



# **Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church**

**Five Solas**

**Grace Alone**

**Romans 3:9-20**

**11/11/2018**

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## **Main Point**

Apart from the grace and mercy of God we are without hope because the law cannot save a us.

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## **Introduction**

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What does it mean to “get your hopes up”?**

**Have you ever gotten your hopes up about something that didn’t work out? What happened? How did you feel?**

**Why is the concept of hope such a critical part of life?**

“There’s always hope.” We sometimes throw around that phrase because we assume that at some point things have to get better. While that might be true in some cases, we see in the Bible that mankind is completely hopeless apart from the intervention of God. No matter how good we might try to be, apart from the grace and mercy of God we are without hope because the law is inadequate to save a person.

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## Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 3:9-18.**

**Do you think most people in the world think they are righteous or unrighteous? How would you explain to someone that they are not righteous?**

**How do you reconcile verse 11 with the many Scriptural references to people seeking God?**

**Which description of unrighteousness from this passage do you think best fits modern society? Why?**

**Which description of unrighteousness from this passage reminds you the most of yourself before Christ? Why? How have you seen Him change you?**

**Why do you think God gets such little fear today?**

From the Psalms, Isaiah, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs come the thoughts that Paul “quotes” in order to show the Jews one thing: the texts which God committed to them for the purpose of being a light to the Gentiles have now been turned upon them. It is as if someone grabbed their sword out of their hand—the sword by which they were to fight their way through the

darkness of this world—and killed them with it. The root problem is lack of vision, as Paul's quote of Psalm 36:1 reveals (v. 18). With our eyes we order our steps. When we fail to look to God and give Him the proper fear or reverence He deserves, then we will fall.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 3:19-20.**

**According to these verses, what is the Law's purpose?**

**What makes verses 19 and 20 such hopeless verses? How does this concept connect with what you see in Romans 1:18-21?**

Paul had maintained earlier we will be judged by works (see Rom. 2:5-7). In that context he was writing of the fruit of a faithful life. In the present context he wrote of works performed legalistically as a means of justification before God. Paul had tried such an approach as a Pharisee and in his estimation had been rather good at it. Ultimately he found that approach completely incapable of saving him. Then what is the function of law? It is a diagnostic device. Through the law comes the knowledge of sin. The law should awaken in us an awareness that we need what only God can supply. The law reveals sin.

**HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 64:6.**

**In what ways is sin related to unbelief in the promises of God? Why might we prefer the word "mistakes" over "sin" when speaking of our attitudes and actions?**

**Is it possible to run from God while trying to earn His favor? How can our "best efforts" get in the way of true salvation?**

Rather than just sweep our sin under the rug and ignore it, God has dealt with it by sending His Son to bear the burden. Jesus is the righteousness of God, and those who put their trust in Him have the burden of their sin completely removed and receive the blessing of His righteous standing before the Father as their own. So our right standing with God is completely His own

doing. Our only boast before God will be in the gift that He has given us—“eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23).

**How does our inability to save ourselves provide a platform for God to display His glory? How does “boasting in the gospel” influence the way we think about evangelism and missions?**

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## Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Even after finding Christ we can often place our hope in other things. Is there something in your life right now that you are hoping in that isn't God? What needs to change about how you look at that part of your life?**

**How can today's text actually be encouraging?**

**Do you know anyone who is without hope? If so, how can you help them this week?**

**What can our group do together to share the hope of Christ with the hopeless of our community in the near future?**

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## Pray

As you close in prayer, thank God for the law, which enables us to know God's expectations for us so we can be truly repentant in regards to our sin. Also thank God for sending Jesus, our hope, to bear the burden of our sin and be the fulfillment of the Law on our behalf.

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# Commentary

## ROMANS 3:9-20

Paul uses his summary of Jewish accountability before God to remind his readers that all—Jews and Gentiles alike—have demonstrated their unrighteousness before God.

3:9. Some of Paul's fellow Jews contended they enjoyed a privileged status as God's people that precluded their being subject to judgment. Paul returned to that theme with stark pronouncements that sin has infected every person. Though the Jews have had the advantage of receiving God's words, they have no privilege when the subject is sin and are not any better with regard to salvation. Not at all could actually be translated as "not altogether" or "not in every respect." This would allow for the one advantage Paul cited in verse 1 and others he anticipated with the phrase "considerable in every way" in verse 2. Paul's focus in this present verse, however, is on sin and salvation. In this respect Jews could expect no favoritism.

