

lesson three
JULY 10-17

*“All Have
Sinned”*

“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”

(Rom. 3:23).



Rom. 2:1

Introduction

Examining Ourselves

Every single day, through good times and bad, we can enjoy and see God acting for our benefit. He supplies our every need, and we can feel His love for us all the way from heaven.

“You can’t enter this church looking the way you do!”

However, at the age of 14, Adalia’s 25-year-old boyfriend lured her into a life of prostitution and drugs. When she was 19, she left behind the city in which she was born and moved to the capital city of her country, hoping that there she could find something better for her life, an opportunity to feel loved, an opportunity to change her life.

One August morning, Adalia was walking in front of a church and heard beautiful singing that touched her heart. These were songs of hope—the hope she was looking for to help her change and reform her life.

Then one night when she was going home from her work in a bar, she went into the church where she had heard the music. She took the first step, the second step, the third step into the church lobby, but when she tried to open the door into the sanctuary, someone’s hand grabbed her arm. Then she heard an angry voice telling her, “You can’t enter this church looking the way you do! You have to be respectful of the people inside!” Immediately Adalia felt her heart break into a million pieces. Tears started falling from her brown eyes. Without looking, she ran back down the steps to the sidewalk and across the street into the path of an approaching car. She died trying to learn about Jesus.

What do we do with the love we receive from God? Where is the hand that we have to give to anyone, excluding no one, regardless of what they look like or do for a living? (See James 2:9.) Why do we hurry to judge others on how they look? (See Romans 2:1–10.) Why do we criticize others without knowing what is in their hearts? For everyone of us has sinned. We all have fallen short of God’s glorious standard (Rom. 3:23). Everyone is called to see in each person a candidate for heaven. Adalia only wanted to be loved. She was looking for an opportunity to change her life.

As you study this week’s lesson, as you consider the people in your life who are like Adalia, remember that we are all standing at the foot of the cross together, in need of God’s saving grace.

Genetics is one of the most complex branches of science. Through their genes, parents give to their children both physical and intellectual characteristics that help them to be who and what they are. Sin also comes from our parents, but don't blame your dad and mom! I'm talking about our first parents—Adam and Eve. From them we all inherit the “genes” of sin and all the consequences thereof. But don't despair! There is hope!

Don't despair! There is hope!

SPF = Super Power Formula (Rom. 1:16, 17)

Paul knew from personal experience that it was impossible for him to save himself. He also knew from personal experience who could save him. He wrote 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, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’ ” (NIV). The SPF formula is, therefore, God + Faith + Bible.

Who Is a Sinner? (Rom. 1:18–32)

In Romans 1:18–32, we learn how awful and far-reaching sin really is. People know what is right. They know their behavior is wrong and that they are breaking the commandments of God. They might start with so-called small sins, but such sins soon lead to more outrageous thinking and behavior until they forsake God completely in favor of “shameful lusts” (verse 26, NIV). Sadly, they take many other people with them on the way down the slippery stairs of sin. We must recognize and accept that we are sinners, no matter “how small” a sin we commit. If we do not recognize this, we cannot change our condition. Then we must recognize that our sinful thoughts and behavior are not what God wants for us. Rather, He desires that we accept His loving salvation, and that we ask for the help of His Holy Spirit to turn our lives around.

A Speck or a Log? (Matt. 7:1–5; Rom. 2:1–11, 17–23)

Romans 2:1–11, 17–23 explain how easy it is for us to see the sins other people do but how difficult it is to be aware of our own sins. In addition, they show how easy it is for people of God to assume that because they are His, they are exempt from being judged. But “sin is sin wherever and by whomever it is committed. Nor does it become less sinful by being committed in the midst of

religious privileges. The people of God have no special license to sin, as though God would not be so strict noticing the offenses of those who profess to serve Him. On the contrary, the Bible consistently teaches that the most serious sins among men are those that are committed by the professed people of God (see Isaiah 1:11–17; 65:2–5; Matthew 21:31, 32).¹

Of Matthew 7:1–5 we read, “How often so-called Christians express profound indignation at the course others have taken, or are presumed to have taken, only to have later events reveal that they themselves are guilty of the very sins of which they accuse others. . . . The Christian who discovers his brother in a fault will ‘restore such an one in the spirit of meekness,’ considering that he himself may have been tempted and may have fallen on that very point, or may do so in the future (Gal. 6:1).²

You’re Dismissed (Rom. 3:10–18, 23)

Because of the “genes” we inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve, all of us are sinners. We have no ability of our own to share in the glory that is God’s. The only genetic engineering that will work to change us is found in Ezekiel 36:24–30. Without God’s grace and a new heart filled with the Holy Spirit, we will never be able to obey. We must give up trying to be righteous on our own and accept God’s righteousness given to us by His grace. When Christ dwells in us, we have new hearts. Then, and only then, can His law become fulfilled in us.

