

**Intro:** What would you think if the following happened? Imagine that I, as a pastor, walked into a hospital room to visit your husband. You were standing there as I walked over and felt his head. It was wet with sweat, and it was obvious that he was having severe chest pain. You watched as I then left the room, and returned in a couple of minutes with an icepack. I placed the ice on his perspiring forehead, and left it there for five minutes without saying a word. Then I removed the ice, placed my hand on his head again, and said, "The skin on his head is cool now. He's Ok. I'll tell the hospital staff to make arrangements to send him home within the hour."

What would you think? You would think that I was crazy, wouldn't you? Why? Because all I did was deal with the symptom (fever) and not the cause of the symptom (apparent heart problem). The sweat on the forehead wasn't the problem. The sweat was merely an external indicator that something was wrong on the inside.

It's pretty obvious, isn't it? You don't need an M.D. degree to know that if you have a physical problem, you don't merely treat the symptom, but the cause.

Here's the irony. What we know in the physical realm, we tend to ignore in the spiritual realm. The world is full of people who are treating the spiritual symptom while ignoring the root problem causing the symptom. All over the world on this very day, there are millions of people going through religious activity and ritual. Why? Because they know something's not right between them and God. They think that if they "add religion" to their lives, the problem will be resolved. Will it?

No. Religion is little more than an "icebag." It may make a person feel better about his problem, but it won't alleviate the cause--the spiritual heart disease. Christianity is not a religion which focuses on external symptoms. It's a relationship with a Person who takes away our diseased heart, and gives us a new heart!

Perhaps you are wondering, "Why must we treat the cause and not just the symptom, when it comes to the spiritual realm?" We'll discover the answer as we consider the message of Romans 3:9-18.

**Proposition: According to Romans 3:9-18, there are two reasons we must treat the cause and not merely the symptom of our spiritual problem.**

- I. Reason #1: The diagnosis is severe (9).
  - A. The problem is sin.
  - B. The problem is universal.
- II. Reason #2: The documentation is sober (10-18).
  - A. The Judge says so (10-12).
    1. We have a moral problem.
    2. We have an intellectual problem.
    3. We have a spiritual problem.

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4. We have a behavioral problem.
- B. The Doctor says so (13-18).
  1. Sin affects our communication (13-14).
  2. Sin affects our conduct (15-16).
  3. Sin affects our character (17-18).

Conclusion: How do we treat the cause?

1. Recognize the severity of the problem.
2. Recognize the sufficiency of the provision in Christ.

### **I. Reason #1: The diagnosis is severe (9).**

V 9 "What then? Are we better than they?" Recall the context. In vv 9-20, Paul is concluding the first major section of his letter. He wrote Romans from Corinth to a church he had not personally visited, in the capital city of Rome. The audience was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. The book of Romans is a written treatise of the message the apostle preached throughout the world. In it we learn what the gospel is--it's the good news of how a sinner can be made right with God (1:16-17).

But first things, first. The initial matter Paul addressed in Romans 1-3 was "Who." Who needs to be made right with God? A religious Jew reading Paul's letter would have no problem saying, "A Gentile does! He's an idol-worshipping pagan. But I'm Ok. We Jews have the Torah. We Jews have the sign of circumcision. We've got the right Book, the right religion, the right ritual. So we're Ok."

In 3:1-8, Paul acknowledges the great advantage enjoyed by the Jewish people. "Yes, the Jews are privileged. The Jews have been given the very words of God (2). But does that mean the Jews are Ok with God?"

Paul addresses that question in vv 9-18. Notice v 9, "Are we better than they? No, in no way." To sum up his answer in one sentence--The diagnosis is severe. The problem is twofold.

#### A. The problem is sin.

V 9 "For we have before proved ("charged"; Paul took the first 3 chapters to lay out this charge) both Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin." What's the problem? The problem is sin. This is the first time the noun "sin" appears in Romans. To Paul, sin is like a power which has control over men (Cranfield, 65). Man's basic problem is sin.

How bad is the problem of sin?

#### B. The problem is universal.

Notice the repeated use of the comprehensive terms "all" and "none" in vv 9-11. "ALL under sin (9)." "NONE righteous (10)." "NONE that understands (11)." "ALL gone out of the way (12)." The problem is sin, and the problem is universal.

Not one of us on planet earth is untouched by this terminal plague called sin. It inflicts regardless of race, gender, skin color, economic status, and even religious background. Sin is a universal problem. All are under sin.

The philosopher says, "I think, therefore, I am." According to the sweatshirt, the "mall-a-holic" says, "I shop, therefore, I am." God's Word says, "Because I am, I sin."

