

Everyone Has Sinned



SABBATH—OCTOBER 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 1:16, 17, 22–32; Romans 2:1–10, 17–23; Romans 3:1, 2, 10–18, 23.

MEMORY VERSE: “Everyone has sinned. No one measures up to [has succeeded in living a life that is a perfect example of] God’s glory” (Romans 3:23, NIV).

PAUL wants to prove a very important truth at the beginning of his letter to the Romans. This truth is at the heart of the Good News about Jesus: all people are sinners. We have been sinners since Adam and Eve sinned. Sin has damaged everyone. Sin is part of us, just as our eye color is part of us.

Let us look at what Martin Luther wrote about Paul’s teaching in Romans. Luther led the way forward in the changes that started the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation was a time in the 1500s when people began to “wake up” to Bible truths. These people wanted to improve the Catholic Church. During that time, Luther wrote these words about Romans: “We must understand the spiritual meaning of the wording ‘Everyone has sinned.’ Paul is not talking about how humans appear to themselves or to other people. Instead, Paul is talking about how no one is a perfect example of God’s glory. In God’s eyes, everyone has sinned. Now, many people do good works to avoid punishment. Some people do good to get love, riches, or praise. But these people do not do the right thing from a willing heart. And so, humans continue to do good works for wrong reasons. But on the inside, humans are filled with the desire to sin. Their desire to do evil wars against good works.”—*Commentary [Explanation] on Romans*, page 69, adapted.



In God’s eyes, everyone has sinned. No one measures up to God’s glory.

THE POWER OF GOD (Romans 1:16, 17)

What does Romans 1:16, 17 mean to you? How have you experienced the hope found in these verses?

Several important words and groups of words appear in Romans 1:16, 17:

“Good News” (Romans 1:16, NIV). This wording comes from a Greek word that means “good message.” By itself the Greek word may mean any good message. But its meaning in these verses is made plain by the wording “it is God’s.” This wording clearly shows us that the Good News is from God, and it is about the Messiah. The Messiah was the One whom God chose to die for our sins. God chose Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus saves us from the power of sin and death. (In fact, the word “Christ” comes from the Greek word that means “Messiah.”) The Good News is that Jesus the Messiah has come. Everyone who believes in Him can be saved. God does not save us by our own works or even by His law. God saves us by Jesus and His perfect righteousness. Righteousness is God’s power to make us right with Him.

“God’s power to make people right with himself” (Romans 1:17, NIV). This wording comes from the Greek word for “righteousness.” We said “righteousness” is God’s power to make people right with Him. In the book of Romans, Paul comes up with a special meaning for “righteousness.” We shall learn more about its special meaning as we continue our study. But for now, notice how the English wording for “righteousness” in Romans 1:17 begins with the word “God’s.” The word “God’s” tells us that the power to make people right with God comes from Him. Soon we will learn that God’s power to make us right is the only power good enough to give us the promise of everlasting life.

“Faith” (Romans 1:17, NIV). The word written as “faith” comes from the Greek word *pistis*. *Pistis* also can be written as “believing.” We will see that the meaning of faith and its connection to our being saved will become clearer as we continue our study of the book of Romans.

Are there times when you wonder if you are saved? Or if you ever can be? Where do these fears come from? Could they be coming from living your life in a way that goes against your beliefs? If yes, what choices must you make to help you know that you are saved in Jesus?



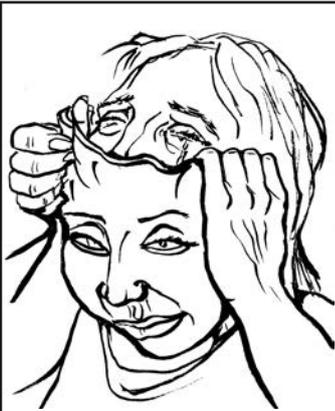
God’s righteousness is the only power good enough to give us His promise of everlasting life.

“EVERYONE HAS SINNED” (Romans 3:23, Nlrv)

Why is the message found in Romans 3:23 easy for Christians to believe today? At the same time, what could cause some people to question this truth?

Some people do not believe that humans are sinners. They argue that humans are, for the most part, good. But this thinking comes from misunderstanding what being good means. We often think about how we are better than other people so that we can feel good about ourselves. After all, we always can find someone worse than we are. But this thinking does not make us good. The important question is: How good are we next to God? Not good at all! No one comes at all close to matching how good God is.

