**Justified 14: *Every Mouth Stopped***

Romans 3:9-20

*January 31, 2021*

**Introduction:** Of pears and asparagus – A tale of two thieves

* One of them, a 4th century theologian and bishop, St. Augustine,
* and the other, an 18th century philosopher named Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
  + Both were thieves in their younger days, and both later confessed their wanton behavior and the life-lesson learned in their written memoirs.
* **Augustine,** in a youthful misadventure with his friends, decided that it would be fun to steal some pears from a neighbor’s tree. They had no intent on eating or sharing them, just the thrill of stealing itself, and no doubt the fun of throwing them around and having a good time at someone else’s expense. And what did Augustine learn from this event? Upon reflection he recognized the corruption in his human nature—in other words, sin. ***He enjoyed stealing and the rebellious acts of destruction***. Augustine’s was a rueful reflection in which he recognized his need for redemption that could only come from Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross.
* **Rousseau,** centuries later, also a produce thief, stole some asparagus at a friend’s behest. But his life lesson was rather different: having rejected Christ, Rousseau determined that he was innocent (for who needs a savior if there is no sin). And with regard to the absconded asparagus, ***‘society made him do it.’*** 
  + Rousseau reasoned that his human nature was pure, and it was only the need for food paired with the influence of friends that led him to steal.
  + More generally, he figured that it is only our need for recognition, competition, and perhaps a dose of resentment for those more fortunate than ourselves, that leads us to such things as throwing pears or stealing asparagus (or, fill in the blank…). Sin was irrelevant: it is not a corrupt human nature that leads to bad behavior, it is a corrupt human society that leads otherwise innocent individuals to ‘bad’ behavior.
* So, today, Rousseau is…
  + Father of modern-day cultural Marxism
    - Man is good, but culture, society and economics corrupt him
    - So, in order to correct things, the government must fix what is wrong in culture and society ***so that man can be perfected*** (restored to his natural state.)
* And Augustine
  + Father of Protestant Reformation, and we could say “the father of the fathers our country”
  + Reformation: That man cannot fix himself, because he is the problem. And that only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can conquer our love for, and fascination with, sin. That the law can reveal man’s sin problem, but it cannot fix it.
  + America: Man is inherently sinful, so both the governed and those who govern them must be restrained by laws.

(Romans 3:9–20)*9 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,*

* The Gentiles have one book of God’s revelation – ***Creation*** – (i.e. Natural Revelation)
  + (Psalm 19:1–3)1 *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. 2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.*
  + And labor to suppress what God has revealed about Himself in creation ***in unrighteousness.***
* The Jews have two books of God’s revelation – ***Creation and Scripture*** – (i.e. Natural and Special Revelation)
  + But, (as we saw last week) like the unfaithful servant, buried their advantage in the ground and did not put it to good use.
* The result?
  + Jews, although initially possessing much greater advantages than the Gentiles, are no “better off”( i.e. “under sin”)
    - Note the double negative followed by the superlative
      * No
      * Not
      * At all, and that all
      * To emphasize that the Jews, because of the way they neglected their covenant advantages, are now on equal footing with the Gentiles; and equally liable to wrath of God (2:5-6)
  + For Paul the terms “Jews and Gentiles” covered all of mankind, no one excepted.
    - So, the whole world is “under sin”
      * (JM) “To be ‘under sin’ is to be under the ***dominion*** of sin…”
      * (CS Lewis, in the opening chapter of *Mere Christianity*) “These, then, are the two points I wanted to make. ***First***, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. ***Secondly***, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the law of nature; [and] they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.”
        + And if you listen to those who claim there are no absolutes, before you can say “Jack Robinson” they will say “should or ought.”

