Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Sin, and What to Do About It

Scripture: Deuteronomy 12:3; 2 Samuel 11:5–17; Psalm 19:12–13; Psalm 32:3–4; Proverbs 24:29; Proverbs 30:12; Isaiah 1:4–6; Isaiah 6:3; Jeremiah 13:23; Ezekiel 24:13; Matthew 23:27; Romans 6:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; James 1:21; 1 Peter 3:9; 1 John 1:5
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On January 16, 2003, the space shuttle Columbia lifted off for what was supposed to be a routine flight. Shortly after lift-off a piece of insulating foam from the shuttle's external fuel tanks broke off and struck Columbia's left wing. This action was caught on video, but it was presumed that no serious damage had occurred. However, serious damage had occurred. The foam from the fuel tanks punctured the wing's thermal protection system.

The seriousness of the damage became evident when Columbia reentered the earth's atmosphere on February 1. The damaged wing was no longer protected from the extreme heat caused during reentry. The shuttle disintegrated in midair killing all seven astronauts. NASA's failure to correctly assess the damage prevented it from taking action that could have avoided the devastating results.

Mankind faces a similar but even more tragic situation. Shortly after creation, Adam sinned. With Adam as the head, the whole human race fell under God's condemnation. Sin now rules every unregenerate heart, and if it had its way, it would destroy and damn every soul.

What Does God Think About Your Sin?

If you refuse to see your sin as God does, you cannot escape His eternal judgment. If you want to deny your guilt or hide your own sinfulness, you'll never discover the cure for sin. And if you try to justify your sin, you'll forfeit the justification of God. Until you understand how offensive your sin is before God, you can never know Him.

Sin is abominable to God-He hates it (cf. Deuteronomy 12:31). Sin is contrary to His nature (Isaiah 6:3; 1 John 1:5). It stains the soul and degrades humanity's nobility. Scripture calls sin "filthiness" (Proverbs 30:12; Ezekiel 24:13; James 1:21) and likens it to a putrefying corpse-sinners are the tombs that contain stench and foulness (Matthew 23:27). The ultimate penalty-death-is the consequence of sin (Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Romans 6:3). The human race is in bad shape.

God wants you to understand how bad sin is and how terrifying its consequences are. You dare not take sin lightly or dismiss your own guilt frivolously. Quite the contrary-you should hate sin.

But sin tempts the best of saints, and even the godliest among us commit sin. David was a man who followed after God with all his heart (1 Kings 14:8); and yet he entered into temptation and committed unimaginable sin-adultery, deception, betrayal, and murder. And until God confronted David through the prophet Nathan, David denied his sin. That's the natural tendency of every fallen sinner.

What Do You Think About Your Sin?

If a man of David's caliber can fall so terribly, where does that leave you and me? If you're honest, you'll admit that you sometimes love your sin, delight in it, and seek opportunities to act it out. You

know instinctively you are guilty before a holy God, yet you inevitably attempt to camouflage or disavow your sinfulness. In a word, you *deny* it, just like David did.

Like the rest of fallen humanity, your denial of sin falls into three general categories: you seek to cover it up, you try to justify yourself, and, most often, you are oblivious to your sin.

First, *you try to cover up.* That's what King David tried to do when he sinned against Uriah. He had committed adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. When she became pregnant, David first plotted to make it seem as if Uriah was the father of the baby (2 Samuel 11:5-13). When that didn't work, he schemed to have Uriah killed (2 Samuel 11:14-17). That only compounded his sin.

For all the months of Bathsheba's pregnancy, David continued to cover his sin (2 Samuel 11:27). Later, when David repented, he confessed, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer" (Psalm 32:3-4).

Second, *you attempt to justify yourself.* Adam blamed Eve, whom he described as "the woman whom *You* gave to be with me" (Genesis 3:12, emphasis added). In blaming Eve, Adam was blaming God too. God, he reasoned, was responsible for the woman who victimized him.

You also try to excuse your wrongdoing by saying it's someone else's fault. Or you argue that you have a valid reason for sin. You convince yourself that it's OK to return evil for evil (cf. Proverbs 24:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9). You can call sin a sickness, a mental condition, or a hormone imbalance; you can excuse yourself as a victim; you can even deny what you've done is really wrong. Your sinful heart is endlessly creative in finding ways to justify its own evil.

Third, *you can be oblivious to your own sin.* Whether in ignorance or presumption, you sin, and you sin *often.* That's why David prayed, "Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins" (Psalm 19:12-13). It's those "hidden faults" that God sees in plain daylight, and they are just as offensive to Him as the "presumptuous sins." Because sin is so pervasive, you naturally tend to be insensitive to your own sin, just as a skunk is impervious to its own odor.

What Are You Going to Do About Your Sin?

Sin is a horrible malignancy for which there is no human cure. It is an incurable leprosy of the soul (Isaiah 1:4-6), and all humanity is sick with it from top to bottom, inside and out.

As a sinner, you cannot improve your own condition. Jeremiah 13:23 says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil." Your tears and sorrow can't atone for your sin. Your "good" deeds can't make amends for your wrong against God. Your prayers and personal devotion can't soften your guilt or cover it in any way.

And don't buy into the erroneous concept of purgatory-the fires of hell over a million lifetimes could never purify the soul from its own corruption or atone for its own sin. If you are looking for a do-it-yourself solution to the problem of sin, you only shackle yourself all the more securely to your guilt.

But there *has* to be a solution to our problem; there *must* be a way God can satisfy His perfect

righteousness and still display His rich mercy toward sinners. I'm delighted to tell you that there is a solution to the human sin problem-it's called the Gospel. The cross of Christ provided the way to God by enabling the only acceptable Sacrifice to atone for human sin once for all.

Our Lord, the sinless One, was the Lamb of God offered as a perfect sacrifice for sin (John 1:29)-it was the very purpose for which He came. "You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Isaiah prophesied, "Surely *our* griefs He Himself bore, and *our* sorrows He carried...He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for *our* well-being fell upon Him" (Isaiah 53:4-5, emphasis added).

Jesus Christ "offered Himself without blemish to God" to cleanse *our* consciences (Hebrews 9:14). He paid the penalty to the fullest on *our* behalf. All the sins of everyone who believes are imputed to Christ, and He *died* for them. Jesus then rose from the dead to declare His victory over sin and death-"[He] was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Furthermore, God reckons all believers righteous in Christ-He accounts Christ's righteousness to the believer. That's the truth taught in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

God redeems those who believe and makes them new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). If you are a believer, you know what I'm talking about. God gave you an entirely new nature, including a love for righteousness and hatred for sin.

If you're unsure of your salvation, reading this should bring you to the point of despair. What can you possibly do to change your hopeless condition? Nothing. You are utterly dependent on God's mercy. But if the cry of your heart is something akin to that of the Philippian jailer who said, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30), take heart-the Spirit of God is *already* working in you! Here is Jesus' clear and concise command to the troubled sinner: "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

To *repent* is to "turn away from all your transgressions" (Ezekiel 18:30). It means confessing and forsaking your iniquities (Proverbs 28:13), and completely hating your sin (2 Corinthians 7:11). If repentance stresses turning *away from* sin and self, believing emphasizes what to turn *toward*-"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31).

You can't lay hold of Christ while still clinging to your sin. Unless you pry your heart from the passing pleasures of sin, you'll never see God. God's salvation from the flames of an eternal hell involves a glorious liberation from the control of sin.

That's good news! You *can* be set free from sin's dominion of your life. Take hold of Christ, and take this gospel offer seriously. It may be your last opportunity!

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