Romans 3:23 also talks about “God’s glory.” There are many explanations for what this wording means. Maybe the clearest explanation for this wording is to give this wording the same meaning it has in 1 Corinthians 11:7. This verse reads, “A man should not cover his head. He is the likeness [example of; having the appearance of] and glory of God” (Nlrv). In Greek, the word for “glory” has the same meaning as the word “likeness [appearance].” Sin ruined the appearance or “likeness” of God’s glory in humans. And so, sinners fail to show the appearance, or glory, of God.



The Spirit will lead the sinner to tear off the mask he or she wears. This mask is the false face of lies and human works.

Read Romans 3:10–18. In these verses, Paul says that humans can be very evil. Has anything changed today? Which of Paul’s words about evil people best shows who you were before Jesus came into your life?

But as bad as we are, we have hope for a new life. The first action we must take to have a new life is to accept that we are helpless sinners. The Holy Spirit helps us come to this clear understanding of ourselves. The Spirit will lead the sinner to tear off the mask he or she wears. This mask is the false face of lies and human works. This mask makes a person appear good to other people. But this mask must come off. Then the sinner must give himself or herself to Jesus. And he or she must beg, “ ‘God, have mercy on me. I am a sinner” ’ ” (Luke 18:13, Nlrv).

When was the last time you took a long look at your reasons for the things you do? It can be hard to examine ourselves this carefully. What is your only hope?

IMPROVEMENT? (Romans 1:22–32)

People thought that the 20th century would bring a better way of life for everyone. The people in the 20th century thought everyone would want to do the right thing. The people in the 20th century also believed that machines and science would help build a perfect life for humans everywhere. The people in the 20th century believed that humans were on the path to becoming perfect. And the people of the 20th century thought humans could improve themselves and their communities by going to school to get special training. This training would help them to choose to do what was right and good. All these good changes were to start happening as we entered the 20th century.

But things did not turn out that way at all. Instead, the 20th century was one of the most evil times in history. Strange as it seems, we have science to thank for that awful fact. Science made it possible for us to kill more people than ever before.

What went wrong?

Read Romans 1:22–32. What things does Paul say were happening in the 1st century? How do we see these same things happening today in the 21st century?

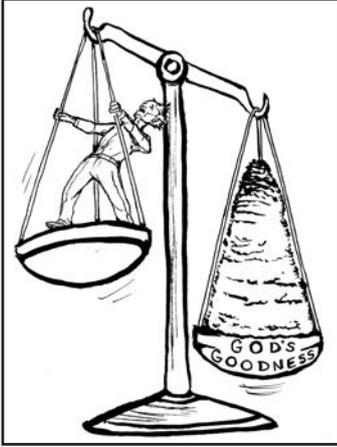
It can take a lot of faith for some people to believe in many things about Christianity. Examples include the Second Coming, a new heaven and a new earth, and the resurrection. The resurrection means coming back to life from the dead. It will take place at the Second Coming. But who has trouble believing that we were born sinners? Today, everyone lives with the pain and suffering that comes from being a sinner.

Read carefully Romans 1:22, 23. In these verses, Paul talks about people who turned away from God. What happened when these people turned away from God? What did these people do to show they rejected God? What are some of the ways that we see the same things happening today in the 21st century?



Who needs faith to believe that we were born sinners?

HOW JEWS AND NON-JEWS ARE THE SAME (Romans 2:1–3, 17–24)



No one is as good
as God is.

Yesterday, we read in Romans 1 about the sins of the Gentiles. Gentiles are non-Jews. The Gentiles worshiped many gods and goddesses and often nature and the earth. Another name for the Gentiles was the pagans. The pagans lost sight of God a long time before Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. The pagans fell into awful sins. These sins filled their minds with evil thoughts. These sins also caused the pagans to behave no better than animals.

But Paul is not about to let his own people think they are somehow better than the Gentiles. After all, the Jews are sinners too. God's law shows just how guilty the Jews are. The Jews also need Jesus' saving grace. Grace is God's gift to us of forgiveness, mercy, and power over sin. Both Jews and Gentiles need God's grace to be saved. This same need shows how Jews and Gentiles are the same.

Read Romans 2:1–3 and Romans 2:17–24. What does Paul warn us about here?

