



THE ROMANS ROAD

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY TO HEAVEN

BY TONY EVANS



THE PROBLEM

*...for all have sinned and fall short of
the glory of God. Romans 3:23*

Salvation is good news, but it comes to us against a backdrop of bad news. The bad news: we are all sinners. No one on earth, past, present or future, is without sin.

The Greek word for "sin" literally means to "miss the mark." It describes a bowman who drew back his string, released his arrow, but failed to hit the bull's-eye. Similarly, sin involves missing the target. The verse we just looked at tells us: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin is falling short of God's standard.

To help you understand this concept, I must attack a popular myth upheld by the media and sometimes even the church. The idea is that sin can be measured by degree. For many of us, criminals seem like big-time sinners, while those of us who tell little white lies are lightweight sinners. It appears logical to believe that those in the county jail have not sinned as seriously as those in the state penitentiary. But sin looks different from God's perspective. In Scripture, sin is not measured by degree. Either we fall short of God's glory or we don't. Since the entire sin question pivots on this point, let's make sure we understand our target.

The word "glory" means to put something on display, to show it off. Sin is missing the mark, and the mark is to properly "put God on display." When we view the issue from this perspective, our understanding of sin begins to change. Any time we have ever done anything that did not reveal accurately who and what

God is, any time we fail to reflect the character of God, then we have sinned.

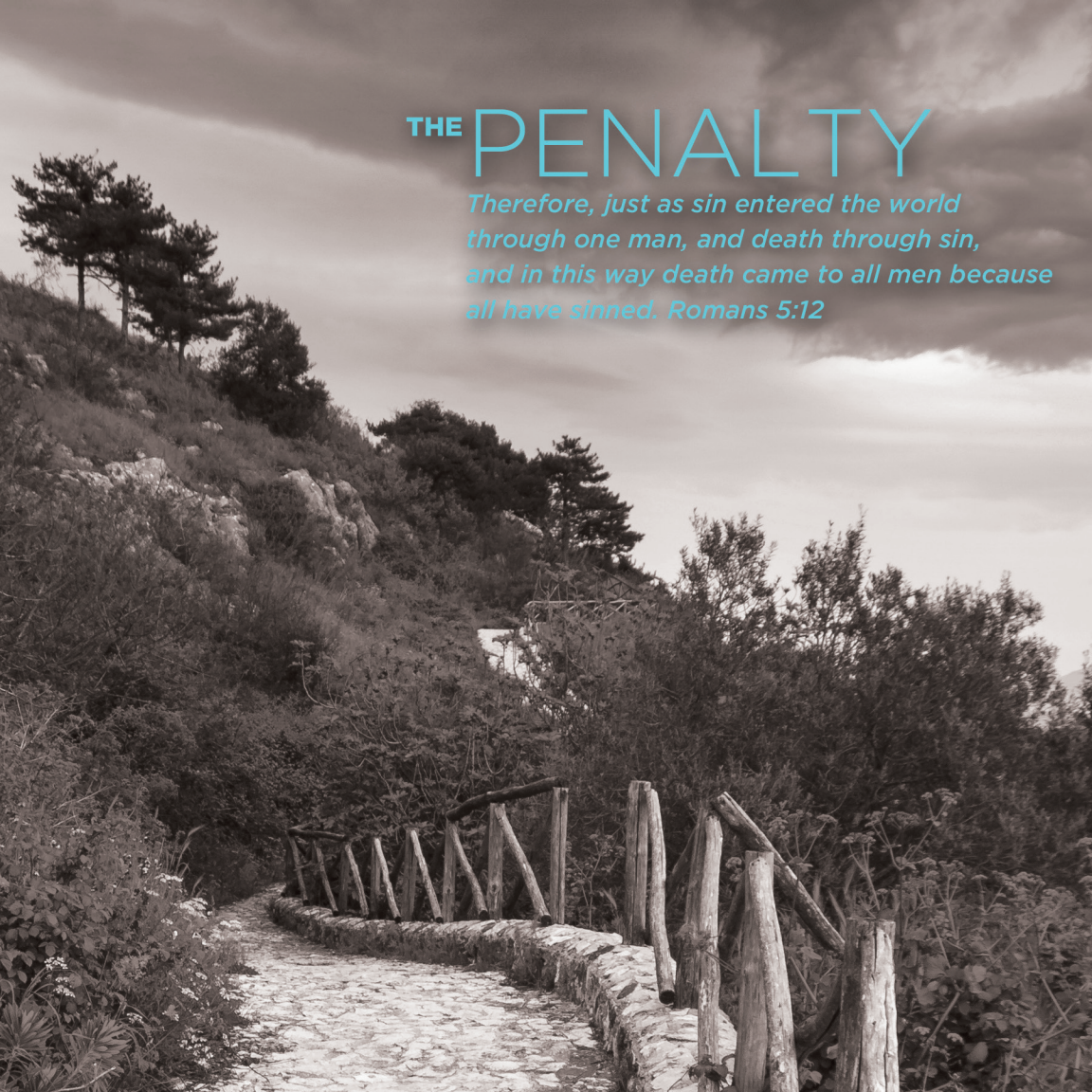
The story is told of two men who were exploring an island when, suddenly, a volcano erupted. In moments, the two found themselves surrounded by molten lava. Several feet away was a clearing-and a path to safety. To get there, however, they would have to jump across the river of melted rock. The first gentleman was an active senior citizen, but hardly an outstanding physical specimen. He ran as fast as he could, took an admirable leap, but traveled only a few feet. He met a swift death in the super-heated lava.

