

Introduction

I'd like you to think of a word on this Easter Sunday, "**restoration.**" It's often linked to homes. Homes are ruined and people act to restore them. That means they bring them back to their original and intended condition or state. Look at these power point slides, which show the before and after pictures of a home. It *was* ruined. It's *now* restored.

But it isn't just homes that are ruined and restored. It's people as well and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

The Ruination of People

Going back to our power point slides, we can see what it means that a home is ruined. The foundation is crumbled, the windows are rotted, the paint is peeled, the shingles are buckled, and more.

That people are ruined, of course, means something quite different. Their mental, emotional, volitional, and bodily processes – and their social relations – are malformed and dysfunctional. It's what one writer calls the "**warpedness and wrungness**" of the human condition. We don't like hearing that I know, but the unending soap opera known as normal human life proves it so.

Take something as common place as our roadways. We all encounter aggressive drivers don't we, ones who tail-gate, cut-off, yell, make vulgar gestures, and more. A national survey found that 50% of us respond in kind, with aggression. 35% of the drivers surveyed said that they honk their horn at the aggressor. 27% yell. 19% make vulgar gestures. 17% flash their headlights. 7% mimic the aggressive driver's behavior. And 2% try to run him off the road.

People's bad behaviors there, on America's highways and streets, are representative of their behaviors everywhere. Reflect on what we routinely experience and observe in day-to-day life and I think you'll agree. People retaliate when they're wronged. They toot their own horns to get praise. They criticize right back when they're criticized. They're

short-tempered with annoying people. They're thin-skinned and offended by slights. They yield to lust. They lash out when they don't get their way, and on it goes.

Those responses illustrate that people in their natural state apart from Jesus are ruined. Their mental, emotional, volitional, and bodily processes – and their social relations – are malformed and dysfunctional.

The Cause of Ruination

Let's return again to the picture of the ruined home. You can probably pick up on the cause of its ruination. It was the long slow process of aging and decline. But homes can be ruined by events as well like fires, earthquakes and floods.

In verses 1, 2, 6, and 7, Paul identifies the cause of people's ruination. It's "**sin.**" That word refers to the inner disposition with which all of us are born, what Oswald Chambers called "**the disposition to self-realization.**" Simply put, we're born "**me-istic,**" that is, inherently self-centered. We routinely think, feel, and act in practice as if we're more important than anyone or anything else is. That in turn dramatically shapes our persons and lives so that they become malformed and dysfunctional. Sin, in other words, is the cause of our ruination.

Most people in our culture's behavioral sciences though disagree. They do recognize the "**warpedness and wrungness**" of the human condition. But they reject sin as a principle for explaining it. They're actually lost in speculations about the cause but the majority seems to come down on the side of ignorance.

Award winning journalist Alix Spiegel, for instance, wrote an article titled "Psychology of Fraud: Why Good People Do Bad Things." She points out that researchers now recognize that people "**are capable of behaving in profoundly unethical ways . . . and do it all the time.**" They also identify why they do. People are "**unaware that they're making a profoundly unethical decision.**" "**It's not that they're evil – it's that they don't see.**"

That explanation is a typical one. Ignorance causes people to do the bad things they do. They don't know any better. Other widely accepted explanations are corrupt social structures and poverty. The state of our current culture's thought world is clear. Across the board, it rejects sin as an explanation for why people do the things they do.

It's deluded though in doing so. People don't retaliate when they're wronged or toot their own horns, for instance, because they're ignorant or poor. Ignorance, corrupted social structures, and poverty are destructive realities. But they aren't the ultimate cause of people's ruination. As Paul and the Bible make clear, sin is.

Restoration

But don't despair. The good news of Easter is that you and I who are ruined can be restored. We can be because of what Jesus did 2000 years ago. Paul mentions two events in that regard.

One, in verses 3, 4, 5, and 6 is Jesus' "**death**" by crucifixion. That death of His was utterly unique because it was substitutionary. He took all of our sins into Himself on the cross and paid the penalty for them that we should have paid so that we wouldn't have to.

The other event, in verses 4 and 5, is His historical resurrection. By historical, I mean that it actually occurred in time and space just as every other event in our world does. On the third day after He was killed, He rose from the dead never to die again.

That's what Jesus did and it makes our restoration possible. Because of it, Father God can and will restore us. He can and will bring us back to the condition or state that He intends for us. That's restoration and it has two facets.

One is the forgiveness of our "**sins**," plural. Sins are the specific behaviors to which "**sin**," singular, leads us. Behaviors are sins when they're contrary to the perfect nature of Father God. Retaliating, for instance is contrary to His mercy and thus, a sin. Or tooting our own horns is contrary to His humility and thus, a sin. Because He's holy, He

reacts adversely to our sins and must punish us for them. The punishment is experiential deadness to the goodness and joy of Him and His kingdom, now and forever. But because Jesus died for our sins, Father God can and will forgive us. He regards us as if we never even committed them and so, doesn't punish us for them.

