

Knowing your misery

Text: Romans 3:23-24; Reading: Romans 7:7-25

The Lord's Day begin with setting out or desperate situation outside of Jesus Christ.

From LD 1 we get a clear setting out of three things that are absolutely essential for us to know if we want to experience the comfort of Q & A 1.

Notice how those three things are intensely personal:

the first, how great my sins and miseries are;

the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries;

the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance.

Three areas sometimes classified as sin, salvation, service.

The Catechism then moves into unpacking these three areas:

And shockingly starts with sin and misery.

Why this start; why this emphasis on the bad stuff?

The emphasis is made for one reason, and one reason only...

That we are shown just how great our need for salvation is.

It shows a picture of our own lives and hearts so we are convinced of the fact that we are sinful people in need of forgiveness.

It is hoped that the knowledge of our misery would, through the work of the Holy Spirit, lead us to know Christ.

Now this is not a good starting place in our world today.

We don't want to know how bad we are.

Our society places emphasis on the good in each of us.

We celebrate the good...no problem with that...

But not at the expense of the bad, the sin.

The article the other day in the paper on the resurrection of sin by Barney Swartz he rightly argues that we have lost the concept of sin, and it needs to be resurrected.

He writes: 'Sin was something we once took seriously, but it has almost disappeared from the landscape. That is to say, the word has vanished. The behaviour it described - selfishness, greed, cruelty - thrives as much as ever it did. What is ailing is our sense of moral responsibility.'

He argues that there is a move away from doing wrong things...

No-one is any longer responsible for their own actions, answerable for the wrong they do.

this trend is seen when celebrities get into trouble and have to apologise. They never say they were callous, brutal, selfish, self-indulgent, shallow or shameful. They never betray anyone. No, they "made a mistake"

They "made a mistake" is a phrase emptied of moral content by comparison with the alternatives.

He writes that 'A mistake is when you take the wrong turn while driving; keeping on until you have overrun Poland is not a "mistake". Nor is perjury or embezzlement or other crimes perpetrators don't see as a problem until they get caught.'

Someone who has done something really harmful doesn't need to be taught how to love himself; he needs to understand the significance of what he has done, make restitution, apologise, try to put it right. Isn't that better for everyone, including the perpetrator?

We need to recapture the idea that sin is the underlying problem...

It can't be fixed by looking at self esteem issues, or better education.

The basic cause of our sin has not been dealt with.

In *The Vanishing Conscience*, MacArthur writes: "If no one is supposed to feel guilty, how could anyone be a sinner? Modern culture has the answer: people are *victims*. Victims are not responsible for what they do; they are casualties of what happens to them. It has radically changed the way our society looks at human behaviour."

MacArthur says the sin-as-disease model has created a multibillion-dollar counselling industry in which therapists sometimes provide extensive treatment for years, or even life.

There are still people out there who challenge the fact that each of us are sinners.

Way of the Master Radio

Freak Show (we are all freaks in God's eyes)

But sometimes these shows go to the other extreme and never get to the grace of God.

LD 2 tries to tackle the problem and confront us with our sin.

Now we can argue that it is a 500 year old document that places the emphasis in an out-dated area, but I think they start at the right point.

We need to know what we need to have forgiven before we can seek forgiveness.

We need to have the sickness diagnosed before we can find the cure.

But we are wrong if we choose to see all this stuff in the first part as depressing and discouraging.

Q & A 2 of LD 1 asks how we can know and enjoy the comfort of Q & A 1.

Firstly it is to know my sin and misery...then we can rejoice even more in the deliverance we have through Jesus Christ.

Yes, sin and misery is great, but then our gratitude to God is also greater for the deliverance we have.

If you know the catechism well you will know that it does not spend much time on its first section of our sin and misery, but it does start there, because of its foundational place.

Most of the Catechism deals with grace and gratitude...but it does start at the very beginning.

Lord's Day 2 queries first where we learn about our misery.

