

Adult Bible Study Commentary

“Everyone Blows It”

Romans 3: 9-20

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In the dense theological treatise of the Book of Romans, Paul clearly and succinctly articulates that no one on earth is perfect. All humanity stands in judgment before God and all have fallen short of keeping God’s law. In our section for this lesson, “Everyone Blows It”, Paul cites verses from Psalm 5, 10, 14, 36, 53, 140, and 143, as well as Proverbs 1 and Isaiah 59, to make his claim. The universality of this claim – that both Jew and Greek alike are sinners – is a key point in his argument necessitating the sacrificial work of Jesus to save us from our sin. And while we will look at Jesus’ life-saving work in future reflections, we should not want to run too fast past this series of indicting verses that make us accountable before God.

Sin, by definition, is quite literally “missing the mark.” We commit sins of commission, meaning we are guilty by our own action of failing to meet the standards set forth for us in Christian living. We also commit sins of omission, where by failing to act, we have also failed to meet the standards set forth for Christian living. When we consider that both by acting, and failing to act, we run the risk of falling short of what is expected of us as followers of Christ, it is easy to see why we are prone to sin!

Knowing that we, by nature, are bent toward sinning, some might argue that we should just freely sin and seek forgiveness afterward. Paul addresses this in his writing, and it has been a topic of discussion in church history, to reject this thinking outright. To live as you would want to live, regardless of your actions, and to seek forgiveness in the aftermath of your decisions would cheapen the sacrifice of Christ’s death on the cross. Jesus’ death is not a license to go and sin freely, though there are those that seem to live their lives in such a way.

I am reminded of a story of a little boy who was told by his father not to swim in a canal near his home by his father. One evening, however, the boy came home carrying a wet bathing suit. "Where have you been?" demanded the father. "Swimming in the canal," answered the boy. "Didn't I tell you not to swim there?" asked the father. "Yes, Sir," answered the boy. "Why did you?" he asked. "Well, Dad," he explained, "I had my bathing suit with me and I couldn't resist the temptation." "Why did you take your bathing suit with you?" he questioned. "So I'd be prepared to swim, in case I was tempted," he replied.

We are not to make plans for when we will commit sin. Sin is part of what it means to be human, and even with our best efforts, we will fail. But the aim of seeking to live for Christ is to try to ensure we are living for Jesus and seeking forgiveness from Jesus when we do not.

Application

I had an Old Testament professor who, when lecturing on the Book of Leviticus, described sin as “sticky.” As we reviewed all the categories of what was “clean” and “unclean”

in the priestly imagination of the early Hebrews, he stated that just because you are human at some point you would be considered “unclean.” When you remember all the things listed in Leviticus, you recall many human events that rendered a person “unclean.” Now these events were not necessarily sinful, but they were significant enough that a person could not participate in the life of the community until some act of restoration or purification.

If we push the analogy, our humanity creates a situation where we all will fall short of perfection – no matter how hard we try. I am reminded of a prayer I heard some years ago that went as follows:

Dear Lord, So far I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent. I'm really glad about that. But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed. And from then on, I'm going to need a lot more help.

Paul, in teaching us that all have fallen short, continues to “build the case” for why God would send Jesus to this earth and why we need Jesus in our lives. Were we capable of following all of the law, there would be no need for Christ coming to the earth. But, we’re human, we see exactly why God sent Jesus Christ – to save us.