

## The Causes and Cure of Sin

### Romans 2:1-5

#### Introduction

Roger Dean – a 37-year-old Australian man who worked at a nursing home in Sydney, Australia - who happened to be addicted to prescription drugs. When a large stash of prescription drugs disappeared from the nursing home pharmacy - - - Dean decided the best way to keep from getting caught for the theft was to set a little fire inside the nursing home. The fire engulfed the facility - - - killing 11 residents. Dean was later convicted on 11 counts of murder.

Why did he do this horrendous act of evil?

The prosecuting attorney said that Dean had a history of narcissism and knew full well what he was doing when he started the fire. i.e. – he was a lover of self – who did not care about others - - - seems pretty self-evident from the crime!

Dean's explanation of his actions: 'You won't believe it, but it was like Satan saying to me that it's the right thing to do. I love the residents very much and I have a really good rapport with them so I feel extremely bad and I just feel evil. I'm just corrupted with evil thoughts that made me do that.'

i.e. – he really did love the residents - - - but Satan told him to start the fire

Why do people do wicked deeds in this world?

The biblical doctrine of sin - - - is key to understanding human behavior as it exists in this world

On the one hand - - - man was originally made in the image of God - - - yet we find human beings to be capable of great evil – because of their rebellion against God. Their corruption manifests itself in personal choices and actions / destructive behavior / wicked social structures

Paul enumerated a number of sins in Romans 1:29-31 - - - greed / malice / murder / deceit / etc.

As Christians – when discussing sin - - - we point back to the Fall of humanity into sin - - - dating back to Adam and Eve in the Garden

**Romans 5:12 - '... through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.'**

Sin became a part of the human condition - - - not an original part of our make-up - - - but ever since the Fall - - - every person born into this world - - - [except for Jesus Christ] - - - has been a sinner

Is Satan involved?

Absolutely - - but that does not mean we can simply blame him for our sin - - - [the devil made me do it]

The picture is a little more nuanced than that

In fact – Scripture tells us that our trouble lies in three areas: the world, the flesh, and the devil

When we ask - who can we blame for our sin?

- 1) We can blame ourselves

Jesus pointed to the human heart – the inner man

**Matthew 15:19 - 'Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.'**

If one wishes for the source of his own sinful behavior - - - Scripture tells him to look within / corrupt human nature - - - which we inherited from Adam

- 2) Of course – Scripture also ascribes a degree of blame to Satan behind sin

Satan tempted Adam and Eve

He is the great deceiver – a future event that takes place just prior to the Tribulation

**Revelation 12:9 - 'the serpent of old, who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.'**

Satan is the great deceiver - - - he deceives people into thinking sin will make them happy or satisfy them – or that they can get away with it / or that it actually is not wrong after all

Satan is the great deceiver

- 3) The world also causes us problems - - - things like cultural influences / peer pressure / societal norms / things like tv / movies / internet / social media / education – all influence behavior

**Proverbs 1:10 - 'My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.'**

You don't have to go along with the crowd - - especially if the crowd is bent on evil

**C.S. Lewis: "When the whole world is running towards a cliff, he who is running in the opposite direction appears to have lost his mind."**

Lot – the nephew of Abraham - - - lived in wicked Sodom and Gomorrah - - - he was running in the opposite direction – was called to flee the city

Paul is in the midst of a section of Romans - - - where he is showing us the universal condition of humanity

If we truly wish to understand our world - - - and the human condition - - - we must begin with the biblical doctrine of sin

**MLJ: 'You cannot understand life in this world at this moment unless you understand this biblical doctrine of sin.'**

When we see what the Scriptures say about sin - - - we will see that we are hopeless sinners without an excuse for our behavior - - - with no safe harbor from the storm of God's future judgment - - - except in the person of Jesus Christ

### **I. The Religious Sinner - vv. 1-3**

Paul has given us a portrait of sinners in this fallen world

He says that God has given people over to their sin

We see all kinds of things like sexual immorality / greed / murder / haters of God / inventors of evil

One thing all human beings share on this planet - - - regardless of race / gender / age / skin color - - - is that of a sin nature

**D. A. Carson: 'one might argue that the failure to adopt Scripture's view of humans as being [both] important because made in the image of God, and desperately wicked because chronically in rebellion by nature and by choice, has played no small part in the butcheries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.'**

It's dangerous not to understand some things about human nature

When people call for defunding the police - - - they reflect an ignorance of human nature

Stephen Pinker – said he once adopted that view as a teen - - - and then the police went on strike in Toronto - - - and pretty soon the banks were being robbed - - - a business was set of fire / etc. - - - all kinds of chaos broke loose

A similar naïve view is that of disarmament

Thomas Oden - - - was a liberal Methodist theologian in the 50s and 60s - - - He thought the church was merely here to be an agent of social change – social justice / redistribution of wealth / etc.