*10 as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”*

* First Paul gives us a brief description of who fallen man ***is:***
* Seven superlatives (Superlative: “The highest level or degree attainable” e.g. all, every, most, none, never, always, anything est or iest) magnified by listing them 7x, 7 being the number of perfection/infinitude
  + None is ***righteous***
    - Definition: *dikaios* – righteous, observing divine laws. 1A in a wide sense, upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God.
    - The Gentiles transgress what is written on their hearts (i.e. what they know to be right.)
    - The Jews transgress what is written on their hearts and what is written in God’s law.
  + No, ***not one*** (just in case you misunderstood the meaning of “none.”
  + No one ***understands***
    - Not for lack of information: Creation and “the oracles of God”
    - But for the hardness of their hearts
      * (Ephesians 4:18) *They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them,* ***due to their hardness of heart***.
  + No one ***seeks*** for God
    - For the same reason bank robbers don’t seek the police.
    - Some people seem to be seeking God, but most are merely seeking an idol of their own making; a deity that already agrees with them about everything.
  + All have ***turned aside*** and together they have become ***worthless***
    - “worthless” = as when milk goes bad, good for absolutely nothing.
  + No one ***does good***
    - (Isaiah 64:6)*6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*
    - (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 16, Section 7, “Of Good Works”) “Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others: yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God: and yet, their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God.”
    - And so, Paul says, “no one does good”, and in case you miss his meaning of his superlative, he follows it immediately with…

* + Not even one
    - (J.C. Ryle) “The holiest actions of the holiest saint that ever lived are all more or less full of defects and imperfections. They are either wrong in their motive or defective in their performance, ***and in themselves are nothing more than “splendid sins,”*** deserving God’s wrath and condemnation.”
* **Nextly**, Paul gives us some examples of how fallen man ***expresses*** who he ***is*** focusing metaphorically on mouths, feet and eyes.

*13 “Their* ***throat*** *is an open grave; they use their* ***tongues*** *to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their* ***lips****.” 14 “Their* ***mouth*** *is full of curses and bitterness.” 15 “Their* ***feet*** *are swift to shed blood; 16 in their paths are ruin and misery, 17 and the way of peace they have not known.” 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

* A detailed description of what fallen men ***do:***
  + With their ***mouths***:
    - Their throat is an open grave
      * Imagine the gag-reflex inducing smells coming from an open grave
      * They love to fill their conversations with gross and disgusting words, topics and images.
      * Why? Because, as Jesus taught, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”
    - They use their tongues to deceive
      * (A.V. “their tongues have ***practiced*** deceit”)
      * Toddler are born liars, but bad liars…
      * But later, after much practice, we get so good at deceiving others, that we are even able to deceive ourselves.
    - The venom of asps is under their lips
      * Fangs invisible until the time to strike
      * And then, by means of words, injecting poison into its victims
      * Gossip, slander, words that tear down, destroy and rob others of their joy.
    - Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness
      * Two tenets of atheists:
        + There is no God
        + And I hate Him
      * Bitter for not receiving their due
  + With their ***feet***:
    - Swift to shed blood
      * Wound
      * Debilitate
      * Kill
    - Their paths are full of ruin and misery
      * Hurt, wounded and limping people all around
    - And the way of peace they have not known
      * E.g. Rae pinching Josiah just for a reaction.
  + With their ***eyes***:
    - 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 stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.*

* The law speaks to those who are under the law. Who are they? Who is under the law?
  + **The Gentiles** have God’s law written on their hearts
    - (Romans 2:14–15)*14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15* ***They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts****, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them*
    - And they demonstrate this reality every time they say, “Should or should not, ought or ought not.”
  + **The Jews** have God’s written law
    - (Romans 2:17–18)*17 But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God 18 and know his will and approve what is excellent, because* ***you are instructed from the law;***
    - (Romans 3:1–2)*1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? 2 Much in every way. To begin with,* ***the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.***
* The result of “being under the law?
  + ***Every*** mouth stopped (recall the seven superlatives)
    - Stopped from what?
      * From saying that man is basically good, and left to himself will do good things.
        + Not righteous
        + Don’t understand
        + Don’t seek God
        + Turned away from Him
        + Doesn’t do good
  + The ***whole world*** (recall the seven superlatives) accountable to God
    - Accountable for what?
      * For breaking the laws they know to be true and right.
        + With entire being – ***mouth, feet and eyes***
      * For sinning ***against God***
        + (Psalm 51:4)***Against you, you only, have I sinned*** *and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment*.
    - NOTE on “whole world”: Paul wants to make sure that no one can possibly claim exemption, a la “He’s not talking about me.”

