

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF SIN

Objectives:

- * Reveal the necessity of understanding the doctrine of sin to better understand the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- * Reveal the depths of our sin and the effects of Adam's sin upon us today.
- * Reveal the three possibilities for understanding the Fall.
- * Reveal what is meant by "original sin" and its effects on us today.
- * Reveal how Jesus is the only solution to the problem of sin.
- * Reveal the necessity of preaching about sin.

The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes:

"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Paul's purpose, in these verses, is to show us the spiritual condition of EVERY human being apart from Christ. Moreover, by doing so, Paul reveals to us an essential truth of the Christian faith that we must embrace. That truth: GOD'S WORK OF SALVATION BEGINS WITH OUR RECONGITION OF OUR COMPLETE SINFULNESS.

A Biblical Understanding of What Sin is:

Paul, here in this text, uses two words that summarize clearly the Bible's teaching on sin. He says — "And you were dead in your **trespasses** and **sins** ..." **Trespasses** (Greek, *paraptomasin*) indicates deviating from the right course, crossing a boundary, or breaking a command. It expresses our

rebellion against God's rule. For example: God has said, "You shall not lie" but we have lied. Additionally, it includes not doing what God has clearly commanded us to do. For example: God has said "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" and we have not. The truth of the matter is; all of us are guilty of trespasses, for we have not kept God's law perfectly.

The second word, translated here simply as **"SINS"** (Greek, *harmartiais*) means "falling short of the mark." It is used of an arrow that lands short of its intended target. It means failing to meet the required standard -- God's perfect standard of holiness. Jesus said **"You therefore must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect"** (Matt. 5:48). However, in Romans 3:23, Paul tells clearly that **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** This applies to all of us. We are not the people that God intended us to be — we fall short, way short of the glory of God.

Question 14 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks "What is sin?" Answer: Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God."

"Sin hath the devil for its father, shame for its companion, and death for its wages." (Thomas Watson)

"Sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, and the contempt of His love." (John Bunyan)

Sin — unbelief, distrust, and rejection of God as well as the removal of God as the center of all reality. Sin is a purposeful disobedience to God's will as evidenced in thought or act. It is an inherent part of the human condition. Sin is universal and is both corporate and individual. RC. Sproul called sin "cosmic treason". Sin is a return to the mindset of Adam and Eve in the Garden telling God that they know better. Sin is something done and not done but is more than acts or inactions! There is an *is-ness* to sin, sinfulness, and sinners. Post-fall our very being, our nature, has no desire to love God and enjoy Him. Rather we use God and thereby abuse Him! In ourselves every individual is pro-self and anti-God. Sin has polluted our very being including our thoughts and desires. We sin because we are sinners, even saved ones! When a person sins, the sinner has chosen against God, for Satan and for self.

This is heart, and often times brain, motivated which has in turn become a patterned way of life! Disobedience is one aspect of this rebellion and distrust is another. That is, disobedience and distrust are linked just as trust and obedience are linked together.

SIN IS DEATH

“FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH” (Romans 6:23).

The Bible teaches that God made mankind good, without SIN. That is, initially, Adam and Eve were sinless — no sinfulness and sinning! The fall of man into sin is clearly set forth in chapter 3 of Genesis. In Genesis 2:17 God is revealed a forbidding Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, on pain of the punishment of death.

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying: “.....of the tree of the knowledge of God and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

When the devil tempted our first parents so that they broke this command and sinned for the first time, the curse of death fell upon our race. Paul explains this is Romans 5:12-14: **“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned — for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not, like the first transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one to come.”** These verses include, sin, misery, and death. These verses plus Romans 6:23 teach clearly that life in sin is a cursed world among sinners and within a person explains the hardness and complexity of life. This is part of the bad news!!!

This raises an important question: **“HOW SINFUL ARE WE APART FROM JESUS CHRIST? WHAT EFFECT HAS THE FALL INTO SIN HAD ON MANKIND?”**

IS MAN WELL, SICK, OR DEAD?

Throughout the entire history of the human race there have been only 3 basic answers to that question.

1. Man is WELL.

The first view sees people as basically alright. They are okay. In other terms we might say that they are well or healthy, as opposed to being sick or dead. These individuals assert that, although human nature is not as healthy as it should be, it is only slightly flawed and will get better over time.

2. Man is SICK.

The second view is that man is not well; he is sick, even mortally sick. There is indeed something wrong with human beings, but it is not as hopeless as one might think. There is hope. This view is strongly held by many evangelicals today. This is the view of

Arminianism, so named for the 16th century theologian Jacob Arminius. Jacob insisted that while man has certainly been corrupted by sin, his fallen condition is not so bad as to render him incapable of cooperation in salvation. Often the analogy will be made of man who is drowning at sea. He is being beaten by the waves and drug down by the current and is taking in water at great amounts. He needs a rescue boat to come along and throw him a lifeline. However, even in this state of weakness, in order to be saved, he must grab hold of the lifeline. The lifeline in this analogy is God's grace, without which the man would drown. But, notice, the man still retains some small power, and he must exercise it in order to be saved (he has to grab hold of the line himself). The argument then goes ... man's exercising of his own free will is the key to salvation.

