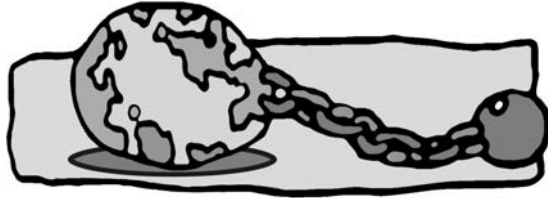


# The Human Condition



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 1:16, 17, 22–32; 2:1–10, 17–24; 3:1, 2, 10–18, 23.*

**Memory Text:** “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (*Romans 3:23*).

Early on in the book of Romans, Paul seeks to establish a crucial truth, one central to the gospel—the sad state of the human condition. This truth exists because, from the Fall onward, we have all been contaminated by sin. It’s wired in our genes as is the color of our eyes.

Martin Luther, in his commentary on Romans, wrote the following: “The expression ‘all are under sin’ must be taken in a spiritual sense; that is to say, not as men appear in their own eyes or in those of others, but as they stand before God. They are all under sin, those who are manifest transgressors in the eyes of men, as well as those who appear righteous in their own sight and before others. Those who perform outwardly good works do them from fear of punishment or love of gain and glory, or otherwise from pleasure in a certain object, but not from a willing and ready mind. In this way man exercises himself continually in good works outwardly, but inwardly he is totally immersed in sinful desires and evil lusts, which are opposed to good works.” —*Commentary on Romans*, p. 69.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 21.

## The Power of God

**“I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live’” (Rom. 1:16, 17, RSV). What does Romans 1:16, 17 say to you? How have you experienced the promises and hope found in them?**

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Several key words occur in this passage:

1. *Gospel*. This word is the translation of a Greek word that means literally “good message” or “good news.” Standing alone, the word may refer to any good message; but modified as it is in this passage by the phrase “of Christ,” it means “the good news about the Messiah” (*Christ* is the transliteration of the Greek word that means “Messiah”). The good news is that the Messiah has come, and people can be saved by believing in Him. It is in Jesus and in His perfect righteousness—and not in ourselves, or even in God’s law—that one can find salvation.

2. *Righteousness*. This word refers to the quality of being “right” with God. A specialized meaning of this word is developed in the book of Romans, which we shall bring out as our study of the book proceeds. It should be pointed out that in Romans 1:17 the word is qualified by the phrase “of God.” It is righteousness that comes from God, a righteousness that God Himself has provided. As we’ll see, this is the only righteousness good enough to bring us the promise of eternal life.

3. *Faith*. In Greek the words that are translated as *believe* and *faith* (*KJV*) in this passage are the verb and noun forms of the same word: *pisteuo* (believe) and *pistis* (belief or faith). The meaning of faith as related to salvation will unfold as we progress in the study of Romans.

**Do you ever struggle with assurance? Do you have times when you truly question whether or not you are saved or even if you can be saved? What brings these fears? On what are they based? Might they be grounded in reality? That is, could you be living a lifestyle that denies your profession of faith? If so, what choices must you make in order to have the promises and assurances that are for you in Jesus?**

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## All Have Sinned

**Read** Romans 3:23. Why is this message so easy for us as Christians to believe today? At the same time, what could cause some people to question the truthfulness of this text?

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Amazingly enough, some people actually challenge the idea of human sinfulness, arguing that people are basically good. The problem, however, stems from a lack of understanding of what true goodness is. People can compare themselves to someone else and feel good about themselves. After all, we can always find someone worse than ourselves to compare ourselves with. But that hardly makes us good. When we contrast ourselves to God, and to the holiness and righteousness of God, none of us would come away with anything other than an overwhelming sense of self-loathing and disgust.

Romans 3:23 also talks about “the glory of God.” The phrase has been variously interpreted. Perhaps the simplest interpretation is to give the phrase the meaning it has in 1 Corinthians 11:7, “He [man] is the image and glory of God” (*RSV*). In Greek the word for “glory” may be considered as loosely equivalent to the word for “image.” Sin has marred the image of God in humans. Sinful humans fall far short of reflecting the image or glory of God.

**Read** Romans 3:10–18. Has anything changed today? Which of those depictions best describes you or what you would be like were it not for Christ in your life?

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As bad as we are, our situation is not hopeless. The first step is that we acknowledge our utter sinfulness and also our helplessness in and of ourselves to do anything about it. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about such conviction. If the sinner does not resist Him, the Spirit will lead the sinner to tear away the mask of self-defense, pretense, and self-justification and to cast himself or herself upon Christ, pleading His mercy: “ ‘ “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” ’ ” (*Luke 18:13, NASB*).

