

Pastor Graham Pfeffer Sermon for Reformation Sunday 27th October 2024

Romans 3:19-28 *There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 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.*

We hear what's going on around us on the news. Shop windows are smashed with money and goods stolen. Houses robbed, cars stolen, people being stabbed, and we might shake our heads and think what is this world coming to. The person who has caused a family so much grief, pain and loss is not given a life sentence or is released from prison sooner and people cry out for justice.

Now I am going to tell you an uncomfortable truth you may not want to hear: You have sinned. So have I. In Romans 3:23, Paul writes, *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

So, what is sin? How do we know when we've sinned?

The bible says that sin is transgression of the law of God. Now what does transgression mean. Look up a dictionary and you will read something like this. Transgression is an act that goes beyond the limits of what is morally or legally acceptable.

The thing is though, we get so used to what is morally and legally acceptable in the changing values of the world where we forget to check our morals and values against the word of God.

Mark 7:21-23 it describes all the areas we sin. For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. ²³ All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you."

So how do we know we've sinned? Well sometimes you may intentionally sin where your conscience is telling you not to do something because you know it's wrong, but you do it anyway. Other times you don't realise you sin. Where your thoughts are not kind to someone, where your thoughts are of satisfying your self without care of others. One of the political accusations against the liberals was they didn't care about women's rights. The thing about standing up for your rights though, is that someone else's rights are denied.

Did you notice that some of those things that make us unclean and defile us, society doesn't even see it as sin anymore. Things that were once done in secret because they were taboo and once seen as shameful, are now seen as ok in society, and the governments even support it. No wonder what is moral and legally acceptable in society, is heading further way from what God's word says is acceptable.

Does it surprise you if I say that God looks down from heaven and doesn't see one single righteous person. You might think, how can this be?" We know some people we might think are good people. Yet we read in Mark 10:17-18 a man came running up to Jesus, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good.

What we must keep in mind is that God judges by a different standard than we do. The world judges on a curve of what is seen as the worst crime to what is acceptable. We might look at our neighbour and say, "Well, I'm not as bad as he is," or "She's better than me."

Can you imagine what the world would be like, if God judged like the law courts on a sliding scale that fits the crime. What if God said, I sentence you to two years in hell. Or I sentence you to life in hell.

Jesus described hell in his teachings as a place of unquenchable fire, and outer darkness, as a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. In Revelation 20:10, it's referred to as a place of eternal torment. Now that does not sound like a place you want to end up in. Yet if you aren't made right with God as we read in the first part of Romans 6:23, the wages of sin is death, and that's a slippery slope you don't want to be on.

Even though we live in a world divided by status, culture and religion, we are all united in this: we've all sinned and fall short of God's glory. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners." SO what can we do about that? Is there anything we can do to get back on track once we've sinned?

Well, no, you can't do anything about it yourself. Remember what we learned in confirmation lessons. What does God's law do? It shows us our sin. It shows the weakness of our human flesh. It shows our need for a saviour.

Thankfully, God is not only right and holy, but he also merciful. Knowing how easy it is for humans to sin, God offers the remedy for sin. That is through the precious gift of his son Jesus. That's why the complete verse of Romans 6:23, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord, applies first the law and then gives the sweet saving grace of the gospel.

Once we are aware of our sin, and that sin condemns us, then we know we are at the complete grace and mercy of God. Then we are ready for the good news that forgiveness of sins and eternal with God, is a free gift through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is by baptism and faith that you receive this free gift. Jesus drank the cup of suffering, went through the baptism of his death, so that when we are baptised into his death and resurrection, we rise to a new life through water and the spirit, just as Jesus rose from the dead.

God's desire is to save you. We learn that in John 3:16,17. *16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

Yet John 3:18-19 gives a warning ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

The amazing grace about God is, even while we were sinners, he sent Christ to die for you and me. This world is not your eternal home. When you consider your life, think of it in terms of life eternal.

Even though we live in this world where there is suffering sometimes because of our sin, sometimes because of the sins of others, sometimes because things just happen the way they do, God understands. God knows all about you. He formed you in your mother's womb. He knows your secrets and desires.

Yet, despite all your faults, mistakes and weaknesses, He sees you as someone who is worth saving, someone worth dying for. Does this sound too good to be true? That is what grace is. A gift that is undeserved. Thankfully, God doesn't operate like the world. God doesn't condemn. He gives the way out and that way is Jesus. God has done all that is required for you to be accepted as his child, to not perish but have eternal life. Therefore, always remember and not take for granted how much God loves you and how you are truly blessed as his beloved children. Amen