

Romans, Part 14 7-24-22

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

When I say the word *inclusion* what comes to mind? Or what vibe does that give you? Do you think of it positively or not so much? It is certainly a word that gets tossed around a good bit in our day. Many extol the values of DEI – diversity, equity and inclusion. If I were to ask you the question – do you want to be included – what’s the smart answer to that? *Included in what* – yes? Today, we read the apostle affirming again for us that, as fallen human-beings of every race, every religion, every financial stratum – we are all included in the deep brokenness, the abject corruption of lost humanity. In our previous verses Paul has been engaging with an imaginary Jewish debater who insists that Jews, by virtue of their heritage, their religion, their advanced knowledge have nothing to worry about with respect to final judgement. Paul says otherwise and wraps up his case in our passage for today. Romans 3:9-20 *What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;¹⁰ as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one;¹¹ there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God;¹² all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.¹³ Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips;¹⁴ whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness;¹⁵ their feet are swift to shed blood,¹⁶ destruction and misery are in their paths,¹⁷ and the path of peace they have not known.¹⁸ There is no fear of God before their eyes.¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”*

We and they. The question comes in verse 9, *are we better than they?* Generally, we like answering that in the affirmative. Between we and they, we usually like “we” because that is the group that includes “I.” Most commentators, and I agree, believe the “we” here refers to the Jews, of whom the author is one. And, as we have discussed, they – these Jews - certainly perceived themselves to be a superior people. But the apostle has been arguing in chapter two that, even though the Jewish people had received more from God, they had not achieved more. They were privileged but had not walked in that privilege, but instead in their sin. And so, the surprising answer comes that, *no, in fact Jews are not better.* Not

in the ways that matter to God. Paul says that Jews, like their Gentile or Greek counterparts, are under sin. *Under sin*. That is an interesting way to put it. Galatians 3:22 *The Scripture has shut up everyone under sin*. Other translations say, *imprisoned under sin*. That is where we find ourselves. Bunyan, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, speaks of sin this way – as a heavy burden that we carry through life until we find faith to lay it down at the foot of the cross. But Paul actually says it imprisons us. And this is the condition of Jews as well as Gentiles, which brings up the subject of the nones. Not n-u-n, but n-o-n-e. That is a term used nowadays to label people who claim no religious conviction at all. Thirty years ago, there were very few in our country; now there are plenty. But the nones in Romans 3 are about all of us. All are nones. Paul's condemnation of humanity is all-inclusive. His approval of humanity is all exclusive. No one makes the righteous team. No one. Look at it. 10-12 *It is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; ¹² all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."* These are the nones. Who here is included in this group? Ah, pay attention. You are a none. If no one is righteous, that means you are what? Unrighteous. If you don't like being in the nones, we can put you with the *alls* of Romans 3. Verse 12 says all have become useless. You know 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. Are you in Paul's *all*? Yeah – but the *all* is a negative thing. It is a universal negative. Paul says this shouldn't be a surprise because this view of humanity is shared by the Old Testament. He says there in verse 10 *as it was written*. Where was this written? Many places. Psalm 143:2 *In Your sight no man living is righteous*. Psalm 130:3 *If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?* And the answer to that is *nobody*. Not Putin, not Zelensky, not the pope, not the dalai lama, not your grandmother not your granddaughter. None means none. All means all. Sin is pervasive. We confront in Romans 3, the universal negative.

Now, I like the language of Psalm 143:2 *In Your sight no man living is righteous*. In God's sight. That is important to consider because in our sight there are some people who seem to be in a different moral category than others. If you grade on the curve some may qualify as righteous, and, indeed, the Scriptures sometimes describe folks in this way. What does it mean to say that Joseph, the husband of Mary, was a righteous man? In light of Romans 3, it cannot mean that he was righteous by God's standards, so I take it to mean that he was better than most. If I were to take all the men in our church and bring them up on stage, you

would observe that some are taller than others. But by the standards of the NBA we are all pretty short and if you went up in a plane and looked down, you really couldn't tell who was 5'2 and who was 6'2. Just so, think of skunks. I expect that among skunks some may be considered nice-smelling – Pepe Le' Pew, for example, but to us they all are disgusting. Just so, given the perfect holiness of God, every fallen person, is simply thoroughly fallen, morally bankrupt. James Boice has a couple of good illustrations of this. In one he imagines that a group of prisoners got a hold of Monopoly money and started using it as currency within the prison. They traded with it, gambled with it. As a result, prisoners became more or less wealthy. Some prisoners collected a large store of Monopoly money. Boice says, imagine that a very wealthy prisoner, who had accumulated \$400,000 in the prison currency, is released and tries to open up a bank account with that money – what will he learn? Your prison money is worthless in the free world. That is the difference between human righteousness and the type God requires of us. Of that righteousness we have none.