- Not from TV, though we learn from TV about much misery in world. Eg, malnourished children in Africa....
- Not from downtown Vancouver (or even downtown Chilliwack), though we observe there some desperate situations, eg, children high on glue, drugs.... Maybe even children who obviously were irreparably damaged in womb by mother's drinking habit....
- Not from home, though can be much misery, eg, ill health (pain), broken marriage, loneliness....

Deliberately, Lord's Day 2 not ask about 'misery' alone, but mention 'misery' in same breath as 'sin'. For Bible: misery entered world through fall into sin. Cf Gen 2:17b. ∴ Gen 3:8b, 3:16ff. That is: when speak of 'sin' speak of *God*, for sin is offense against holy God – and given His holy nature, He *must* judge/punish.

∴ to "know your sins and misery", need to consider

- *God's* standards, will, ordinances, law.
- It against *Him* we offended, so need to consider *His* response to sin.

God given a law, His revealed will re how He wants people to live/act. That law an instructor for us: Rom 3:20: "by the law is the knowledge of sin." Ie, it teaches us "how great our sins and misery are". Cf 3:19: every mouth stopped, all guilty before God.

Q: when you look into mirror of your bathroom, you know what you see. But: what you see when you look into mirror of law? Hear that phrase 'mirror of law' more often; cf words before 10 Commandments. So we look into that mirror each Sunday, and what we see?

We know right answer: we see our failures..., we not done what we should have done.... But let us be honest: *is that really how we feel?* Do we *really* see failures, see 'how great our sins and misery are'?

Did you hear *Romans* about the do's and don'ts life?

What happens when you focus on the rules? As Paul puts it, you actually become *more* prone towards shooting wide of the mark then you were before.

Not that laws in themselves are bad. They're good. Holy. Pure.

BUT.... (there's that word, again!)

Have you ever noticed that when you tell a child, "don't take a cookie from the cookie jar" they suddenly begin to feel hungry and the compulsion grows inside them to do just that?

Confession time - I remember certain Tuesday nights in my youth. That was Catechism night. The road to church was about ½ mile, around the block. Perhaps a few hundred feet shorter if you cut through the backyard of a guy named Frank, who lived down the road. No big deal. Walk around. Right?

Wrong.

There was this *enticement* of making the adventuresome journey through Mr. Tucciaroni's place - up the driveway, along the big picture window in his living room, past the always open side door, across the yard and over the fence.

St. Augustine writes in his *Confessions* about an incident when he was 16. With a bunch of friends he shook a pear tree and stole its fruit. His motive, he confesses, was not that he was hungry, for they threw the pears to the pigs. He says, "*My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing, but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong.*"

Why do it?

Because it was there. The temptation.

Paul writes about his personal challenge. Happens to have been with coveting.

Didn't know what it was, at first. Somewhere along the way gets exposed to the 10th commandment. Suddenly - boom: a huge moral issue and tug to face.

If you'll open your bibles to Romans 7, and notice carefully vv.7-24, you'll see that in this whole moral discussion Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are not mentioned even once. The point being that if we're trying to get our spiritual house in order by following a bunch of rules - no matter how right and pure and good those rules may be - the wheels are going to fall off; you'll end up in the ditch.

Go to vv.14-25. I think everyone of us can understand the tension there. We know the right way. We know crossing it pains God. And yet - time and again - what happens?

The very thing God says "*No*" to, harmful or not, becomes the thing we do. In fact, 1 John 1.8 tells us that if we try to convince ourselves that we never face this kind of struggle, we're just deceiving ourselves. We're lying.

Now - we'll never break totally free from this tension. There is throughout our life the challenge of remaining true to the Lord and to His holy way of living.

That is why we read Bible passages which say things like, "*Take heed lest you fall*", "*Put on the full armour of God*", "*Fight the good fight*", "*Buffet your body into submission*." "*Train like a competitive athlete*."