The other explorer was a much younger man in excellent physical condition. He put all his energy into his run, jumped with flawless form and went farther than ever before. Unfortunately, he landed far short of the clearing. Though the younger man clearly out-performed his companion, both wound up equally dead. Survival was so far out of reach, so ability became a non-issue.

Degrees of "goodness" may be important when hiring an employee or choosing neighbors. But when the issue is sin, the only standard that matters is God's perfect holiness. The question isn't how you measure up against the guy down the street, but how you measure up to God. God's standard is perfect righteousness, and it is a standard that even the best behaved or most morally upright person still cannot reach.

THE PENALTY

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men because all have sinned. Romans 5:12



Now as you read this passage, you may be thinking, “If sin entered the world through one man (Adam), it isn’t fair to punish the rest of us.” Yet, death spread to all men because “all have sinned.” We are not punished simply because Adam sinned, but because we inherited Adam’s propensity to sin, and have sinned ourselves.

Have you ever noticed that you don’t need to teach your children how to sin? Can you imagine sitting down with your child and saying, “Here’s how to lie successfully” or “Let me show you how to be selfish”? Those things come naturally.

Let me illustrate this another way. Have you ever seen an apple with a small hole in it? If you do, don’t eat it. The presence of the hole suggests that a worm is in there waiting for you.

Now, most people don’t know how the worm managed to take up residence in that apple. They think he was slithering by one day when he decided to bore through the outer skin of the fruit and set up house inside. However, that is not what happens. Worms hatch from larvae dropped on the apple blossom. The blossom becomes a bud and the bud turns into fruit. The apple literally grows up around the unborn worm. The hole is left when the worm hatches and digs his way out.

In the same way, the seed of sin is within each and every one of us at the moment of birth. Though it may take some time before the evidence of sin shows on the surface, it is there and

