

February 12, 2023 The Cure

Becoming a follower of Jesus is a long-term **process** that continues to the end of our lives- and beyond. But it's also a **choice** - an emotional, intellectual event that takes place in a moment of time. We may notice the choice being made or we may not.

I can tell you the day and date I made my choice to give my life to Jesus. I can also plot the moments over the course of my life where that choice was reinforced and restated. On the other hand my wife will say she doesn't remember a time when she wasn't following Jesus. But she does remember making choices that clarified that allegiance. Sometime, somewhere, for all of us who call ourselves Christians or disciples or followers of Jesus –whatever- a choice was made, **a stop and an intentional change of life direction-** and the process began.

In other words every Christian you know –at some point- was not one. And at some point in their life something –an experience, a story, a piece of information- made them choose to step into the circle of Jesus' authority and begin making their way to Him at the center.

But why make THAT choice? I mean your life is yours, right? You do as you please. *Why give up your autonomy to some ancient wandering, crucified Rabbi?* Sure, some people say He came back to life in some new and improved version of himself! But people say aliens beamed them up for a medical exam. And others say they had a nice cup of tea with Bigfoot.

Why make the choice to follow Jesus? **What reason might there be to choose to step into Jesus' circle of authority?** Well, there are lots of reasons both emotional and practical. This morning I'm going to share one with you.

One verse from the NT will be our focus today: **Rom 3:10.** But to “get” the full force of the message we need some background on the book of Romans and some setup of Paul's argument there.

Here's the Romans backstory: **Claudius Caesar** banished all Jews from Rome in 49- even the [Torah-following] **Jewish Christians.** This left the leadership of the Roman Church in the hands of gentile converts, who -obviously- didn't look or act like Jews. So they weren't banished. Instead, for the next few years they lead the Roman Church. Then **Claudius dies (54) and his edict against Jews with him.** So Roman Jews return, including Jewish Christians who return to worship to find the [:gasp:] gentiles in charge!! [N.T. Wright] And the Gentile church leaders were likely non-plused about their Jewish siblings in Christ being back in worship. Paul's letter was sent to address the simmering ethnic tensions in the church of Rome.

So the problem Paul addresses in Romans is: How do two culturally different peoples [Torah-observant Jewish Christians & converted pagans] live and minister together as one body of Christ? **To address that problem Paul talks about the Universality of Faith and Grace and...Sin.** To help you see what I mean I'm going to give you a very_brief summation of Paul's argument in Romans chapters 1-3.

Paul's opening greets Gentiles and Jews in the church as equals: 7“To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be Saints.”

He says [1:16-17] **Salvation** and a sort of “**personal goodness**” [righteousness] comes from God to anyone -Jew or Gentile- purely **by Faith**- that's his “good news” [Gospel equality].

Next Paul gives a thoroughly decadent description of the sinful, worldly, sex-crazed, lawless gentiles. He winds up his description saying: **they do what they know is wrong and they approve of others who do the same** [1:18-32].

Now remember: letters like this are read aloud to the gathered church. Suddenly the Gentile Christians are staring at their feet, wondering, “is it warm in here?” and not making eye-contact with their Torah-observant brothers and sisters. Meanwhile the Jewish Christians are all thinking: Amen to that! Preach it Paul! Give it to those lawless, pagan pretenders! _

Paul's letter continues: By the way, every one of you passing judgment; thinking “give it to those lawless, pagan pretenders,” you're condemning yourself because you do the same things [2:1-3]. *[That took them by surprise, I'm sure.] Paul goes on...*

2:6 God “will give to **each person** according to what he has done.”

2:9 There will be trouble and distress for **every human being** who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; **10** but glory, honor and peace **for everyone** who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Then Paul goes off on a lengthy description of the Jewish Christians [2:17ff] that amounts to something like: “You Superior, judgmental, selfish, two-faced twits!!! Your circumcision and Torah mean nothing. Because...*being a Jew isn't about who your parents were or a cut of the skin*” [2:28]. **TEV 2:29** Rather, the real Jew is the person who is a Jew on the inside, that is, whose heart has been circumcised, and this is the work of God's Spirit, not of the written Law.