Just remember -

The key to growing spiritual vitality, to joy as a believer, to being a truly effective worker for the Lord, and to experiencing the peace and love that He brings

Is **NOT** found by laying out all the do's and don'ts and walking the line.

It's not in getting close to the rules. That's not the key.

Who rescues us?

Hear the Word of God - Romans 7.25 - quoting *The Message* again:

"The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acts to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different."

The key lays in what v.6 hints at, something we'll see more clearly in the next chapter; something v.25 proclaims:

It's getting into a close, intimate **relationship** with our Saviour Jesus.

Wanting to know Him **personally**.

Wanting to be known by Him in a close, intimate, **personal** way.

As that person of Jesus grows nearer and dearer, the divine laws for fruitful living - like the 10 commandments - will fall into place. Oh, to be sure there will be the glitches. We'll all have those this side of heaven. The bipolar tug of war between that in our hearts and minds which the Spirit of Jesus renovates and the part that remains damaged and stained by sin will be there till we're called to glory. Like the poster says,

Please be patient. God isn't finished with me, yet.

Brothers and sisters, the joy of Christian living is found in getting to know the Saviour as a person; walking, talking, spending time with him.

Not in laying down and demanding a whole bunch of rules and regulations of ourselves and of everyone else in the Church.

That's the blunt message of God's Word.

It's not as neat. Not as black and white. Makes it hard for us to look around and categorize or slot other people (as if we should be doing that, anyway!). But it's God's way. The way that leads to life.

And it's more demanding. I mean - rules are easy. You do them or you don't. Relationships are different - they demand attention. They demand emotion. They demand affection. They demand care. They demand time.

Else they don't work.

That's true with your friendships, your marriage, your children.

It's true with your Saviour.

It's also something Satan will try to distract you from. He'll work hard on getting the elders & deacons more focussed on rules rather than relationships for us as a church community. He'll work hard on getting us as individual believers caught up in do's and don'ts.

Because then we're easier for him to pick off and destroy.

He'll try to convince you that now you've gone too far. This last sin. One too many. You've gone over the quota. It's over between you and Jesus. Because you *did* one too many *don'ts*.

And when he, in his conniving way does that, remember Jesus. Remember the cross. Where your first sin was paid for. And your last. You are no less worthy now than you were then. You didn't deserve forgiveness or salvation in the first place. You don't now.

BUT YOU GET IT, ANYWAY!

I GET IT, ANYWAY!

That's called grace.

God's incredible riches granted to undeserving sinners.

Focus on the do's and don'ts and Satan quickly sucks you into a game where you begin to think you deserve something from God..... just a bit, maybe..... but something.

No you don't.

Never have.

Never will.

But you get it anyway. Because of v.25. ***Because of Jesus!***

One more thing - remember that as you work on the relationship thing, allow yourself to become vulnerable with Jesus, to move into intimate space with Him, that when you sin it DOESN'T mean your faith is gone. Doesn't mean He's abandoned you. You don't need to fear that the well of forgiveness, for you, has run dry.

Though Satan may try to push that line, too.

No - you're in the same boat as St.Paul, leader of the church, writer of of the New Testament.

Challenged by sin. Upset with it. Fighting a constant inner battle with it. Determined not to let it get permanently between him and his Lord.

Actually the very fact that it bothers you, that you feel pained by your sin, is a sign that you're spiritually alive. Dead people don't feel. Spiritually dead people aren't bothered by sin.

No.

We're in relationship.

Let's focus on relationship. And then - *out* of that relationship - let's seek to live in a way that makes the Lover of our Soul happy. When He calls, let's follow.

For He knows what's best.

He's got the life.

Then, in verses seven to twenty-five that we come to today, Paul develops the argument that the Law cannot either justify or sanctify. That is, it cannot make us acceptable to God and save us; nor can it help us to defeat the sin which still dwells in us after we have been saved. It cannot deliver us from either the penalty or the power of sin. Only living the new risen life of Christ by the power of the Spirit, can do that.

