

Whenever I was a child, watching the various cartoons on TV, I remember that when one of the cartoon characters had moral decisions to make, there would have been an angel sitting on one shoulder and a little devil sitting on the other. I can remember a few times watching Tom & Jerry which I still think was my favourite cartoon, and you would see Tom having to make these big decisions with a miniature version of himself on his shoulder, dressed all in red with a pitchfork, forcing him be cruel to Jerry, and then an angel with little wings on his other side telling him to take a more compassionate approach. Most of the time Tom was strongly compelled to take the devil's recommendations, but then after his actions it would end far worse than he started – resulting in him realising that the proper decision would have been to listen to the angel.

I know it's only a cartoon, but I wonder why do we generally feel more swayed towards doing bad things in life? Am I right or is it just me that feels the strong temptation? Certainly when temptation comes my way, it requires a strong compulsion within me to do the right thing each time. And I know that deep down we all consider ourselves as fundamentally good people, so why do we even have this battle going on in our heads? Why do we get that momentary rush when we give in to one of our weaknesses – even when we know that we're doing the wrong thing? Why does it feel rather satisfying that when you give someone a piece of your mind, it feels like you have won the upper ground, that doesn't it feel good to have put them in their place? When you give in to a craving and do something that you know you shouldn't be doing, many times in that brief moment it feels good – until very quickly the guilt sets in?

But most of us go through life believing that we're fundamentally good people. I don't know many people who walk around saying, "I'm bad. I'm evil to the core." Most of us honestly believe that we're really good people at the core, who want to do good things but occasionally mess up and make mistakes. Even when we make mistakes, most of us think that we just have to try a bit harder and be a bit more sincere and we'll make it. We believe that we're fundamentally good people who occasionally do bad things. But I think it's Paul who really understands this issue of the human heart, he's incredibly honest about it. I know we will come to it in the weeks ahead, but here's what he says in Romans 7:15 *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."*¹⁶ *And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.*¹⁷ *As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.*¹⁸ *For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*¹⁹ *For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.*²⁰ *Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it".*

The fact that you're at church today probably means that you recognize that you need a Saviour. Certainly for me, I know the need for personal confession is a very important aspect to my daily walk with the Lord, recognising the sinful wretch that I am. It would worry me greatly if I was blind to the issues that were going on in my own life thinking that in some way it's ok because generally I'm a nice guy – that doesn't cut it folks. But I know I end up beating myself up because I keep on messing up. And if you're like me, you're occasionally very frustrated with yourself because you want to be good, but you keep on doing bad things. The reassuring thing for me is knowing that I am in good company with the Apostle Pau.

Or actually something that I think is much more dangerous is if you think you are really very good, with nothing really harmful going on in your life, so therefore you don't understand the need for confession, and you're actually blind to the issues that others can see. It was Nicky Gumbel who said this "If you find the perfect church, don't join it. The moment you or I join the church it will become imperfect".

You see folks, the reality today is that everyone of you is a complete mess when it comes to sin. We should never think that this side of glory, we are better than any one else – we're not.

Now the passage from Romans 5 today that we have read is considered as one of the most difficult passages to understand, which is why I've chosen for it to be read from the New Living Translation to help all of you. And the passage's premise is this – none of us are good, but on the other hand Jesus is perfect. So what's the problem? What creates the divide between us and God, between our rebellion and God's perfection? Well the problem is sin. And this problem goes to the very heart of our nature as a civilisation. Remember a few months ago, Romans 3:23, a verse to keep remembering that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*". Not one in creation can escape sin, we are born into it. Why don't we have to teach our babies to fight back when we really want them to go to sleep? Why don't we have to teach two very young siblings the competitive nature of who plays with the favourite toy? Why don't we have to show a young person on the day they become a teenager to moan, complain, and grunt at their parents for simply existing? It's down to sin. We don't have to teach any of that, because there's something in our nature as human beings that just knows and wants to do the wrong thing. The solution to everything comes when we recognize this as our problem, when we come to grips with reality, and when we also figure out that there's a solution that God has for our most fundamental problem.

And so Paul here in chapter 5 begins to explain what exactly it is about our nature that God wants to change.

Follow with me again, verse 12 of Romans 5, "*When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned*". So what Paul is saying is this: God created humanity as fundamentally good. But Adam, that's us, made a choice that fundamentally changed the nature of humanity: Adam did bad, and as a result, all of humanity became bad. And when all of humanity became bad, all kinds of other things happened as well – both sin and death entered the world. Now before we simply blame Adam for everything that we do, remember that every one of us has a free will, and the bottom line is this, if I or you were told that you could have all the knowledge of everything of God, you and I would be taking that apple and eating it. Don't think you wouldn't. And you wouldn't even have to blame Eve for giving it to you. All of us are born with a sinful nature, and as we look at the economic, the environmental, the political, and social issues affecting our world today – it comes down to one thing – and that is the sin of humanity.

