

Rom 3:9-20
Tim Anderson 6/11/22

Christians are people who never smile.
They walk around with long expressions on their faces.
They wear grey clothes – no bright colours.
They won't eat nice food,
or drink nice drink.
If you tell a joke,
they will look down their long noses at you.
Not only do they take all the fun out of their own lives,
but they want to spoil everyone else's life as well.
If someone looks like they are having fun,
the Christian will come in waving their index finger,
and shouting "Stop. Stop. That's sin!"

It's an untrue caricature of Christianity, isn't it?
And yet those in our community who have that view of us,
have it fed from somewhere, don't they?
And the bad news is that it's not all from inaccurate TV soaps
portraying the Christian in an unfair way.
The non Christian view of us is not just fed by the media.
It's also fed by the behaviour of Christians themselves.
Every Easter there are Christians in countries like the Philippines,
who get into the spirit of the Easter Season
by nailing themselves to a cross.
And the story doesn't stay in the Philippines.
Every year it will be on our TVs and in our newspapers.
It makes for slightly more interesting reading
than reporting on the Easter services here.
There is an order in the Roman Catholic Church called Opus Dei
whose members whip themselves
and wear spiked wire around their thighs.
That's true.

This depiction of Christians as killjoys has had a big impact on way we look at ourselves. Particularly we have become frightened of saying anything about sin, lest we be viewed as a killjoy. We are so concerned about being seen as intolerant or down on other people, that we won't call it as we see it.

What we need to remember is that sin is not fun. Sin is misery.

If we work hard to get rid of sin in our own lives, then we aren't removing fun, we are removing misery.

If we seek to remove sin on a broader level in the community, so called structural sin,

it's because we don't want other people to be subjected to misery – it's not because we want to take away their fun.

Suppose there was a proposal to change the local by laws to alter what time the pubs have to close so that they could open 24 hours like Coles does.

If we as a church wrote a submission to the shire opposing the change, it wouldn't be because we want to take away the fun people might have, having a drink with their friends when the pub isn't currently open – between 2am and 9am or whatever it is.

It would be because we wanted to protect people from the misery that comes from 24 hour access to a drug of addiction.

We want to protect people who don't know when to stop, and don't seem able to stop themselves, from ruining their lives.

Getting rid of sin is getting rid of misery.

The shyness that we often have about speaking about sin is not shared by the apostle Paul.

In the passages we have looked at over the last couple of weeks, we have witnessed Paul demonstrating

that every single person in the world
 is held captive by sin and so faces the wrath of God.
 And he concludes this section in the reading we just read out,
 by painting a picture of what sin looks like.
 The evil one will do his best to make sin seem attractive to us.
 That's how he tries to lure us in.
 So in case we are under any illusions,
 Paul shows us how ugly sin really is.

The centre piece of this passage
 is a string of quotes from the Old Testament.
 They are single sentences
 that Paul has pulled from anywhere and everywhere,
 united by the theme that each sentence describes what sin is like.
 So let's take a look into the mirror.
 Let's take a look at human beings without the blood of Jesus.
 Let's look at a picture of sin.
 The picture of sin starts and finishes with godlessness.
 It starts in verse 10,
 "There is no one righteous, not even one;
 there is no one who understands,
 there is no one who seeks God."
 It finishes with verse 18,
 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."
 Sin begins and ends with leaving God out of the equation.
 Now you might think Paul is saying,
 "If you leave God out of your life,
 then the inevitable consequence is doing a whole pile of sins.
 Leave God out of your life –
 and murder, malice and mayhem will be your path."
 But he's actually saying more than that.
 He's saying that the heart of sin is leaving God out.
 It's like if you've got the chicken pox.
 What you notice is all these little sores coming up on your skin.
 But the heart of the disease.

The real core of it,
is running around in your blood stream.
If your body wants to fight off the chicken pox,
the white blood cells have to attack the chicken pox virus
running around in your blood.
It's no good your body just trying to heal the sores
without fighting the virus.
The virus will just make more sores appear.
Sin is like a disease.
And the heart of the disease is turning away from God.
Trying to get rid of sin without turning to God,
would be like putting bandaids on the chicken pox
and thinking you had cured it.
The number 1 sin.
The sin that causes all others is turning away from God.
God rules the world.
He made it.
He owns it.
At its very heart.
Sin is saying to God,
"OK you made the world.
But this little piece of your world that is my life.
I'm going to rule this bit myself.
You can be God over the rest of the world,
but I'm going to be God over my life."
Frank Sinatra might have made a virtue out of it.
"I did it my way."
And many others take Sinatra's words for themselves at their funerals.
But that is the essence of sin.
Doing it your way rather than God's way.

The essence of sin is deciding to rule your own life,
instead of accepting God's loving rule.
But sin is like a dust storm.
When it comes,

it gets through everything.

Paul has collected this group of verses about sin,
to show how it gets through everything.

Nothing is exempt.

Did you notice how it moves through the body parts?

“Their throats are open graves;

their tongues practice deceit.

The poison of vipers is on their lips.

Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.

Their feet are swift to shed blood.

There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

No part of me is exempt from sin.

That’s not to say that I’m as bad as I possibly could be.

There are plenty of ways I could go wrong that I don’t go wrong.

But it is to say that there is no aspect of my life that escapes sin.

Some parts of my life the sin is easy to spot.

Like many men, there is a constant battle against the sin of lust.

It's not as bad now as it was a decade ago.

But it's there and it's not hard for me to recognise it.

My patience with my family decreases

if I am frustrated about some aspect of my work.

That's also there and easily recognisable.

But what about areas of my life that look very godly?