There are two ways to try to live as Christians. One way is to live with the rulebook in one hand, ever looking over your shoulder fearful that you are about to break one of God's Laws and incur His punishment. The other way is to live in the freedom of the Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says, "[God] has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life."

And in Colossians 2:13 he says this:

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

He forgave all our sins. All our sins. Past, present and future, they were all paid for at the cross. And by that action, the written code that condemned us was also nailed to the cross. Trouble is, sometimes we go get our ladders and climb up there on that cross and try to take it down again! Brothers and sisters, WE ARE FREE. It is not God, but the Evil one, the Satan, the Accuser of God's people, who tries to bring the Law against us now. We are free. But we are not free so that we can sin. We are free so that we can be filled by the Spirit of Jesus.

The Apostle says in Galatians 5:1 "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." And he continues in verse 13 of that same chapter, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

We're free. Free from the reign of sin and death and law. Free to love. But if you want to return to lawkeeping, you will not find freedom.

You will not find power over sin in lawkeeping. Instead you will find only guilt and despair. And that is what the rest of the chapter is about.

I agree with the commentator called Toussaint, who writes, ". . . this is what Paul is driving home in Romans 7-there can be no spiritual victory under law. In other words, Romans 7:13-24 portrays more than a conflict; it describes the abject misery and failure of a Christian who attempts to please God under the Mosaic system. He is doomed to defeat."

You see the temptation for us once we become Christians by faith in Christ alone, is to set aside that grace and return to legalism in our Christian living and struggle with sin. But as Paul says so clearly in Galatians 2:21 "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Now who is the man that we find in verses seven to twenty-five? Martin Luther wrote, "I am a sinner, and I feel sin in me, for I have not yet put off the flesh, in which sin dwelleth so long as it liveth. . . Let no man marvel therefore, or be dismayed, when he feeleth in his body this battle . . ."40 The Christian cannot live victoriously alone, and Paul describes why that is so, namely, that there are two laws which conflict within him. The conflict is real: I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good (v. 21). The principle is explained that there is, within the Christian who desires to do good, the flesh (cf. v. 18a) that desires to do evil. Herein lies the struggle in sanctification!"

There has always been an argument over whether Paul is speaking in these verses as a converted man or an unconverted man. Most of the earliest Christian commentators on Scripture thought it was Paul talking of his unconverted life before he found Christ. The great theologian Augustine held first one view then another. And other great ones throughout history have offered various interpretations. What's my view?

Well it depends which week you ask me and whose commentary I last read! I have to confess that I have changed my mind several times.

Those like the great reformer Martin Luther, who hold the view that it is Paul speaking as a Christian of his present experience, find great comfort in this passage. If even an apostle struggles with his continuing sinful nature, then we should not be discouraged to encounter the same. Now this is not an unreasonable view. Other scriptures make plain that sin does remain within the believer, that we have two natures which are in conflict with each other.

Consider Gal. 5:16-17: So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. That's very similar wording to what Paul says here in verses 15, 16, 19 and 20.

Then there is James 4:1: What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

Or 1 Peter 2:11: Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

Each of these passages is clearly addressed to believers, but each describes a continuing struggle with sin. So I'm happy for people to think that Romans 7 is talking about the same thing - it's certainly not against the teaching of the rest of the New Testament to interpret it that way.

But I don't think that is Paul's primary concern here. I believe both sides of the argument are wrong, and both are right. Because they're asking the wrong question.