What does it mean to be "under sin"? The word "under" means "to be under the authority of, to be dominated by." In Mt 8:9, the centurion says, "I have soldiers UNDER me." That is, "I have soldiers under my command."

We are all born under the control of sin. In his commentary on Romans, J. Vernon McGee points out that man is a sinner in four different ways (p. 59), "1. Man is a sinner by act. 2. Man is a sinner by nature. Sinning does not make a sinner; we sin because we are sinners. 3. Man is a sinner by imputation. We'll see that later in this epistle. 4. The estate of man is under sin. We are all under sin--the entire human family."

All of us are born under sin. We are born with a sin nature which we inherited from Adam (Rom 5:12). That sin nature erupts and spews forth sin acts. All of us are sinners. All of us are guilty.

No wonder the diagnosis is severe. But not everyone is convinced. Frankly, most modern sociologists and psychologists would hold a very different view of the condition of man and society. The humanist says, "Man is basically good." The Bible says, "Man is a sinner, and intrinsically evil." The humanist says, "What man needs is reformation which comes from education." The Bible says, "What man needs is regeneration." The humanist says, "Man's heart is a blank slate." The Bible says, "Man's heart is a black slate."

Perhaps you're thinking, "Well, how do you know for sure that the diagnosis is severe. Maybe the diagnosis is wrong." No, the diagnosis is not wrong, as we soon discover when we consider the second reason.

## **II. Reason #2: The documentation is sober (11-18).**

How does Paul document the problem? V 10 "As it is written." Paul points to six Old Testament references to document the sober condition of mankind apart from Jesus Christ.

It's amazing how well Paul knew Scripture! His mind was saturated with it. When he sought to help people, his approach was not, "Well, here's what I think," but "Here's what God has said." Throughout his letters, you'll find these words, "As it is written." Scripture shaped his view of God, his view of man, his view of salvation, his view of marriage, his view of sexuality, and everything else. He believed the Scriptures were authoritative and sufficient.

Paul used the Old Testament as his documented proof that the diagnosis of mankind is severe. Who says so?

### A. The Judge says so (10-12).

In vv 10-12, Paul references Psalm 14:1-3. As you listen, you get the feeling you are in a courtroom, with the Judge seated behind the bench, with his gavel in hand. The judge speaks these words of indictment, "Hear ye, hear ye: There is none righteousness, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh

after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

The Judge says we need help. God is the Judge. What does God say is true of all of mankind? We have a four-fold problem (10-12).

*1. We have a moral problem.*

What is it? V 10 "There is none righteous, no, not one." God is righteous. That means He is always right. He is the standard of what is right. His holy character demands that we be right, too. But we are not. That's our moral problem.

Think of a compass (Briscoe, 78). A compass is designed to point north, and all the other points on the compass find their identity in relationship to the North. If the compass is broken, and the needle no longer points to the north, you have a problem. Your compass is not right. It doesn't fulfill the purpose for which it was made. So with righteousness. God is the standard of righteousness. Man can be righteous only if his life is in proper relationship with God.

There is none righteous. Friend, that is a categorical statement. It means that, on our own, none of us are right with God. We have a moral problem.

*2. We have an intellectual problem.*

V 11 "There is none that understandeth." The thought processes of men and women are damaged by sin. The truth of God is all around them, but they can't grasp it. 1:20 "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen." I Cor 2:14 "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him."

It's not that the brain doesn't work. It's that the brain doesn't work the way God intended it to work. We leave God out of our thinking. That's our intellectual problem.

*3. We have a spiritual problem.*

V 11 "There is none that seeketh after (lit. "seek after") God." Sinners don't seek after God. You may assert, "Oh yea? I did. I sought God when I prayed the sinner's prayer." The truth is you sought God because He sought you first. When you were dead in sin, His Spirit regenerated you (Paul will elaborate in 8:28, 29, 30, 33).

Theologically, the problem is called "total depravity." Man is totally depraved. That doesn't mean man is as bad as he could be, rather that he is as bad off as he could be. His whole being affected by sin. He's out of step with God. His problem is spiritual.

*4. We have a behavioral problem.*

V 12 "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." The word "unprofitable" is the Greek word which means "to render useless." It's used of "spoiled fruit" and of milk that has gone sour. "Human nature without Christ is a soured and useless thing (Barclay, 55)." We have a behavioral problem. We have gone out of the way.

We've had a problem with something on the front end of our Geo Prizm. Something is out of line. When driving down the road, it pulls to the right. Instead of going straight, it wants to go off line. So, too, the sinner.