**When was the last time you took a good, hard, cold look at yourself, your motives, your deeds, and your feelings? This can be a very distressing experience, can't it? What's your only hope?**

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## Progress?

At the turn of the twentieth century, people lived with the idea that humanity was improving, that morality would increase, and that science and technology would help usher in a utopia. Human beings, it was believed, were essentially on the path toward perfection. Through the right kind of education and moral training, it was thought that humans could greatly improve themselves and their society. All this was supposed to start happening, en masse, as we entered into the brave new world of the twentieth century.

Unfortunately, things didn't quite turn out that way, did they? The twentieth century was one of the most violent and barbaric in all history, thanks—ironically enough—in great part to the advances of science, which made it much more possible for people to kill others on a scale that the most depraved madmen of the past could only dream about.

What was the problem?

**Read Romans 1:22–32.** In what ways do we see the things that were written in the first century being manifested today in the twenty-first century?

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We might need faith to believe a lot of things in Christianity: among them, the resurrection of the dead, the Second Coming, and a new heaven and a new earth. But who needs faith to believe in the fallen state of humanity? Today, each of us is living the consequences of that fallen state.

**Focus specifically on Romans 1:22, 23.** How do we see this principle being manifested now? By rejecting God, what have twenty-first century humans come to worship and idolize instead? And in so doing, how have they become fools? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

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## What Jews and Gentiles Share in Common

In Romans 1, Paul was dealing specifically with the sins of the Gentiles, the pagans, those who had lost sight of God a long time ago and, thus, had fallen into the most degrading of practices.

But he wasn't going to let his own people, his own countrymen, off the hook either. Despite all the advantages that they had been given (*Rom. 3:1, 2*), they, too, were sinners, condemned by God's law, and in need of the saving grace of Christ. In that sense—in the sense of being sinners, of having violated God's law, and of needing divine grace for salvation—Jews and Gentiles are the same.

**Read** Romans 2:1–3, 17–24. What is Paul warning against here? What message should all of us, Jew or Gentile, take from this warning?

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“After the Apostle has shown that all heathen are sinners, he now, in a special and most emphatic way, shows that also the Jews live in sin, above all because they obey the Law only outwardly, that is, according to the letter and not according to the spirit.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 61.

Often it's so easy to see and point out the sins of others. How often, though, are we guilty of the same kinds of things—or even worse? The problem is that we tend to turn a blind eye on ourselves, or we make ourselves feel better by looking at just how bad others are in contrast to ourselves.

Paul would have none of that. He warned his countrymen not to be quick to judge the Gentiles, for they, the Jews—even as the chosen people—were sinners. In some cases they were even more guilty than the pagans they were so quick to condemn, because as Jews they had been given more light than the Gentiles.

Paul's point in all this is that none of us are righteous, none of us meet the divine standard, and none of us are innately good or inherently holy. Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, and God-fearing or God-rejecting, we all are condemned. And were it not for the grace of God as revealed in the gospel, there would be no hope for any of us.

**How often do you, even if only in your own mind, condemn others for things that you yourself are guilty of? By taking heed to what Paul has written here, how can you change?**

## The Gospel and Repentance

“Despisest thou the riches of [H]is goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (*Rom. 2:4*). What message is here for us in regard to the whole question of repentance?

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We should notice that God’s goodness leads, not forces, sinners to repentance. God uses no coercion. He is infinitely patient and seeks to draw all people by His love. A forced repentance would destroy the whole purpose of repentance, would it not? If God forced repentance, then would not everyone be saved, for why would He force some to repent and not others? Repentance must be an act of the free will, responding to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Yes, repentance is a gift from God, but we have to be ready and open to receive it—a choice that we alone can make for ourselves.

**What** comes to those who resist God’s love, refuse to repent, and remain in disobedience? *Rom. 2:5–10*.

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In Romans 2:5–10, and frequently throughout the book of Romans, Paul emphasizes the place of good works. Justification by faith without the deeds of the law must never be construed to mean that good works have no place in the Christian life. For instance, in Romans 2:7, salvation is described as coming to those who seek for it “by patient continuance in well doing.” Although human effort can’t bring salvation, it is part of the whole experience of salvation. It’s hard to see how anyone can read the Bible and come away with the idea that works and deeds don’t matter at all. True repentance, the kind that comes willingly from the heart, always will be followed by a determination to overcome and put away the things that we need to repent over.