3:10. The solemn formula as it is written again calls attention to God's Word to prove Paul's argument. The words in verses 10-12 come from Psalm 14:1-3 or Psalm 53:1-3. Paul had studied the Hebrew Bible in his training. Also he apparently had a Greek translation of the Old Testament available, which this quotation closely follows. A Jewish audience would have been receptive to the Scripture, so Paul quoted this psalm to indicate the universal sinfulness of humanity. Written by David, the psalm shows racial distinctions do not matter with regard to sin. Those who trust in their own righteousness to bring salvation need God's clear word: There is no one righteous. The quote is written as a couplet, one phrase repeating the thought of the previous phrase. This method of "rhyming" characterizes Hebrew poetry.

3:11. A second couplet underscores Paul's argument. Understanding translates a word that indicates the ability to use reason to comprehend a given concept. No one seeks God indicates a person who holds on to sin or to reason alone will never find God. In our age we often hear about people who are searching for God. People who undertake this search using only the faculty of reason will end up with the biblically indefensible position of "many paths to God." The path to God is walked by faith, not reason.

3:12. A third couplet adds the idea that not only are people unrighteous and pursuing the wrong path, they consciously have turned away from God. God provides plenty of signposts. If we choose to ignore them, we are doing the same thing as turning away.

3:13-14. In verses 13-14 Paul cited passages that deal with the throat, the tongue, the lips, and the mouth. The ungodly display their fallen nature when they open their mouths to speak. God provided us with the gift of communication so that we may honor and praise our Creator. We tend to take the gift and place it in the service of our own sinful nature. The throat of the unrighteous is an open grave. Others understand the expression as a reference to the deadly effects of the psalmist's enemies. Their tongues were used to deceive. The poison of vipers was on their lips. Their mouths were full of cursing and bitterness. Jesus said that "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt 12:34).

3:15-18. The feet of the unrighteous are swift to shed blood (v. 15). Their natural instincts encourage them to kill. The desire to prevail at any cost leads to suffering and disaster. Evil inevitably overreaches itself. It creates the conditions for its own collapse. In a moral universe wickedness earns its own sentence of personal retribution. The way of peace is unknown to those who turn from God. Their lives are marked by unrest and lack of genuine satisfaction. They live out their days haunted by a dim vision that there must be something in life that would satisfy their deeper longings. They do not venerate God or hold him in esteem.

Paul's portrayal of the unrighteous person may seem overly pessimistic to many contemporaries. However, Paul was making a specific point and was under no obligation to mention all the extenuating circumstances. Then, of course, we participants in this fallen world tend to minimize the difference between our own conduct and the expectations of a holy God. In view of what God intends, humans fall lamentably short (cf. Rom 3:23).

3:19-20. Paul declared that all have sinned (3:9). The Old Testament declares that all have sinned (3:10-18). And finally, the law declares that all have sinned (3:19-20). The law here has a dual reference in Paul's words. First, it simply refers to the verses he has just quoted, showing that the law speaks to those who are under the law. Paul is not asking the Jews to give heed to the sacred writings of some other religion, but to their own. If you claim these writings, he says, then receive their claim upon your life. Do not own them without letting them own you. Receive their verdict without objection.

Second, however, Paul says that the law's purpose is to let you know that the law cannot make you righteous. Rather, it is through the law that we become conscious of sin. In other words, when the law says, "Do this or that," it is really saying, "You can't do this or that." The law wants you to know that you are guilty of not being able to keep it, and that your righteousness

will never have its source in the law. The law tells you of your unrighteousness; the gospel tells you of the righteousness of God.

Paul has concluded his words concerning his beloved kinsman (Rom. 10:1-3). He has brought the church at Rome to the point where they understand that they are unrighteous (Jew and Gentile), the Romans are unrighteous, the “barbarians” in Spain and beyond are unrighteous, that there is no one righteous, not even one (3:10). He is now ready to tell them who is righteous—God alone—and more importantly, how a bridge may be built upon which they may move from their unrighteousness to the righteousness of God. This he will do beginning in 3:21—“a righteousness from God ... has been made known.”