Now the Jewish Christians are finding reasons to look at their shoes thinking: “Is he saying we're no better off before God than ... the Gentiles!?” And some of the Gentile Christians are thinking: “Is he saying God sees us all like equals?”

And if Paul had been there, he'd of said, **“YES!! NOW you're getting it!!”**

3:9...Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin

To drive the point home Paul strings together proofs from Psalms & Isaiah:

Rom. 3:10 As it is written: “**There is no one righteous, not even one;** **11** there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. **12** All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” **13** “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” **14** “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” **15** “Their feet are swift to shed blood; **16** ruin and misery mark their ways, **17** and the way of peace they do not know.” **18** “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

And there's our focus for this morning: **Rom 3:10** “There is no one righteous, not even one...”

There it is. **NO ONE is good.** No one is consistently righteous, or consistently fair, or consistently honest. No one is consistently kind, or gentle, or patient, or generous or loving. And some of us are downright nasty, mean and selfish.

You have never known a good person. All of us at some point are selfish and act it

out.

No one seeks God consistently. Everybody turns away from God. All have sinned. Therefore: **Rom 3:10** “There is no one righteous, not even one...” **David wrote it a thousand years prior** and it’s still true in Paul’s day: **Jews and Gentiles alike are all sinners.** There is no “good” person on the face of the planet nor has there ever been.

This is sometimes called “human depravity.” Bible teacher **Warren Wiersbe** defines it well: *“Human depravity doesn’t mean that all persons are as wicked as they can be, or that all are equally bad, or that no man or woman can ever do anything good. It simply means that all have a fallen nature they cannot change...”*

BUT, we humans contain within us the image of God and so there is this piece of us that wants to be good and to do good because that’s who God is: ineffably GOOD and we are **hard-wired to reflect his image into the world.** But we blew it -in the beginning- and twisted and defaced God’s image in us. Thus: **Human Depravity!**

That’s what the first few chapters of **Genesis** are all about. We’re shown a picture of the first man and woman – perfect, flawless, without sin and utterly innocent and having the gift of free will living a gloriously perfect life as God’s image-bearing humans. Then **they blew it**, even bearing God’s perfect image they disobeyed the one rule set for them and **ruined everything.** As the story goes we go from eating forbidden fruit to murder in one generation. **Rom 3:10** “There is no one righteous, not even one...”

Evil and violence escalate to the point that the whole world is headed to destruction. **Noah and his family are saved.** But the cycle continues with Noah’s drunk-ness and his son’s disrespect. Noah’s descendants establish Babylon for the sake of control over their lives apart from God. **“There is no one righteous, not even one...”**

So, God chose Abraham and promised that his descendants will be more than the stars in the sky. And all nations will be blessed through him. But **Abraham** doesn’t always trust God. He lies to protect his own skin and risks God’s promise to make a few bucks on the side. Abraham is not good. **Jacob** is a cheater and a liar. **Moses** answers God’s call to save the people but he can be faithless, surly and disobedient. **Samson** is a judge over Israel but his pride and sexual appetite destroy Israel. **King Saul** disobeys God for the sake of wealth- as an offering- of course. **King David**, the Hebrew pattern for the Messiah, commits adultery, murder and lies to cover it up. **Jesus’** disciple **Judas** betrays him. **Peter** declares Jesus the messiah, Son of God but denies him three times. **The Disciples** argue about their greatness and every last one runs away at Jesus’ arrest. Before his conversion **Paul** hated Jesus Christ and tortured Christians to renounce their faith. **If these are the best people God can get a hold of clearly** “There is no one righteous, not even one...”

Thanks to the choice of the first Humans, every human since is **infected with sin-sickness.** James:1:14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Paul gives us a picture of our existence in Rom 7. He portrays himself saying: 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

This should be obvious. **How often in the course of your life have you lied?**

As a child, a teenager, an adult? You know sort of made yourself look better or smarter.

How about cheating? On a test, or your taxes or your timecard? **Disobeyed your parents?**

Ever steal anything? Ever been rude or abusive: insulted someone, called them names ...behind the wheel or computer screen? **Ever treated something as more important than**

God? And our good brother James tells us: **2:10** For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. **And so considering our own records...**

Rom 3:10 "There is no one righteous, not even one..."

