

"THE WEIGHTINESS OF SIN"
ROMANS 3:9

Every year for the past four years, Zimbabwe has hosted a most unusual pageant. You know about beauty pageants, right? I never knew there were so many pageants, so Friday morning I did a quick Google search. Some of these you know about, but others? The "major" pageants for women:

- Miss Earth
- Miss International
- Miss Universe
- Miss World

Then there are the "minor" international pageants:

- Miss Global
- Miss Globe International
- Miss Grand International
- Miss Heritage
- Miss Model of the World
- Miss Tourism International
- Mrs. International
- Mrs. Universe
- World Miss University
- International Pageant of Pulchritude

There are some pageants for men as well, but my favorite one is probably among the least well known. It is the one held in Zimbabwe this past November, where for the fourth time, a "Mr. Ugly" was crowned:

Judges...chose 42-year-old Mison Sere, citing his numerous missing front teeth and a wide range of grotesque facial expressions, over William Masvinu, who had held the title since 2012.

Masvinu and his supporters mobbed the judges upon hearing their decision, claiming that Sere was "too handsome" to win and his ugliness wasn't natural since it was based on missing teeth.

"I am naturally ugly. He is not. He is ugly only when he opens his mouth," maintained Masvinu, gesturing at his rival.

"Do we have to lose our teeth to win? This is cheating," shouted another contestant, Patrick Mupereki. While no one was injured, there was a great deal of pushing and shoving as the results were announced and insults were hurled at the judges....

Sere dismissed the critics as just "sore losers" as he pocketed the \$500 in winnings.

"They should just accept that I am uglier than them," he said. "I hope to get a TV contract. I already moved around schools performing and showcasing my ugliness so this is a chance to make it on TV." [["Cheating accusations mar Zimbabwe's 'Mister Ugly' contest"](#); accessed 2/5/16]



There are many ugly things in this world, and while Mr. Sere doesn't look too good, what is infinitely more ugly is sin. For the better part of three chapters, Paul has been delineating the sinfulness of mankind. In chapter 1, verses 18-32, he demonstrated how Gentile pagans are unrighteous and under the wrath of God. In chapter 2 verse one, through chapter three verse 8, Paul argues that Jews without Christ are unrighteous, sinful, and deserving of God's wrath.

And now in chapter three verse nine through verse 20, Paul is going to assert that all men everywhere are sinners. In the first 2-1/2 chapters, his emphasis has been on God's right to judge all who reject Christ; the emphasis in these verses is slightly different — it is more on the nature of sin itself rather than on the righteousness of God in judging sin.

In verse 9, Paul provides a summary statement for the nature of sin, and then he develops how that sin is manifested in the lives of sinners (vv. 10-18):

- ✓ Sinners are rebellious against God (vv. 10-12)
- ✓ Sinners are rebellious in their speech (vv. 13-14)
- ✓ Sinners are rebellious in their relationships (vv. 15-17)
- ✓ Sinners are rebellious in their lack of a fear of God (v. 18)

What this section demonstrates is that sin has touched every area of man's life — he is "totally depraved" and completely unable to do anything to save himself.

As Paul opens this final portion of his first section in Romans, his theme is —

THE WEIGHTINESS OF SIN IS THAT IT OVERPOWERS AND ENSLAVES ALL MEN.

In this verse, Paul makes two primary assertions about the nature of sin —

1. No Man Is Better Than Anyone Else (without Christ)

- ✓ The GENTILES are condemned (1:18-32)
- ✓ The JEWS are condemned (2:1 – 3:8)
- ✓ Paul and the ROMANS were condemned (3:9a)

2. Sin Weighs Down EVERY Man (without Christ)

- ✓ Men are sinners because they are BORN that way
- ✓ Men are sinners because they SIN
- ✓ Men are sinners because they are CONTROLLED by sin (3:9b)