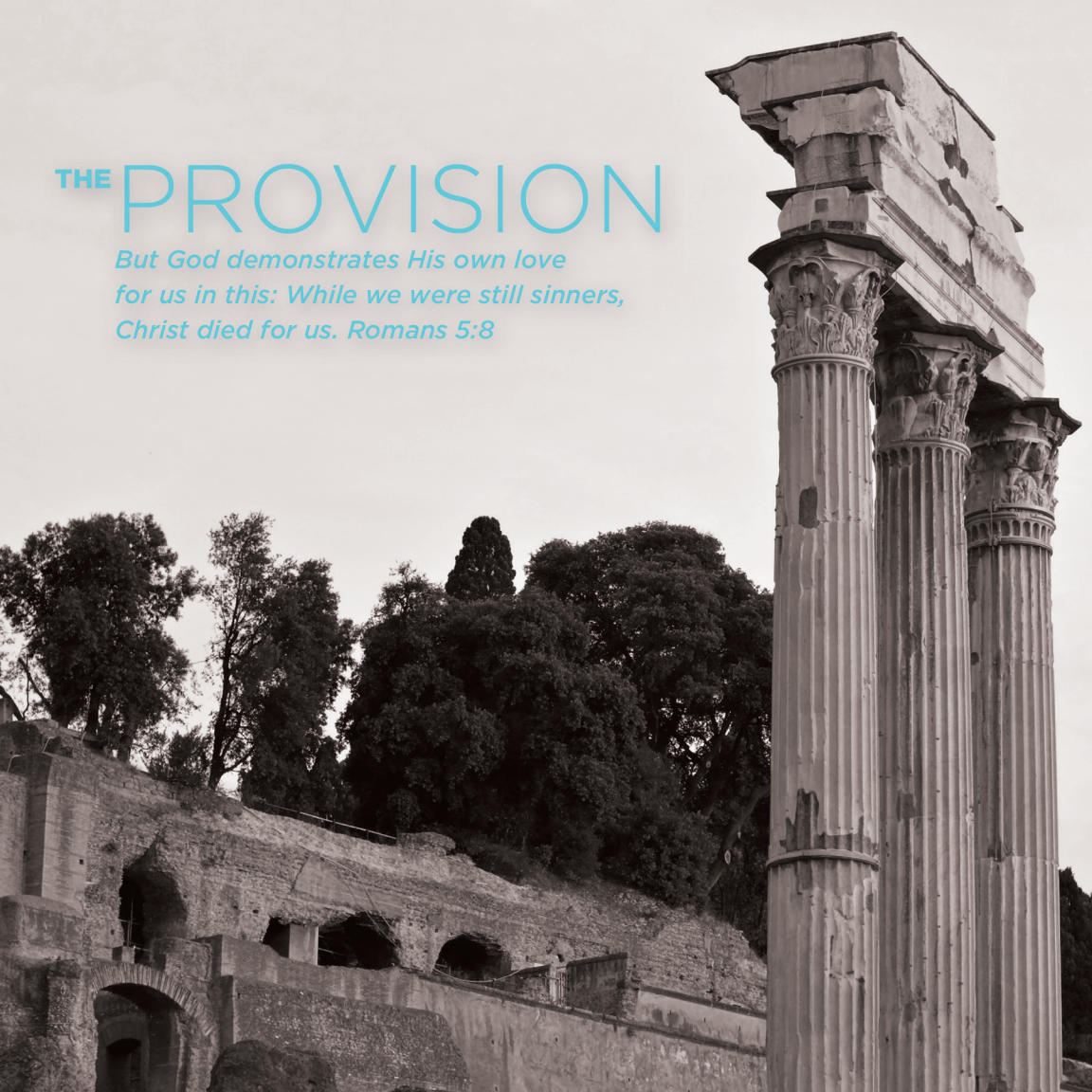
eventually it makes its presence known.

Sin demands a penalty. That penalty, according to Scripture, is death. That means physical death (where the soul is separated from the body) and spiritual death (where the soul is separated from God).



THE PROVISION

*But God demonstrates His own love
for us in this: While we were still sinners,
Christ died for us. Romans 5:8*



Two very powerful words when put together are “but God.” Those words can revolutionize any situation. “My marriage is falling apart. But God...” “My husband abandoned us and my children are out of control. But God...” “I have no job, no income and no future. But God...” God can restore any situation. He is bigger and more powerful than any life challenge or any predicament that results from sin.

“I’m a sinner condemned to eternal separation from God. But God...” Those same words sum up the Good News for each of us. Even while we were still sinners, God proved His love for us by sending Jesus Christ to die in our place.

How amazing that God would love us so deeply. We have certainly done nothing to deserve it. But the amazement deepens when we consider the significance of Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary because not just anybody could die for the penalty of sin.

