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ONE GREAT PROBLEM



If you had the power to fix one problem, what would you fix?

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

Without Christ, we are condemned forever.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Some things fail to live up to their intended purpose.

When the city of Vancouver, British Columbia, purchased its first motorized ambulance in 1909, it paid a huge sum of \$4,000. (That's close to \$100,000 by today's standard.) Yet when the city crew took the ambulance on a test run, they hit a pedestrian—and killed him. This expensive purchase, meant to save lives, ended up transporting its first passenger to the morgue.¹

God created us for a specific purpose: to live in a joyous relationship with Him and bring Him glory. Like the ambulance, however, we have not lived up to that purpose. The Bible tells us clearly where the problem lies—inside our hearts.

Thankfully, the Bible is also clear on the only answer to our great problem. We can read about that answer in Romans 3.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Romans 3:9-12

⁹ What then? Are we any better? Not at all! For we have previously charged that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one. ¹¹ There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away; all alike have become useless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one.”

In the opening chapters of the Book of Romans, Paul identified those who have sinned and are under the wrath of God. He included the kinds of people we’d expect—blatant sinners and rebellious people. But he also included people whom most of his readers would have considered to be good and religious; that is, the Jews. For centuries, the Jewish people had enjoyed special privileges as a result of being God’s chosen people. Despite these privileges, however, they were still guilty of sin. (Paul was a Jew himself, which is why he asked, “Are we any better?”)

Both Jews and Gentiles are guilty before God. All people everywhere are under the curse of sin, and our world is in its fallen condition because of our sin.

Evil runs rampant among us because humanity as a whole loves sin and despises righteousness. Many want to blame God for the state of the world, but the blame is ours. We all have turned away from God to seek sinful pleasure for ourselves. Paul referred to the Old Testament when he wrote, “There is no one righteous, not even one” (see also Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccl. 7:20).

No one does good? No one. Even our human attempts at goodness—trying to be good apart from God—fall woefully short. Everything we seek to do is tainted by sin. The evidence is overwhelming. It’s all around us. Every day we lie, lust, disobey, covet, steal, and the list goes on.

What evidence points to sin as a universal problem?

QUESTION #2

Sadly, much of humanity is spiritually ignorant about its sinfulness against God. Because our natures drift so easily toward sin, we easily turn our backs on God. As a result, we have no desire either to know God or to seek Him.

Think about this: no one had to teach you how to sin. We're all born with a sin nature. We inherited this nature from our first father, Adam, the head of the human race (see Rom. 5:12). When he fell into sin, we fell, too. Once the corruption of sin became part of humanity, the sin nature has since passed down from generation to generation.

In short, we've all broken the commandments of God. We've all fallen short of Christ's righteous standard. Sin reigns in our hearts.

Romans 3:19-20

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says speaks to those who are subject to the law, so that every mouth may be shut and the whole world may become subject to God's judgment.

²⁰ For no one will be justified in His sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law.

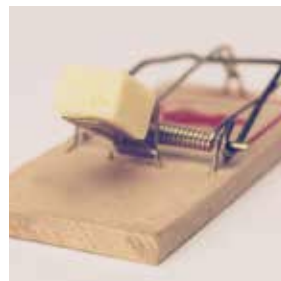
Many of the Jews in Paul's day would have quickly affirmed that sinfulness was a major problem—for the Gentiles. But they never would have claimed the same problem for themselves. They were God's chosen people. They had been given God's Law.

Similarly, our world is filled with people who compare themselves with others to elevate their own righteousness: "It's not like I've ever killed anyone," or "I'm not nearly as bad as that person." We're quick to compare ourselves with those we consider worse than we are. However, when we compare ourselves with Christ—the only true standard of righteousness—we always fall miserably short.

Jesus shines a harsh light on the reality of our own sinfulness. That's because only Jesus perfectly obeyed the law of God.

PICTURING SIN

Which of the following images best represents the presence of sin in your life? Use the space below the images to explain your choice.



Who are some people in your life who need to experience God's forgiveness? List three.

"Prostitutes are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God. The proud, the avaricious, the self-righteous are in that danger."

—C. S. LEWIS

When we say, “I’m not perfect,” we are admitting that we fall short of Jesus’ moral standard. We are guilty of sin.

The evidence stacked against us regarding sin is overwhelming—and we have no defense. So-called “moral” people might argue, “But I do good things.” Religious people might add, “I go to church.” Yet no matter how moral or religious we may be, we all stand guilty of sin before a holy God.

And here’s the really bad news: guilt always leads to judgment. When it comes to our sin, the evidence has been presented, and the Judge has handed down His verdict. No amount of good works can change it. Humanity stands justly condemned before a holy God.

This is a hard truth to accept. It flies in the face of our human pride, and especially the prideful cry of our modern culture: “How dare someone tell me I can’t do something?” “Who are you to judge me?” “That may be true for you, but not for me.” Such protests don’t change the reality of our situation.

As long as we think we’re good enough or strong enough to overcome sin in our own power, we cannot be saved. We’re lost. And as long as we look to ourselves instead of to the only solution God has provided, we remain guilty and condemned. “Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God” (John 3:18).



What are some ways people try to explain away God's judgments?

QUESTION #3

Romans 3:23

²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Our sinfulness is further magnified by the reality that we “fall short of the glory of God.” Our very purpose is connected to the glory of God. He created us to bring Him glory—to be motivated only by the desire to glorify Him. Yet the very thing He created us to do, we fail to do.

When we’re not satisfied in God, we look to other things to fill the void in our hearts. We look to the things of this world, and we seek glory for ourselves. This only leads to further emptiness because self-glory can never satisfy the soul. It’s only when we live for God’s glory that our souls become satisfied.

What exactly is God’s glory? The glory of God is wrapped up in the totality of who He is and what He does. When we put all God’s attributes together, we see His glory. His eternal nature, holiness, love, righteousness, justice, grace, wisdom, mercy, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence all point to His glory. His full glory is something we can’t fully fathom in this life, but we do see it in Jesus Christ. “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact expression of His nature” (Heb. 1:3a).

To say we “fall short of the glory of God” means we fail to measure up to the righteousness of Christ. The law served as God’s standard for righteousness, but only Christ fully kept that standard. We can’t come up to the standard of Christ or His perfect obedience; we fall short. But when we trust in Him, His righteousness is credited to us.

Trying to match God’s standard of righteousness on our own is like trying to swim the Atlantic Ocean. Some may make it further than others, but even the world’s best swimmer would eventually drown. In the same way, no matter how good you try to be, you still fall short of God’s righteous standard.

Thankfully, He has not left us on our own to drown. We have hope and an answer.

When have you felt the reality of sin in your own life?

QUESTION #4

How does sin prevent us from living in a way that glorifies God?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

Without Christ, you are condemned forever because of your sin. How will you respond to that truth in the days to come? Consider the following options:

- ▶ **Confess.** Ask God to reveal any areas of sin in your life that have not been dealt with. Confess those sins and do whatever is necessary to turn away from them.
- ▶ **Pray.** Pray daily for the three people you listed in the “Picturing Sin” activity. Ask that the Holy Spirit would confront them with their sinfulness and their need to turn to Christ.
- ▶ **Worship.** Spend 30 minutes this week praising God for His offer of grace and forgiveness. Thank Him for the work of Christ in your life and in the lives of those you love.



The city of Vancouver spent the equivalent of \$100,000 in an effort to save lives. Christ paid a much greater price to save those who had no hope of saving themselves—including you and me.

My thoughts

1. Randy Richmond and Tom Villemaire, *Colossal Canadian Failures 2* (University of Toronto Press, 2006), 174.

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLtruth**