

The Big Problem

Part 2



Last week we looked at some horrible news and a bit of good news.

The bad news, is pretty bad. Paul, in sharing it seems to be expanding on this passage from Isaiah:

We are constant sinners ... We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags ... Therefore, you have turned away from us and turned us over to our sins. (Isaiah 64:5-7, NLT)

In the last half of Romans 1, Paul makes these painful points:

1. You are infected with sin and the gap between where you are and salvation is too great to overcome. You don't have what it takes and there is no chance of you getting there on your own.
2. Many have rejected God instead worshiping created things. So, God will finally give up and leave them to wallow in their sin, reaping eternal destruction.
3. The only thing God hates is sin. He loves people (see **John 3:16-17**, **Romans 5:6-8**, & **Romans 8:31-39**) – even wicked people. He loves you dearly and will do everything He can to separate you from sin. But, if you resist this effort and choose to hold on to sin (in any form), in the end, He will give up trying and you will be destroyed along with the sin you refuse to let go of.

Paul ends this section with this summary:

Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too. (Romans 1:29-32, NLT)

Message to “Believers”

Up to this point, the Jewish believers in Rome, would have concluded that Paul was condemning the Pagans or Gentiles. The church folk would have been cheering Paul on with hearty “amens”.

This is not much different from what we hear many Christians saying about non-believers today. Many are quick to condemn:

- Those liberal folk who believe and practice immorality and abortion.
- Those non-patriotic people who want every person and religion to be protected – who believe even illegal aliens have certain rights simply because they’re human.
- Those scientists who tell us we came from someplace other than the Hand of God.
- And those pagans who call us out on our bigotry and judgementalism.

Unfortunately, our voice as Christians is most often heard in condemnation as we try to hold a non-believing world to our standards of justice and righteousness.

Paul; however, is setting us up. He turns the table on us – all of us who look out from our churches in judgement. He writes:

You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse!
(Romans 2:1, NLT)

Wait a minute, you may be thinking. I’m not as bad as that. I’m not practicing immorality. I’m not wicked! In fact, I’m better than most people I know.

Paul doesn’t let up:

When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God’s judgment when you do the same things? (Romans 2:1-3, NLT)

Is Paul out of his mind here? What is he talking about?

Let’s look at his summary again:

Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin ... (Romans 1:29, NLT)

He then goes on to list what he means by every kind of wickedness and sin:

... greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful ... (Romans 1:29-30, NLT)

Is anything here ringing a bell? Sexual immorality isn’t even on this list.

- *Greed* – are you content with what you have or do you “need” more?
- *Hate* – are there people, or groups of people you can’t stand and you wish they would just go away?
- *Envy* – have you ever been jealous of someone, wishing you could have what they have?
- *Quarreling* – have you ever argued just to make your point not really caring too much how you were making the other person feel? Or trying to be sure the other person knew they were wrong and you are right?

- *Deception* – have you always been truthful? Do you ever try to hide your actions and motives? Have you ever “bent” the truth a bit in an attempt at making yourself look better?
- *Malicious Behavior and Gossip* – have you ever said something to make someone else look bad? Have you talked about someone behind their back in an attempt to put them down? Have you ever engaged in “Spiritual Gossip” saying: “This person really needs our prayers because of this bad trouble they have gotten themselves into ...”
- *Backstabbers* – have you ever been nice to people when you’re with them, making them think they have a friend in you, but when you’re not with them, say bad things about them?
- *Insolent* – have you ever been rude and had an arrogant lack of respect for others? Been cheeky, ill-mannered, uncivil, or insulting?
- *Proud and boastful* – do you like to talk about yourself more than you like listening to someone else? Do you want people to know you have accomplished something or something was your idea?

We could dig a little deeper. The problem is these sins are somewhat respectable – many are seen as no big deal.

As we went through this list, did some people come to mind that you wish could hear this and take this to heart? Paul points out:

Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God’s judgment when you do the same things? (Romans 2:3, NLT)

So many of us church folk have the same problem the Scribes and the Pharisees had – we secretly believe we are better than other people. After all, we belong to the church that upholds *all* of God’s commandments.