1. No Man Is Better Than Anyone Else (without Christ)

- The GENTILES are condemned (1:18-32)
 - ✓ Paul speaks in chapter one about Gentiles; they haven't received the Scriptures and they are outside the promises of God for redemption. They are "disadvantaged" (contrast 3:1). Yet their unbelief is still inexcusable.
 - ✓ Their rebellion against God is not accidental — they *suppress* the truth of God (1:18).
 - They do all they can to resist it, hide it, push it away, and act against it. They want nothing of it.
 - And Paul is clear that they *know* the truth that they rebel against:
 - ... In order to suppress the truth (1:18), they have to know the truth.
 - ... They do know the truth of God — it is within them (1:19); in 2:15, Paul will say it is in their consciences — without having the written moral Word of God in Scripture, they know the moral code of God in their hearts and consciences. They know what sin and righteousness are.
 - ... They know something of the nature and character of God because it is all around them in ***what has been made*** (1:20).
 - ... They ***knew God***. But being ungrateful, they didn't give thanks to Him (***honor Him as God***, 1:21). They knew of God but they didn't want Him, so they resisted, pushed Him away, suppressed what they knew was truth, and rebelled against Him.
 - ✓ And Paul's main point in saying all this is not just that God will judge them (which he has and will, 1:24, 26, 28), but that God is righteous in His condemnation of these sinners.
 - ✓ The Gentiles are condemned for their unbelief; and God is just in that condemnation.
- The JEWS are condemned
 - ✓ Not only are the unbelieving Gentiles condemned, but so are the unbelieving Jews.
 - ✓ They were holding onto the notion that because of their superior position by being part of the covenant that God made with Abraham that they would be safe from God's wrath.
 - ✓ Yet Paul is clear, that their failure to trust Christ is also inexcusable:
 - They are condemning the pagans, but they do the very same things (2:1).
 - They wrongly presume that God's patience in withholding His wrath means they are safe (2:4).
 - They are storing up wrath for themselves at the final judgment of God (2:5).
 - Yes, they have been circumcised, but that external act is of no benefit if they hate the Law of God and disobey God's Word and don't appeal to Christ for redemption (2:25).
 - God *will* condemn them, despite their Jewishness (2:28-29).
 - ✓ Paul is careful to say in 3:1-8 that God still has a covenant with Israel; He will keep it and He will redeem *the nation*. Not every individual Jewish person will be saved, but the nation will be redeemed; the Messiah (from David's line) will set up His throne in Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1ff) and God

will fulfill all the promises that he made to Abraham, Moses, David, and Jeremiah about Israel.