**How often are you in an attitude of repentance? Is it sincere, or do you tend just to brush off your faults, shortcomings, and sins? If the latter, how can you change? Why *must* you change?**

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**Further Thought:** “Thus the biblical terminology shows that sin is not a calamity fallen upon the human unawares, but the result of an active attitude and choice on the part of the human. Further, sin is not the absence of good, but it is ‘falling short’ of God’s expectations. It is an evil course that the human has deliberately chosen. It is not a weakness for which humans cannot be held responsible, for the human in the attitude or act of sin deliberately chooses a way of rebellion against God, in transgression against His law, and fails to hear God’s Word. Sin attempts to pass beyond the limitations God has set. In short, sin is rebellion against God.”—*The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 239.

“A terrible picture of the condition of the world has been presented before me. Immorality abounds everywhere. Licentiousness is the special sin of this age. Never did vice lift its deformed head with such boldness as now. The people seem to be benumbed, and the lovers of virtue and true goodness are nearly discouraged by its boldness, strength, and prevalence. The iniquity which abounds is not merely confined to the unbeliever and the scoffer. Would that this were the case, but it is not. Many men and women who profess the religion of Christ are guilty. Even some who profess to be looking for His appearing are no more prepared for that event than Satan himself. They are not cleansing themselves from all pollution. They have so long served their lust that it is natural for their thoughts to be impure and their imaginations corrupt.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 346.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What answer do you give to those who, despite all that has happened, insist that humanity is improving? What arguments do they give, and how do you respond to them?
- 2 Look at the quote from Ellen G. White above. If you see yourself in it, what is the answer? Why is it important not to give up in despair but to keep claiming God’s promises—first, of forgiveness; second, of cleansing? Who is the one who wants you to say once and for all, “It’s no use. I’m too corrupt. I can never be saved, so I might as well give up”? Do you listen to him or to Jesus, who will say to us, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (*John 8:11*)?
- 3 Why is it so important for us as Christians to understand basic human sinfulness and depravity? What can happen when we lose sight of that sad but true reality? What errors can a false understanding of our true condition lead us into?
- 4 Think about the untold numbers of Protestants who chose to die rather than give up the faith. How strong are we in the faith? Strong enough to die for it?

## One Year in Mission: Part 2

As members in the local Seventh-day Adventist churches watched the enthusiastic One Year in Mission (OYIM) young people, they understood that they, too, could do something special for the community and began to follow the example of reaching out to their neighbors.

“I can tell you honestly,” Anna said, “that I didn’t used to think much about working in the big cities—I didn’t see what the real problems were. And it’s easier to go to a village. But after being involved with this project, I understand that we really, really need to be here.

“When I came back to my home church in Russia, I saw it with different eyes. I realized that we need to work differently—we need to be real Christians. Something in my mind had changed; I understood how we need to live and how to work.

“I was so inspired in New York, I began praying about what could be done in my home division of ESD [Euro-Asia Division],” Anna recalled.

In June 2013, hundreds of leaders, pastors, and evangelists from around the world descended on New York City to participate in the General Conference International Field School of Evangelism. The program included classes in the day and practical experience in evening evangelistic meetings held across the New York metropolitan area.

Leonid Rutkovsky, a pastor from the ESD, gave presentations at the Ukrainian and Russian churches in New York. When he wasn’t in class or meetings, Leonid and Victor Kozakov, the Adventist Mission director for ESD, talked about how they could do something similar in their division.

“We decided that if people were preaching in New York, and having good results, then why not in our territory?” Leonid said. “If it can happen in New York, then it can happen in Moscow or Kiev.

“The field school gave us clear direction for reaching the big cities. Now we were focused, we had a purpose in mind and a goal to reach.”

When Anna met Leonid, she was excited to hear about the developing plans. “We have a goal to knock on every door in Kiev,” he told her. “There are seven hundred thousand doors in Kiev, and we want every one. We will have special maps showing every street, every block, and every house.”

Anna was delighted. “I could see that God was leading, and I knew I needed to go to Kiev. He has His wonderful plan—we just need to follow it.”

As the Mission to the Cities director in Kiev, Leonid provides training in preaching for church members and oversees the work of Bible and literature workers and medical missionaries, who provide simple remedies to the community—including 16 classes on such topics as smoking cessation, cooking and weight loss, alcohol recovery, and mother and child health.

*To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.*