One of the big differences in this human righteousness versus true righteousness is that true righteousness considers largely our disposition toward God. We are to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. It is precisely here where we fail so miserably. Look at how Paul writes of us in verses 10-18. These short verses are all quotes from the Old Testament – from various portions of it. After saying *no one is righteous* he says *none seeks for God*. You might be nice, but do you seek the truth, do you seek for the Lord? So many of our churches are built around the notion of reaching those they call “seekers.” People who have a certain interest, or curiosity in matters of faith get this label – and maybe they are truly seeking something, but what are they not seeking? God. When their hearts are changed by the Lord and they truly do seek God, what will readily happen? They will find. Those who seek God find God. So, there is this value on seeking God; but none of us, by nature, will do this. Verse 12 says *all have turned aside*. Turned aside from what? From the ways of God. Isaiah 53:6 (NLT) *All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own*. Sin, is always atheistic – meaning that it denies God, rejects God, puts ourselves in his place. The catalog of sin ends in verse 18 with this 18 *There is no fear of God before their eyes*. They just don't care about God. They may concern themselves with human opinion, human relations, but God is dismissed and this is not okay. This is the essence of our fallenness, our brokenness, our corruption. It begins with our

hostility or indifference to God. It ends there as well, but in the middle, it manifests in terrible human relations as well.

From verse 13–17 we have a fascinating list that I call the anatomy of sin. Paul uses body parts to describe how we manifest our depravity toward each other. 13 *Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips;* ¹⁴ *whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.* What is the focus here? What kinds of sin is he covering with this description of throat, tongue, lips and mouth? These are verbal sins. Interesting. The word of God pinpoints these types of sins as being notably prevalent among us. You know James 3? James 3:2 (NLT) *If we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.* Big If. None of us succeed at this 6-8 (NLT) *Among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.* ⁷ *People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish,* ⁸ *but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison.* Paul uses dramatic imagery to say the same – *open grave* – this is defiling. *Deceiving tongues* – God is always connected with truth. Satan always with the lie. *Poison under lips* – refers to the injuries we inflict with our words. *Cursing and bitterness.* Hmm – any of that go on in our world? On our TVs? Marks of a rebel race – lies, perversions. The next verses describe violence as well. Human conflict. Have you noticed we have a hard time getting along? Nations, tribes, families? Within families? Crime. Theft. Oh Lord help us, we are such a needy, broken race of rebellious sinners.

So, this is Biblical anthropology. This what God's word says about the human race. May I suggest he is teaching diversity, equity and inclusion? Did you know the Bible teaches that? Diversity – Jews and Gentiles – all races and people groups involved. Equity – no one is righteous, all flunk the moral exam. Inclusion. All have become useless. All have sinned and fall short. It is a dark picture that is going to set the backdrop for the astounding good news that will soon follow. But let's think of a couple of applications before we go on. First, there is humility. Because I, you, the person next to you are one of the nones. None righteous, none who does good, none who seeks for God. Corrupt of thought and speech and deed. Humility is warranted wouldn't you say? In human relations none of us comes from a superior place. The implications of that are enormous. One place to apply this is in your marriage. Love is blind, but marriage is a real eye-opener. Stay married to someone for a while and you will see all the flaws. But don't you dare, relate to

your spouse from some blind sense of personal superiority, always trying to get the speck out of your spouse's eye while ignoring your own issues, your own failings. Humility – a key to marriage and every other human relationship. Then too I think of parents. What does this say about your little angel? Not so angelic huh? They won't need to be trained into selfishness and hurtful speech and fraternal hitting. No-no. They will need to be trained into almost everything that is positive and good. Proverbs 22:15a *Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.* Here is something I hear kids say to parents – especially the older ones. *Mom, Dad, you just need to trust me. You gotta trust me.* Ha! Our kids learned not to say that to me. I would just pull out Romans 3 and say, *Son, here is what God says about you. No, I don't trust you. You shouldn't trust you either.* Romans 3 is why we all need accountability - right? Can I hear an amen on that? Our politicians need it. Kids need it. Employees need it. Pastors need it. We are all nones. Clearly, there is more that can be said about trust – in certain contexts it is appropriate, but don't fool yourself into thinking that you deserve it. You almost certainly do not – fellow none.