- ✓ But if any Jew does not embrace Christ and believes that he is fine without Christ's righteousness, he will be condemned by God's wrath — that's Paul's point in 2:1 – 3:8.
- ✓ No Jew (nor anyone else) can appeal to God on the basis of favoritism or position and say that he doesn't need Christ. All men are dead without Christ.
- ✓ And that leads Paul to his summary statements in 3:9-20.
- Paul and the ROMANS were condemned
 - ✓ Paul asks the same question in v. 9 that he asked in 3:1 — **what then?** In 3:1 he was drawing out the implications of what it meant for a Jew to be under the condemnation of God.
 - ✓ Here Paul is pulling back even further and making some larger observations. He is not just asking what the implications are for God's judgment of the Jews. But he is asking, "what conclusions can we make about sin since God judges both Gentiles and Jews?"
 - ✓ And the first point he makes is in the form of a question: **are we better than they?**
 - ✓ The main question here is who Paul means with **we**. Most commentators assume that Paul is talking still about the Jews from vv. 1-8. But that has several problems:
 - It is exceedingly rare that Paul identifies himself with the Jews who misunderstood their need for the righteousness of God (the hypothetical reference in 3:5 might be the only example).
 - It is strange that Paul would ask essentially the same question as v. 1 — **what advantage has the Jew?** and **Are we [Jews] better...?** but answer them differently (v. 2 — **great...;** v. 9 — **not at all**). It *was* advantageous for the Jew to have the declarations of God in His Word and know the need for righteousness and the provision of God's righteousness through the Messiah.
 - In v. 8 Paul also uses the word **we** referring to himself and those who are with him, teach with him, and believe like him. And then in 9b he again uses the word **we** (**we have already charged**) to refer to his writing in the letter to the Romans to this point. It would be highly unusual to have **we** refer to believers in vv. 8, 9b and not in v. 9a.
 - So it is probably best to see Paul making a transition in v. 9 to the universality of all men being under the condemnation of God because all men are sinners. And Paul does that by asking, **are we better...? Not at all** — Paul and the Romans believers also were under sin.
 - Now why have I belabored this point? Because all men, Gentiles and Jews are sinners. And even those who are now redeemed sinners didn't have any inherent advantage; God plays no favorites with anyone. Paul didn't have an advantage in any way prior to his salvation; the Romans weren't God's favorites and you and I weren't God's favorites before He saved us.
 - ✓ Are the Jews superior? Are the Gentiles superior? Are redeemed people before they are saved superior? Paul emphatically answers, **not at all**. No way. Some translate it, "certainly not!" No one has an advantage before God. All men are equally condemned under the law of God.
- Combine all the teaching from 1:18 – 3:8 and it is clear: without Christ, no one is better than anyone else (and no one is worse). Sin leaves every person in the same miserable condition (1:18; 2:5).

- ✓ We do well to think about that when we think about gunmen in Dallas and terrorists in Nice, France. And when we think about people who embrace and affirm the homosexual lifestyle (1:26-27, 32). And those who are unrighteous, wicked, greedy, evil... (1:29-32). We are not superior. We were under the same condemnation.
- ✓ We do well to think about that when we look at our spiritual “heroes” — they too were under God’s wrath and judgment and were in no way superior — Abraham, David, Paul, Peter, John... all had no advantage prior to coming to Christ.
- ✓ Without Christ, all men are equal. All deserve the wrath of God. And that is true of every person in this room as well.

2. Sin Weighs Down EVERY Man (without Christ) — why do men sin?

- Men are sinners because they are BORN that way
 - ✓ This is the basic teaching of Eph. 2:1-3. When a child is born, he is born under the condemnation and wrath of God. He is a **child of wrath**.
 - ✓ Paul will expand this principle in 5:12-21. Note especially vv. 12a, 15a, 17a, 18a, 19a. Because Adam sinned, all those who were born after him were born into sin. They were sinners by nature. Every single person (Rom. 5 makes that repeatedly clear).
- Men are sinners because they SIN
 - ✓ But men aren’t sinners only by nature; they are also sinners by deed. They sin (Rom. 5:12b).
 - ✓ The sins that the sinner commits are various, but they do fall into several broad categories:
 - Sins of greed, covetousness, and idolatry — these are sins that exalt the self and exclude God. This is affirmed in Paul’s statement in 3:11b — **none who seeks for God**. The reason they don’t seek God is because they are worshipping themselves and their own desires. Note that in Colossians 3:5, Paul says **greed...amounts to idolatry**. To indulge selfish desires is to go against God and resist God.
 - Sins of the body — particularly sexual sins (1:24-28; 1 Thess. 4:3-6; Eph. 5:3; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). And these sins often carry over into the destruction of human relationships, which he will emphasize in 3:15-17.
 - Sins of the tongue. We don’t think of verbal sins as particularly significant, but Scripture does. Cf. vv. 13-14; Js. 3:1-12; Eph. 4:25, 29; Col. 3:8-9.
 - Sins of the mind. The motivation for sin comes from illicit desires that are developed in the mind (Js. 1:14-15; 4:1-2; 2 Cor. 10:5); and the greater problem is that the mind of the unbeliever doesn’t work properly (Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:17-19).
 - ✓ So men sin, but it should be noted that men also *chose* to sin: Rom. 5:12b. They *wanted* to sin. They are condemned because they carried out their sinful inclinations and desires.

