I. INTRODUCTION. When we think of the word “power,” we probably tend to think of strength or might. But power can also mean authority or the right to do something. So, as we consider being under sin’s power we can understand that it has the legal right to control us. Sin is always lurking at the door to our hearts and minds; the moment we entertain it, ponder it, and think longer about it, we have just given sin authorization to tempt us again. On our own, conquering sin would be a never-ending battle. In this week’s lesson, the Apostle Paul made it clear that no one is righteous because every human being is born into sin, is depraved in nature, and is in need of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, whom our merciful God sent to overcome the power of sin, death and the grave!

II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. In advancing his argument concerning the universal condemnation of the human race, Paul emphasized the sins of the Gentile world in
Romans 1:18-32, and the sins of the Jews in Romans 2:1-3:8. The apostle then brought the Jews and Gentiles together in finding them both guilty before God. This is where our lesson begins.

III. PAUL’S ACCUSATION AGAINST MANKIND (Romans 3:9). Our lesson begins with a question. Paul acknowledged that as God’s chosen people, the Jews enjoyed certain spiritual advantages over the Gentiles, particularly, the “oracles of God” (see Romans 3:2) or the Scriptures. Then Paul asked in this verse, “What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.”

Since the “Jews” were God’s chosen people, with the question “are we better than they?” Paul was basically asking “are we Jews better than Gentiles?” The issue concerns the standing of “Jews and Gentiles” before God. Are “Jews” in better position spiritually before God? On face value, we might think so, since they had the “oracles of God” (see Romans 3:2), but this would be the wrong conclusion. Answering his own question, “are Jews better than Gentiles,” Paul emphatically said “No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.” In other words, he was saying “Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles) are under the control of sin and subject to its power.” In the first century, there were two main groups of people—“Gentiles and Jews.” “Gentiles” or non-Jews were pagans or heathens, while “Jews” saw themselves as true followers of
God. Regardless, both groups needed Christ in their lives because they were “all under sin.” Paul declared that he had already “proved” or more literally, had earlier accused or charged that the whole human race was under the control of sin. He did this in Romans chapters 1 and 2. The term “sin” here refers to “sin” as a power. In Scripture, “sin” as a power is described as reigning (see Romans 6:12), as enslaving (see Romans 6:6), as ruling (see Romans 6:12), and as exercising lordship or dominion (see Romans 6:14). The Scriptures also describe people as slaves to “sin” (see Romans 6:16, 17, 20) and free from “sin” (see Romans 6:18, 22). “Sin” as a power rules over all people, but it shows itself in specific acts. This is humanity’s basic problem. Everyone is addicted to “sin;” therefore, a Savior is needed to liberate all people. Note: Many people tend to see “sin” in relative terms—we can always find someone worse than we are! But God is not dealing with us in relative terms because one “sin” is no greater than another. The Apostle James wrote “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” God’s judgment of “sin” is absolute. One “sin,” any “sin” is enough to separate us from God forever, and all of us whether Jew or Gentile, have many, many sins. “Sin” is not prejudiced. It strives to infect anyone it can, almost like an uncontrollable virus. “Sin” does not care about our gender, religious beliefs, or social status. “Sin” has one objective: to overpower our will, our morality, and our conscience. The question is, will we yield to it?
IV. PAUL’S EVIDENCE AGAINST MANKIND (Romans 3:10-18)