The other facet of restoration is what Paul calls in verse 4, "**newness of life**," which is a remarkable reality.

The before and after pictures of the home I showed you are striking. Think of them as metaphors for human restoration. You and I can become "**a new creature in Christ**" to quote Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17 to the same degree that this old home became this new home.

Being a new creature is about our inner condition. You know the old joke. Question – When is a door not a door? Answer – When it's "**a jar**." It's a play on words. A door is no longer a door, in other words, when it's something else. That's what it means to be a new creature in Christ. We're something else in relation to what we were before.

When is a retaliator, for instance, no longer a retaliator? It isn't just when he stops retaliating. He may still desire to retaliate but because he knows it's wrong, grits his teeth and doesn't. A retaliator is no longer a retaliator when he desires not to retaliate but to do good and does. At that point, he's something else. He's a "**new creature**."

And what Paul mentions in verse 4 is the result. It's "**newness of life**." Because his inner condition is restored, his outer life is too. So, a driver cuts him off. Before, he was a retaliator. He felt like honking at the driver and did. Or he felt like it, but gritted his teeth and didn't. But now, he isn't a retaliator. He feels like doing good, not retaliating, and does. He prays for the driver, not honks at him.

Notice how Paul analyzes what I just explained. Before, we were "**slaves to sin**," verse 6, and "**lived in it**," verse 2. But now, "**our body of sin is done away with**," verse 6. We've "**died to sin**," verse 1, "**are no longer slaves to sin**," verse 6, and are "**freed from sin**," verse 7. Before, sin controlled us. We couldn't "**not sin**." But now, sin

doesn't control us. We can "**not sin.**"

That doesn't mean we'll ever be perfect because we won't be. Sin resides in us until the day we die. We are always capable of sinning and on occasion will. But sin is no longer an irresistible force in us. We can stand beyond its reach so that we *increasingly* do what is good and right and *decreasingly* what is bad and wrong. We're restored!

Our Part in Restoration

And it's Jesus who does the restoring. Listen to Paul's words in Romans 8:10, "**If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive.**" Jesus inhabits our spirit – our mental, emotional, volitional, and bodily processes. But He doesn't just inhabit it. He transforms and empowers it as well. The result? We're freed from sin. We're able to stand beyond its reach and live a life that isn't perfect, but that is habitually and pervasively good and joyful. Yes, it's Jesus who restores us.

But we have a part to play in that. He restores us "**if . . .**" Our restoration is predicated upon a condition. Paul identifies it in verse 5. It's that we're "**united with Jesus in the likeness of His death (and) resurrection.**" We must identify with Him, in other words. This identification, as the Bible teaches, involves three steps, in sequence.

The first step is recognition. We must grasp and admit that we're sinners. Most people believe that the first step toward restoration is self-esteem. But it isn't, for two reasons. One is all the confusion about what self-esteem even means. The other is that, realistically, I'm not okay and neither are you. Don't misunderstand me. We are valuable. As G.K. Chesterton pointed out, the hardest thing for most to accept about Christianity is the value in places on the individual soul. Human beings are in God's image and, therefore, priceless. That's why even the ruined are capable of great strength, beauty, and goodness. Sin doesn't make us worthless. But it does make us ruined, and we need to recognize that.

Recognizing that then enables us to move to the second step in

restoration. That step is remorse. In all the relevant contexts of life, it still matters greatly that wrongdoers seem to be truly sorry for what they've done. When I was practicing law, for instance, I observed judges take the remorse of criminal defendants into account in sentencing them. Genuine remorse is reflective of a person's character. One who does wrong and isn't sorry is clearly a different person than one who does wrong and is. People without remorse, without the anguish of regret, are incapable of experiencing any significant change.

Those first two steps, recognition and remorse, become the foundation for the third step, which is redirection. Grasping that we're sinners and being sorry that we are, we redirect our lives so that we won't be. This redirection is away from self as God to Jesus as God. We call this "**redirection**" discipleship to Jesus. We make the decision to be with Him so that we can become like Him and to learn and do all that He says. We then arrange our day-to-day affairs around carrying out that decision. We make being with Him, becoming like Him, and learning and doing all that He says primary. We make everyone and everything else – including us and our needs, desires, and status – secondary.

Jesus then "**does His thing**" as some say it. He increasingly transforms us into the image and likeness of Him. His goodness and joy end up prevailing in our persons and lives because He does.

Conclusion

A research physicist named Lambert Dolphin was ruined. As he describes it, he "**was not happy at all and faced the strong possibility of becoming an alcoholic.**" But then he became a disciple of Jesus, and is now restored. He says about that: "**Old problems and desires have faded away. For the first time I feel complete as a human being. I have a new understanding of reality.**"

Dolphin's testimony fleshes out what I've preached about today. Become a disciple of Jesus. Metaphorically, you'll be this (restored home) not this (ruined home) if you do. You'll be restored!