Yes, sin is a genetic disease. Yet we can rejoice in this fact: “He will cure it all right; but He will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if once you call Him in, He will give you the full treatment.”³

Thanks be to God for His love for sinners like you and me!

REACT

1. Recognizing yourself as a sinner to be saved is the first step toward salvation. What else must happen?
2. Without Jesus Christ, there is no hope. Why is that?
3. Think about an experience you had when you realized your sinful condition. What did you do about it, and why?
4. What do you find yourself often accusing others of doing? How might you be doing the same things?
5. Review the quote from C. S. Lewis. What does he mean by God giving “you the full treatment” once you have called “Him in”?
6. Ezekiel 36:24–30 uses the metaphor of a new heart to describe what takes place when we are saved. What other metaphors describe righteousness by faith?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 485.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 355.

3. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2002), pp. 160, 161.

Testimony
*Can Working Hard
Kill You?*

Matt. 7:12

Much debate abounds about the role of faith and good works. Ellen White, however, is clear about how these disciplines relate to each other and to our salvation.

“A legal religion . . . is a loveless, Christless religion.”

“A legal religion can never lead souls to Christ; for it is a loveless, Christless religion. Fasting or prayer that is actuated by a self-justifying spirit is an abomination in the sight of God. The solemn assembly for worship, the round of religious ceremonies, the external humiliation, the imposing sacrifice, proclaim that the doer of these things regards himself as righteous, and as entitled to heaven; but it is all a deception. Our own works can never purchase salvation.”¹

“Priests and scribes and rulers were fixed in a rut of ceremonies and traditions. Their hearts had become contracted, like the dried-up wine skins to which He had compared them. While they remained satisfied with a legal religion, it was impossible for them to become the depositaries of the living truth of heaven. They thought their own righteousness all-sufficient, and did not desire that a new element should be brought into their religion. The good will of God to men they did not accept as something apart from themselves. They connected it with their own merit because of their good works. The faith that works by love and purifies the soul could find no place for union with the religion of the Pharisees, made up of ceremonies and the injunctions of men. The effort to unite the teachings of Jesus with the established religion would be vain. The vital truth of God, like fermenting wine, would burst the old, decaying bottles of the Pharisaical tradition.”²

Ellen White is clear that faith alone is needed for salvation. However, she also emphasizes the role of loving others and striving to be more Christlike.

“In order to fulfill the law, we are to . . . do unto others as we would have them do unto us. . . . We are to be ready to speak kind words from hearts full of sympathy and love. We are to manifest patience, revealing to the world what it means to be a practical doer of the words of Christ, ever remembering that our life is bound up with the life of Him who died for us. Christ and the child of humanity become one, so that the Spirit and character of Christ are represented in his followers day by day and hour by hour.”³

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 280.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 278, 279.

3. *Signs of the Times*, July 11, 1892.

Rom. 3:23

Evidence God's Word Is Clear

When discussing sin, it's important to understand human nature. The book of Romans helps us to do so, as do other portions of the Bible. In the recounting of many events, the Bible clearly gives us evidence as to what human nature consists of. For example, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were full of incest, sexual abuse, and drunkenness (Genesis 18; 19). The Bible shows the jealous side of sinful human nature in the story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37).

The Bible is clear! All have sinned! Even you and I.

The New Testament also helps us understand sinful human nature. Once again, drunkenness and inappropriate sexual activity play a terrible part in John the Baptist's death, as does anger (Matt. 14:1–12). Lying and greed abruptly ended the lives of Ananias and Sapphira as they sought to withhold some of the money they had promised to give for the work of the church (Acts 5:1–10). All these examples are evidence of sin, one of the topics in the book of Romans.

How about today? Where do we find drunkenness, inappropriate sexual activity, jealousy, greed, lying, and anger in our society? What about other sins not mentioned here?

Sin is present everywhere today. All we have to do is watch the news, read a newspaper, or surf the Internet to learn that crimes of all sorts are being committed everywhere, all the time. And the Bible is clear! All have sinned! Even you and I.

But just as the Bible clearly teaches us that all people have sinned, so it teaches us the cure for sin. When Scripture mentions that people such as Job, Noah, and Elizabeth were “blameless,” “righteous,” and “blessed,” it is not saying that they were sinless. Rather, it is saying that they were godly people who kept His commandments through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

When we are caught in the middle of temptation and even sin itself, let us always remember this promise from God to us: He “will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life” (Rom. 2:6, 7, NRSV). Let us do battle to be victorious in Jesus' holy name!