As the LB paraphrases, "No one is good--no one in all the world is innocent. No one has ever really followed God's paths, or even truly wanted to. Every one has turned away; all have gone wrong. No one anywhere has kept on doing what is right; not one."

The documentation is sober. Man is guilty. The Judge says so. Who else?

### B. The Doctor says so (13-18).

In vv 13-18, it's like Paul takes an x-ray of a sinner, from head to foot (Wiersbe, 521). Sin has damaged our throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet, and our eyes. Every part of our body has been contaminated by the vileness of sin. Notice three areas.

#### *1. Sin affects our communication (13-14).*

When you go to the Doctor, what is the first thing he usually says to you? "Open your mouth." Then he takes that stick, and probes in your mouth. That's what the Great Physician does, too. Do you know what He says about us?

Vv 13-14 "Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips.; Whose mouth is full of cursing." The asp, or Egyptian cobra, has a small sac of deadly poison in its mouth. With it, the snake can paralyze its victim. So, too, our lips.

Do you know the first area sin reveals itself in us? In our speech. Like a viper, the tongue can kill. It can kill a person's reputation.

I read this confession from J. Vernon McGee (63), "I actually advised someone not too long ago not to join a certain church, because I happen to know that some of the worst gossips in the world are in that church. And I want to tell you they have slaughtered the reputation of many individuals. Do you know who they are? They are the so-called spiritual crowd. I call them spiritual snobs...With their tongues they use deceit, and 'the poison of asps is under their lips.'" Sin affects our communication.

#### *2. Sin affects our conduct (15-16).*

Vv 15-16 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways." In the Bible, "feet" represent conduct. Sin damages our conduct.

#### *3. Sin affects our character (17-18).*

V 17 "And the way of peace have they not known." Like the bumper sticker, "No God, no peace. Know God, know peace."

V 18 is the final nail in the coffin, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." You may object, "Wait! I know even non-Christian people who fear God. How can you say there is NO fear of God in an unsaved person?" To say that there is no fear of God before their eyes is a figurative way of saying a person does not give God the place He rightfully deserves in his life. He may "fear" God, but for all practical purposes, he is an agnostic. He lives as if God didn't exist.

## **Conclusion: How do we treat the cause?**

The diagnosis is severe. The documentation is sober. All of us are born with a severe, deadly case of spiritual heart disease. Our "arteries" are clogged by the soot of sin. Because our hearts are diseased, there are certain complications that result--broken relationships, poor self-concepts, emotional insecurities, and a host of others. But these are merely the symptoms.

A lot of people treat the symptoms, but ignore the cause. For instance, suppose your marriage is on the rocks. You may think, "What we need are some techniques to teach us how to get along better with each other." Techniques may provide temporary relief for the symptom, but the cause is untouched. Having two people with spiritual heart disease living under the same roof is like a time bomb just waiting to explode.

Or maybe you're struggling with poor self-esteem. You could go to a humanistic counselor, and he could put you through a program designed to "make you feel better about yourself." But if you do, what has happened? You have addressed the symptom, but ignored the root cause.

How do we treat the cause? We must take two steps.

### 1. Recognize the severity of the problem.

A doctor doesn't put a bandaid on a cancer sore. He deals with it. He tells his patient, "You have a serious problem. The sooner you recognize the severity of your problem, the sooner I can help you."

A person with heart disease doesn't need an ice bag. He needs heart treatment. A person with spiritual heart disease doesn't need mere religion to patch up his life. He needs heart regeneration. The remedy is "inside-out," not "outside-in."

Have you ever admitted the severity of your problem? Have you ever admitted to God the fact that you are a sinner, that your heart is black with sin, that you are in desperate need of His cleansing power?

You say, "Maybe my heart problem is too severe. Maybe it's too late."

### 2. Recognize the sufficiency of the provision in Christ.

Jesus Christ can give you a new heart. He went to the cross to take care of the cause of our spiritual predicament. He took the penalty for our sins. He died, and then He rose again. Have you ever recognized that His provision on the cross was sufficient for you?

That's the point of Romans 3:21-5:21. Jesus Christ has dealt with the cause of our problem, once and for all. Notice 3:23-24, "For all have sinned (there's our problem)...Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (there's the remedy for our problem)."

Have you ever dealt with the cause or have you merely been salving the symptoms in your life? Trust Christ today.

For those who are already Christians, what must we do? In the words spoken by William Jay (Barclay, 55), when he was an old man, "My memory is failing, but there are two things I never forget--that I am a great sinner and that Jesus Christ is a great Savior."