Paul goes on:

... Because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. He will judge everyone according to what they have done ... He will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on doing what is evil – for the Jew first and also for the Gentile ...

When the Gentiles sin, they will be destroyed, even though they never had God’s written law. And the Jews, who do have God’s law, will be judged by that law when they fail to obey it. For merely listening to the law doesn’t make us right with God. It is obeying the law that makes us right in his sight ... The day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone’s secret life. (Romans 2:5-16, NLT)

Now, you may think I'm just trying to make you feel miserable. The trouble is; until you and I get a glimpse of our real condition, we won't feel any need of changing.

Until you understand the depth of sin in your life, you cannot appreciate what Jesus has done for you.

If nothing hurts, we don't usually think about going to see a doctor. But, when we have enough discomfort, we try to find a solution.

The same is true spiritually. Paul wants us to know – all of us, you and I – that we're sinful to our core. He wants us to understand that salvation is way beyond our ability and strength – it's out of reach. And, if we are left this way, we will be destroyed with the sin we have refused to let go of.

And just in case we missed it, Paul goes another round. Especially for us church folk, he quotes a phrase or two from a number of Old Testament passages dealing with our sinfulness.

You can read it in **Romans 3:9-18** – but let me warn you, it's brutal. He then concludes the bad news with this summary:

Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. (Romans 3:19-20, NLT)

God knows not even us church folk can keep the law. In our sinful world, its purpose is to show us how bad we're really doing – to make sure we understand we're all law breakers, hopeless sinners. And this understanding is what will drive us to Jesus.

The law simply shows us how sinful we are. (Romans 3:20, NLT)

To me, this is the first thing Paul has said in a bit that's actually encouraging.

It's exhausting to believe that salvation depends on my ability to keep the law. This is one thing that really is impossible. And, Paul finally just states it.

So, if keeping the law won't save me, what will?

But Now ...

Reading on, beginning with Romans 3:21:

But now ... (Romans 3:21-22, NLT)

This signals another big transition. Paul has spent the better part of three chapters making sure we understand how sinful we are and how helpless we are to do anything about it.

"But now ..." brings us to what many consider to be one of the most important passages in Scripture:

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law ... We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight ... People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood ... (Romans 3:21-25, NLT)

When you take the step of giving yourself to Jesus, believing in Him – you are made right with God.

Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. (Romans 3:27-28, NLT)

We are declared “not guilty” when we, by believing in Jesus enough to give ourselves to Him!

Steps to Christ summarizes it like this:

If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.

(Steps to Christ, page 62)

Because Jesus died for us, He has a right to give us His righteousness and to take our sinfulness. When you give yourself to Jesus, you are considered to be perfect – there is no guilt associated with your name. Because of Jesus' righteousness, which stands in place of your sinfulness, you are accepted by God as if you had never sinned.

For those of you who like to put a name on things, this is what theologians call justification.

I call it the most wonderful news in the Universe. God loves you so much that He has done through Jesus, what you cannot do for yourself, and when you accept it, calls you perfect.

The only remaining question is: What are you going to do about it?

Jesus gave this invitation to the church of Laodicea as the solution to their lukewarm ways:

“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.” (Revelation 3:20, NLT)

If you have not invited Jesus into your life, I invite you to do so right now. Most of all, He wants to hang out with you. Don't put it off. Experience the joy of God saying to you: “Not Guilty!”

Notes

Text you find in **this color** is a link to more information. It may take you to the Bible verse in context and/or in several different translations utilizing BibleGateway.com. In some cases, it may take you to a website where there is additional information. And, it may take you to a PDF copy of previous sermons in this series.

