

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW

Lesson 16

Sin: It's Nature & Character

INTRODUCTION

Mark Driscoll, in his book *Doctrine*, begins the chapter on the Fall of man with this statement...

“Something has gone terribly wrong. And everyone knows it.”(page 145)

REVIEW: In the last 3 lessons we have looked at...

(1) Our sanctification, that is, the process of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. This included a look at what happens when a Christian sins and the importance of confession.

(2) The creation of man, that man is God's special creation made in His image.

(3) Man's fall, that he chose to disobey God and brought sin into the human race.

So, we have seen the origin of sin but what about its effects?

Today we will further explore the nature & character of sin and the extent to which everything “has gone terribly wrong”.

[TEACHERS: This lesson is going to appear a bit negative and gloomy. But, herein lies the problem: we would rather think happy thoughts than learn clear, Biblical truth. We tend to minimize and excuse sin especially in our own lives. If we minimize sin then we minimize what Jesus did when He died on the cross for our sin - we feel we really were not that bad. So – be confident as you teach your class about sin – they need to know these truths!]

THE NEED FOR THIS STUDY

As we begin you may be asking, “Why do we need to study sin? I come to church and this class to be lifted up & encouraged, not to be torn down.” This is a legitimate question. Here's why we need to study and understand sin...

1. The Bible devotes quite a bit of material to sin, its nature and consequences. In fact, there are approximately 700 Bible verses in which the word sin or a similar word appears! If the topic is that important to God, then we need to know about it and understand it.
2. Our tendency is to be casual about sin, especially in our own lives. We tend to minimize and excuse sin which can eventually lead to disaster.
3. We will not fully appreciate what Jesus did for us in dying for our sin until we see how bad sin is and how bad off we were.

ILLUSTRATION: If you went to the doctor and he diagnosed you as having cancer, it would not be logical for you to accuse him of “tearing you down” or being negative. Sure, it is bad news but it is critical info that you need so that you can deal with it accordingly in getting treatment. We all have a disease called sin. It is serious and deadly. Rather than deny it we need to understand it and arrive at the remedy.

I. WHAT IS SIN?

Definitions are always helpful. The Bible uses several words for sin to show its different aspects...

1. A break in relationship/fellowship with God. This is what initially happened in Genesis 3 as we looked at last week. Adam and Eve hid from God and were afraid of God.
2. Disobedience. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's instructions (Genesis 3).
3. To go astray, sin unintentionally – Numbers 15:28.
4. Transgression, to step over the line, out of bounds – Psalm 32:1.
5. Iniquity, a perversion or distortion - Psalm 32:2.
6. Deceit, fraud – Psalm 32:2.
7. Error, failure – Leviticus 19:17; Matthew 1:21
8. To miss the mark – Psalm 32:1 and Romans 3:23, fall short of the glory of God.
9. Rebellion against God – Exodus 32-34, the people rebelled while God gave them the 10 Commandments thru Moses.
10. Lawlessness – 1 John 3:4.
11. Anything that is not of faith is sin, violating one's own conscience – Romans 14:23.

Sin includes both omission – where we do not do what we should; and commission – in which we do what we should not have done. As Dr. Charles Ryrie states in his book *Major Bible Themes*, “Good omitted means wrong committed.” (page 111)

Sin includes our thoughts, words, deeds and motives.

Mark Driscoll in his book *Doctrine*, states it in this way,

“The Bible uses a constellation of images to explain sin as everything from rebellion to folly, self-abuse, madness, treason, death, hatred, spiritual adultery, missing the mark, wandering from the path, idolatry, insanity, irrationality, pride, selfishness, blindness, deafness, a hard heart, a stiff neck, delusion, unreasonableness, and self-worship.” (page 149)

POINT: Once we truly understand the concept of sin and its many aspects, we understand that we have sinned and are sinners!

II. WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN?

1. As we have already seen with Adam & Eve: a break in fellowship with God. With them, they had perfect fellowship, it was ruined and they could never return to that state of innocence. For us, as believers, our fellowship is broken and must be restored through confession of sin (1 John 1:9).