I think to ask whether this is the converted or unconverted Paul talking, is to miss the point. It is not the question Paul is asking. What I believe is in Paul's mind is the question "what is the right and wrong use of the Law?" Remember that the whole context of Paul's letter to the Romans, and indeed of most of his letters, is the backdrop of the biggest controversy in the early church. What was that controversy? The issue of whether Gentile Christians have to become Jews and keep the Law of Moses. Paul has already shown in chapters 3 to 6 that no one can be justified, no one can earn their salvation, through the Law. Rather, he says, through the Law we become conscious of sin. But there is a more subtle heresy to contend with. We can easily recognise that salvation is not through Law keeping, but by faith in Jesus - his death and resurrection for us. But what Paul's opponents were saying was, yes, that's fine, that's how you get to be a Christian, through faith in Jesus. But how you stay a Christian, how you become a real Christian, how you go on to the next level in Christian life, is by obeying the Law of God. It wasn't so much a salvation by works position as a view of salvation by faith plus work.

I believe what Paul is saying here, whether he is speaking of his prior experience as a non-Christian Pharisee, or whether he is speaking as a converted Jew, is that the right use of the Law is to show us how sinful we really are, and to drive us on our knees back to the throne of grace. And the wrong use of the Law is to try to make us more holy. Our efforts to keep the Law can never make us holy. Only God can do that, by His sovereign grace and the indwelling of His Spirit.

In verses seven to eleven, Paul is showing that if we rely on lawkeeping to bring us life, we will find the exact opposite. The Law kills. The Law condemns. The Law awakens our ungodly desires even more, by denying us things. Wet Paint. You want to touch it, don't you? Don't walk on the Grass. You never even thought about walking on it before you saw the sign. The law makes us aware of our sinful nature. And it leads us into the internal conflict of verses fourteen to twenty-five. A struggle which the Law cannot free us from. All it can do is to send us back to God's grace.

Verse 21. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Can't you hear the utter relief and joy in Paul's voice as he dictates this to Tertius, his scribe?! Are you burdened by besetting sins that you just can't shake? Have you been trying and trying to obey God's laws? Have you thrown up your arms in despair and thought you will never overcome this? Who will help me? Well, God has helped you. He has already set you free from the law of sin and death. And that's what chapter eight is about. It begins, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The Law is meant to show us that both our justification and our sanctification are by grace through faith alone. Our justification is brought about by the Son of God, Jesus, the second person of the Godhead. And our sanctification, our progress in holiness, in becoming more like Christ, is brought about, not by our human efforts to conform to God's Law, but by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

Paul sums up by saying, "So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."

I myself. That is, if Paul relies upon his own self, he finds that he is a slave to God's law in his mind and a slave to the law of sin in his flesh. If as a Christian you fall back into self-reliance in living the Christian life, this will be your experience - you will be defeated every time. You will be striving to keep God's laws with your mind, but your sinful nature will not let you do that.

So stop trying to justify and sanctify yourself by God's Law. You have been set free by Jesus Christ. Free from the Law. Free to the Spirit. You are free to change. You are free to be filled with the Spirit. You are free to have joy and peace. You are free to love. Does that mean you stop struggling with sin? NO! Does that mean you are free to sin? May it never be, says the apostle Paul. But it does mean that your sin does not condemn you, because the Old Law is nailed to the cross along with the old sin. And now you serve a new law, a law of life, the law of Christ. But that is the story of chapter 8.

The objective standard is not found in this world, is not found in ourselves. There it is all subjectivism, and then we seek to guard ourselves, we seek to uphold ourselves, we seek to cause ourselves to be acquitted, and then we have never come to the knowledge of how great our sin and misery is. And that is the problem of this world, that is the problem of human society. There is no knowledge of sin; that's basically it. Very simple. If there would be a knowledge of sin, this would be a different world in which we live. And then the Catechism of course, goes to the lengths of asking, how great it is, how great it is. By just the realization of what sin really is, of the nature of sin, that ought to reveal to us already our total bankrupt situation, in order that we may take our refuge in the living God.

