

**Sermon Notes**  
**Sin: Are we really born sinful? Are we as bad as we could be?**  
**Romans 3:9-26**  
 All Nations Presbyterian Church  
 Sunday, 21 June 2020

**Introduction: Are people basically good?**

- It's very popular these days to hear that people are basically good.
  - We're told, "Yes, people may make a few mistakes."
    - "We may do a few bad things."
  - But then we're told: "Deep down, on the inside, everyone is basically good."
- But if that were true, how could we possibly make sense of the nightly news?
  - Turn on the news any night on any channel and you'll get story after story of crime.
  - If people are basically good, why are there so many crimes?
    - Why do people seem to keep inventing new ways to do evil?
  - Or if people are pretty much good, why are our relationships so hard?
    - Why do we sometimes have a big fight with the people we love?
    - Why do young children learn the word "no" so quickly?
  - If people are basically good, why do we still have wars and genocide?
- You see, the idea that people are pretty good on the inside, it may make a nice bumper sticker
  - It may be good for political campaigns
  - But it doesn't do justice to the evidence of life.
    - And even more importantly, it doesn't fit the verdict of God's Word

**Sermon Series: Big Questions**

- This morning, we're continuing our sermon series looking at big questions together
  - And today, we're thinking about the question of sin
    - Sin is disobedience to God's law
      - Failing to live up to God's standard
  - If you like big words, the key phrase this morning is "total depravity"
    - "Depravity" is just a big word for our sinful condition
    - And when we talk about "*total* depravity," we mean that our entire nature is corrupted, twisted by sin
- But while this idea of sin and total depravity does justice to the evidence of the world
  - It may raise questions in our minds:
    - Does this sinfulness apply to a few bad people on the news?
      - Or is everyone born sinful?
  - Or maybe your questions is more like this:
    - We may not be as good as some people say
      - But are we really as bad as we possibly could be?
    - Surely my nice non-Christian neighbour does some good things, right?
  - And then of course, some of the most important questions of all:
    - Does my sin really deserve God's judgment?
    - If we really are this sinful, is there any hope for us?
- Today, we're going to start to answer these questions by hearing from Romans 3 together.
  - And the main point for us this morning is simply this:

- We are born totally, terribly sinful, but in Jesus Christ, we have full salvation.
- It's our two points today:
  - Totally Sinful (vv9-20)
  - Full Salvation (vv21-26)

### **I. Totally Sinful (vv9-20)**

- In vv9-20, Paul helps unpack what it does and does not mean to be totally sinful
  - So let's see what he says

#### **A. First, in v9, we see that sin is total because it affects all people**

- Paul begins with a series of questions
  - He asks, "What then? Are we Jews any better off?"
  - And he answers: "No, not at all."
    - "For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks are under sin."
- And really, this is a summary of Paul's entire argument from Romans 1:18-3:8.
  - For nearly two whole chapters, Paul has been labouring the point that everyone is sinful
    - Jews and Gentiles alike
- But maybe you're thinking, "Surely there's an exception somewhere"
  - What about my nice neighbour?
  - "What about that cute little baby?"
    - "They're not really sinful, are they?"
- Well, Psalm 51:5 tells us that we are conceived in sin
  - Because of Adam's sin, all of us are born sinful
  - Even that newborn baby
    - Even that unborn baby
  - They are all under the universal verdict of sin
    - Guilty in Adam
    - And from the very earliest days, guilty for our own sin
- And if you doubt this, just talk to parents of young children
  - Because you don't have to teach children to be selfish and greedy
    - You don't have to teach a two-year old to throw a tantrum when they don't get the toy they wanted
  - No, you have to teach children to share
    - Because even children—yes, those cute, cuddly children—they are already sinful
      - They are sinners in nappies.
- But it's not just kids who are sinful.
  - It's all of us.
    - V9: "All are under sin"
    - V12: "All have turned aside"
    - V20: "All flesh" is guilty before God
    - And just in case we missed it, v23:
      - "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
- Friends, this is God's universal verdict against all humanity
  - Whether you were raised in the church
    - Or grew up a Buddhist, a Muslim, an atheist