REACT

1. Why is the wound of sin not incurable?
2. Why is there nothing we can do to be redeemed?

Roxana Lisset Cruz-Jovel, Santa Tecla, El Salvador, Central America

How-to Avoiding the Wrong Direction

Rom. 1:16–32;
2:1–11, 17–23;
3:1, 2, 9–18, 21–23

It was an amazing day in January when our family decided to go for a walk in the Costa Rican National Rainforest Park. We were walking to the picnic area, but after a few minutes we found ourselves lost. We had been distracted and missed the sign that gave directions. So we retraced our steps until we saw the small sign on a tree pointing to where we wanted to go.

There is a direct line to heaven. It's called prayer.

How many times in our lives do we think we are heading in the right way when, in reality, we are lost? Returning to our starting point can be difficult and painful. Today, we will review how to continue going in the right direction:

Calibrate your compass. Sometimes we think that the decisions we are making are good ones, when actually they are not. Our spiritual compass is not pointing to Jesus. Calibrate your spiritual compass through Bible study, meditating on the Word, and prayer.

Use the most updated map. Every time we are in an unfamiliar place, we need a good map to guide us through detours and construction (or destruction). Our spiritual map is the Bible. As a light on our way (Ps. 119:105), it is the most precise and up-to-date atlas we can have for our journey to heaven. Because human nature will remain what it is until our Savior returns, it shows us the best way around any and all sin.

Ask for directions. God is the head of His people—people who have sinned and overcome. As the head of His church, it is good to ask Him for advice. Sometimes it is also good to ask church members for advice—members who have a solid relationship with God, who know from personal experience what salvation is all about.

Call 911. There is a direct line to heaven. It's called prayer. The line is never busy. God is waiting for us and is longing to forgive our sins. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

Think positively. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18. “There is always something for which to give thanks; even on the darkest day there are blessings to count. We must remember that if we face the sun the shadows will always fall behind us. . . .”*

*William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, rev. ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 207.

Judg. 2:19;
Rom. 3:23;
Rev. 7:14

Opinion

I'm Sorry, But You're Infected With CSD

First Act: The service started a half hour ago, but you've just arrived. It's not the first time you're late. You find a seat, and everything seems to be the same. You're still asking yourself: *Do I have enough faith?* You're still feeling that you're going nowhere, and you're hoping the sermon will make you feel better. This isn't the first Sabbath you've felt lonely and empty inside.

This isn't the first Sabbath you've felt lonely and empty inside.

You see a busy deacon, and you think: *I'd like to be like him. He seems so devoted. I'd like to have that kind of joy. But sin is holding me back.*

Doctors can't give us a prescription if they don't know our sickness. But the Great Physician knows about our sickness and has diagnosed us with chronic sin disease. Take a second look at Romans 3:23. Put your name in the verse: "_____ has sinned and has fallen short of the glory of God." Now read it again while thinking of a specific sin you've committed. Don't try to hide it. God knows your nature. Jesus went to the cross because He was thinking about you. He preferred to die for you rather than live without you.

Loneliness, discouragement, and sin are a result of these things: (1) we don't accept that we're sinners; (2) we despise Jesus' sacrifice; and (3) we reject His forgiveness. Let's admit that we've failed. Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was a text that said, "For all have repented and have come face-to-face with the glory of God"?

Second Act: The following Sabbath, early in the morning, a young person looks different. Put your name in the blank: _____ reflects peace, humility, and a desire to work. _____ is full of confidence and in love with his/her new best Friend—Jesus.

Take a closer look at who this person is. Why, it's you!

REACT

1. When we talk about how all have sinned, why do we seldom think of ourselves in relationship to that verse?
2. Why do we often think that people who do a lot in our churches must have holier lives than everyone else?
3. How did you feel after putting your name in the blanks above, and why?

Exploration *Sin's Surprising Solution*

Rom. 3:21–28

CONCLUDE

Sin. It's not so common a word these days, but its reality still shapes every facet of our lives. At its root, sin says we are sufficient in ourselves, and the earth shows the tragic and ghastly effects of life disconnected from God.

Because sin runs counter to God's selfless love, it took a sinless supreme Being willing to shatter Himself on sin to ultimately defeat it. That selfless sacrifice puts us all on the same level, yet it's still too easy to grow discouraged in our struggles or smug in our supposed superiority. The only solution is to daily remember that the God who chose our redemption no matter our infraction loves each one of us equally—and calls us to love His hurting children too.

CONSIDER

- Creating an abstract drawing of your life before and after you discovered and accepted God's work for you on the cross.
- Reflecting on how sin has warped God's ideal in human relationships and on how Christ's love can restore it.
- Hiking in a nearby park or wilderness area and meditating on how sin has impacted God's creation.
- Watching advertisements with an eye for how they play on selfish desires.
- Asking God to lead you to someone whose spiritual journey mirrors yours.
- Taking an honest personal inventory of the areas in your life where you struggle with self.

CONNECT

Kim Allan Johnson, *The Gift* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2000); Keavin Hayden, *Saving Blood* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2000).