

# All Have Sinned



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

Unless a person acknowledges that he or she is unrighteous, that person will sense no need for justification (God's declaration of a sinner as righteous in His eyes). Therefore, for Paul, the first step in justification is that a person recognize himself or herself as a helpless, hopeless sinner. In building this argument, Paul presents first the terrible depravity of the Gentiles. These have sunk as low as they have because they have pushed God from their memories. Paul then shows that the Jews are just as bad, the point being that none can save themselves with their good works.

Ellen G. White makes it so clear: “Let no one take the limited, narrow position that any of the works of man can help in the least possible way to liquidate the debt of his transgression. This is a fatal deception. If you would understand it, you must cease haggling over your pet ideas, and with humble hearts survey the atonement.

“This matter is so dimly comprehended that thousands upon thousands claiming to be sons of God are children of the wicked one, because they will depend on their own works. God always demanded good works, the law demands it, but because man placed himself in sin where his good works were valueless, Jesus' righteousness alone can avail. Christ is able to save to the uttermost because He ever liveth to make intercession for us.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1071.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 17.*

## Not Ashamed of the Gospel

**“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 do these verses 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 meaning 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 meaning “Messiah”). The good news is that the Messiah has come and all people may be saved by believing in Him. In Jesus and in His perfect righteousness—and not in ourselves, or even in God’s law—can one 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 translated *believe* and *faith* (*KJV*) in this passage are the verb and noun forms of the same word: *pisteuo* (“believe”), *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? What are they grounded on? 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?**

## The Human Condition

**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 folk actually challenge the idea of human sinfulness, arguing that people are basically good. The problem, however, stems from not understanding what true goodness is. People can compare themselves to someone else and feel good about themselves. Even the mobster Al Capone was a saint compared to Adolph Hitler. However, 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.

The verse 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 man. Sinful man falls 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?

As bad as we are, our situation is not hopeless. The first step is for us to 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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## From the First to the Twenty-first Century

At the turn of the twentieth century, folk 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; that is, through the right kind of education and moral training, humans could 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 written there, in the first century, being manifested today in the twenty-first century?

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When humanity lost sight of God, a floodgate of sin and error and degradation opened. We, today, each of us, are living the consequences of that problem. In fact, unless we are moment by moment surrendered to God, we become part of the problem, as well.

**Focus specifically on Romans 1:22, 23. How do we see this principle being manifested now? By rejecting God, what have humans in our century 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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## Jews and Gentiles Together

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, fallen into the most degrading 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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“Do not think yourself better than other men, and set yourself up as their judge. Since you cannot discern motive, you are incapable of judging another. In criticizing him, you are passing sentence upon yourself; for you show that you are a participant with Satan, the accuser of the brethren.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 314.

It's often so easy to see the sins of others and to point them out. 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 will have none of that. He warns his countrymen not to be quick to judge the Gentiles, for they, the Jews—even as the chosen people—were sinners, in some cases 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 is righteous, none of us meets the divine standard, none of us is innately good or inherently holy. Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, 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 big of a hypocrite are you? That is, how often do you, even if only in your own mind, condemn others for things that you, yourself, are guilty of? How, by taking heed of what Paul has written here, can you change?**

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## Repentance

A five-year-old boy pushed his little sister down, and the parents made him say he was sorry. He didn't want to, and out of the side of his mouth, with no sincerity and gaze boring into the ground, he barely squeezed out, "Sorry." Hardly true repentance, for sure.

**With** that story in mind, read the following: "Despisest thou the riches of his 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?

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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 men 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 and not others to repent?

**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 these verses, 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 verse 7, salvation is described as coming to those who seek for it "by patient continuance in well doing." Though 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 of.

**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 Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Lord’s Vineyard,” pp. 291–294, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “God’s Love for Man,” pp. 9–15; “The Sinner’s Need of Christ,” pp. 17–22, in *Steps to Christ*; “In Contact With Others,” pp. 492–494, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Agents of Satan,” pp. 146, 147, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5.

“Many are deceived concerning the condition of their hearts. They do not realize that the natural heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. They wrap themselves about with their own righteousness, and are satisfied in reaching their own human standard of character; but how fatally they fail when they do not reach the divine standard, and of themselves they cannot meet the requirements of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 320.

“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 In class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s question. How do we see this principle manifested in today’s society?
- 2 Look at the second quote from Ellen G. White in Friday’s study. If you see yourself in there, 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 that 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? Into what errors can a false understanding of our true condition lead us?

## Jean Claude Comes Around

When Jean Claude joined a charismatic church in Burundi, a tiny country in central Africa, church leaders saw his potential and urged him to become a pastor. Jean Claude studied and was sent to northern Burundi to pastor. Soon he became the district leader with some 250 churches and 79 pastors under his guidance.

One day he went to a shop owned by an Adventist man. The shop owner shared some Bible texts with Jean Claude. Jean Claude wasn't interested in Adventist beliefs. He thought Adventists were legalists and poked fun at them. But the layman didn't give up. He continued to share Bible truths with the pastor every chance he had.

One day when Jean Claude stopped by, the layman challenged him to explain Matthew 5:17, 18 and James 2:10, which say that Jesus never did away with the Ten Commandment law. Jean Claude couldn't explain them, and the layman introduced him to the Adventist district pastor, who offered to study the Bible with him. Reluctantly, Jean Claude agreed.

Jean Claude became convinced that he had been wrong, that God's laws had never been abolished. And if the law still stood, then he was teaching the people under his authority a lie.

Jean Claude resigned from his church position saying, "I can no longer teach lies. I'm going to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church." He sent copies of the letter to the pastors who served under his leadership.

His church headquarters sent pastors to talk to him, but Jean Claude stood firm and read to the pastors the Bible texts that had convicted him. "We've not been observing all the Ten Commandments," Jean Claude said. His wife supported his decision, and the couple began worshipping in the Adventist church with the shopkeeper who had introduced him to the Adventist faith. But the church was quite far from where he lived.

Near Jean Claude's home was a small Adventist congregation with only 20 members. Jean Claude arranged to hold evangelistic meetings in the area. He bought a piece of land and invited the larger church's choir to come and sing for the meetings. The members helped build a simple church.

Several members of Jean Claude's former church came to the meetings, and some of them have joined the church. Jean Claude continues to share his faith in the same eager way that was so successful in his former church.

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*Our mission offerings help build up the church in Burundi and in other areas where few people know the truths we love.*