for the deadly poison of sin**. Jesus' sacrifice is the antidote for the deadly poison of sin. The passage continues in verse 19, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who were under the law so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world will be held accountable to God. For by works of the law, no human will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

### **THE LAW HELPS US UNDERSTAND OUR SIN**

Here we see that the purpose of the law is that it helps us understand our sin. The law helps us understand our sin, as he said, in verse 20, "Through the law comes knowledge of sin."

Have you ever heard of luminol? Luminol is this chemical that reacts with the proteins and bodily fluids like blood. At a crime scene, the police will spray luminol and then when they shine an ultraviolet light, they can see anywhere that the luminol has reacted with protein that you can't see, it's invisible to the

naked eye. Imagine you're a murderer, you're not a murderer, imagine a murderer had a knife that he killed somebody with and he wanted to wash it off and so he went into the bathroom and he washed the knife off. Then once he was done washing the knife off, he made sure that he washed off the sink so that if you were looking at the sink, it would just be white porcelain.

You couldn't tell that there was any blood on it. And he's thinking, "Oh, they'll never know," right? Well, the police could come in and they could spray luminol on that sink, turn the lights out, turn an ultraviolet light on and that sink would light up like a horror show, right? You would just see everywhere that the blood had touched. That's what the law is. The law is like luminol, right? You can do your best to clean yourself up. You can read your Bible every day, you can give money to the guy on the side of the road, you can be nice to strangers. You can do everything you can to try to clean your life and make it look good from the outside.

But even if you do all that, you know that in your heart of hearts or behind closed doors, you harbor resentment for people, you get angry, you have lust, you have all these things that maybe nobody can see. The law gives you the standard to measure yourself against, not just about what you do but even what you think and how you feel. These things are tainted by sin. That's the idea of depravity. Not that you're as bad as you could be but that there's no part of you that is as good as it should be. The law gives us that standard. The law is like luminol to show us our sin so that we can understand it better.

Well, look, if sin is the poison and the law exposes our sin, what is the antidote? Remember we said that our Big Idea is that **Jesus' sacrifice is the antidote for the deadly poison of sin**. How does that really work?

### **ONE DROP OF GRACE**

Well, Jesus brings us this antidote through his death and resurrection. The sacrifice that Christ made is the antidote. One drop of grace, one drop of God's grace is all the antidote we need for the poison of sin and it brings forgiveness to us once and for all. It's a hundred percent effective. It's a vaccination for the effects of sinfulness in the eyes of God forever.

In fact, in Ephesians 2:8, Paul says for by grace, you have been saved through faith, through action but through faith, right? Faith means that you don't have to scrub your life down with good works, you don't have to beat yourself up over your sin. You can accept God's grace, you can accept Jesus' sacrifice on your behalf and you have the antidote for the poison. Our standing in the light of the law is taken care of by Christ. Paul says later in this chapter that even though we've fallen short, verse 23, even though we've fallen short, in verse 24 it says, we are justified, that's a law word, right? We are justified by what? By his grace that we received through Christ. The redemption that we receive through Christ.

How do you get this grace? Can you earn it? No, absolutely not. Again, back to Ephesians two in the next verse, Ephesians 2:9 it says, "It's a free gift that God gives us." Sin is a poison. It taints every part of who we are. We're never as good as we should be in any area of our lives. The law is the luminol that shows us that no matter how much we try to scrub our life down, no matter how good we try to make it look, we're still not living up to the standard of the law but God's grace and Christ's sacrifice is the antidote for the poison in our lives. You are clean and pure when you become a Christ follower. When Jesus calls you and the Holy Spirit calls you to be a part of the family of God, to his glory, praise God. Let's pray.

Father, thank you so much for passages like this, that help us understand the pervasiveness of our sin, how it just invades every part of our lives. Lord that gives us a clear standard with the law that we can see by that standard, that we could never live up to it. And Lord, but instead you sent your son Jesus to be the antidote for the effects of our sin. You clean the poison out of our system so that when you look at us, you see the righteousness of Christ, not the unrighteousness of ourselves.

Not the effects of the poison on ourselves Lord. But you see the clean, healthy righteousness of Christ that has been given to us as a propitiation Lord on our behalf. Thank you, Lord, for saving us. Thank you

for saving us from the poison of sin Lord. Help us to understand the depths of your grace, the power of your sacrifice and the deep love that you have for us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.