

Romans: A Solid Foundation for Christian Living

Message 14: The Final Diagnosis

Text: Romans 3:9-21

No one likes to receive bad news, which is why so many men will not visit the doctor. For all their bravado, many men are quite timid at times, especially concerning their health. It's like we think, "As long as I don't know what I've got, than maybe I don't really have it." Such denial has landed countless men in the surgery suite or ICU for much more invasive treatments than they would have faced had they visited the family "doc" earlier. If only they had done so. If only they had been diagnosed earlier. Why would it matter? Because the diagnosis they avoid really brings both bad news and good. The bad news is that they are sick. The good: now that they are diagnosed, they can begin treatment.

In today's text we'll see how the same thing applies to our spiritual lives. There is a diagnosis that many people avoid. They don't want to hear about it. It's the root problem with the human race, the problem of sin in our lives. We shun the diagnosis, especially when it has to do with us or someone we love. And yet, as hard as the diagnosis is to take, we must take it. For this diagnosis too brings with it both good news and bad. The bad news is we're sick. But the good news is that our Lord has provided the treatment (read).

In Romans 3:9-21 Paul comes to the conclusion of his discussion of the great problem that separates mankind from God. To review: Paul's writing to build up the faith of believers and to lead others to the saving relationship with the Lord that He himself enjoys. His main point is in Romans 1:16-17: "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last...*" He wants people to trust the Lord through the gospel. He wants them to be saved. Saved from what? From ch. 1:18-today's text in chapter 3 Paul answers this question by explaining how the wrath of God is coming, on account of sin – willful rebellion against and rejection of God. He says that the Gentiles are in sin, and even the Jews are in sin. Here, in ch. 3 verses 9-21 he brings that case to a close with a summary statement and a series of scripture quotes affirming the reality of sin.

Now through all of this Paul makes a legal argument. Like a skillful prosecutor, he presents his evidence case for conviction. All persons apart from Christ are under sin, and therefore separated from God. And though I don't like to mix my metaphors, this morning I'd like us to view the text from a medical standpoint. The two are not much different. Where the lawyer considers evidence of a crime, the physician looks for evidence of disease. Now I know we don't like to talk about it. In fact, in many corners it is considered offensive. Some churches have completely done away with the

word "son", so as not to offend. They call it "making mistakes", if they speak to it at all. But the problem is that, without an accurate diagnosis, there can be no treatment. You cannot partake of the cure, unless you've been diagnosed with the disease. This is why Paul gives so much attention to what is essentially his final diagnosis of humanity.

So, what is the diagnosis? Well, as I said, it includes both bad news and good:

1. The Bad News: Apart from Christ you are very, very sick.

Vs. 19: "*...Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.*" Lit: Under sin's power and authority; under its control. In our natural state, sin is our master and, no matter how hard you try, you cannot escape it.

- It's not a matter of what you do. It is who you are! We are not sinners because we do sin. We do sin because we are sinners. In Eph. 2:3 Paul says that, apart from Christ, we are by nature children of wrath.

- This is an important distinction to keep in mind. When sin is only what we do, than it is in our power to stop it (or at least we think so). In theory, all one would have to do is be careful to live each day and not sin – no lie, no cheating, no laziness, always respect our parents, always love others, etc. But Paul has just spent a chapter telling us how the Jews were given all of God's law, but they couldn't keep it. Why? Because the problem was not in the things they did or did not do. It was in their very nature. We're not sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners. And so we're sick.

How sick are we? Paul uses a series of scripture quotes to highlight how deep the sickness of sin runs in our lives, and why it is so devastating.

- **First, sin destroys your ability to relate with God** (vs. 11: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God." Ps. 14:1-2).
- **Second, sin ruins your ability to realize your potential** (vs. 12: "*All have turned away, together they have become worthless...*" Ps. 14:3; worthless means useless – like sour milk or spoiled food thrown out because it is no good).
- **Third, sin reduces your ability to connect with others** (vs. 13-17, "*the way of peace they do not know...*" Ps. 5:9; 140:3; 10:7;)

To sum it all up, Paul quotes from Ps. 36:1, "*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*" Remember the heart of sin in Rom. 1:21 (read)?

Sin is a deep, deep sickness. It destroys your ability to relate with God. It keeps you from becoming all God called you to be. And it keeps you from relating with others as God designed you to do. Like cancer run amuck, it

touches every area of your life. And, because it is a product of our nature, there is nothing we can do about it. That's the bad news.

Just what you got up early on a Sunday morning to hear, right? But that's alright. Because, remember, the diagnosis brings both the bad news and the good.

2. The Good News: God has a cure, and it's Jesus.

Vs. 21: "*But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known...*" We'll look at this verse in detail when we look at this passage later. But does it sound familiar? Go back to ch. 1, vs. 17: "*In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed...*" Paul is returning back to this point: what we could not do, Jesus did. When – because of the infection of sin – your righteousness could not meet God's standard for holiness and entry into His presence – Jesus made a way by which his righteousness could be transferred to you. He died your death, so that your sin would be forgiven, and the disease of sin removed. In Romans 5:8 Paul says, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." The next verse says that, having trusted Christ, we were justified by his blood and saved from God's wrath through him. That is good news.

So, while we may want to avoid the diagnosis, the best thing that can happen to us is to take it, for only then can we apply the cure.

Conclusion:

The bad news is that we are by nature sinners. The good news is that there is a cure in Jesus Christ. So what about you? Have you been examined yet?