Previous Sermons in this Series

- January 5, 2019: **Welcome to Rome (Romans, Part 1)**
- January 26, 2019: **The Big Problem, Part 1 (Romans, Part 2a)**

Scripture References

Job 14:1-6 I(NLT): *“How frail is humanity! How short is life, how full of trouble! ²We blossom like a flower and then wither. Like a passing shadow, we quickly disappear. ³Must you keep an eye on such a frail creature and demand an accounting from me? ⁴Who can bring purity out of an impure person? No one! ⁵You have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer. ⁶So leave us alone and let us rest! We are like hired hands, so let us finish our work in peace.” (Job 14:1-6, NLT)*

Psalm 32 (NLT): *Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! ²Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty! ³When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. ⁴Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Interlude*

⁵Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.” And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Interlude

⁶Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment. ⁷For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory. Interlude

⁸The LORD says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. ⁹Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control.”

¹⁰Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the LORD. ¹¹So rejoice in the LORD and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure! (Psalm 32, NLT)

Psalm 103 (NLT): *Let all that I am praise the LORD; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name. ²Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things he does for me. ³He forgives all*

my sins and heals all my diseases. ⁴ He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. ⁵ He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

⁶ The LORD gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly.

⁷ He revealed his character to Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel. ⁸ The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. ⁹ He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. ¹⁰ He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. ¹¹ For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. ¹² He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. ¹³ The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. ¹⁴ For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust. ¹⁵ Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die. ¹⁶ The wind blows, and we are gone – as though we had never been here. ¹⁷ But the love of the LORD remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children's children ¹⁸ of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments!

¹⁹ The LORD has made the heavens his throne; from there he rules over everything.

²⁰ Praise the LORD, you angels, you mighty ones who carry out his plans, listening for each of his commands. ²¹ Yes, praise the LORD, you armies of angels who serve him and do his will! ²² Praise the LORD, everything he has created, everything in all his kingdom.

Let all that I am praise the LORD. (Psalm 103, NLT)

Isaiah 61:1-3 (NLT): *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. ² He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come, and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies. ³ To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for his own glory. (Isaiah 61:1-3, NLT)*

Isaiah 64:1-7 (NLT): *Oh, that you would burst from the heavens and come down! How the mountains would quake in your presence! ² As fire causes wood to burn and water to boil, your coming would make the nations tremble. Then your enemies would learn the reason for your fame! ³ When you came down long ago, you did awesome deeds beyond our highest expectations. And oh, how the mountains quaked!*

⁴ For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him! ⁵ You welcome those who gladly do good, who follow godly ways.

But you have been very angry with us, for we are not godly. We are constant sinners; how can people like us be saved? ⁶ We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags.

Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall, and our sins sweep us away like the wind.⁷ Yet no one calls on your name or pleads with you for mercy. Therefore, you have turned away from us and turned us over to our sins. (Isaiah 64:1-7, NLT)

Jeremiah 3:12-15 (NLT): *Therefore, go and give this message to Israel. This is what the LORD says:*

“O Israel, my faithless people, come home to me again, for I am merciful. I will not be angry with you forever.¹³ Only acknowledge your guilt. Admit that you rebelled against the LORD your God and committed adultery against him by worshiping idols under every green tree. Confess that you refused to listen to my voice. I, the LORD, have spoken!

¹⁴ “Return home, you wayward children,” says the Lord, “for I am your master. I will bring you back to the land of Israel – one from this town and two from that family – from wherever you are scattered.¹⁵ And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will guide you with knowledge and understanding. (Jeremiah 3:12-15, NLT)

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NLT): *“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.*

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34, NIV)

Ezekiel 20:18-20 (NLT): *“Then I warned their children not to follow in their parents’ footsteps, defiling themselves with their idols.¹⁹ ‘I am the LORD your God,’ I told them. ‘Follow my decrees, pay attention to my regulations,²⁰ and keep my Sabbath days holy, for they are a sign to remind you that I am the LORD your God.” (Ezekiel 20:18-20, NLT)*

Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NLT): *“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols.²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.” (Ezekiel 36:25-27, NLT)*

Matthew 5:43-48 (NLT): *“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy.⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.⁴⁷ If you are kind only to*

your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸ *But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.* (Matthew 5:43-48, NLT)

Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT): *Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30, NLT)

Matthew 11:28-30 (the Message): *“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”* (Matthew 11:28-30, the Message)

John 3:14-17 (NLT): *And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.*

¹⁶ *“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.* (John 3:14-17, NLT)

Romans 1:18 – 3:31 (NLT): *But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. ¹⁹ They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. ²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

²¹ *Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. ²² Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. ²³ And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.*

²⁴ *So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies. ²⁵ They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. ²⁶ That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. ²⁷ And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.*

²⁸ *Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. ²⁹ Their lives became full of every kind of*

wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. ³⁰ They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. ³¹ They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. ³² They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.