2. Also with Adam & Eve: guilt and shame. They hid from God. When a believer sins, God's hand remains heavy on him, convicting him of sin - John 16:8; Psalm 32:3-4. Guilt can be a "canary in the coal mine" to warn us and protect us from further sin.
3. Death: both physical and spiritual – Genesis 3:3, 19; Romans 5:12. Spiritual death beyond this life means judgment and an eternity separated from God in hell – Matthew 5:22; Luke 16:23; John 3:36.
4. Increased pain in childbirth – Genesis 3:16.
5. Increased difficulty in work, tilling the ground, etc. – Genesis 3:17-19. But remember, work in and of itself is not part of the curse.
6. For the believer: discipline from the Lord – Hebrews 12:4-8.
7. Earthly consequences. This would include a variety of things such as financial difficulty, disease, psychological problems, loss of job, jail time, etc. We may be forgiven by the Lord but there are still earthly consequences.

ILLUSTRATION: If I run a red light and get pulled over - I confess it to God and am forgiven because of what Christ has done for me. But, I broke the law and still have to pay the fine!

III. I'M REALLY NOT THAT BAD

Thus far, with all of this info on sin, you are probably a bit defensive thinking, "Gee, am I really that bad? I mean, it's not like I've ever killed anybody. I don't cheat on my taxes, don't kick my dog, I attend church, don't smoke, etc. I'm a good guy!"

This is the problem I mentioned at the beginning of this lesson. Our tendency is to minimize our sin, to overlook it or to excuse it. Some do this by comparing themselves to others so that theirs appear minor and somehow less sinful. We can always find someone who is a bigger sinner than we are. When we do this we are playing games with God and fooling ourselves.

Of course, some sins are worse than others. It doesn't mean that we are all mass murderers. People like Hitler and Stalin were very bad dudes who were responsible for the deaths of millions of people. However, here is the way to think about it: we are not as bad as we could be but we are as bad off as we could be. Romans 3:23 plainly says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". All means all. The best person you can think of (Mother Theresa, Billy Graham) may be a very good person but they are still sinners in need of a Savior.

So, don't compare yourself to Hitler or Billy Graham – compare yourself to Jesus. He did not sin; we do.

ILLUSTRATION #1 – Remember when you were in school and you took a really hard test? I certainly do. In that case I would pray that the teacher would grade on the curve – an 80 was an A, 70 was a B, a 60 was a C, etc. But, there always seemed to be a smart kid who made a 99 and broke the curve. Well, God does not grade on the curve! We either make a perfect 100 or we fall short of the glory of God. James 2:10 says that if we break one of God's Laws we are guilty of all. There is simply no wiggle room.

ILLUSTRATION #2 – The world record in the long jump is 29 feet, 5.5 inches held by Mike Powell. Let's say that I challenge Mike to a contest in the long jump but here's the deal: we are both going to try to jump across the Grand Canyon. Will Mike jump farther than I? Absolutely. Will either of us come

close to jumping across the canyon? Not hardly. We will both end up at the bottom. Are some people better than others? Sure. Is anyone perfect and sinless like Jesus Christ? Not hardly.

Again – we are not as bad as we could be but we are as bad off as we could be. We are sinners, we cannot save ourselves; we cannot be good enough and we do not deserve heaven. We need a Savior.

IV. SIN: THE SOLUTION

Now that we have studied the extent and seriousness of our sin, we can more fully appreciate what Jesus did for us.

As we studied in Lessons 8 and 11, we are saved by grace (free gift) through faith (trust) in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's review the key points and terms...

- **Atone:** to make amends as far as sin or fault.
- **Atonement:** reconciliation between God and man brought about by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"...in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin."

Baptist Faith and Message, page 8

- **Matthew 1:21** – before He was even born, an angel told His earthly father, Joseph, that he was to name the baby Jesus, "for He will save His people from their sins." The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew which means "Jehovah saves" or "Jehovah is salvation".
- **1 Corinthians 15:1-8** – verse 3 says He "died for our sins according to the Scriptures".
- **2 Corinthians 5:21** – the "He" is the Father; "Him who knew no sin" is Jesus Christ who was sinless. He became sin on our behalf – He took our sin on Himself.
- **1 Peter 2:24** – this is as crystal clear as it gets. He bore our sins in His body. It has been called "the exchanged life" – Jesus exchanged His righteousness for our sin and took our sin on Himself.

[TEACHERS: Close with an evangelistic appeal to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Remember, you could have had people join your class since you taught on salvation.]

Next Week: We will look at our 3 enemies – the world, the flesh and the devil.