One of his many liberal political views – which he later came to repudiate - - - was that of pacifism

If everyone would just get rid of their weapons / their nuclear bombs - - - this would be a wonderful world – that was a popular view among liberals of his day [make love / not war]

He later said

Thomas Oden: 'The trouble with pacifism was that it tried to live in history as if it were without sin.'

i.e. – you can't ignore history - - - or biblical theology - - - safely - - - and come to the right judgments on what human beings are capable of

J. I. Packer: "The Fall narrative gives the only convincing explanation of the perversity of human nature that the world has ever seen. Pascal said that the doctrine of original sin seems an offense to reason, but once accepted it makes total sense of the entire human condition." [Concise Theology, p. 81]

This is not a world of angels - - - it is a world filled with sinners

We need military to hold aggressor nations at bay

We need the police - - - to enforce the laws and to restrain criminal behavior

Why is that? [answer: the sinful nature of man]

Paul turns his attention now to a particular class of people – who might be reluctant to acknowledge their own sinfulness [which is a position that carries its own kind of danger]

This person sees others as sinners - - - but not necessarily themselves

Commentators debate: is he talking about the noble pagan [the good pagan] - - - or the religious Jew

The religious Jew is most likely the target of this dialogue he creates with them

The pious Jew always took a position of moral superiority towards that of the Gentiles - - - we see that in the NT

The pious Jew: 'Thank God I'm not a Gentile!' - - - 'Those Gentiles . . . they are a piece of work - - - the rabble

One response some might have to Paul's gospel: 'other people are bad and sinful - - - but that's not who I am!'

And that is a very dangerous place to be spiritually

Because – if that is how one sees themselves - - - they will perceive no need for the gospel themselves

But Paul has told us - - - the gospel is for everyone - - Rom. 1:16

Paul is beginning to make the case that the Jew is no better off before God than the Gentile - - - all are sinners before God

Jews hated Christianity for two reasons:

- 1) Because Paul taught that the Jew needed to be saved – by Jesus!
- 2) Because Paul taught that Gentiles could be saved by Jesus!

The Jewish response to all this: ‘What!’ - - - we have the law / circumcision / we are descendants of Abraham / we have the covenants / the promises - - - don’t tell us we need Jesus to be saved!

Don’t lump us together with the Gentiles! / how insulting!  
Of course – those Gentiles / the rabble - - - they deserve God’s wrath - - - but not us!

This was a common problem from the get -go

John the Baptist - when he called Jews to repentance:

**Matthew 3:9 - 'And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.'**

‘We are descendants of Abraham - - - we’re good’

The true children of Abraham are those who have faith in Christ Jesus – the seed of Abraham

Jesus referred to this category of person as well

**Luke 18:9 - 'And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt.'**

**Luke 18:10-12 - 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust,**

adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

Luke 18:13 - 'But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

Luke 18:14 - 'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.'

Jesus – in His parable - - - describes this religious person who looks down his nose on those sinners

Sin is over there - - - not here - - - [in his own heart]

We call that self-righteousness

Wherever self-righteousness exists - - - there is an underestimation of one's own sinfulness before God – and an overestimation of one's own goodness

C.S. Lewis: 'Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good - above all, that we are better than someone else - I think we may be sure that we are being acted on, not by God but by the devil.'

Self-righteousness is a dangerous position to be in spiritually

To see sin – as something that others do - - - or have – but not ourselves

When it comes to the gospel - - we must begin with – 'God be merciful to me the sinner' – and we maintain an ongoing awareness of our own sin and need of grace throughout our lives until glory

## II. God's Patience - v. 4

Here for a brief moment - - - Paul brings in an attribute of God on display in our world - - - in relation to the sinful and corrupt behavior of men

It's a natural question to ask - - -if God hates sin - - - and if He promises to judge sinners

Why doesn't God punish sinners right away for their sins?