God's Judgment of Sin

2 You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. ² And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. ³ Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? ⁴ Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

⁵ But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ He will judge everyone according to what they have done. ⁷ He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. ⁸ But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. ⁹ There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on doing what is evil – for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. ¹⁰ But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who do good – for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism.

¹² When the Gentiles sin, they will be destroyed, even though they never had God's written law. And the Jews, who do have God's law, will be judged by that law when they fail to obey it. ¹³ For merely listening to the law doesn't make us right with God. It is obeying the law that makes us right in his sight. ¹⁴ Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. ¹⁵ They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. ¹⁶ And this is the message I proclaim – that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.

The Jews and the Law

¹⁷ You who call yourselves Jews are relying on God's law, and you boast about your special relationship with him. ¹⁸ You know what he wants; you know what is right because you have been taught his law. ¹⁹ You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a light for people who are lost in darkness. ²⁰ You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. For you are certain that God's law gives you complete knowledge and truth.

²¹ Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal? ²² You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you commit adultery? You condemn idolatry, but do you use items stolen from pagan temples? ²³ You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonor God by breaking it. ²⁴ No wonder the Scriptures say,

"The Gentiles blaspheme the name of God because of you." (Isaiah 52:5)

²⁵ The Jewish ceremony of circumcision has value only if you obey God's law. But if you don't obey God's law, you are no better off than an uncircumcised Gentile. ²⁶ And if the Gentiles obey God's law, won't God declare them to be his own people? ²⁷ In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God's law will condemn you Jews who are circumcised and possess God's law but don't obey it.

²⁸ For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. ²⁹ No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.

God Remains Faithful

3 Then what's the advantage of being a Jew? Is there any value in the ceremony of circumcision? ² Yes, there are great benefits! First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God.

³ True, some of them were unfaithful; but just because they were unfaithful, does that mean God will be unfaithful? ⁴ Of course not! Even if everyone else is a liar, God is true. As the Scriptures say about him,

*"You will be proved right in what you say, and you will win your case in court."
(Psalm 51:4)*

⁵ "But," some might say, "our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn't it unfair, then, for him to punish us?" (This is merely a human point of view.) ⁶ Of course not! If God were not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world? ⁷ "But," someone might still argue, "how can God condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory?" ⁸ And some people even slander us by claiming that we say, "The more we sin, the better it is!" Those who say such things deserve to be condemned.

All People Are Sinners

⁹ Well then, should we conclude that we Jews are better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin. ¹⁰ As the Scriptures say,

“No one is righteous – not even one. ¹¹ No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. ¹² All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.”

(Psalms 14:1-3, 53:1-3)

¹³ “Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are filled with lies.” “Snake venom drips from their lips.” (Psalms 5:9, 140:3)

¹⁴ “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” (Psalm 10:7)

¹⁵ “They rush to commit murder. ¹⁶ Destruction and misery always follow them. ¹⁷ They don’t know where to find peace.” (Isaiah 59:7-8)

¹⁸ “They have no fear of God at all.” (Psalm 36:1)

¹⁹ Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. ²⁰ For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

Christ Took Our Punishment

²¹ But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. ²² We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. ²⁴ Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. ²⁵ For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, ²⁶ for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

²⁷ Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. ²⁸ So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

²⁹ After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn’t he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. ³⁰ There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. ³¹ Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law.