A. Unsaved mankind’s ungodly character (Romans 3:10-11).

1. (vs. 10). In this verse, Paul goes on to say “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” The Apostle Paul was a Pharisee; therefore, he was extremely knowledgeable in the Scriptures (Old Testament). So, he could declare “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” Of course, the words “As it is written” refers to what was written in God’s Word which is truth (see John 17:17), and therefore accurately and perfectly describes the condition of humanity. If we want to know and understand humanity’s problem, we must look to the Bible for the correct diagnosis, not to unbelieving philosophers or psychiatrists. Using the Scriptures to support what he said in verse 9, Paul said that it was written “There is none righteous, no, not one.” He quoted from the last part of Psalms 14:3 (see also Psalms 53:3). It states without a doubt that no one, not a single person is “righteous.” No one perfectly does what is right according to God’s standard for right. Therefore, everyone is subject to God’s wrath (see Romans 1:18). Note: The Apostle Paul used God’s Holy Word, the Old Testament to support his argument that “all are under sin” (see Romans 3:9). Of course, he was talking about man in his unsaved state. However, as believers, sin no longer has any power over us, but we can still be influenced by it. This is where God’s Word, the Bible becomes our most valuable weapon against
the temptation to sin (see Ephesians 6:17). Jesus is our example in this. When tempted by the devil to sin, three times Jesus drew strength to resist the temptations by using Scriptures (see Matthew 4:1-11). Likewise, we too can resist the temptation to sin by using God’s Word, because every word of it is truth (see John 17:17). In his second letter to Timothy, Paul encouraged him to continue to study the Holy Scriptures (see II Timothy 3:15), because “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (see II Timothy 3:16). For Timothy, the “holy scriptures” was the Old Testament—Genesis to Malachi. The Old Testament is important because it points to Jesus Christ, and at the same time faith in Christ makes the whole Bible understandable. The whole Bible is God’s inspired Word. Since it is inspired and trustworthy, we should read it and apply it to our lives. The Bible is our standard for testing everything and everyone else that claims to be true. It’s our safeguard against false teaching, and our source of guidance for how we are to live. It is our only source of knowledge about how we can be saved (see II Timothy 3:15). However, in our zeal for the truth of the Bible, we must never forget its purpose—to equip us to live right (see II Timothy 3:16-17). We should not study the Bible simply to increase our knowledge or to prepare us to win arguments. We should study the Bible so that we will know how to do Christ’s work in the world. Our knowledge of God’s Word is useless unless it strengthens our faith and leads us to do good, or live justly. This is a requirement of God for His people (see Micah 6:8).
2. (vs. 11). The Apostle continued to say in this verse “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.” Here, Paul continued giving his evidence to support the fact that all are under sin. Quoting from Psalms 14:2 (see also Psalms 53:2) he declared that among unsaved humanity, “There is none that understandeth” God. Unsaved people don’t have the ability to grasp who God is (see Psalms 14:1; Ephesians 4:17-18). In addition, Paul said “there is none that seeketh after God.” Just as the unsaved don’t “understand” God, neither do they “seek” Him. The unsaved don’t even have the desire to “seek” God; instead they turn away from Him (see Romans 1:20-21). Although there are unsaved men and women who claim to be looking for God, they must understand that God is the One who goes after sinners (see Genesis 3:8-10; Luke 19:10). God goes after, or seeks unsaved mankind by revealing Himself to them in His Word and in His Son, and changing their hearts so that they believe and embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ.

B. Unsaved mankind’s useless lives (Romans 3:12). Paul goes on to say in this verse “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” The apostle here quoted Psalms 14:3 (see also Psalms 53:3) saying “They (the unsaved) are all gone out of the way.” In other words, the unsaved have turned away, or gone astray from God and His way of godliness (see Romans 1:20-21). Therefore, “they are together become unprofitable.” The word “unprofitable” means “useless.” Since the unsaved only serve themselves and not God as they were created to
do, they therefore become useless to themselves and to God. Paul then concluded with the words of the Psalmist saying “there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” In other words, no matter how much good a person does, it’s nothing when compared to God’s standard of goodness. **Note:** Paul’s declaration that there is no one, not even one who does good or right, emphasizes the depravity or sinfulness of mankind. Nobody is good either in character or in works. It’s true that some people do good, but when we consider their motives, there are none that do good, because whatever they have done is for some motive that does not include glorifying God.

When it comes to motive, or one’s reason for doing good, no man has ever made a practice of doing good. Of course, Paul is describing humanity in its fallen or sinful state, showing the need for all to respond to the gospel in faith. It’s true that born again people can by the power of the Holy Spirit, live consistently righteous lives (see II Corinthians 5:21) and do good with proper motives that honor God (see Romans chapter 6).

**C. Unsaved mankind’s corrupt speech (Romans 3:13-14).**

1. (vs. 13). Still speaking about the unsaved, Paul in this verse goes on to say “Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips.” Sooner or later, the evil in a person’s heart comes out in their speech (see Matthew 12:34; 15:11, 18; Luke 6:45). To illustrate this, first, Paul said “Their throat is an open sepulcher.”
Quoting from Psalms 5:9, Paul compared the sinful person’s “throat” to “an open sepulcher” or “an open” grave. This description likens their words or language to the smell of a decaying body. Their words come from an unclean heart and have a corrupting effect on others. Second, Paul declared that “with their tongues they have used deceit.” The apostle quoted this from Psalms 10:7. This means that the “tongues” of sinners purposely deceive others. Those who use flattery and lies do so to lead people astray and promote themselves. Third, he said “the poison of asps is under their lips.” This quote is from Psalms 140:3. The phrase “under their lips” refers to the speech of the unsaved or ungodly which is also likened to the deadly “poison” or venom of “asps” or vipers. In other words, the unsaved spiritually poison people with their evil words.