- Whether you are a nice person who always pays your taxes
  - Or someone with a checkered, troubled past
- On our own, apart from Jesus Christ, *all* of us are sinful
  - *All* of us have fallen short of God's glory
    - *All* of us are guilty, guilty, guilty.
- And brothers and sisters, this is why evangelism and missions are so important
  - This is why we have English classes and missions we support
    - Because if everyone has a problem with sin
      - Then as Christians we have a message that everyone needs to hear
  - And look, I know, I understand it's easy to feel guilty when we talk about evangelism
    - So if you're looking for someplace to start
      - Why not start with a commitment
  - A commitment to pray for one non-Christian once a day—one person, once a day
    - Maybe your nice, next-door neighbor
      - Maybe your friendly coworker
        - Maybe even your cute, cuddly child
  - Because Romans 3 tells us that apart from Jesus, everyone is under sin
    - Everyone needs the gospel
- Sin is total because sin affects everyone
  - But when we talk about being totally sinful, totally depraved, we especially have something else in mind
  - And it's simply this...

### **B. Sin affects all parts of us (vv10-18)**

- V9 is a bit like Paul's opening statement, his opening indictment against humanity
  - But then, in vv10-18, Paul lays out his evidence.
    - Like a lawyer in the courtroom, he brings out one piece of evidence after another
  - And these verses, Paul's evidence it's really a patchwork of OT quotes
    - If you look at the footnotes in your Bible, you'll see references to at least 8 different passages in the OT
  - And together, these passages show us how big a problem is really is
- Sometimes it's tempting to think that sin is just a few bad actions
  - Maybe it's a simple mistake, a slipup here or there
  - But Paul's evidence shows us
    - Sin is far bigger than we think
      - Sin impacts every single part of us
- In fact, did you notice all the different parts of the body in these verses?
  - V11: our minds
    - V13: our throats, our lips, our tongues
    - V15: our feet
    - V18: our eyes
  - The picture Paul is painting is the picture of an entire body—all our faculties, our whole nature—corrupted by sin
- I'm sure all of us can think of times when we've done sinful things
  - Times when we copied an assignment

- Times we lied just to make ourselves look good
  - But you know, our sinful actions go so much deeper than this
    - Our sin runs so deep that Paul can say in v12:
      - “No one does good, not even one.”
    - Because even our outwardly good deeds—those things that look so impressive to other people
      - They can be corrupted by sin
- I can remember working at a Christian camp in high school
  - And before the campers arrived, we had to clean up the campsite
    - Somehow, I got stuck with the job of picking up pinecones
  - And outwardly, if you saw me, you might have thought I was doing a pretty good thing
    - But the truth is, in my heart, I was grumbling and complaining
      - In my heart, I was fuming, “Why do I have to do such a boring job?”
      - “Why did so-and-so get a more exciting assignment?”
      - “It’s not fair!”
  - Even when our actions look good on the outside
    - They can still be corrupted by sin
      - By wrong motives
        - By grumbling and complaining and bitterness in our hearts
  - In fact, Jesus tells us in Mark 7, that all our sin flows from our hearts
  - So, Paul’s verdict still stands: “No one does good, not even one.”
    - Sin impacts all of our actions
- But sin also affects our speech, vv13-14
  - Before Ah Young and I moved to Australia, one of the things people kept mentioning to us is all the poisonous animals that live here
    - I think Australia has some of the most poisonous snakes in the world
    - And the venom of some Australian snakes is so powerful
      - If they bite you, you could die in minutes
  - And that’s the image Paul uses for our speech
    - V13: “The venom of asps is under their lips.”
      - V14: “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”
  - If you want to see this in practice
    - Just listen to drivers in traffic or fans at a footy match
  - Or maybe closer to home for many of us:
    - Just think about how we respond
      - The cutting comebacks we use when we are criticized
      - The constant sarcasm
  - Because it’s those biting, angry words spoke in the heat of the moment
    - That are more venomous than Aussie snakes
  - And it’s those words that reveal to us the deep sinfulness of our hearts
    - Apart from Jesus, we are totally sinful
      - Sinful in actions, sinful in words, sinful in thoughts
        - Sinful even to our hearts
- I don’t know about you, but sometimes when I see the depressing stories of crimes on the news
  - Sometimes my reaction is: “How can anyone possibly do that?”

