



## Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia

"your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" psalm 119:108

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### Sermon Meta Information

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## Sermon

### Introduction

- a. When interest rates were raised on Wednesday, the Prime Minister John Howard stooped to use the 's' word that he finds so difficult and almost impossible to use. He said he was *sorry* that rates had gone up and that many people with mortgages would suffer increased financial stress. There is one 's' word in the Bible that the vast majority of people find very distasteful and unacceptable. It has become politically incorrect to use this 's' word to describe the spiritual condition of people who are not Christians. Some Theological Colleges teach students for the ministry not to use this 's' word in preaching as it deeply offends people. The hated 's' word the Bible uses is that dreadful and horrible word *sinful*. To use that horrible word to describe the spiritual state of a person is like describing a person's medical state as a leper or having aids.
- b. Jesus Christ, who when he walked on the face of the earth was God incarnate described all men and women as *sinful*, meaning that they were *full-of-sin*. God does not suffer from the limitations human beings do, therefore he knows the heart and mind – not just the function, but its motivations, content and desires – not just in the present, but also the past and the future. Jesus Christ who at the beginning used the image and likeness of God to design and make Adam and Eve described them as *good* after he made them. Everything about their hearts and minds were *good*. The effect and influence of sin on the human heart is expressed by Jesus in **Mark 7:20-23** when he said, "*What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.*" This is a categorical statement which is a thoroughly accurate and true description of every man and women ever born. The only exception was Jesus who did not have a biological father. This is a true and proper description of you and me. Most human beings do not believe that they are inherently sinful and have hearts which are corrupted and capable of every kind of wickedness and evil. The vast majority accept that they make the odd mistake, poor judgment calls and act stupid from time to time, but these are the exception and not the rule. The vast majority of people see

themselves as being basically *good* people, hard working, honest citizens and kind hearted. It needs to be recognised that this very popular opinion contradicts Jesus; it believes that Jesus was very wrong in his evaluation of the condition of the human heart. This popular opinion sees Jesus as greatly over estimating and over stating the influence and effect of sin on human beings. This very popular opinion about human beings being *basically good* really says that the Bible bears false witness about the spiritual condition of people. This very popular opinion by direct implication says God is a liar. If you hold to this very popular opinion that you are not full of sin, recognise that you are accusing God of being wrong in his assessment of your heart, mind and life.

- c. If men and women are not *full of sin* then the Apostle Paul must be seen to be urging Titus to tell lies, as he tells Titus to remind the believers on Crete of their spiritual condition before they were converted saying, '*For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another Titus 3:3.*' Paul sees himself and every other Christian as once being *full-of-sin*. This is a very serious accusation and we need to fully grasp what we are being accused of.

### **1. The strong accusation against unbelievers being full of sin.**

- a. As I do not want to deal with this matter in detail, we will look very briefly at the six terms Paul uses to explain the sinfulness that dwells within and dominates the hearts of unbelievers.
  - i. To be *full-of-sin* means *being foolish*. The word Paul uses in the kindest sense means - *not able to perceive or understanding things, refusing to think through things and not applying the mind*. In the worst sense it means not having *morals*. In the context of Titus 3 it's meaning is very specific, it means not thinking about spiritual things - to give no place to thinking about the reality of God. No thought is given about accountability to God regarding what you think, say, do or love. It means God does not feature in your thoughts about life. Your morals are not connected to what God says is right or wrong, but connected to your feelings and opinions. To be foolish is to think there are no consequences from God for what you think, say or do. If you are *full-of-sin* then your attitude towards life excludes God.
  - ii. To be *full-of-sin* means *being disobedient*. The word used here is not the breaking of an impersonal law. I am sure that most of us at some point in travelling to the worship service this morning broke the speed limit by one or two kilometres an hour. In breaking the speed limit did you offend someone? You did the wrong thing, but you did not offend another person. The *disobedience* to which Paul refers takes place in the context of a personal relationship which involves trust and love. This is a disobedience of a child defying a very clear command given by its mother. This is *disobedience* that defies the other person's authority and refuses to submit to them. Titus must remind Christians that when they were unbelievers they willingly, deliberately and defiantly refused to obey God's instructions concerning worship and life. All unbelievers are *full-of-sin* and refuse to obey God.
  - iii. To be *full-of-sin* means *being deceived*. The Greek word used here could perhaps be better translated as *misled*. In the context it means to reject what God commands in order to follow your own sense of right and wrong - you are misled by your arrogance in making your own opinions the supreme authority in determining what is the right way to live. The Bible says that unbelievers are misled by Satan who encourages all men and women to rely on their own understanding rather than accept what God has written on their conscience, in nature and his word. This world's systems are built on the opinions of men and women who are influenced by the lies of the Devil. Those who give no time to think about God certainly will not think about Satan or accept his existence.
  - iv. To be *full-of-sin* means *serving various lusts and passions*. The word translated as *serving* usually means *enslavement* when it is associated with sin. In *John 8:34*

