

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

Man's Biggest Problem

Scripture: Matthew 5:29-30

Code: 2217

We're looking in our studies at the 5th chapter of Matthew, and tonight I want to use that as a beginning point, a starting point for what's on my heart to say to you.

Matthew chapter 5, and I want to read to you verses 27 through 30. Our Lord says, Matthew 5:27, "Ye have heard that it was said, thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

Now we've been looking at this passage. Tonight will really be the third message dealing with this general passage. Next Sunday night, we're going to be sharing in the Communion Table, and the following Sunday night we're going to begin a series on verses 31 and 32 on divorce and remarriage. But for tonight, I want to share with you just one more message related to this particular theme.

Now you'll notice that in this passage our Lord is condemning not only the act of adultery, but the very thought of evil; as in verses 21 and 22 of the same chapter where He condemned not only murder but even hatred and anger, dealing with the internal attitude as much as the external act. And in fact, what our Lord is doing throughout this part of the Sermon on the Mount is giving us an insight into the definition of sin. Sin is not only a matter of what we do, it is a matter of what we think. It is not only a matter of an action; it is a matter of an attitude.

Now our Lord in the passage is speaking to the Jews of His day, who felt that they in themselves were righteous. They felt that they were good enough to be in God's kingdom without God's help. They felt that they didn't need a Messiah, they did not need a Savior, they did not need someone to die for their sins because they felt they had been able to handle that on their own.

And the reason they were doing so well is because they really didn't understand the problem. They thought they were righteous, but that was only because they had an inadequate view of sin. Had they known how deep sin really is, had they understood how pervasive sin is, they would have known there was no possible way that they could have ever been made righteous on their own.

And so the fact of their self-righteousness really grew out of the fact that they had an inadequate doctrine of sin. And so in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus Christ gives us a comprehensive view of sin. So that we will understand the depths of the problem of man and we'll come in desperation to God's only cure, in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now most pointedly in verses 21-48 of Matthew 5, Jesus destroys their self-righteousness. Jesus lets them see the truth about sin so there's no way for them to believe they're really righteous. They thought it was only externals, but He shows them it's much deeper than that. And as we have been studying this, I have been literally overwhelmed with the tremendous emphasis Jesus places on the sinfulness of sin, just how deep it is and how broad it is and how encompassing it is. And so I have decided tonight to share with you as best I can an overview of the whole problem of the sin of man.

Now as I mentioned this morning, in this week's issue of Newsweek magazine, President Carter said the greatest issue facing man today is the SALT talks, Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. But I think he's wrong. The greatest problem facing man today has nothing to do with weapons. It has nothing to do with war. It has nothing to do with nuclear factors. The greatest problem facing man today is the greatest problem facing man in all of his history. It is sin. That's the problem.

And in the text before us, our Lord is giving us several perspectives on sin. First of all, in the very passage I just read, we see the depth of sin. And that is not only an act, it is an attitude. It is much deeper than just committing adultery. It is even looking on a woman to lust after her. And so our Lord shows us the depth of sin.

Also, I think we see here the deceit of sin, that it's never as simple as it looks. Sin would like to make us think that if we're highly respectable on the outside, we're all right. Jesus shows us that you could be highly respectable on the outside and be rotten on the inside.

We see not only the depth and the deceit of sin, but we see the destructiveness of sin. Our Lord is showing us that sin will cast someone into hell. At the end of verse 29 He says it, and at the end of verse 30. Sin is so severe that the ultimate end of sin is to cast people into an eternal hell.

This is the destructiveness of sin. So serious is it that we would be better to maim ourselves if that would prevent it. We would be better to deal with ourselves in a very harsh and brutal way to prevent sin because of what sin can do.

And so our Lord shows us the depth, and the deceit, and the destructiveness of sin. And really this is just one part of a broad picture in this passage where our Lord is showing how really sinful man is. And if I sound like I'm speaking a lot about this, you'll have to pardon me because I'm picking my cues up from Christ.

Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman told of a distinguished minister from Australia who preached very strongly one day on the subject of sin. And after the service, one of the church officers came to counsel with him in his study. And he said, "Doctor Howard, we don't want you to talk as openly as you do about man's corruption. Because if our boys and girls hear you discussing the subject, they'll more easily become sinners. Call it a 'mistake' or something, if you will. But don't speak so plainly about sin."

The minister took down a small bottle from the cabinet and showed it to the visitor and said, "Do you see that label?" The man said, "Yes. It says 'strychnine,' and underneath that in bold red letters is the word 'poison.'"

"Do you know, man, what you are asking me to do? You're suggesting that I change the label. Suppose I do and paste over it the words, 'essence of peppermint.' Do you see what might happen? Someone would use it not knowing the danger involved and would die. And so it is, too, with the matter of sin. The milder you make the label, the more dangerous you make the poison." And so we cannot mitigate the danger of sin. We must speak of the issue.

Chrysostom, the early church Father, said, "I fear nothing but sin." I understand that because that's exactly how I feel. I don't fear anything in the world, anything in the church, anything at all but sin. That's all. Just sin. Sin will destroy us, rob us of our power, confuse us, cast us upon the mercy of Satan, and ultimately sin damns the unregenerate to an eternal hell.

You don't have to really be very astute to figure out that the greatest problem facing man is not the arms race. The greatest problem facing man, the one great blight on human life, the great phenomena that curses us all is sin. It pervades the whole world. It is the blight of the universe. And by the way, it is only when sin is removed that paradise can be regained.

And that's why we find toward the end of the book of Revelation, and even in Second Peter chapter 3, that God has to do a work of purging the whole universe of evil if ever there is to be paradise regained. Because of sin there are tears. Because of sin there is pain. Because of sin there is war. Because of sin there is fighting. Because of sin there is anxiety. Because of sin there is discord and unrest and fear and worry and sickness and death and famine and earthquake and weeds and pollution and every other bad thing.

Sin disturbs every relationship that exists in the human realm. And by the way, there are only three: man and God, man and nature, and man and man. And all of them have been destroyed by sin. You read Genesis 3 and the curse came, violating the relation between man and God, man and nature, and man and man.

First of all, man was separated from God. He died spiritually. Secondly, man was separated in a sense from nature insofar as he had to toil by the sweat of his brow, and he had to fight against a cursed earth. And man was separated from man as we see in the very curse upon Adam and Eve, bringing conflict in their own marriage.

And sin has generated cosmic chaos. We find there is even chaos going on between the holy angels and the fallen angels who are known as the demons. Sin waits in lurking to attack every baby born into the world, beginning at conception. David said, "In sin did my mother conceive me." Sin rules every heart. Sin is the monarch of man. Sin is the king of humanity. Sin is the lord of the soul, and nobody ever escapes.

All who die in childbirth, all who die from heart disease, cancer, war, murder, accidents, old age, or whatever, die as a victim of sin. "For the wages of sin is" - What? - "death." Every person on the globe has been infected with the virus of sin. Only one person ever entered this world and passed through it without the stain of sin, and that was Jesus Christ. Every other human being is captured under the fearful power of sin, and sin is a destructive thing.

Sin attacks everyone at birth, and before it's done it degrades, it debases, and it destroys in an eternal hell. Every broken marriage, every disrupted home, every shattered friendship, every argument, every disagreement, every pain, every tear can be attributed to sin. In fact, the Bible in Joshua 7:13 calls it "the accursed thing."

It is compared to the venom of snakes. It is compared to the stench of death. Anything that is sinister and powerful must be faced and dealt with, and sin is such. We cannot ignore it. We cannot gloss it over. We cannot change the label. We must face the reality, and that is exactly what Jesus is saying.

Old Dr. Guthrie wrote, "Who is the hoary sexton that digs man a grave? Who is the painted temptress that steals his virtue? Who is the murderess that destroys his life? Who is the sorceress that first deceives and then damns his soul? It is sin. Who with icy breath blights the fair blossoms of youth? Who breaks the hearts of a parent? Who brings old men's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave? It is sin.