- And in one sense, that's a right response
  - Sin against a holy God should upset us
- But even though we will never fully understand sin
- Romans 3 does give us an answer that fits the evidence all around us
  - It tells us people are not basically good
    - Instead, Paul says, "There is no one righteous, no not one."
- But the verdict of this chapter doesn't just fit the evidence we see on the news
  - It fits the reality of our own hearts
  - And dear friends, when we begin to realize just how sinful we really are
    - It should humble us
  - Because the root of all sin lives in us—in you and in me
  - So when we hear that shocking story on the news
    - When we see a friend caught in adultery or tax evasion or plagiarism
  - We can call sin, sin, yes
    - But part of our response should be: "But for God's grace, that could be me."
      - To cry out: "Lord, keep me from sin."
- In fact, if sin is so comprehensive
  - If it affects all the different parts of us
  - Then even as Christians, we should stop and humbly examine our lives
    - Not just for those outward, obvious sins
      - But for selfish ambition in our hearts
      - For a tongue that is quick to complain, quick to cut down
      - For bitterness and discontentment that we've been quietly feeding for years
  - Friends, let's take time this week to do a check-up on our heart and life
    - To confess our sins to God
      - To repent of the venom of our speech
        - And the hidden sins of our heart
- Are we really born sinful?
  - Yes, we are.
    - From the moment of our birth, we are sinners in nappies.
  - Is sin really such a big problem?
    - Yes, it is.
      - It affects everyone.
        - It affects all different parts of us.

### **C. A Qualification: God's common grace restrains human sin**

- But one qualification, one clarification
  - Some people take this idea of total depravity to mean that we are all as bad as we could be
    - But notice: that's not what Paul says
  - In fact, God's common grace—God's goodness to all creation—restrains sin
    - God holds back human sin (e.g. Romans 1:18ff)
  - And yes, the root of all sin lives within us
    - But that does not mean that all of us work sin out to its full potential
  - Hitler's sinfulness may well be of a different degree than our own
    - I may not commit every possible sin that I'm capable of
- And God's common grace even allows unbelievers to do much earthly good

- Non-Christians feed the homeless
  - They work tirelessly in third-world countries
    - They serve wisely in government and public service
- So, does total depravity mean that we are absolutely bad as we could be?
  - Does it mean that we commit every possible sin?
    - No, it doesn't
  - God graciously restrains our sin
    - He doesn't let it reach its full potential
      - He allows even non-Christians to do much earthly good
- But as we thought about with the pinecones
  - Earthly good works, outward good works, are still corrupted by sin
    - It is possible to pick up pinecones with bitterness
    - It is possible to work in a third-world country
      - And still have a self-righteous attitude
- God's common grace restrains sin
  - It enables earthly good
    - But it does not remove our guilt
  - God's verdict still stands
    - "There is no one righteous; no, not one." (v11)
  - And because of that...

#### **D. Our sin deserves God's total judgment (vv19-20)**

- In v9, Paul lays out his opening charges.
  - In vv10-18, he sets out the evidence.
  - But then in vv19-20, God hands down the sentence.
- And because we are totally sinful
  - Because our sin is ultimately directed against God Himself
  - V19 says: we are all accountable to God.
    - We all deserve God's judgment.
- As the rest of Romans makes clear, the punishment for sin is death—eternal death
  - God's unending judgment and wrath
    - The eternal fires of hell
- And dear friends, as sobering as this picture of God's judgment is
  - We are born totally sinful
    - We sin in all kinds of ways
      - And God's terrible judgment is exactly what we deserve
- And if that's true, then
  - Is there any hope?
  - It's our second point this morning.
    - We are born totally sinful
    - But now briefly
      - In Jesus Christ, there is full salvation

#### **II. Full Salvation (vv21-26)**

- vv21-26 is one the clearest, richest, deepest explanations of the gospel in all of the NT
  - So this morning, all we can do is just scratch the surface
  - Today, we don't have time to think about "propitiation"
- Instead today, what I want you to see is that the "righteousness of God has been revealed" in the gospel of Jesus Christ