3. Man is DEAD.

The third view, the biblical view, which Paul states so clearly in our passage,

agrees that man is not well. Rather, it asserts that man is DEAD. DEAD so far as his relationship to God is concerned. He is dead in trespasses and sin (v.1), just as God said he would be in Eden before Adam's fall. Therefore, fallen man is spiritually dead in darkness despite being physically alive.

This view is held by Reformed theology, also associated with the great ancient theologian Augustine, and is sometimes called Calvinism, for the Protestant Reformer John Calvin. I call it BIBLICAL.

This is the Bible's teaching about men and women in sin. We are not well, not even sick, we are spiritually dead. We are alive to sin — for sin, for Satan and against God. We actively pursue self in place of God. We are arrogant and ignorant; our lives are fostered by rebellion. In other words, we understand that Paul does not mean that we lack, biological life: we still walk and talk, eat, drink, work and play. But we do all this in the realm of sin, we are dead to the things of God. We are like spiritual corpses unable to make a single move toward God. A spiritually dead person cannot respond to God's Word: they have no comprehension; when the Gospel is offered, they don't respond, they cannot respond Or desire to respond in a God-honoring way. D.M. Lloyd-Jones in his work, *God's Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2*, is very helpful here. He writes:

"The man who is not a Christian finds the Bible very boring, and expositions of the Bible very boring. He does not find films boring, he does not find the newspaper boring, he does not find novels boring; but he finds these things boring. He does not enjoy conversations about the soul and about life and death and heaven and God and the Lord Jesus Christ. He cannot help it, but he just sees nothing in it and he is not interested. He is interested in men and their appearance, and in what they have done and in what they have said, the world and its affairs appeal to him tremendously. The position is perfectly simple; these other things are spiritual, they are God's things, and that kind of man sees nothing in them. Why? Because he is "dead" and has no spiritual life" (p.19).

This is the state of man until he or she is brought to spiritual life by Christ's resurrection power — dead, spiritually dead to the things of God and unable to do anything about it!!!

Doctrinally speaking, the matter in question is in regard to the human will. Man is free to choose. His will is an expression of himself. People ask: is man and his will free to choose God, even in a fallen state? Some Christians believe man is free to choose. Others argue that he is unable to choose God, being bound by sin. This matter of the will of man has been debated throughout the history of the Christian church. However, it is interesting to note that, the church has always come out on the side of what Martin Luther called the will's bondage. That is to say, the church has always asserted and affirmed that apart from the grace of God in regeneration no one will ever willingly turn to God or embrace the offer of salvation. Sin holds us captive. Instead of turning to God we run from Him. **NOTE: NO OTHER VIEW DOES JUSTICE TO WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES CONCERNING THE RADICAL NATURE OF SIN AND THE TOTALITY OF GRACE IN SALVATION.**

By Nature, We Are All Walking Corpses

According to Paul this is the universal condition of mankind apart from the saving grace of God. You may pass as good and respectable in the eyes of men, but in the sight of God ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. None seek righteousness, no not one, and apart from Christ, all are DEAD in SIN.

In verse 3 Paul tells us why all are dead in sin: it is our nature. We were “by nature children of wrath,” meaning that we deserve God’s just punishment. You see — this is what we are told about our very nature. This is why we are all dead in trespasses since the fall. Since the fall (recorded in Genesis 3) each one of us by nature are corrupted by sin.

We are sinners not because we sin; we sin because we are by nature sinners.

Remember, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they did not immediately die physically. God would have been perfectly just in permitting the physical death of both Adam and Eve immediately after they disobeyed; He delayed the result of the curse. More importantly, they DIED SPIRITUALLY. This is seen clearly in their response as they were naked and ashamed, running and hiding from God. Death entered into man’s nature as moral and spiritual corruption. And this has been our problem — this condition has been

passed to us. The doctrine here presented is the doctrine of original sin. Original sin refers to Adam's covenantal unfaithfulness in the Garden. It does refer to Adam's subsequent sins. Original is the consequence of that sin upon mankind. God judged mankind in Adam. As a result mankind entered into the kingdom of darkness, deadness and depravity. Simply it means that we are born with natures inclined or bent toward evil. John Calvin in his *Sermons on Ephesians*, writes: "*For all of us tend to evil, and we are not only inclined to it, but we are, as it were, boiling hot with it*" (p, 37).

For proof of the truth of the doctrine of original sin — look to your children. King David himself writes: "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). Anyone who has raised a child knows exactly what David was talking about.