2. (vs. 14). Paul continues saying in this verse “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” The apostle took this from Psalms 10:7. The sinner’s “mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” The term “cursing” in Paul’s day referred to uttering curses or bad situations upon someone. Of course, we know what it means today: foul language. The word “bitterness” refers to evil words. The “mouns” of the unsaved are filled with “cursing and bitterness” all designed to hurt others. **Note:** Soon after we meet a person for the first time, we can usually discover what kind of person they are by the language they use (see Luke 6:45). If we are godly, our tongues should be used for blessing others (see Ephesians 4:29). Our words should encourage people and praise God and His creation. The connection between words
and character is seen in Matthew 12:34: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” By nature, the sinner is spiritually dead (see Ephesians 2:1-3), therefore only death can come out of his or her mouth. However, the condemned mouth can become a converted mouth and acknowledge that “Jesus is LORD” (see Romans 10:9-10). Jesus said in Matthew 12:37, “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” Therefore, the Bible teaches that a clean heart is the key to clean speech or language. But even believers have a hard time trying to break sinful habits, and unwholesome and evil language can come out in a moment. Our tongue is the deadliest weapon we will ever use. This is why the Bible says so much about controlling our speech. When we do so, we become a source of blessing to others rather than a source of destruction. We also save ourselves much grief (see Proverbs 10:32; 12:17; 15:1-2, 28; 16:27-28; 18:21; Ephesians 4:29; James 3:2-13).

D. Unsaved Mankind’s violent ways (Romans 3:15-16).

1. (vs. 15). In this verse, Paul said “Their feet are swift to shed blood.” Again, the word “Their” refers to unsaved mankind. Here, the apostle began to make note of the violent ways in which sin shows itself. Quoting from Isaiah 59:7, Paul said the unsaved “feet are swift to shed blood.” This statement shows how eager both sinful Jews and Gentiles are to pursue violence and even murder, which
is the meaning of “to shed blood.”

2. (vs. 16). Paul continued to say in this verse, “Destruction and misery are in their ways.” The apostle took these words from Isaiah 59:7 as well. History has proven that no matter where man is, “destruction,” or violence and “misery” are not far behind. Note: Human beings are capable of the most horrible things toward one another, and some have even done such things. Others have thought about doing evil things and have wished them on others. The LORD Jesus said that thinking evil in the heart is the same thing as already doing it (see Matthew 5:28). Every deed, wrong or right starts out as a thought. If we want to avoid doing wrong, we had better not even think about it!

E. Unsaved mankind’s lack of peace (Romans 3:17). Paul, in this verse goes on to say “And the way of peace have they not known” quoting from Isaiah 59:8. As we look back at history and even in the present, it’s easy to notice two things about mankind’s existence: the desire for “peace” and the complete failure to achieve it. Because unsaved mankind is under the power of sin and prone to do evil, Paul declared that “the way of peace have they not known.” Unsaved mankind doesn’t even know how to achieve “peace.” We can see that by counting the number of wars and conflicts in the world today. And let us not forget the many terrorist acts and the daily slaughter of people in gang-infested communities, both here and abroad. Unfortunately, we even have to be concerned about domestic terrorism. Note: One of the great longings of mankind
today is personal and societal peace. As long as we continue to pursue violence and destruction, we will never have peace. Unfortunately, mankind will continue to pursue violence and destruction as long as sin reigns in the human heart. And sin will continue until the LORD comes and removes it forever. The good news is that those who come to Jesus Christ by faith can enjoy personal peace right now (see Psalms 4:8; 29:11; 119:165; Proverbs 16:7; Isaiah 26:3; John 14:27; 16:33; Romans 5:1; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 2:14). But you can bank on it: there won’t be any societal peace or personal peace for the unsaved (see Isaiah 48:22; Ezekiel 7:25; 13:16). In fact, there won’t be any real peace until the Prince of Peace returns and sets up His millennial reign (see Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Ezekiel 34:5).