- ✓ There are a number of words for sin in the NT —
 - The word **trespass** (Eph. 1:7) refers to falling away from God's truth.
 - The word **transgression/transgressor** refers to rebellion and disobedience (Rom. 4:15, 25).
 - The word **sin** that Paul uses here is the word *hamartia* — it is the word that is often given the sense, "to miss the mark." That is the way the word was originally used, but it is greatly misunderstood. The idea is that the sinner wanted to do something righteous, but just missed doing it righteously, like a marksman that is off the center of a target by a few millimeters. That's not how the word is used; the word implies rebellion against the standard. Yes, the sinner misses the mark, but he misses it because he *wants* to miss it. He wants nothing to do with God's standard for righteousness. He doesn't want to obey. He does want to rebel.
- ✓ All men are born in sin and all men sin. But Paul makes another statement about the nature of sin in this verse that is critical to understanding it —
- Men are sinners because they are CONTROLLED by sin
 - ✓ The way that Paul says it is that all men (**Jews and Greeks** [Gentiles]) are **under sin**. That is, sin is on top of them, weighing them down and holding them down.
 - ✓ The preposition **under** means not only to be underneath something, but to be completely under its power, authority, and control. In other words, without Christ, all men are controlled by sin.
 - ✓ Paul uses a number of different terms to emphasize this same truth:
 - Sin reigns (5:21)
 - Sin is enslaving (6:6, 16, 17, 20; **Gal. 3:22**; 4:8)
 - Sin rules (6:12)
 - Sin is a master (lord, 6:14)
 - Sin pays "wages" (6:23), implying mastery
 - Sin deceives and kills (7:11, 13; Eph. 2:1-3)
 - ✓ There is not only nothing good in sin, but to be in sin is to be controlled and dominated by it and to be incapable of doing anything good or pleasing to God.
 - ✓ Notice also that Paul doesn't say **sins** (pl.), but **sin** (sing.). So Paul isn't focusing so much on the individual actions of sin but that man is by nature characterized by sin and under the control and domination of sin. It is "as if the lid closed in on us over a massive chest that we could not open or as prisoners in a dungeon." [Robertson] Sin has completely dominated us.
 - ✓ "For Paul...the human plight is not that people commit sins or even that they are in the habit of committing sins. The problem is that they are helpless prisoners of sin." [Moo]
 - ✓ And there is another implication of being **under sin** — it is not just that the person is controlled by the sin, but that he is under the sentence of condemnation for that sin. He is guilty.
 - When we say that someone is guilty, we don't mean that he "feels" guilty but we are talking about an objective reality; he has sinned and that sin was a violation of God's standard and he is culpable and responsible for that sin. And in biblical terms, his guilt leaves him under wrath.

