

⁹ What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. ¹⁰ As it is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.”^[a]

¹³ “Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit.”^[b]

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”^[c]

¹⁴ “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”^[d]

¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ ruin and misery mark their ways,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know.”^[e]

¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”^[f]

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Good Morning My Sisters and Brothers in Christ. I am glad to see you in the Lord's house this morning. In light of the events of the past few weeks you might have considered that perhaps it would be safer just to stay home with the door locked, the curtains drawn, under the bed covers with the Disney channel playing and plenty of milk and cookies. I mean, how else can we deal with a world gone mad? But to seek a return to a childhood in which we could expect someone else to deal with the bad stuff.

A respected theologian, one that I often consult when I am perplexed by a passage, has taken four issues

- 1) the killing by police of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Philando Castile in St. Paul, Minnesota,
- 2) the sniper killing of five police in Dallas,
- 3) the FBI non-indictment of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton after her repeated, FBI-acknowledged falsehoods and "extremely careless" handling of classified material, and
- 4) the continued defense by national leaders of the legitimacy of killing children in their mother's wombs.¹

placed them together in an article called the American Moment. His premise is that as a country we are ignoring the "truth". And that when a people ignore the "truth" it becomes easy for them to be lead to another truth that is not true. As a Christian theologian he of course builds an eloquent case for people of God to seek the truth as found in Jesus the Christ.

As a denomination, ABCMC, we are wrestling with issues that are the result of us living for many years with our heads in the sand. We ignored gaps in communication, we turned a deaf ear to complaints, we played follow the leader because the leader had a reputation of goodness and mercy and justice and so we overlooked, ignored, rationalized

¹ <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/this-american-moment>

those things we knew not to be “truth” in favor of being children in bed with the Disney channel and our milk and cookies.

Our children generally are not interested in the news, the History channel, or the stories of how life was when we were growing up. I imagine they think, as you and I might have when we were children, that there is time for that “adult” stuff later. But when later comes often our adult children are lacking a foundation of information that will help them recognize the truth and then live the truth they believe with faith.

I could provide many examples of what I mean, but let me limit it to just one. Black Lives Matter is a slogan, a movement, a political group born out of the 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin. As Christians, parents, and concerned citizens many of us have embraced this concept, but we have ignored another truth – Black Lives Matter should not just be about justice for young black men at the hands of white police and law enforcement types – Black Lives Matter ought to be the battle cry of young black men and women against the injustice - the injustice - they inflict upon each other. Has anyone considered that black folks are killing more black folks than white folks are killing black folks? I can no longer be content with saying Black Lives Matter, my battle cry will now be – ALL LIVES MATTER.

Now someone wants to know what does this have to do with Paul's letter to the church at Rome. The letter was about **telling them the truth**, so that they might be about the business of changing how they live **into that truth**.

Listen to the passage again, this time from The Message:

20 So where does that put us? Do we Jews get a better break than the others? Not really. Basically, all of us, whether insiders or outsiders, start out in identical conditions, which is to say that we all start out as sinners. Scripture leaves no doubt about it:

There's nobody living right, not even one,
nobody who knows the score, nobody alert for God.

They've all taken the wrong turn;
they've all wandered down blind alleys.

No one's living right;
I can't find a single one.

Their throats are gaping graves,
their tongues slick as mudslides.

Every word they speak is tinged with poison.
They open their mouths and pollute the air.

They race for the honor of sinner-of-the-year,
litter the land with heartbreak and ruin,

Don't know the first thing about living with others.
They never give God the time of day.

This makes it clear, doesn't it, that whatever is written in these Scriptures is not what God says **about others** but **to us** to whom these Scriptures were addressed in the first place! And it's clear enough, isn't it, that we're sinners, every one of us, in the same sinking boat with everybody else? Our involvement with God's revelation doesn't put us right with God. What it does is force us to face our complicity in everyone else's sin.

So for just a few more minutes allow me to ask:

What Do You See When You Look In The Mirror?

SHALL WE PRAY?

Father God we are living in horrible, horrific, heinous times. Innocence blood continues to be shed in your name; in the name of two wrongs make a right, in the name of all authority is racist and therefore harmful. We continue to blame politics, poor housing and poverty for the problems in this world. We continue to wait for someone else to do something about our situation. Help us Lord! Help us to see what we need to be doing! Help us to seek your face and turn from our evil ways! Help us to speak the truth, in our homes, in our communities, in our petitions to our government and in our petitions to you. Now during this teaching moment open our hearts and heads and hands so that you may fill us with Your Spirit, Your Peace and Your Understanding. Abba, melt me, mold me, make me into your servant rightly dividing the word of truth. Amen and Amen.

What Do You See When You Look In The Mirror?

When Saul looked in the mirror he saw a Jew who had been taught the law, finished at the top of his class, and proceeded to create a job for himself enforcing the law. But when Jesus got through with Saul of Tarsus, he had become a new creation in Christ and he was Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ. After his conversion experience Paul knew he had to tell others what he had learned and part of that was the truth that we are all sinful by nature, we all want shortcuts to justice and mercy, we all want what we want now.

Let me try again! **We each wish to be respected, but when we are disrespected being disrespectful in return does not gain us any respect.** Yes, it might allow our crew, our entourage, our BFF to comment on how we handled the situation. But the respect, the positive comments we should be seeking is not that of our peers, friends or even family, the praise we ought to be seeking is from the Most High God.

²⁷⁻³⁰ "To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

What Do You See When You Look In The Mirror?

Jamie likes to look in the mirror in clothing stores. Often as he looks he sees multiple images of himself, but they all look just alike. But if we go into a fun house at an amusement park we might see a mirror in which the multiple images are not true reflections of who we are – they are distorted by how the light is reflected off the glass.

Sometimes we allow our sinful nature to dim and distort the light of Jesus in our lives and so the reflection in the mirror becomes distorted. We see so much evil, injustice and hate that we cease to see and name it for what it is SIN. We file what we see under the heading of not getting involved, minding our own business, it don't concern me and each time we do that we sin.

What Do You See When You Look In The Mirror?

Before I leave home I look in the mirror. If I drive to my destination, I look in the mirror before I get out of the car. Generally, before I leave my office to enter the sanctuary, I look in the mirror. I suspect you each do something similar. Each of those images are important and hold value but I wonder...

When was the last time you looked in the mirror and told yourself how you had fallen short?

When was the last time you looked in the mirror and said I need to do
 More of
 Less of

When was the last time you looked in the mirror and asked God to show you the real you?

This week I plan to spend some time looking in the mirror.

Often I end with Christian lyrics but not today – instead I will paraphrase the King of Pop

I'm starting with **the man** in the mirror
 I'm asking **him** to change **his** ways
 And no message could have been any clearer
 If you want to make the world a better place
 Take a look at yourself, and then make a change

What Do You See When You Look In The Mirror?