Not Judas, and not Peter, Not Hitler and not Mother Teresa. Not Jimmy Carter and not Richard Dawkins. Not Jeffery Epstein and not Fred Rogers, Not Ruth Osborn or Al Scalf, or Mike, or Barb, or Tye, or Maryrose- and certainly not Skip. Since Adam every Human has been "sin-sick." **Romans 5** says: Rom. 5:12... through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—

Remember James 2:10 just a moment ago: breaking the law [sinning] on one point makes you as guilty as if you'd broken it all. **Our sin-sickness results in death for all of us** because Rom. 3:10 "There is no one righteous, not even one;"

So in terms that are pretty familiar: **We have a virus problem.** This virus is so **incredibly contagious** that every human that has ever breathed the air of this world is infected with it. No masks or gloves can shield you from it. They won't help because **this plague is already inside you.** And this sin-sickness is deadly. **Unchecked, it will kill you to a degree that you cannot begin to imagine-body and soul.** Your immune system cannot produce anti-bodies to fight it. And there is no vaccine. No cure

Or there wasn't –until Jesus. While Jesus was God He was also **totally human.** The scripture says He was subject to the same temptations to sin that you face. **But He never sinned** [Heb 4:15]. He is the ONLY good human- EVER. He is the only one EVER to have lived a sinless, life- as God intended it to be lived! **His death on the cross-** a perfect sacrifice- provided a vaccine for our sin-sickness in the form of the potential transfusion to us of His own Goodness -the goodness of God- into us. Here's how Paul describes it:

Rom 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, **has been made known,** to which the Law and the Prophets testify. **22 This righteousness from God** comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, **23 for all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God, **24 and [all] are justified** freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Notice that the potential cure is as universal as is the sin-sickness. The vaccine is not just available to a few. **The vaccine** –God's own Goodness, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus' perfect life, **is amply & freely available for everyone and anyone who wants it.**

Here's another description of our sin-sickness from the NT book of Ephesians -which

we'll begin studying next Sunday. **Eph. 2:1** And you were dead in your offenses and sins, **2** in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. **3** Among them we too all previously lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the rest.

But then, here comes the cure: **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), **6** and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, **We were dead in our wrongdoings** until Jesus died in our place and raised us up with Him giving us the cure of Jesus' own righteousness purely by the Grace of God.

And the only way to get this “cure” is to put our “faith in Jesus Christ”

Rom. 3:10 “There is no one righteous, not even one; This is the reason the world is so messed up. This is the reason for all the evil in the world.

This is why we have wars and abuse, and poverty and violence. No one is righteous; not one person. That includes you- all of us! **In our sin-sickness ALL of us are in the same state as Paul:** Rom 7:19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. And the funny thing is: we think we're good. We compare ourselves to others and think: Yeah, I'm a good person. But God sees our sin-sickness and says: nope.

Rom. 3:10 “There is no one righteous, not even one;

And that sin-sickness **quarantines you away from God** [as well as from other humans you live, work and play with]. Without the cure - without the goodness of God- death of body and soul- *an eternal and horrible sort of death- is a certainty.*

But –and this is important- God will not force the death-destroying, life-giving vaccine on you. **The choice to receive the vaccine Jesus has provided remains with you.**

The consequences of the choice may be dreadful or glorious but the choice remains yours. **Every human-** all equally sin-sick and universally in need of the cure- **is left to choose whether to receive the cure or not.**

Our little text says: **Rom. 3:10** “There is no one righteous, not even one;

Meaning: we all are sin-sick and in desperate need of a cure.

And Jesus has provided **just such a cure** in the willing sacrifice of his perfect life.

The question was: **Why choose to step into the circle of Jesus' authority?** Why choose to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? And our answer is **that it's in taking that step** -giving our lives to Jesus- **we receive the goodness of Jesus Christ, that cures us of our sin-sickness forever**, fills us with God's Holy Spirit, putting us in Right Relationship with the God of the Universe and setting us off on a glorious, life-long, Spirit-of-God adventure