"Who by a more hideous metamorphosis than Ovid even fancied changes gentle children into vipers, tender mothers into monsters, and their fathers into worse than Herods, the murderers of their own innocence? It is sin. Who casts the apple of discord on household hearts? Who lights the torch of war and bares it blazing over trembling lands? Who by division in the church rends Christ's seamless robe? It is sin.

"Who is the Delilah that sings the Nazarite asleep and delivers up the strength of God into the hands of the uncircumcised? Who, winning smiles on her face, honeyed flattery on her tongue, stands in the

door to offer the sacred rites of hospitality, and when suspicion sleeps, treacherously pierces our temples with a nail? What fair siren is this who seated on a rock by a deadly pool smiles to deceive, sings to lure, kisses to betray, and flings her arms around our neck to leap with us into perdition? It is sin.

“Who turns the soft and gentlest heart to stone? Who hurls reason from her lofty throne, and impels sinners mad as Gadarene swine down the precipice into a lake of fire? It is sin.” All of this is true. If it is true, we must understand sin.

I want us to see the answer to five questions. Question number one, What is sin? What is it? Anything this severe needs a definition. We must understand it in order to avoid it. The definition is simple. First John 3:4. Listen. “Sin is the transgression of the law.” That is sin. “Sin is the transgression of the law.” Literally, the Greek is “everyone doing sin is doing lawlessness,” *anomia*. Sin is disobeying, ignoring God’s law.

In fact, the Greek construction of 1 John 3:4 makes sin and lawlessness identical. We might say sin is living as if there was no God and no law. Sin is godlessness, lawlessness. It is not being bound by the standards of God. It is living on your own definition, and by your own terms, and according to your own whims.

Now the Bible gives other definitions of sin. In 1 John 5:17 it says, “All unrighteousness is sin.” In James 4:17, “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” So sin is unrighteousness and sin is not doing the good you know you should do.

In Romans 14:23, we have yet another definition of sin. The apostle Paul says, “For whatever is not of faith is sin.” A lack of faith, an unrighteous act, not doing what you know you ought to do. But it all can be summed up in this. Sin is lawlessness. It is not responding to the law of God. It is going beyond the bounds that God has set.

Man is like a horse in a fat pasture who jumps the hedge and lands in a quagmire. Man lives within the place of God’s green, rich pasture, and he finds that he wants to get out of this, and he leaps the wall, as it were, of God’s law, and he lands in the muck of sin. God has given His law. According to Romans 2, He’s written it in the heart of man. He’s revealed it in the Scripture.

And in Romans 7:12 Paul says, “The law is holy, just, and good.” “Holy, just, and good.” In it there is nothing impure, that’s holy; nothing unfair, that’s just; nothing evil, that’s good. And there is no sane reason to break it because it is the path of blessing, as we saw this morning. But man does it because man seeks to live apart from God’s law. So though we could look at many biblical verses on sin, it’s all summed up. Sin is breaking God’s law.

There's a second question. What is sin like? What is it like? Here we go past the definition, and I want to have you look for a minute at the nature of sin. What is it like? Well, we can best see what it's like by its characteristics.

Number one, and I'll give you several. Sin is defiling. It is defiling. Sin is not only a defection or a disobedience from God's law, but sin is a pollution. It is to the soul what rust is to gold. It is to the soul what scars are to a lovely face. It is to the soul what stain is to white silk cloth. It is to the soul what smog is to an azure blue sky. It makes the soul red with guilt and black with sin. It defiles.

In fact, it is so said in the Old Testament in such graphic terms that we'll never forget them. Isaiah chapter 30 and verse 22: "You shall defile also the covering of your carved images of silver, the ornament of your melted images of gold: thou shalt cast them away like an unclean cloth." And listen, that is used by Isaiah to describe sin. And the term unclean cloth refers in the Hebrew to the bloody cloth from a woman's menstrual period. That's how God sees sin. It's a defiling thing.

