

There are days I think it must be God's fault. I mean, I've prayed about it, I despise it (most of the time), and I've even made consistently inconsistent efforts at changing it, so the fact that I'm still a procrastinator must be God's design. Kind of like Paul's thorn in the side, not removed by God so that Paul would stay humble and reliant on Him, my procrastination certainly has me returning to God for help, pleading for mercy and grace throughout my days.

I'm not exaggerating. When we stop and ponder our unrighteousness, our need for God's forgiveness before the absolution is pronounced, a very large majority of the sins I think on stem from procrastination in one way or another. My lack of attention and appreciation for time in God's Word and praying to Him, that is heavily related to my misuse of time. My lack of love shown to my neighbour, well it's nearly impossible to be out there loving our neighbours when I waste my time scrolling on my phone and watching tv. Neglecting to serve my wife in the things I said I'd do but didn't because I was squandering my time, there it is again. Thinking of the things that I ought to have done around here and in our congregation, you can bet my procrastination is a large part of why it didn't happen. So it causes me to sin against my neighbours and against God Himself.

So I joke that it's God's fault that I'm a procrastinator, but there's not a word of a lie when I say it's the root of much of my sin. There are days when, if I weren't a procrastinator, I don't know what sins I'd confess to God.

We've all got these, don't we? The sins that are almost routine in our confession. They're the ones that pop into your head first each week because they're the same sins you fight against, or just simply cave into, week after week after week. God forgive me for my vulgar mouth, for not controlling my drinking, for my gossip against my Facebook friend—she just posts so much that annoys me. Lord I gave into gambling or porn or lying again even though I promised I wouldn't. Lord, I said I'd read my Bible but the week just slipped away and somehow it's Sunday again. Lord, I'm back here with the same laundry list of sins again; I'm not even creative. I'm just stuck.

It is good and right to fight against these sins, knowing how our sin offends God and hurts our neighbour and even ourselves. So carry on in this fight.

But know that even if you master these temptations, avoiding your favourite vices, you are still a sinner.

I know that you know that, but I also know that we sinners think we're just one bad habit, one vice, one pet sin away from being good enough.

It would be so satisfying if I didn't have to sit with this guilt, if I didn't need to confess this sin again. Without it, I know I wouldn't be a perfect Christian or anything, but at least I'd feel good enough, like I weren't a dog that can't stop returning to my own vomit, as the proverb puts it.

It's not worth it, Paul says. Having your righteousness nice and lined up, as far as you can tell, it's not as satisfying as you'd think.

He was one that had it all together. His parents did it all right, getting him circumcised on the 8th day, he attended synagogue faithfully and he knew God's Word better than the rest of his peers. Paul, or Saul, I suppose, was the kid that knew his stuff, how to act, the answers to questions about God, and all about how bad Christianity was. Saul was one of the tenants throwing servant after servant out as God sent His prophets and His Son even with news of salvation.

The Israelites were God's chosen people, invited to live on His land and care for it, enjoying the fruits of His creation and the goodness of His promises, but once they were settled in they were happy with a little distance from God. In Isaiah 5, another parable of the vineyard that is Israel, God comes looking for fruit but finds worse than nothing. He comes looking for fruit and finds stink fruit, He seeks to harvest justice but finds bloodshed, He seeks righteousness only to find cries of distress. These tenants that Jesus speaks of, they likewise refuse to hand over what is rightly God's. They won't give Him the righteous mercy He requires; they won't live in humble faith; they won't hear the prophets' calls to repentance and gracious living.

They want to live in their own land in their own way without God, who has given it all to them, interfering. Or as we can see from Paul's life, they've accomplished a righteousness that ought to be good enough all on their own. So send in a king or leave us alone

Paul was able to look at his life with pride, not needing to flee to God for any particular mercies, though almost certainly offering up the right sacrifices at the right time to appease God.

This attitude of rebellion and rejection of a merciful saviour who ate with sinners and welcomed tax collectors, who didn't despise prostitutes nor distance Himself from lepers, yet who also was not satisfied with an exterior appearance of holiness but demanded inward purity as well, the religious elite weren't pleased with a redeemer like this. They wanted someone who came in and brought vengeance upon their enemies because they had been so faithful in their waiting. They wanted someone to come in and pat their back and put them on a pedestal. This is what Paul was aiming for. This is what we all aim for.

And in desiring such a self-righteousness we cast the Son out.

Paul literally cast the Son out for proclaiming such a message and requiring such fruit. Though he wasn't one of the Pharisees that was seeking to catch Christ in His words, he cast Christ out as he supervised the stoning of Stephen, as he sought to round up Christians and imprison them, persecute them, and kill them. He was hunting down Christ's body as it proclaimed repentance and salvation to the world and He cast Him out of every place. He rejected the stone on which His future salvation would be built.

Your sin and your self-righteousness cast Christ out, out of your heart and outside of the walls of Jerusalem into Golgotha. But according to God's good plan, the rejection of the Jewish leaders, the rejection of Paul and the people, your rejection, this brought about Christ's glory and salvation. Rejoice that God took your sin, your wretched evil, your violent intentions, your boastful but lacking self-

righteousness and wrought your salvation out of it. He took the brutal murder of His beloved Son and caused the eternal life of all us murderers

“Why, what hath my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite? He made the lame to run He gave the blind their sight. Sweet injuries, yet they at these themselves displease and ‘gainst Him rise.”

What has He done to us that we would reject Him, even rejecting His perfect gift? Yet we who refuse such love, He shows us love that we might lovely, holy and righteous be. Just as God was faithful to send servant after servant, prophet and messenger and Son after the other to warn the people of Israel away from judgment, so He continues to send His Son to break down our rebellion and give us life. He did this for Paul on the road to Damascus, making a murderer of Christ’s body into a faithful proclaimer, going into the very people who would cast him out and imprison him.

He did this for you in your baptism where you were transformed from a child of wrath, rebelling against and rejecting your God and creator, into a child of peace, resting in faith in your God and redeemer. He does this as He proclaims His law into your ears, showing you just how far you fall short, but also reminding you that His grace persists, sustaining you through your life.

It is our journey in faith, week after week, to learn how much deeper and truer Christ’s righteousness is than ours ever could be, how much more perfect His love living through us is than our stirred up attempts to love. We are invited by the One we, in our sin reject, to rest on Him as our foundation, to receive His mercy and to be shaped by Him rather than prove that we fit by our own efforts. Paul calls his former righteousness worse than garbage that must be burnt outside the city. May you ever despair of all you could bring to the table and rejoice that Christ has already provided all you could ever need, to receive and to share with the world around you. Rejoice that you cannot overcome your sin because it means you still need, and still certainly have, your beloved Saviour.