Jesus says, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave to sin. The services offered by a slave are not voluntary, but forced by the master. Titus must remind the Christians in Crete that before they were converted they were *slaves to their lusts and passions*. The word *lust* describes a *strong craving* for something - like a heroin addict craves more and more of the drug. The Greek word translated in **Titus 3:3** as *pleasure* is the word from which we get the English word *hedonism*. *Hedonism* is a philosophy that believes that only what is pleasant or has pleasurable consequences is intrinsically good. By nature all men and women are hooked on pleasure. *Pleasure* becomes the benevolent master offering endless *pleasures*. The world has made power, money and sex the three most desirable things in order to have a life of perpetual enjoyment. God created us with desires and passions so they are not sinful in and of themselves; it's the objects of desire and the use of pleasure that creates the problem.

- v. To be *full-of-sin* means *living in malice and envy*. In these words the awful consequence of sinfulness on relationships is revealed. *Malice* is a strong word in the Greek and has the sense of a perverseness or deviant. *Envy* according to the etymology causes one to *waste away*. Our English word *envy* is from the Latin *in-ideo* meaning 'to look against' that is, to look *with* ill-will at another person because of what he is or has. *Envy* hates to see another person have something that you would like to own. In Australia collective *envy* is called the *tall poppy syndrome* and is part of our culture. Envious of another person's success, the successful person is accused of taking himself too seriously or of flaunting his success without due humility and so deserves some negative and harsh criticism. Malicious envy is part of our culture, its roots are in the sinful nature.
- vi. To be *full-of-sin* means *being hateful and hating one another*. To hate someone is really to want that person dead. The consequences of killing someone are costly, therefore it is avoided. If you cannot get rid of a person by killing him, the next best thing is to ignore his existence. Pretending that the other person does not exist is the most popular expression of hatred. In many countries laws forbidding hate-speech are in place to curb the natural tendency of hatred. The holocaust was the product of hatred and malicious envy. All forms of racism, bigotry and prejudice are expressions of the hatred that lies naturally in the human heart. Exercising hatred is partly the product of *malicious envy*.

We may not have all these six aspects of sinfulness expressing themselves fully in our lives, but if we are honest we will be willing to admit that they are present. Their presence even in seed form ought to alarm us for it means that if the right stimulus came along they would manifest themselves more fully. Paul's description is sadly true about all of us; these things are part of the nature we were born with. Paul makes a strong accusation against us, but in brutal honesty we have to accept that he is right.

- b. We need to make the connection between being full of sin and being ungodly. Ungodliness and sinfulness are two sides of the same coin. Many people are willing to say, I believe in the existence of a god or admit that there is a higher and greater power, but the god they believe exists or the higher power that's at work does not make any difference to the way they think or behave. To be sinful simply means that you do not have any sense of accountability to God and that you can live your life independently from him, decide for yourself what is right and wrong. Being full of sin does not necessarily mean that you are a murderer, thug or crook, it simply means you live your life without reference to God. You can be full of sin and live a life that is perfectly acceptable in our society. The accusation made against us is true we are not by nature given to be loving, kind, gentle, moderate, honest, self-controlled and genuinely concerned about others. We all are by nature self-centred, self-seeking and self-worshipping. That we are *full-or-sin* is sadly and tragically true and expresses itself clearly in our ungodliness.