And there in the second place, the reason for this teacher of sin. This teacher of sin comes to us beloved, in order to show to us that it is indeed the objective standard. Who laid the plumb line, who hanged the plumb line in the midst of His people, and that doesn't lie. That shows every deviation, and when that plumb line is cast next to something vertically then it shows whether it is straight or whether it is not. And that is exactly what we need. That is, the plumb line which is so exacting, and that we may also see that the law of God is something that is exacting. It is not something so that we have a general idea of it, that we take a stab at it, in the parlance of today, but know that it is something which is so exacting, that He lays a plumb line there, hangs a plumb line, which shows every deviation so clearly that it is unmistakable. That's what the Law does. And therefore we need it, that is the reason for this teacher of sin. That this law will come to us of which so many have said that we are through with it. That belongs to the Old Testament, you know.

We understand: this starting point of our Lord's Day is a statement of faith, implies that we take as our starting point the existence of God and the fact that He spoken to men in His Word. More, with this statement of faith comes an attitude of submission and humility; we accept from the start the authority of the Word of God, accept that God's analysis of our circumstance is far more penetrating and accurate than any human analysis could ever be.

What, now, does God say about our sins and misery? To answer that question for us the Lord God does not place us in an Afghani refugee camp for some months so that we might learn to empathize with the misery of orphans and the homeless. He does not put us in the West Bank either for some weeks so that we might experience the terror that comes with suicide bombers walking the streets. Nor does He put us in an AIDS clinic or make us live with Perth's street kids for some time either in order to spell out for us our Sins and Misery. Why not? That's because a refugee camp or an AIDS clinic or being a street kid are all *incidental* circumstances that do not characterize the lives of *all* people – and certainly not ours in our quiet and prosperous corner of the globe. The Lord God does not confront us with the sins and misery of the Afghanis or the Israelis or the AIDS patient; He wants to confront us with *our* sins and misery. He would have us know that *within our own homes*, in the personal lives of each of us, there is such rot and such corruption that our circumstance is more miserable than we ourselves care to admit. To drive that point home to us the Lord asks our attention for His law – a law God has given to *each* of us.

The law. We hear the term, and our thoughts go to the Ten Commandments. But when the Catechism, brothers and sisters, uses the term 'law of God' in our Lord's Day, the Catechism is not thinking of the Ten Commandments; it's thinking instead of the whole Bible.

Now we say in our Catechism that Jesus catches in Mt 22 the attitude, the heart, the essence of what God requires of us in His law, in His Word. We hear this summary from time to time in church after the reading of the Ten Commandments. Now what do you think, beloved? *How well do you fare in showing love to God and neighbor?* We understand that love is not kindness, and love is not being decent to each other, and love is not being polite to each other either; love is that you *empty yourself for the benefit of the unworthy*. Tell me: do you think that you show that love to your spouse? Do you think that you show that love to your children or to your parents? Do you think you show that radical self-emptying to your neighbor – be he the boss at work or the fellow student at school or the chap across the road or the brother sitting in the next pew?

Let me take the question further. God's love involved self-emptying so that we might be filled. There's *action* there, doing something concrete –at expense of self- to advantage the other. Concretely then: is your life characterized by actions of self-emptying resulting in benefits to those around you? Does your spouse see in you every day that you put yourself last to advantage your other half? Do your children or your parents see in you every day that you put yourself last in order to give benefit to your children, those parents – whether they are worthy or not? Does your boss, do your workmates, see you as a person who thinks last of self, who gives the self to do good to the other – whether believer or unbeliever? *That* is the essence of God's whole revelation, it's the fine point upon which Jesus lays His finger in Mt 22.

Again, *we* could answer that question on the basis of what *we* feel about our performance - and come away reasonably satisfied. But the question is not how *people* evaluate each other. For again,

we are too involved to be objective; it's just not in our fallen selves to give ourselves a failing mark. The question is how *God* evaluates us. *And His evaluation is scathing!*
See Romans 3: all under sin.