But the good news is that God is also able to fix us at the level of the problem. In his Bible Study of Romans, Scot McKnight says these reassuring words – '*What one did, the other undid. And not only did he undo [what Adam did], but his undoing far transcended the doing*'. You see in people's various searches for Spirituality, it's only in Christianity that God provides a Saviour. No other religion provides a solution to the sin of the world that involves God rescuing those that he created, even though it was humanity that caused the problem and not God. Paul explains that Jesus came to undo the mess that Adam had made. Jesus came to give us a new nature.

And so in our reading of God's word this morning, Paul explains that Jesus came to make two huge differences in who we are.

FIRSTY, JESUS CAME TO FREE US FROM THE PENALTY OF SIN

Romans 5:15 says, “*But there is a great difference between Adam’s sin and God’s gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ.*” Adam brought death to us because of his sin; Jesus brought forgiveness to us as a result of his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus came to bring forgiveness where Adam brought us death. Leon Morris in his commentary on this passage reflects that [Jesus] not only reverses the effects of Adam’s sin, but brought an abundance of positive blessings: he brought a whole new life. Whilst Adam’s one sin brought condemnation upon everyone, Christ’s one act of righteousness makes all people right in God’s sight and gives them life. Folks what an offering of praise and thanksgiving we should offer today to our God when we realise this.

You can probably hear what Paul is saying. Adam (that’s you and me) – there’s condemnation; Jesus – there’s life and righteousness. Adam – disobedience and sin; Jesus – obedience and a verdict of “not guilty”. And Paul gives us the solution, and it isn’t about trying harder or trying to be more sincere. The solution is trusting in what Jesus has already done for you and me on the cross. In our sin we don’t deserve it, that’s grace, but when we trust in his redemption on the cross, we are forgiven and rescued from the penalty of sin.

And whilst being free from the penalty that sin ultimately brings to all those that do not turn to Christ, there’s more. Yes, Jesus has rescued us, but secondly:

2. JESUS ALSO CAME TO FREE US FROM THE POWER OF SIN

Romans 5:17 says, “*For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, **for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.***” You may feel sometimes like it’s impossible to do the right thing – that sometimes you want to do what’s right, but you can’t. But Paul gives us some good news: just as sin ruled over us, so now “all who receive God’s wonderful, gracious gift of righteousness will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.” If today you are a follower of Jesus, then know that you have victory over sin. Jesus didn’t just come to rescue you from the penalty of sin. Jesus came to rescue you from the power of sin.

You know, in this past week I was with someone who gave their life to Christ. And after she had prayed a prayer of repentance and submitted herself to the Lord, she was very frightened about the things that she had done in her life in the past and how God would judge her for these. I reassured her that she was now free of all these things, that when God would look upon he looks at her through Jesus, and as Hebrews 8 reminds us that God has not remembered our sins any longer, but also that the power of sin that hung over her was now gone through Christ’s victory on the cross. So today if you are a follower of the Lord, remember that you are free from any power of sin that would try to entrap you or remind you of your past – it’s gone.

And if you’re here and you don’t have a relationship with God, here’s the takeaway. We spend so much time trying to do better and to be better. And what we need to understand is this: none of us are fundamentally good people. Yes, we occasionally do good things, but our problem isn’t really that we occasionally mess up. Our problem is that at the most basic level, we are by nature sinful. And at the most basic level, we don’t need to try harder or be more sincere. At the most basic level, we need a Saviour.

I know it's tough to hear that. Our problem isn't our parents and how they raised us. Our problem isn't that we need more counselling or education. Our problem is that we need a Saviour. That's why Jesus came – not to help you but to change you. Jesus came so that you could be a new you.

It's to also understand what no sermon can make you change, no song can inspire you to realize: it's to understand the basic truth that when you come to Jesus Christ and trust him with your life, sin has no power over you. You are not a slave to sin. When you are in Jesus Christ, there's a fundamental change in your nature. Jesus has not only changed the power of sin over your destiny, but Jesus has also changed your will.

You may be sitting there thinking, "Well, I know my will hasn't been changed. I know that I still want to sin." Yes, but remember that you are not a slave to sin. This thing called sin is no longer the core of who you. Sin has no power over you.

When you become a Christian, whatever it is – lust, anger, impatience, materialism, whatever – it can still tempt you. You can still make a choice to fall into that behaviour. God doesn't take away your ability to make choices. But God does give you the freedom from its power. It's to be able to say to that sin, when you're tempted, "You are not my master." You've been set free.

Jesus said those familiar words in John 10:10, "*The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy.*" We know about what sin can take away – how it can deceive us and damage us. We know how it affects everything – our relationships, our work, our marriages. But Jesus said, "*My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.*" Jesus didn't come to just give you eternal life one day. Jesus came to give you life and freedom from sin right now. Jesus came to give you his life, so that he could live in and through you.

My prayer for all of you today is what Paul wrote in Ephesians: that you would "*understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead*" (Ephesians 1:19-20). My prayer is that God would open the eyes of your heart to realize that sin has no more power over you. You've been changed. There's a new you as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 "*anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ*".

As we all wrestle with sin in the week to come, may we experience that new life of freedom and victory from sin through Jesus Christ. Amen.