(Romans 1:18 – 3:31, NLT)

Romans 8:5-8 (NLT): *Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. ⁶ So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. ⁷ For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. ⁸ That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. (Romans 8:7, NLT)*

Galatians 5:16-26 (NLT): *So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. ¹⁷ The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. ¹⁸ But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.*

¹⁹ *When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

²² *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

²⁴ *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. ²⁵ Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another. (Galatians 5:16-26, NLT)*

Ephesians 2:4-10 (NLT): *But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ⁶ For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷ So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.*

⁸ *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:4-10, NLT)*

Titus 3:3-7 (NLT): *Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other.*

⁴ But – When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, ⁵ he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. ⁷ Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life. (**Titus 3:3-7**, NLT)

Revelation 3:14-22 (NLT): “Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen – the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation:

¹⁵ “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! ¹⁶ But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! ¹⁷ You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. ¹⁸ So I advise you to buy gold from me – gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. ¹⁹ I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference.

²⁰ “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. ²¹ Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.

²² “Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.” (**Revelation 3:14-22**, NLT)

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Desire of Ages, page 107: “I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance,” said John; “but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” (**Matthew 3:11**). The prophet Isaiah had declared that the Lord would cleanse His people from their iniquities “by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.” The word of the Lord to Israel was, “I will turn My hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin.” (**Isaiah 4:4; 1:25**). To sin, wherever found, “our God is a consuming fire.” (**Hebrews 12:29**). In all who submit to His power the Spirit of God will consume sin. But if men cling to sin, they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them. Jacob, after his night of wrestling with the Angel, exclaimed, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” (**Genesis 32:30**). Jacob had been guilty of a great sin in his conduct toward Esau; but he had repented. His transgression had been forgiven, and his sin purged; therefore he could endure the revelation of God’s presence. But wherever men came before God while willfully cherishing evil, they were destroyed. At the second advent of Christ the wicked shall be consumed “with the Spirit of His mouth,” and destroyed “with the

brightness of His coming.” (2 Thessalonians 2:8). The light of the glory of God, which imparts life to the righteous, will slay the wicked. (**Desire of Ages, page 107**)

Desire of Ages, pages 172-173: Jesus continued: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” By nature the heart is evil, and “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” Job 14:4. No human invention can find a remedy for the sinning soul. “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” Romans 8:7; Matthew 15:19. The fountain of the heart must be purified before the streams can become pure. He who is trying to reach heaven by his own works in keeping the law is attempting an impossibility. There is no safety for one who has merely a legal religion, a form of godliness. The Christian's life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus was still perplexed, and Jesus used the wind to illustrate His meaning: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”

The wind is heard among the branches of the trees, rustling the leaves and flowers; yet it is invisible, and no man knows whence it comes or whither it goes. So with the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. It can no more be explained than can the movements of the wind. A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or to trace all the circumstances in the process of conversion; but this does not prove him to be unconverted. By an agency as unseen as the wind, Christ is constantly working upon the heart. Little by little, perhaps unconsciously to the receiver, impressions are made that tend to draw the soul to Christ. These may be received through meditating upon Him, through reading the Scriptures, or through hearing the word from the living preacher. Suddenly, as the Spirit comes with more direct appeal, the soul gladly surrenders itself to Jesus. By many this is called sudden conversion; but it is the result of long wooing by the Spirit of God – a patient, protracted process.

While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power. When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God. (**Desire of Ages, pages 172-173**)

Desire of Ages, pages 173-174: The Jews whom Jesus had driven from the temple claimed to be children of Abraham, but they fled from the Saviour's presence because they could not endure the glory of God which was manifested in Him. Thus they gave evidence that they were not fitted by the

grace of God to participate in the sacred services of the temple. They were zealous to maintain an appearance of holiness, but they neglected holiness of heart. While they were sticklers for the letter of the law, they were constantly violating its spirit. Their great need was that very change which Christ had been explaining to Nicodemus – a new moral birth, a cleansing from sin, and a renewing of knowledge and holiness.