## 2. The strong action of God against unbelievers being full of sin.

- a. What do the *full-of-sin* unbelievers deserve from God? God is a God who is holy and just therefore those who are ungodly have broken his law and greatly insulted him by defying his existence and word. To be blunt, the clear teaching of the Bible is that those *full-of-sin* are under God's condemnation and sentenced to endless suffering, pain and frustration in hell. If God ignored ungodliness it would corrupt his holiness. If God accepted those who are *full-of-sin* it would comprise his justice. If God's love stopped the outworking of his holiness and justice, God would be confused and inconsistent. God by the very nature of his being must punish sin, he cannot leave it unpunished. Paul's accusation is that you are *full-of-sin* and God must punish you for your sinfulness. Paul's accusation against you means you are under God's condemnation.
- b. It is very important for us to go back to the text and grasp what Paul says about Christians and what God has done for them and to them. At one time every Christian was *full-of-sin* and deservedly under God's condemnation, but God intervened and saved them. Listen to **Titus 3:4-5**, *But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* No Christian would exist if it were not for the action taken by God. Christians ought to be fully aware that they were under the sentence of condemnation and would have gone to hell, if God had not acted. If you are a Christian you know it is because God acted to save you.
- c. There is something quite wonderful in being able to say, *'I was at one time foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hated, but God saved me.'* The words *'God saved me'* are at the very core of the Christian faith, Christianity is about salvation, and it's about the glory of God in Jesus Christ saving his people from their sins. God has saved me from sin – from sin's penalty and enslaving power. God has saved me from sin - from divine wrath and judgement. God has saved me from sin - from eternal misery in hell. God has saved me - to be with him and like him. God has saved me – to adopt me as a son. God has saved me - to inherit the Kingdom with Christ. God saved me - to bring me to glory. God saved me – to keep me by his grace. Jesus came into the world to save sinners, to rescue sinners doomed and damned to hell, and by God's mercy, kindness and grace he saved me. God took the action and due to his action alone I am saved. No Christian should ever tire of rejoicing in the wonderful actions of God in saving him. Christians should rejoice because they are saved from unending misery in hell, and also rejoice because they have been saved to enjoy amazing blessings as God's dearly beloved children.
- d. God saved us, it was his work alone that delivered us from sin's bondage, judgment, dominion and misery. God did not make it possible for me to save myself, but saved me by his might and power. If you are a Christian it is not because you did something, but because God acted to save you. In 1987 two RAAF crewmen died when their F111 crashed on an exercise in New South Wales. It seemed that the fighter bomber was going to crash into the town of Tenterfield. If the pilot and navigator had ejected immediately they were in trouble the plane would have crashed into the town, killing many people. The pilot and navigator rather than allowing the plane to crash into the town guided the plane into the desert to crash. The local newspaper editor said, *'There is a feeling in this town that we owe our lives to those two. It would have been no trouble for them to eject.'* The pilot and navigator by their actions saved the lives of many residents of Tenterfield. The townspeople did not do anything to save themselves; they were saved by the actions of others. Christians are not saved by anything they do themselves, nor because other people do something to them or for them, they are saved by the action of God alone.
- e. The action God took is partly described by Paul in **Titus 3:4** when he says, *'But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared toward men.'* This is a statement of the coming of Christ Jesus in the incarnation. In Jesus Christ the greatness of God's *kindness and love* are displayed to mankind. The word *kindness* literally means *'goodness of heart.'* God had a deep concern in his heart for sinners condemned to eternal misery. The word translated

as *love* is not the usual Greek word *agape*, but the word from which we get the English word *philanthropy*. The strong emphasis in the word is not a response of affection out of pity, but a response from the goodness of heart. Listen to **John 3:16**, '*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*' Jesus came specifically to save his people from their sins; he died to make full atonement for their sins in order to reconcile them to God. Listen to **2 Corinthians 5:21**, '*God made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*' Jesus became the substitute, he suffered the full punishment sinners justly deserve, he took the place of all who would believe in him and suffered for them. It is God's action in Christ Jesus that saves sinners. The death of Jesus tells you that God takes his evaluation that you are full of sin very seriously.

### **Conclusion**

God's evaluation of you is that you are *full-of-sin* fully deserving to be cast into hell forever. God who knows all things does not make mistakes or errors of judgement; therefore his evaluation is absolutely true. If that was all the Bible told us we would live in fear of death, for we know that after death we would experience the horrors of hell's torment. The Good News of the Bible is that Jesus has come to save and reconcile sinners to God. I urge you if you are *full-of-sin* be reconciled to God today.