You see, we all have sinned. So none of us could die to pay the penalty of sin. We each have our own price to pay. Whoever would save us must be perfectly sinless.

Two brothers were playing in the woods one summer day when almost without warning, a bee flew down and stung the older brother on the eyelid. He put his hands to his face and fell to the ground in pain. As the younger brother looked on in horror, the bee began buzzing around his head. Terrified, he began screaming, “The bee’s going to get me!” The older brother, regaining his composure, said, “What are you talking about? That bee can’t hurt you. He’s already stung me.”

The Bible tells us that this is precisely what happened on Calvary. God loves you so much that He stepped out of heaven in the person of Jesus Christ and took the “stinger of death” in your place on Calvary. Jesus hung on the cross, not for His own sin, but for my sin and yours. Because Jesus Christ is without sin, His death paid the penalty for all of us.

How do we know that Jesus’ death on the cross really took care of the sin problem? Because of what happened on that Sunday morning. When Mary Magdalene came to Jesus’ tomb that morning, she couldn’t find Him. She saw someone and, thinking it was a gardener, asked Him where the Lord’s body had been taken. When the gardener turned and removed His cloak, Mary gasped in amazement. It was Jesus.

In fact, according to I Corinthians, over five hundred people personally saw the risen Christ before He ascended into heaven.

I am a Christian today because the tomb is empty. If not for the resurrection, our faith would be empty and useless. As the Apostle Paul said, if Jesus were not raised, we should be the most pitied people on earth. But the fact is, Jesus is raised. Now what do we do?



THE PARDON

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Romans 10:9-10

If good works could save anyone, there would have been no point in Jesus' death. But Jesus knew we couldn't pay sin's price. That's why His sacrifice was vital. In order for His sacrifice to secure our pardon, we must trust in Him for our salvation.

Believing in Jesus means a great deal more than believing about Jesus. Knowing the facts about His life and death is mere "head knowledge." Believing in Jesus demands that we put that knowledge to work. It means to trust, to have total confidence, to "rest your case" on Him. Without knowing, you illustrate this concept every time you sit down. The moment you commit your weight to a chair, you have "believed in" that chair to hold you up. Most of us have so much faith in chairs that, despite our weight, we will readily place ourselves down without a second thought.

If a tinge of doubt creeps in, you might steady yourself by grabbing something with your hand or by keeping your legs beneath you, resting only part of your weight on the chair. That's what many people do with salvation. They're reasonably sure that Jesus is who He said He is. However, they "hedge their bet" by putting some of their trust in their efforts at good behavior, their church traditions or anything else they can do.

You must understand that if you depend on anything beyond Jesus for your salvation, then what you're really saying is that Jesus Christ is not enough.

God is waiting for you to commit the entire weight of your existence to Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross. Your complete eternal destiny must rest upon Him.

You might say, "But my mom was a Christian. And she prayed for me." Praise God. But what about you? Christianity has nothing to do with your heritage. It has nothing to do with the name of the church you attend. It has to do with whether you have placed absolute confidence in the work of Christ alone.





WHERE

Do I Go From Here?

Have you ever confessed your sin to God and trusted in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? If not, there's no better time than right now.

It all begins with a simple prayer. The exact wording isn't important. What matters is your sincerity. Here's an example:

Dear Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner. I have failed to reflect your glory and deserve the punishment that results from sin. Jesus, I believe that you are holy and sinless, that you died on the cross at Calvary and rose from the dead to grant salvation. I now place all my confidence in you as my savior. Please forgive me of my sins and grant me eternal life. Thank you for saving me. I want to live my life for you. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer for the first time, I want to welcome you into the family of God. Also, talk with your pastor or a Christian friend. Let them know about your decision so they can encourage you and help you to grow in your newfound faith. Find a church that teaches the Bible and get involved right away. Like little babies, newborn Christians need this kind of care and attention. Please also feel free to call us at 1.800.800.3222. We'll do all we can to help you get started on this fantastic journey.

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