So now let's turn a corner and finish by pondering the role of the law. **19-20** *Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;*²⁰ *because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.* Before we see what the law does, notice first what it does not do. There is something Paul says it can't do, wasn't meant to do, will never do. What is that? It will not provide for us the way of our salvation, our justification. The NLT translates verse 20 this way **20a** *No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands.* Yet this is apparently what the Jews among whom Paul lived seemed to think. This is what so many who live around us seem to think. You get into heaven by doing good, by obeying the rules – at least reasonably well. But Paul says NO! Galatians 2:16 says the same **16** *A man is not justified by the works of the Law.* This is what it can't do and it can't do this because we can't keep it. Paul will later say this in Romans 8:3 (NLT) *The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. We will come back to this in Romans, but here Paul makes it abundantly plain. Our justification, our right-standing with God is never going to be ours by means of our stellar obedience to God's law. There has to be another way and that is what Romans 3, 4, and 5 will describe for us.*

But, we aren't finished with the law yet. The law cannot pave the way to our justification. But here are two things it can do. First, it can drain you of excuses. Ever had an argument with your spouse or your parent or your child and the core of the dispute was over what had been said and agreed upon? All the time, right? You wish for a recording mechanism to settle it. But sometimes, sometimes, there is a helpful wrinkle. There is a written agreement. Sometimes we put it in writing. *Son Adam will mow the lawn by noon on Saturday. Failing to do so, Adam forfeits his evening out with friends.* Adam signs, you sign. But on Saturday afternoon, Adam is given the news about his evening and things erupt. Adam may say, *you didn't tell me I had to do it today!* But then you pull out the contract and, *wallah!* Adam's mouth is shut. His excuse blown to pieces by his signature on the document. This is what the law of God does as well. *Who said I couldn't worship the goddess Diana? Who said I couldn't stretch the truth a bit. Who said I had to honor those dumb parents of mine?* And then God pulls out the commandments. *Shut my mouth!* No defense. No excuses. Those mouths we read of that lied and cursed will one day be silenced. That will be a good day. Every sinful soul will stand before God with nothing to say in the way of self-justification. Toplady's hymn puts it well – all we can do is appeal to the mercy of the judge and the sacrifice of His son. *Nothing in my hand, I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress, helpless look to thee for grace.* Helpless, silent. *Foul, I to the fountain fly, wash me Savior or I die.*

The law shuts the mouths of guilty sinners and then one other thing – one other huge, critical thing. It points us to Christ by showing us our need. 20b *Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.* We hold up our lives next to God's standard and say, "Uh-oh." Then we look around for something, someone, to rescue us. They say desperation is the mother of invention. Why is that? It gets you motivated to find a way out of your predicament. It may even humble you to the point of putting your trust in someone else. When the doctor shows you the X-ray and says, *there is the tumor that will kill you if we don't cut it out.* What do you do? You say, *whatever it takes. Put me under, take that scalpel and slice me open. I see my need.* Is that a critical step toward healing? Oh my, yes! And it is critical that we see our desperate need for pardon and cleansing, for a righteousness that may be given us, imputed to us, flowing from grace. The commandments of God, which we have broken time and time again are called elsewhere our *tutor* that leads us to Jesus. I believe in Jesus for many reasons – the resurrection, the fulfilled prophecy, the witness of so many. But here is another reason – what he offers me in His

atoning death in my place, in his gift of righteousness that is credited to believers, is precisely what I need more than anything. The precious law of God shows me that and convicts me of my need. Praise the Lord!

One of my favorite hymns is by Dora Greenwell and a line in it says this: *I take Him at His word indeed: "Christ died for sinners," this I read: For in my heart I find a need of Him to be my Savior.* That verse speaks volume to me. *For in my heart I find a need of Him to be my Savior.* You say, "Oh well, Preacher, what you are talking about then is just wish projection. Because you have a need, you pretend something to be true when it isn't." Believe me – I understand that objection. But consider this with me. Every appetite that I have within me, every longing, every hunger corresponds to something in the world outside of me that addresses that hunger, that need. Can't we learn something from that? I have thirst. You have thirst, and so there is water. Or Mt. Dew or whatever it is you may drink to quench that thirst. The need in me is met by the reality out there. I have hunger. And so, there is Giant Eagle. Even more basic, I need oxygen. And conveniently the air is full of the stuff. Inside of me there are longings for companionship. Outside of me, God has provided my wife. I came in the world needing to be completely cared for and there were parents to do that. I get tired, I need rest, and there is this miracle drug called sleep. It is not wishful thinking, it is sensible, to recognize that every longing, every need inside of me corresponds with something outside of me that fits the need. The hymnwriter is saying in her simple verse that one of the reasons she takes God at His word is that what that word announces to her corresponds so perfectly with her need. And that is my story too. If you are like me then about 99% of advertisements you encounter bounce right off you. But occasionally, you will encounter an ad that catches you and pulls you in because what it is pushing speaks directly to a problem you are facing, to a felt need in your life. What is offered to me by Jesus, the good news, or gospel, He came to announce does not always strike people that way. But the more you get to know yourself, the more you will say as well, that *in my heart I find a need of Him to be my Savior.*