“Paul shows that all pagans are sinners. Next, Paul shows that the Jews also live in sin. They give the appearance of obeying the Law. The Jews follow all its rules. But the Jews do not obey the Law in their hearts.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary [Explanation] on Romans*, page 61, adapted.

It is easy to point out other people's sins. But how often are we guilty of doing the same evil or even worse sins? The problem is that we seem to pay no attention to our own faults. Or, we try to make ourselves feel good by pointing out how much better we are than other people.

Paul is not going to accept that behavior. Paul warns his people not to be quick to judge the pagans. In some ways, the Jews were guiltier than the pagans. Why? Because God gave the Jews more truth than He gave the pagans.

Paul's message is that no one is as good as God is. No one is born holy or good. Everyone is guilty—male and female, rich or poor. This group includes those who accept God or reject Him. But without the grace God shows to us in the Good News, no one would have hope.

How often do you find fault with other people for doing the same things you are guilty of doing? How can following Paul's words help you to change?

**THE GOOD NEWS AND TURNING AWAY FROM SIN
(Romans 2:4)**

Read Romans 2:4. What truth does this verse teach us about turning away from sin?

God's love leads sinners to repentance. Repentance means we feel sorry that we sinned. It also means we turn away from sin with the Holy Spirit's help. God's love leads, but it never forces, sinners to turn away from sin. Repentance that is forced would destroy the whole reason for why we need to repent. What if God forced someone to turn from his or her sins? Then everyone would be saved. But no one would be free. We must choose freely to turn from sin. Repentance is an act of free will. Free will is the power to choose how we live our lives. When we repent, we allow the Holy Spirit to help us turn away from sin. Yes, repentance is a gift from God. But we must be ready and open to God's gift. Nobody else can make the choice to repent for us. We must make this choice ourselves.

Read Romans 2:5–10. What happens to people who refuse God's love, refuse to repent, and continue to disobey Him?

In Romans 2:5–10, Paul puts a lot of importance on good works. But the importance that Paul puts on the works of the law does not mean we are saved by our works. At the same time, we must not think that our being saved by faith means that good works are not important in the Christian life. True, nothing we do can save us. But our good works show we are saved. Our good works show that Jesus gives us victory over sin and power to live holy lives. It is hard to understand how anyone can read the Bible and come away with the idea that good works are not important. Repentance comes from a willing heart. And our repentance always is followed by our desire to do two things: (1) We will want to win the war against sin. (2) We will want to let go of the things that separate us from God.

How often do you feel the need to repent? Or do you try not to think about your sins, and pretend your sins are not real? What will happen if you continue to pretend your sins are not real? What danger will you be in? What can you do to change? Why must you change?



God's love leads, but never forces sinners to turn away from sin.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The Bible shows us that sin is not something bad that happens to a person and that takes someone by surprise. No, sin happens because of our free choice. Also, sin does not happen because there is no good. Instead, sin is a choice. Sin means we are afraid to live out God’s plan for our lives. Humans are responsible for their choice to sin. The person who chooses to sin chooses to turn against God. Sin breaks God’s law and fails to follow the Bible. Sin tries to go beyond the limits God has made. Sin is war against God.”—*The Handbook of SDA Theology [The Study of God]* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), page 1108, adapted.

“I have been shown in a vision an awful picture of life on this earth. Evil behavior fills the earth. The special sin of this time is disobedience. Evil never lifted its ugly head with such power as now. People seem to have lost all feeling. They do not want to be kind to other people. People who love the things that are holy and good feel hopeless at how strong evil is and how evil seems to fill the earth. But evil is not found only in the unbeliever and in people who laugh at the truth. Sadly, many people who say they are Christians are guilty, too. These Christians say they are looking for Jesus’ Second Coming. But these Christians are no more ready for that day than Satan himself. These Christians are not being made clean from every sin. Instead, for far too long, these Christians have chosen sin. So, it is natural for their thoughts to be full of sin and for their hearts to be evil.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 2, page 346, adapted.



Evil has never lifted its ugly head with such power as it does now.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Maybe you see yourself described in the words from Ellen G. White above. So, why is it important not to give up hope? Instead, why must you continue to trust God’s promises to forgive you and to make you holy?
- ② Why is it so important to remember that humans are sinners? What happens when we forget?
- ③ Many Christians in the past disapproved of the Catholic Church’s teachings. These Christians chose to die instead of give up their faith. How strong is your faith? If you had to, would you be willing to die for your beliefs?