I know of you that this *is* your confession, even as it is mine. Because this is the confession of every child of God who has been brought out of darkness, into God's marvelous light. If you confess before the face of God the exceeding sinfulness of your sin, if you recognize yourself as lost, miserable, worthy of damnation because of the hatred of your heart and the expression of that hatred in your life, there is only one explanation. If you confess this from the heart, in repentance, in the true knowledge of your sin and misery, it is only because you belong to your faithful Savior Jesus Christ, Who by His Spirit has given you to see the power of sin and death, and Who against that dark background has also revealed to you His love.

IN THE PRESENCE OF *GOD* WE STAND.

And we are silenced. By the blackness of our own hearts we are silenced. What help is it to be a little bit better than someone else, if we ourselves are still black and vile? Have you stopped speaking? Has your rebellious pride been silenced in the presence of God? Have you given up your arguing against this verdict that God Himself has announced? "Yes...but." No, no. If you are still saying that, you have not understood the truth of God. If you are still saying, "I know I'm a sinner, but I'm not that bad; I don't need to hear about my sins," then the Scripture has no comfort whatsoever for you. You are still under condemnation. The believer stands in silence before the presence of the Holy God. And in our silence we know that we are answerable to God.

I must emphasize this, because it is essential to our comfort: It is not enough just to know and admit that there is something wrong with you, that you are not everything you should be. We must know that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Our great need is to know that we stand before the living God. Then we shall come humbly before our God and confess that we don't know what to say. We have no answer to our misery. Then and then alone shall we see Jesus. And we shall say, "O God, be merciful unto me a sinner. Forgive and deliver me. For I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. Thou hast given me to Him, and Him for me. He has delivered me from all the power of this terrible depravity." Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!

We tend to think of sin like the 6yo child who was challenged to name a sin he had committed, responded that he sometimes took a cookie out of the cookie jar.

We chuckle at that sort of response...

But whether we are 6, 16 or 60 many people see sin as just that...

Being tempted by something nice, taking them, even though it may be frowned on a little...

It really isn't a hugely bad thing.

But our Christian understanding goes a little deeper in our understanding of sin.

Sin is our inability to love God and our neighbour.

Sin is not merely the bad things we do, the dirty thoughts we have, the mistakes we make...

Sin is a lack of love.

As a commentator, Kuyvenhoven, states, 'the misery of sin is not that we still have starvation on a grand scale, not that a few are rich at the expense of many, not that we have accidents that break off lives, and not that old age makes wrecks of strong men and lovely women. All these things are certainly part of the misery of humanity. But our misery is that we don't love God above all and our

neighbour as ourselves. That has always been our misery, that is still our misery, and that will be the last misery of hell when God has taken away the last warmth of his love.'

By nature we hate God and our neighbour.

That's what the final question and answer point us to.

But we hesitate to use the word 'hate'; it seems such a strong word, a harsh word.

We may be indifferent to God; we may be very self centred...

But hatred to God and neighbour seems such an unjust judgement/ruling.

We base that on our own experience...

We are fairly civilised to our neighbours; tolerant of their behaviour.

But what is the underlying attitude of our hearts.

Not as bad as we could be...but not perfect in every dimension.

God, in the Bible, also tells us that those who are indifferent to God and his ways are those who are hostile to him, opposed to him.

Those people are called 'fools' and opposed to God...

Isn't that a definition of hatred.

There was only one man in this world whose life was goal-directed, who loved perfectly, who could cry out... 'It is finished'.

The only one who loved his Father with all his heart, mind and soul; with every ounce of his strength.

Jesus Christ.

None of us can reach the goal to which God calls us...

But Christ gathers us, loves us, and teaches us how to obey the commands.

That's why he calls out, 'Follow me!'

If we agree with God's diagnosis, we know there is only one solution: Jesus.

It doesn't help to know the law...because we can't keep the law fully.

But it does help to know Jesus.

God, who requires love, has given love.

That love came in Jesus Christ.

We can thank God that all comforted believers know they have been delivered from sin and misery by our saviour, Jesus Christ.