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

* Here is the concise summary of everything that Paul has been teaching in the previous 80 verses (2 ½ chapters.)
  + No one will by justified by the works of the law
    - i.e. by obeying all that the law requires.
    - Not for lack of knowledge
      * Because everyone does things they know are wrong; and don’t do things they know they should.
  + **No** human being (note the superlative)
    - Gentiles with one “book” of God’s revelation.
    - Jews with their two “books” of God’s revelation.
  + Will be ***justified*** in God’s sight
    - For now: ***Declared not guilty, fully righteous***
  + Since through the law comes knowledge of sin.
    - The law is a thermometer, not a cure; it diagnoses but it does not heal or make well.
    - Trying to fix anything, especially people, with the law is like trying to calm down a hornets’ nest with a stick.
* The doctrine of the Trinity (one God in three persons) and this utter divorcement of “law keeping” from “justification” together form what distinguishes Christianity from every other religion, ***even Roman Catholicism***.

**Application**

* **Review**
  + The charge: All of fallen mankind is under the dominion of sin.
  + Proof One: Man’s essence – not righteous, not seeking God, not doing good and altogether worthless (like milk gone bad.)
  + Proof Two: Man’s tongue, his feet and his eyes all together employed to ***express*** his unrighteousness in rebellious, hurtful words and deeds.
  + Result: Every mouth stopped (from alleging inherent goodness) and the whole world accountable to God for their sin.
  + And fallen mankind perfectly unable to fix himself by keep the law (Why? Because he is “under the dominion of sin.”)
  + So,
    - Augustine is helpfully right
      * And his counsel was instrumental in launching the Protestant Reformation and greatly helped our own country begin on solid footing: Understanding the sinfulness of man and the inadequacy of government and laws to fix him.
    - Rousseau is damnably wrong
      * And his demonic counsel is leading many in our country ***today*** to believe that man is basically good, that society and culture are the problem and ***need to be fixed by the government***.
* **Good News Part One:** We don’t seek God, but He seeks us. Viz

I sought the Lord

And afterward I knew

He moved my soul

To seek Him seeking me

It was not I that found

O Savior true

No, I was found of Thee

Thou didst reach forth Thy hand

And mine enfold

I walked and sank not

On the storm-vexed sea

‘Twas not so much

That I on Thee took hold

As Thou dear Lord on me

* **Good News Part Two: What law keeping cannot do, *faith* can.**

***CH Spurgeon-***

(Note: The constellation named, the “Southern Cross” has five stars, and is the southern hemisphere’s version of our “Big Dipper” and was used by sailors before GPS to navigate the seas south of the equator.)

You will as surely be lost if you trust to your

good works, as if you had trusted to your sins.

There is a 'clean' path to hell as well as a 'dirty' one.

There is as sure a road to perdition along the 'highway

of morality', as sure as down the slough of vice.

If your faith is not fixed in Jesus,

your best works will be but SPLENDID SINS.

All the performance of duties will not bring you salvation.

Trust Jesus, and you are saved.

Trust self, and you are lost.

There is your only hope, poor shipwrecked mariner-- yonder

constellation of the cross with those five stars, the wounds

of Jesus- look there and live. One glance and you are saved.

Those soul-quickening words, "Believe and live,"

comprehend the whole gospel of God.

May the Divine Spirit lead you now out of self, unto Christ.

And, amen.