How about when I’m writing a sermon –

surely sin has no place there?

Yes even there sin is active.

It blinds me to seeing things in the Scriptures,

which would challenge me to reform my own life.

I can’t give you an example,

because I don’t know what they are.

Sin has blinded me.

But you could probably give me examples.

It’s pretty easy to see where sin has blinded someone else.

It’s just hard to see it in yourself.

One of the ways that sin blinds us to its presence is when we seek a second spiritual opinion.

Often when people are wanting to justify something sinful they are doing, they seek out someone who is some kind of religious authority, who will tell them that it's OK.

You can find a religious authority who will tell you anything is OK.

The Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church has told Putin that his war is a holy war blessed by God.

You want someone to tell you greed is OK, there is a prosperity gospel pastor who will happily do that for you for a fee.

You want someone to tell you sexual immorality is OK, no shortage of churches will be more than happy to oblige.

It's super easy to find someone who will pat you on the back and tell you that there's nothing you need to repent of.

Question is, are they right?

I would suggest that reading and reflecting on the Scriptures is a far more reliable guide

than gathering around you people to tell you what you want to hear.

We even need to question our motives.

What about when I do something generous, give some money to the cow project or something like that?

Surely sin has no place there.

But even there,

my motives are not totally pure.

I may have love in my heart for the poor people overseas.

But is there not a bone in my body that wants my generosity to be noticed?

Of course there is.

Sin is all pervasive.

It affects every area of my life.

What are the implications of this all pervasive sin?

We should never trust ourselves not to sin.

The great Christian evangelist Billy Graham knew this. When he was travelling, speaking at rallies, he would always have one of his assistants check into the hotel with him.

Just to make sure there was no temptation to sin because of cable TV or to make sure there were no extra visitors in Billy Graham's suite. People do all sorts of things when they are travelling, that they would never dream of doing when they are at home, simply because no one knows them, and they think no one will find out.

If Billy Graham took those sort of precautions, who are you and I to say that we don't need to be similarly cautious? I wonder if there are parts of your life that someone else ought to be standing beside you in, just so that you are accountable.

You should never put yourself in a position where it feels like you could sin without anybody ever knowing. Sin is all pervasive.

If you get over confident and think you'll have no problems resisting sin, that is exactly when you'll trip up.

So keep a healthy dose of scepticism about your motives and be realistic about how easily you can avoid sin.

Give it a wide berth.

If you were going on a bush walk and you saw a coiled up snake, you wouldn't want to see how close you could walk without getting bitten.

You'd just play it safe and keep a good distance.

Treat sin like a coiled up snake.

Sin is all pervasive.

Sin is also universal.

How is that different from being all pervasive?
 By all pervasive, I mean it gets into every part of your life.
 By universal, I mean that every single person is infected.

Paul quotes from the Old Testament,
 “There is no one righteous, not even one;
 there is no one who understands,
no one who seeks God.
All have turned away ...
 there is no one who does good,
not even one.”

You know sometimes we use words a little loosely.
 On a sunny Saturday afternoon down on the Hastings foreshore,
 I might say,
 “Every man and his dog are down here today.”
 The playground and the skate ramp are full.
 Lots of groups having picnics and bbqs.
 There are people everywhere.
 But of course I don’t mean that literally every single person in Hastings
 is on the foreshore.
 It’s just a figure of speech.
 Paul is not (I repeat not) using a figure of speech.
 He means that every single person, without exception,
 has turned away from God.
 There is absolutely no one who does what is right.
 Not you.
 Not me.
 Not the Archbishop of Canterbury.
 Not Mother Theresa.
 Not the Op Shop's most devoted volunteer.
 Not our CMS missionaries.
 Absolutely no one.

Just in case there is someone here today who wasn’t here last week.
 Don’t despair.
 It’s not a reason to panic or give up.

It's just a reason to realise in the depth of your heart that every single person needs Jesus.

More on that next week.

But Paul finishes up today's passage with a couple of sentences about the law.

He's underlining once more to his Jewish readers, that having the Old Testament Law on its own won't save you.

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole earth held accountable to God.”

That's been the whole point of this discussion.

To silence every mouth.

We humans are master of the art of making excuses for ourselves.

We can all think of 100 reasons why my sin is not really serious.

Self esteem.

I've got low self esteem,

that's why I need to spend extravagant amounts on clothes.

Nature.

It's not my fault, it's my Irish genes.

You know what red heads are like.

My Dad had a short fuse and I've just got it from him.

Nurture.

I grew up in a very critical household.

The reason I criticise people harshly

is because that's the environment I've always lived in.

Education.

It's my education that's to blame.

If I'd had a private school education like you,

I wouldn't be so coarse in my language.

Society.

Society's to blame.

I'm surrounded by sexual temptation all day long.

It's on the Internet, it's in the newsagent.

Women go round scantily clad.
Who can blame me if my mind wanders?
The church.
The church is to blame.
The reason my kids have gone off the rails is not about my parenting.
If the church had run a half decent youth group,
everything would be OK.
We have 100 excuses.
But every mouth must be silenced.
While you are still making excuses,
you won't grasp the opportunity of a Saviour.
You will think you don't really need one.
Jesus said,
"Blessed are the poor in spirit."
That means,
blessed are those who know they need a Saviour.
If we only let go of our pride long enough
to admit that we need God's help,
his mercy will come flooding in,
in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
But it can't happen while we are still protesting our innocence.
That's why every mouth must be silenced.

Let's stop defending our sin.
Let's recognise sin for what it is.
Sin is godless.
Sin is all pervasive.
Sin is universal.
Sin is the cause of human misery.
Let's run to Jesus who can cleanse us from sin.