There was no excuse for the blindness of Israel in regard to the work of regeneration. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah had written, “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” David had prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” And through Ezekiel the promise had been given, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes.” (Isaiah 64:6; Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26, 27)

Nicodemus had read these scriptures with a clouded mind; but he now began to comprehend their meaning. He saw that the most rigid obedience to the mere letter of the law as applied to the outward life could entitle no man to enter the kingdom of heaven. In the estimation of men, his life had been just and honorable; but in the presence of Christ he felt that his heart was unclean, and his life unholy. (Desire of Ages, pages 173-174)

Desire of Ages, page 175: Not through controversy and discussion is the soul enlightened. We must look and live. Nicodemus received the lesson, and carried it with him. He searched the Scriptures in a new way, not for the discussion of a theory, but in order to receive life for the soul. He began to see the kingdom of heaven as he submitted himself to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

There are thousands today who need to learn the same truth that was taught to Nicodemus by the uplifted serpent. They depend on their obedience to the law of God to commend them to His favor. When they are bidden to look to Jesus, and believe that He saves them solely through His grace, they exclaim, “How can these things be?”

Like Nicodemus, we must be willing to enter into life in the same way as the chief of sinners. Than Christ, “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:12. Through faith we receive the grace of God; but faith is not our Saviour. It earns nothing. It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, and appropriate His merits, the remedy for sin. And we cannot even repent without the aid of the Spirit of God. The Scripture says of Christ, “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” Acts 5:31. Repentance comes from Christ as truly as does pardon.

How, then, are we to be saved? “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,” so the Son of man has been lifted up, and everyone who has been deceived and bitten by the serpent may look and live. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1:29. The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not

resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour. Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul. The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will of Christ. The heart, the mind, are created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself. Then the law of God is written in the mind and heart, and we can say with Christ, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God." Psalm 40:8. (Desire of Ages, page 175)

Desire of Ages, page 239: *Our standing before God depends, not upon the amount of light we have received, but upon the use we make of what we have. Thus even the heathen who choose the right as far as they can distinguish it are in a more favorable condition than are those who have had great light, and profess to serve God, but who disregard the light, and by their daily life contradict their profession. (Desire of Ages, page 239)*

Desire of Ages, page 246: *But Peter was unmindful now of boats or lading. This miracle, above any other he had ever witnessed, was to him a manifestation of divine power. In Jesus he saw One who held all nature under His control. The presence of divinity revealed his own unholiness. Love for his Master, shame for his own unbelief, gratitude for the condescension of Christ, above all, the sense of his uncleanness in the presence of infinite purity, overwhelmed him. While his companions were securing the contents of the net, Peter fell at the Saviour's feet, exclaiming, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."*

It was the same presence of divine holiness that had caused the prophet Daniel to fall as one dead before the angel of God. He said, "My comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." So when Isaiah beheld the glory of the Lord, he exclaimed, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Daniel 10:8; Isaiah 6:5. Humanity, with its weakness and sin, was brought in contrast with the perfection of divinity, and he felt altogether deficient and unholy. Thus it has been with all who have been granted a view of God's greatness and majesty.

Peter exclaimed, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man;" yet he clung to the feet of Jesus, feeling that he could not be parted from Him. The Saviour answered, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." It was after Isaiah had beheld the holiness of God and his own unworthiness that he was entrusted with the divine message. It was after Peter had been led to self-renunciation and dependence upon divine power that he received the call to his work for Christ. (Desire of Ages, page 246)

Desire of Ages, page 266: *When we pray for earthly blessings, the answer to our prayer may be delayed, or God may give us something other than we ask, but not so when we ask for deliverance from sin. It is His will to cleanse us from sin, to make us His children, and to enable us to live a holy life. Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." Galatians 1:4. And "this is the confidence*

that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." 1 John 5:14, 15. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. (**Desire of Ages, page 266**)

Desire of Ages, page 280: A legal religion can never lead souls to Christ; for it is a loveless, Christless religion. Fasting or prayer that is actuated by a self-justifying spirit is an abomination in the sight of God. The solemn assembly for worship, the round of religious ceremonies, the external humiliation, the imposing sacrifice, proclaim that the doer of these things regards himself as righteous, and as entitled to heaven; but it is all a deception. Our own works can never purchase salvation. (**Desire of Ages, page 280**)