- And because he is a sinner, constantly (and only) sinning (never doing anything righteous), then as Hodges says, he is “like a perpetual fountain, constantly [reproducing and increasing] this guilt.” His guilt is constantly on him, always growing and never abating.
- ✓ The word that theologians use to describe this condition of sin is “depravity.”
 - Depravity does not mean —
 - ... every individual is as completely corrupt and depraved as could become
 - ... the sinner has no innate knowledge of God or that he has no conscience to distinguish between good and evil (Rom. 1:20; 2:15)
 - ... the sinner cannot admire the virtuous and righteous character of others or that he has no affections for other individuals (Mt. 7:11; 1 Tim. 5:8)
 - ... every unbelieving man will indulge of every form of sin
 - Depravity does mean —
 - ... the inherent sin in man extends to every part of his nature — there is no part of him (body or soul) that remains untouched or unstained by sin and sinful desires.
 - ... there is no spiritual good in relation to God in the sinner at all (Mt. 5:3-5; Rom. 1-3; 7:18, 23; 8:7; Eph. 4:18). “Apart from God’s grace, we can never please Him (Rom. 8:8).”
- ✓ Paul combines all these truths about sin together in one short statement: ***both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.***
 - Sin is universal — no one is born without a sin nature and all men sin.
 - Sin is total — it blankets every area of a man’s life; there is no part of his life that escapes the domination and control of sin.
 - And that means as well that because God is holy, He must judge sin, He will judge all sin (and thus all men), and He will be righteous when He judges.
- If you are not a Christian; if you still feel this weight of sin, and you want to stop sinning, but can’t, let me give you a word of hope: vv. 22-26.
 - ✓ All are sinners (v. 23), but all can believe in Christ (v. 22) — God doesn’t have any favorites, but He also doesn’t exclude anyone from believing in Christ. All may come.
 - ✓ Salvation from the penalty and power of sin is a gift of grace (v. 24) that is made available through Christ’s death on the cross.
 - ✓ God poured out His wrath against sin on Christ (v. 25), but Christ satisfied that wrath.
 - ✓ So God is just (righteous) and also justifier (declaring righteous) all those who believe in Christ.
 - ✓ If you believe that you are a sinner deserving of God’s wrath and believe that Christ alone can liberate you from your sin so that you are no longer under sin, but under Christ so that you can live to obey and please Him, then God will save you and free you to stop sinning and to live for Christ.

CONCLUSION: This helps us understand our world:

- ✓ Marxists believe that the problems in the world are because of an unjust distribution of wealth.
- ✓ Moralists, educators, and politicians believe the problems in the world are because of ignorance and a lack of education. If you educate a highschooler about the dangers of drug use or unprotected sex they won't use drugs, or engage in sexual activity prior to marriage, or so the thinking goes. Just this week I read that that 15 years ago Elie Wiesel said at an event in Dallas, "I believe that if there is anything that could disarm fanaticism, it is learning. It's education. Whatever the essential answer to urgent and dangerous problems is, surely education is a major component. Without it, nothing is possible. Without it, there is no culture, no civilization, no compassion, no humanity." He was wrong. Education is no solution.
- ✓ Psychologists and psychiatrists often believe the problems in the world are the result of organic issues: so treat an individual with the right drugs and he won't be depressed or angry or hyperactive or gluttonous or a host of other ills. The problem is our bodies have gone awry and we can't help it.
- ✓ But Paul says that the reason for the problems in the world is that the world is filled with sinners who are under the domination and control of sin. They are "addicted to sin..."

They are imprisoned under it, unable to free themselves by anything they can do. Knowing this, then, God has sent to us not a teacher or a politician but a liberator— one who has the power to set us free from our sins.

When we really see the people all around us— at work, in our neighborhoods, at the store— as helpless captives of sin, we will be better motivated to help them find the true liberator who alone can rescue them from their captivity. Only Jesus Christ, proclaimed in the gospel, can break through the walls of sin that imprison human beings. [Moo, *Romans (NIV Application)*, 86-7.]

Since that's true, we do well to be compassionate towards these folks. They are doing the only thing they can do. They have no ability to do anything righteous or honoring to Christ. We shouldn't mock or ridicule them; we should give them the rope of Christ that will pull them to safety and salvation.

This helps us understand ourselves; while we who are in Christ are no longer dominated by sin, we still have an inclination towards sin because of our fleshliness and "remaining sin."

- ✓ Be discerning about the ideologies of the world system — the world's philosophy is false and deluding and everything we read, see, and hear is saturated with that deception. We must remain vigilant to stand against it, or we will find ourselves enticed by sin.
- ✓ Be discerning about your friends (teenagers, especially) — we listen to our friends; they disciple and influence us. And when they are not believers, they are following the world system, controlled by sin and doing nothing but sin; they are shaped by unbiblical thinking and if we heed their counsel, we also will be shaped by unbiblical, ungodly, sinful thinking. And it will produce sin.

BENEDICTION: Rom. 11:33-36