The message of Jesus speaks to the deepest, most basic needs in my soul. It addresses my concerns about the past, and the future and the present. Concerning the past – what problems do I have with the past? The same ones you do. In your past you fouled up big time. You sinned, against God, yourself, and lots of others. We want something that will deal with our guilt. But what? What is there that can deal with the problem of guilt? What has modern science come up with huh? What

has the government devised to address the problem of guilt? We in the church pretty much have cornered the market on guilt. Our only real competition is the narcotics and liquor industries because we alone are offering, not a diagnosis, not an excuse, not an addictive way to just forget, but a real and intelligible forgiveness that is founded in the life, the death and the promise of someone who is hyper-credible. And when I look at the coming of Jesus, the mission of Jesus, all the realities around His story I see how perfectly Jesus meets my needs related to the past.

Well, how about the future? The past and the future are certainly related subjects. What happened yesterday makes me concerned about tomorrow. And, if there is one thing I had better do in this life, it is to prepare for the next one. I feel a need for that don't you? But who is offering help in that department? All kinds of folks are suggesting they can help you live longer – maybe a few years. All kinds of folks claim they can make your finances secure right up to the end of this life. All kind of folks will offer to take care of your physical remains and bury them, burn them, fly them into space whatever you like. But who is there but Jesus who is offering to take care of your eternity? And remarkably, this One who teaches us how to prepare for eternity flashed His credentials in the most extraordinary event in history, the one we celebrate every Easter. Jesus said in John 11:25 *I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies.* You can write this guy off as a fool, but you know something? In my heart, in the depths of my being, I find a need for what He is offering. I have a hunger, a desperate longing to know that my life is meaningful and will last beyond this century. And only Jesus offers something credible that corresponds to that need.

He is King of the Past and He is King of the Future. What about the now? What about the challenges of the present? Well, in the present, in this life, I need a lot. I need a guide, a teacher, a model to show the way. I need power to deal with the temptations that come my way. I need a Friend who understands me, who loves me at my worst, who is always gonna be there for me. You know what I just said? I just said I need Jesus. He is and promises to be all of those things. You see, here is the amazing story that the Bible presents. The Scriptures present us a problem at the beginning of the book that gets answered perfectly at the end. In Genesis 3 we read of how man rebelled against God and how our lives and this planet were put under a curse which explains why everything is just so difficult and painful. Do we have anybody here from Boston? You people from Boston know something about curses, don't you? For over 80 years the people of Boston lived

under the curse of the Bambino. You see, in 1918 the Boston Red Sox baseball team won their 5th World Series, the most by any team at that time. But in 1920 their owner sold their best player, a fellow named George Herman *Babe Ruth*, aka *the Bambino*, to the New York Yankees for \$100,000. Over the next 84 years the Yankees went on to win 26 world series while the Red Sox won none. The curse of the Bambino. In 2004, the Red Sox and their fans found themselves in a familiar place. They were losing to the Yankees in the playoffs. Leading three games to none in their playoff series, the Yankee fans showed up at the ballpark with pictures of Babe Ruth to remind the Red Sox of the curse. It was the 9th inning of that game, when the Sox were on the brink of another defeat, when something remarkable happened. They came back and won the game. Then they won the next game and the next and the next in the greatest comeback in baseball history. Then they went on to win their first World Series since 1918. The headline of the Boston Globe the next morning said this: *CURSE LIFTED!!* That's rich. That's what I want written on the headline of my life. *CURSE LIFTED!!* And that is precisely what Jesus has come to do for us, to take that curse of sin and death on Himself and thereby set us free. He comes to make His rich blessings flow far as the curse is found. What He offers is exactly what I need. In my heart I find a need of Him to be my Savior. And because of that and many other reasons, I take Him at His word.