Here Paul points to the patience of God

A. W. Pink: 'Divine patience is that power of control which God exercises over Himself, causing Him to bear with the wicked and forbear so long in punishing them . . . the patience of God is that excellency which causes Him to sustain great injuries without immediately avenging Himself.'

We are reminded here – that God's patience is a reflection of His goodness to man

He is giving the sinner time to repent of his or her sin

II Peter 3:9 - 'The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.'

It is God's patience that allows man time to think about his behavior – to come to himself

With the prodigal son - - - he asked for his inheritance – went out and squandered it on loose living / etc.

What was the father doing?

In a sense – he turned him over to his sin

What was the son doing?

He was trying out every wrong path in the far country before he was ready to take the right path home

Only after testing out all the ways of futility and sin was he ready to come back

It took time for the son to see that

When people live wicked lives / thumb their nose at God / blaspheme His name / live sexually immoral lives / perhaps even commit violent crimes -- - God is allowing them to test out every wrong path they can find - - - to see that it doesn't work

Some will repent – like the prodigal / some won't

Of course – the danger: - - - - none of us knows how much time we have in this world

There is not always time to change the road you're on - - - sometimes the clock expires - - - often without warning - - - and that's it - - - no repenting in the afterlife

There is a day when God's patience runs out with the individual - - - and there is a day when God's Day of patience is over - - - at the return of Christ

We see God's patience in the book of Jonah

God was patient with Jonah - - - when he disobeyed God

He did not strike him dead right away - - - although he did send a storm to help awaken him - - - God provided a great fish to swallow him up and preserve his life - - - and then he repented and obeyed God

God is a God of the second chance - - - each new day is a day to start fresh and follow Him

But - the sinner who thinks - - - well - - - I can always repent and get right with God tomorrow - - - is gambling with eternity – assuming God will give him a tomorrow -- when God makes no such promises

Some mistake God's patience for His approval or condoning of sin

Well – I've been doing this sinful behavior for a couple months and nothing bad has happened - - - maybe God doesn't care after all / etc.

Paul reminds us not to think that way

God is patient with sinners

But – He never approves or condones sin

When we trust in Christ - - - He forgives sin - - - but He never validates it

Habakkuk 1:13 - 'Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, And Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor.'

### III. God's Judgment - v. 5

Some people do interpret God's patience for His approval - - - they harden themselves in sinful patterns and ways

**Robert Mounce: 'The person who knows but resists truth does not go away from the encounter morally neutral. Truth resisted hardens the heart . . . life is not a game without consequences. By our response to God's revelation we are determining our own destiny.'**

Throughout Scripture – we are exhorted to live life in light of the end - - in light of future judgment - - in light of the return of Christ

There is coming a day – when one's actions will be weighed in the divine balance and judgment handed down

Man is stubborn – σκληροτης – hardness



We use the word *arteriosclerosis* – hardening of the arteries  
This is a hardening of the heart [spiritually]

Pharaoh of Egypt – hardened his own heart  
Egypt was being leveled by God's plagues

Finally, Pharaoh's advisors said – 'this doesn't seem smart – all Egypt is being destroyed – we should let the people go!'

Stubbornness leads to no where good

When people sin – it doesn't mean that God does not exist or that He is blind and can't see - -  
- or that He doesn't care - - - or that He condones sin after all

What it means is He is allowing the sinner to store up wrath unto the day of judgment

C.S. Lewis: 'The answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: 'What are you asking God to do?' To wipe out all their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.'

He lets the sinner alone - - - to see that every wrong path in the far country only leads to futility - - - but if the sinner will repent and go home to the Father - - He finds a glorious welcome

### **Conclusion**

Edward Le Beau – served in the US marines during WW II. One day – while stationed at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba - - - Edward saw something floating in the water - - - near a Navy ship. He grabbed a palm branch and fished it out of the water. It turned out to be a soaked copy of the gospel of John - - - which perhaps a sailor had tossed overboard.

Edward cleaned it off and put it under his bunk to let it dry out - - - and later – he began to read the pages.

He came to John 5:39

**John 5:39 - 'You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me.'**

He was greatly fascinated by this verse and reference Jesus made to the Scriptures.

When his ship later docked at Puerto Rico - - - Edward went ashore and bought a copy of the Scriptures - - - the Bible

Soon – he had read thru the entire NT - - - and confessed his sins - - - and put his trust in Christ as His Savior

John 3:36 - 'He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him.'