- The word “righteousness” is the key word in this entire section
  - In fact, it occurs at least 7 different times
- And here, righteousness especially has the idea of right standing before God
  - Being declared “innocent,” “right” with God Himself
- And this righteousness that Paul is talking about is wrapped up in Jesus and His work
  - In fact, the only exception to total depravity is Jesus Christ
    - Unlike us, Jesus was not born in sin
      - Unlike us, Jesus did not sin at all
        - Not once
    - If we are totally sinful
      - Jesus was totally holy, totally obedient
- And because of that, in Jesus Christ, we have redemption (v24)
  - Redemption or redeeming means paying the price to purchase our freedom
    - In the OT, redemption was the price paid to set a slave free
  - And here Jesus redeemed us
    - By taking the curse of our sin
      - By suffering the penalty of God’s wrath in our place
  - So that in Christ, we can go free
    - So that in Christ, v24, we can be “justified”
- Justified means that God declares us righteous
  - God declares us not guilty, right, righteous before Him
    - Because of Jesus
  - So that instead of the fires of hell that we deserve
    - We get the joys of heaven
  - Instead of the curse we earned
    - We get a blessing
  - Instead of God’s anger
    - We get God’s favour
  - Friends, this is a full salvation
- And as Paul makes abundantly clear
  - This salvation is all of God’s grace
    - V24: we are “justified by his grace as a gift.”
  - Kids—you didn’t do anything to earn your last birthday present
    - It is just a free gift from your parents
- And how much more is the salvation that God gives us in Jesus a free gift
  - Because if God gave us what we really deserve
    - Then we would all be headed straight for hell
  - But in God’s grace, He gives us free gift
    - A gift of salvation in Jesus Christ
- And this free gift is received through faith alone
  - V22: It is “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”
  - So, yes, we are born totally sinful people
    - But there is hope even for sinners like us
    - Because this righteousness, this justification, this full salvation is for everyone who believes
  - So if you’re watching this morning
    - If you’ve been convicted by your sin
    - If you’re starting to realize that people are not basically good
    - But yes, your sin is so much bigger than you ever imagined

- Then the call of the gospel is this: repent and believe
  - Confess your sins to God
  - Turn and put your faith in Jesus Christ
    - Because in Christ, there is redemption, forgiveness, justification, righteousness
  - In Him, there is full salvation even for totally sinful people like us
- Brothers and sisters, in Jesus Christ, we are fully forgiven.
  - And in Jesus Christ, the power of sin in our lives has been broken.
  - Yes, the pervasive influence of sin still lingers
    - Yes, we will never be perfect until heaven
    - But we are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:1-14)
- And Christian: that means the next time you're tempted to look at porn
  - To say something sarcastic or nasty to our spouse or our kids
    - In Jesus Christ, filled with His Spirit, there is hope for us to battle sin
      - By the Spirit, God gives us power to resist temptation.
        - By the Spirit, we can put sin to death
  - As Paul cries out in Romans 7, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"
    - "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"
- Look, I know Romans 3 is a confronting chapter.
  - It's a sobering message.
  - But it's a message that is realistic about the world we see around us
    - It's a message that is realistic about our own hearts
  - But it's also a message of incredible hope
    - We are born totally depraved, but in Jesus Christ, there is full salvation.

## Conclusion

- So how can we respond today?
  - Well, we can begin by identifying one area of sin we need to address
    - Maybe for you, it's lust or sarcasm, gossip or anger or fill in the blank
  - Whatever it is, spend time confessing that sin to God today
    - And in dependence on God's Spirit, in community with God's people, take practical steps to address it
- We may need help from other Christians we trust
  - We may benefit from talking it over with family or friends
  - We may be wise to avoid certain situations
    - And we will certainly need to pray every step of the way
- Because on our own, we are totally sinful
  - But in Jesus Christ, our sins are completely forgiven
  - In Jesus Christ, there is hope for us to grow, to make progress battling sin.
    - So, in dependence on His Spirit, let's get started today.