F. Unsaved mankind has no fear of God (Romans 3:18). In this verse, Paul declared that “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” The word “fear” here refers to the recognition, respect, and reverence for God that mankind needs in order to be submissive to Him. The unsaved have “no fear of God” which shows their lack of godly wisdom and knowledge (see Proverbs 9:10). It also shows that the unsaved don’t have the proper hatred for evil (see Proverbs 8:13). This is the spiritual condition of every person; Jew and Gentile who is “under sin” (see Romans 3:9). Having “no fear of God” is both a result of sin as well as the cause of sin. Everything that Paul has said here about the unsaved reveals the sinful state into which every person is born (see Psalms 51:5).
V. PAUL’S CONCLUSION REGARDING ALL MANKIND (Romans 3:19-20)

A. The purpose of the law (vs. 19). In this verse Paul went on to say “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” When the apostle said here that “we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law,” he was talking about Jews. Gentiles didn’t know God’s law, but even though they were still like all people who are guilty before God, they were not strictly under the law that God gave to Israel. The term “law” here refers to the entire Old Testament, the only completed portion of the Scriptures at that time. Paul then gave the purpose of “the law.” He said it was given so “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” In other words, God gave His “law” (the entire Old Testament) so that every mouth would be “stopped” or silenced, and to show that the whole “world” is “guilty” of sin before God. Jews couldn’t keep God’s “law” so they were pronounced “guilty.” Gentiles were ignorant of “the law,” but had no excuse for not knowing God because His creation reveals Him (see Romans 1:18-20). Therefore, Gentiles in their natural state are “guilty” before God as well. The word “guilty” in this verse means “under judgment.” God’s Word, His “law,” declares people to be “guilty” of sin and therefore subject to God’s judgment. Paul’s point was that
no one can defend themselves for their sinful actions before God and His holy standard because His “law” will silence them. While most Jews thought of “the law” as a means of salvation, they were now reminded that its purpose was that “all the world may become guilty before God.” In essence, “the law” left people under sin’s power. For Paul, “the law” was like an x-ray that revealed an illness, sin, but couldn’t cure it.

B. Paul’s conclusion of the matter (Romans 2:20). In our final verse, Paul comes to a conclusion saying “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” This statement would be clearer if we replace the word “Therefore” with “because.” Paul’s conclusion to all he had said was that all are guilty before God because “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.” In other words, no “deeds” or works of obedience to “the law” can justify a person before God. Even the most dedicated person to God’s “law” does not measure up to God’s holy standard. Note: “The law” was never intended to justify a person, that is, to declare a person righteous. Man is only justified or declared righteous by faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16; 3:11, 24). Instead of declaring a person righteous, “the law” could only declare a person guilty. Those of us who have saving faith in Jesus Christ have been made righteous as a result of Jesus Christ becoming sin for us (see II Corinthians 5:21). Paul then declared that “by the law is the knowledge of sin.” This was the purpose of “the law:” to make people aware of their
“sin” and their need for the Savior (see Galatians 3:24). When we don’t know “the law” or God’s Word, we have no standard to measure our actions against. This is why we need God’s Word, “the law.” Without it we are left to our own devices and operate under sin’s power because we are blind to the fact that we are sinning. It is through the knowledge of “the law” or the Word of God that we realize when we are sinning. **Note:** For sure, no one likes to talk about “sin.” It makes us all uncomfortable. We all like to think that we are good people striving to do God’s will here on earth. However, when we talk about “sin,” we begin to see the issues in our own hearts. And when these issues arise, we prefer to cover ourselves with “fig leaves” the way Adam and Eve did (see Genesis 4:7), to keep from exposing ourselves. **The truth is that if we humble ourselves, admit our wrongdoing (confess), and are willing to change our ways (repent), we can be released from sin’s grip.**

**VI. Conclusion.** We who know Jesus Christ and His salvation can rejoice that we were enabled to recognize our own sinfulness, because no one comes to Christ in faith without understanding this. Those of us who trust in Jesus Christ should continuously thank God that we are no longer under the power of sin, but under grace. We should never be surprised at what unsaved people do because they are still under sin’s power. Without the grace of God, all of us are under the power of sin, and sinners sin! Unfortunately, very often, even those who are truly born again Christians sin.
This is when our standing in Christ and His grace becomes so precious. We can confess and forsake our sin and be restored to fellowship, and once again experience spiritual power over sin. We may still have to suffer at least some, if not all of the consequences of something we did because sin has its costs (see Romans 6:23). However, we who are saved can begin again to obey the LORD and keep ourselves from sinning.

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