Desire of Ages, pages 296-297: As His representatives among men, Christ does not choose angels who have never fallen, but human beings, men of like passions with those they seek to save. Christ took upon Himself humanity, that He might reach humanity. Divinity needed humanity; for it required both the divine and the human to bring salvation to the world. Divinity needed humanity, that humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man. So with the servants and messengers of Christ. Man needs a power outside of and beyond himself, to restore him to the likeness of God, and enable him to do the work of God; but this does not make the human agency unessential. Humanity lays hold upon divine power, Christ dwells in the heart by faith; and through co-operation with the divine, the power of man becomes efficient for good.

He who called the fishermen of Galilee is still calling men to His service. And He is just as willing to manifest His power through us as through the first disciples. However imperfect and sinful we may be, the Lord holds out to us the offer of partnership with Himself, of apprenticeship to Christ. He invites us to come under the divine instruction, that, uniting with Christ, we may work the works of God. (**Desire of Ages, pages 296-297**)

Desire of Ages, page 300: The proud heart strives to earn salvation; but both our title to heaven and our fitness for it are found in the righteousness of Christ. The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to bestow. From the soul that feels his need, nothing is withheld. He has unrestricted access to Him in whom all fullness dwells. (**Desire of Ages, page 300**)

Desire of Ages, page 302: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." The sense of unworthiness will lead the heart to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and this desire will not be disappointed. Those who make room in their hearts for Jesus will realize His love. All who long to bear the likeness of the character of God shall be satisfied. The Holy Spirit never leaves unassisted the soul who is looking unto Jesus. He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto him. If the eye is kept fixed on Christ, the work of the Spirit ceases not until the soul is

conformed to His image. The pure element of love will expand the soul, giving it a capacity for higher attainments, for increased knowledge of heavenly things, so that it will not rest short of the fullness. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." (**Desire of Ages, page 302**)

Desire of Ages, page 311: *God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This command is a promise. The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning. (**Desire of Ages, page 311**)*

Desire of Ages, page 314: *"Judge not, that ye be not judged." Do not think yourself better than other men, and set yourself up as their judge. Since you cannot discern motive, you are incapable of judging another. In criticizing him, you are passing sentence upon yourself; for you show that you are a participant with Satan, the accuser of the brethren. (**Desire of Ages, page 314**)*

Desire of Ages, pages 316-317: *The Jewish elders who recommended the centurion to Christ had shown how far they were from possessing the spirit of the gospel. They did not recognize that our great need is our only claim on God's mercy. In their self-righteousness they commended the centurion because of the favor he had shown to "our nation." But the centurion said of himself, "I am not worthy." His heart had been touched by the grace of Christ. He saw his own unworthiness; yet he feared not to ask help. He trusted not to his own goodness; his argument was his great need. His faith took hold upon Christ in His true character. He did not believe in Him merely as a worker of miracles, but as the friend and Saviour of mankind.*

*It is thus that every sinner may come to Christ. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us." Titus 3:5. When Satan tells you that you are a sinner, and cannot hope to receive blessing from God, tell him that Christ came into the world to save sinners. We have nothing to recommend us to God; but the plea that we may urge now and ever is our utterly helpless condition that makes His redeeming power a necessity. Renouncing all self-dependence, we may look to the cross of Calvary and say, "In my hand no price I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling." (**Desire of Ages, pages 316-317**)*

Steps to Christ, pages 62-63: *The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been – just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents – perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness. If eternal life were granted on any condition short of this, then the happiness of the whole universe would be imperiled. The way would be open for sin, with all its train of woe and misery, to be immortalized.*

It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God's law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have

no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.

More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. So you may say, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20. So Jesus said to His disciples, "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." Matthew 10:20. Then with Christ working in you, you will manifest the same spirit and do the same good works – works of righteousness, obedience.

So we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. We have no ground for self-exaltation. Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us. (Steps to Christ, pages 62-63)