This is the great and universal problem of ALL mankind. Our problem (whether you are in America, Africa, India, or Australia) is not ignorance, a lack of education. Our problem is not a bad environment whether it be in a home with plenty to eat or a refugee camp suffering from hunger pains; being by nature spiritually dead sinners, we are the ones that ruin every good environment. Our problem is not a lack of money. Our greatest problem is this: (apart from Christ) we are dead to God, spiritually dead, dead to the Word of God without hope and peace and happiness and every other good thing. We are walking corpses and we cannot escape our guilty and corrupt nature unless we are saved by God's grace.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE DEAD IN SIN:

What does it mean to be dead in sin? Paul tells us in verse 3, that sin reduces us to our passions, our desires. Several key words are important here, the first is the word translated "lived" (Greek, *anestrapemen*) which actually denotes a lifestyle. Paul is saying that sinfulness is best characterized by a certain way of life. The second key word is translated "passions" (Greek, *epithymiais*). This could also be translated as "lusts." What Paul is asserting here is this — Man, in sin, lives according to the passions and desires of his sinful nature — the lusts of his flesh. Man is an arrogant and ignorant enemy of God. He is a God-hater and lover of self. Experience itself reveals clearly how sin reduces men and women to animal cravings.

Paul also says that we are “carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.” Literally this reads, “doing the will of the flesh and the mind. By “mind” Paul wants us to understand our thoughts — in this case our evil thoughts. People boast of their “free-will.” But what Paul knows and we must understand is that outside of Christ our wills — thoughts, desires, and actions are bound and governed by our sinful nature. We have a will, but apart from Christ, it is always enslaved to our desires. Paul explains this further in Ephesians 4. He writes:

“They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity” (Eph.4:18-19).

Finally, as if it could not get any worse, Paul says that in our sin we are “by nature objects of God’s wrath” (v.3). The worldly mind does not take God’s wrath seriously because it does not take sin seriously. Yet, the Bible teaches clearly that God judges both sin and the sinner. People say that God hates the sin and loves the sinner. That is true in so far as God offers salvation to sinners in Jesus Christ. But in the end, on that great day of God’s final judgment it will not only be sins but sinners who are cast into the pit of hell.

God’s holiness demands that His wrath be poured out on sin. Christ Himself proved this on the cross when God the Father poured out His full wrath upon His only begotten Son. How horrific will it be then for those on that day who bear their own sins, not having them forgiven through the precious blood of Christ? Therefore, to be dead in sins is to suffer eternal death, eternal condemnation and judgment in the wrathful hands of an angry God.”

The Importance of Talking About Sin

According to Paul, for us to properly understand the salvation that God offers through Christ, we must address and discuss the subject of sin. Why? Paul insists that the only way to understand properly and receive salvation is to admit and confess our sin. This is our point of entry. We do not talk about sin in order to put people down. We talk about sin in order to set people on the path of God’s saving grace. You must hear the bad news to appreciate and correctly respond to the Good News!

The Bible itself talks constantly about sin. And, as a preacher myself, I

know that sinners don't want to talk about sin. However, the subject of sin forces us to speak of sinners. Sin is one thing: sinning and sinners are another. As sinners, even forgiven ones, we all deal with the issue of sin enough and could use more good news in our lives. But imagine going to the doctor because you have been terribly sick. Imagine going into his office and sitting up on the examining table and the doctor proceeds to examine you thoroughly. He runs all kind of test and labs and takes x-rays and scans and then after an hour or so he comes in and says to you here take this for the next 14 days and let's see if you feel better. Notice he does not discuss with you why you are sick or what is making you sick. You have no idea what he is giving you to "see" if you might feel better. You do not have any understanding of how serious your condition might be, you are at a loss. What would you think about this medical doctor? I can assure you I would have a number of questions and if they were not answered satisfactorily, I would find another doctor quickly. The same is true in the church — **pastor it is your duty to talk about SIN and SINNERS.** It may seem more beneficial and even popular amongst your congregation to provide some relief from the misery and discomfort produced by sin — yours and others. The problem is a wrong view of sinners and sin only complicates the misery experienced!!only the truth sets you free. Preachers can attempt to be funny and tug on the heart strings of their listeners by sharing with them a host of sentimental stories. However, both doctors and preachers would be failing their patients and pew sitters. It is better to see someone's sin conquered, overcome, and removed then it is to be popular and see your people die. **Pastor faithful preaching of the Word of God does not shrink back from pointing out the problem of SINNERS and SIN!!!**

The church of Jesus Christ is about salvation, and salvation insist that we face the facts about our spiritual condition. Sin is the greatest problem you or I could have and as men or women we have no solution.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE SOLUTION TO OUR SIN PROBLEM:

Here is the good news: **Jesus Christ has conquered our sin problem by dying on the cross in our place and paying in full the debt our sin owed. Moreover, He offers salvation to all who will come, confess their need, and believe on Him. He offers life for those dead, peace for those in chaos, and life everlasting for those doomed for hell!!!**

Additionally, we who have come to saving faith, who have been delivered from the bondage of our sin debt, need to hear about sin and continuing to sin in order that we might remember the love of God in our salvation and to awaken our love toward Him.

You see, in Christ, we can be born again (John 3), and enter a new life in which we no longer desire to serve our own passions and cravings but rather serve a new master with a new nature that craves His holy passions.

How does this happen? It happens by coming in our sin and death to Christ Jesus. By confessing that you have been dead in trespasses and held captive by the desires of your flesh, and that you deserve God's just punishment for your sin. Then it means placing your faith and trust in Jesus and His work on the cross on your behalf and then in His promise to send the Holy Spirit to make you spiritually alive forever.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“Truly, truly, ‘Jesus said, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life’ (John 5:24).