In 1 Kings chapter 8 and verse 38, the writer compares the sin of man's heart with sores that come on the body from a deadly plague. In Zechariah 3:3, we find the prophet Zechariah seeing sin as filthy garments on the high priest, Joshua. And over and over again, we find in Scripture that sin is seen as something vile, and something defiling, and something wretched, and something filthy that pollutes that which is pure.

And by the way, it is so defiling that it even makes God loathe the sin. In Zechariah 11:8 it says, "My soul loathed them." Amazing that God should say that. God so despises the defilement of sin that He loathes what it does to the sinner.

And you know something else? In Ezekiel chapter 20 and verse 43 it says that when the sinner sees his sin, he loathes himself. It is so defiling God hates it and so does the sinner. So sin pollutes and defiles everything. The apostle Paul calls it "filthiness of the flesh and spirit" in 2 Corinthians 7:1. So we find that sin is defiling. That's what it's like.

Second, sin is rebellion. It is rebellion. In Leviticus 26:27, God talks about those who "walk contrary to Me." Sin is defying God. It is walking in opposition, walking in rebellion, walking in antagonism to God. It is a sinner trampling on God's law, a sinner affronting God, spiting God, slapping Him in the face, spitting on Jesus Christ.

It is as Hebrews 10 says, "One who knowing the truth willfully tramples under foot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant, by which he was sanctified, an unholy thing." Sin is a flat-out, open, flagrant rebellion.

In fact, you might be interested to know that the Hebrew word for sin, pasha signifies rebellion. That's the Hebrew definition of sin. There is the heart of a rebel in every man and every woman. In Jeremiah 44:17, this is what the people said. "But we will certainly do whatsoever things go forth out of our own mouths." In other words, we'll do exactly what we want. The rebelliousness of sin.

Sin, if it had its way, would murder God. Sin did have its way and murdered Jesus Christ. Sin would not only dethrone God, but un-God God because sin is rebellion. If the sinner had his way, God would cease to be God. Christ would cease to be Christ. Sin is defiling and sin is rebellion.

Thirdly, sin is ingratitude. It is ingratitude. You know that Acts 17:28 says, "That in him we live, and move, and have our being." Do you know the very fact that you live and exist you owe to God? Do you know that everybody who's existing in the world today is a creature made by God for a divine purpose and a divine end? God has so created you to show forth His praise, to grant glory to Himself. God has a purpose for you that is beyond anything you could imagine.

And yet there are people who live in absolute ingratitude, who spite the very face of Jesus Christ, who mock God, who turn their backs on God. Sin is flagrant, violent ingratitude. God has created you for His glory. God has created mankind to dwell in an eternal kingdom of bliss with Him. And man not only doesn't want it, but spites the very One who offers it.

In Matthew 5:45, the Bible says, "God makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, he sends rain on the just and the unjust." If there's any joy in this life, it's because God gave it to you. If there's any sunshine in the life, it's because God put it there. If there's any rain to make your life fresh, it's because God rained it on you. Everything you are is because of God's graciousness.

God's marvelous love is poured out on all men. God isn't responsible for the evil. That's man's rebellion. God is responsible for the good. It is God who has provided all the food the sinner eats. It is God who has provided the delicacies you taste. It is God who has made a world of color and brightness. It is God who has made love and music and all of the things that make life worth living. It is God who has given the senses that you can enjoy. It is God who has granted every beauty your eye ever beheld.

It is God who gave wisdom to your body so that you could think and feel and work and play and rest, and your life might be useful. It is God who made love and laughter. It is God who gave to every individual a special skill and ability to excel in some area. It is God who made man care for each other and enjoy the fellowship of his fellow man. It is God who providentially preserves us from getting every disease and dying every death. It is God who literally surrounds the sinner with mercy.

But it is the sinner who says no, and in flagrant, open rebellion, in disobedience to the laws of God, he defiles himself and acts in an attitude of ingratitude. Like Absalom, Absalom the son of David; David his father had kissed him, and David his father had wrapped his arms around him and taken him to his heart. And immediately from that place where his father had kissed him, and his father had embraced him, Absalom went out and plotted a rebellion against his own father, plotted the assassination of his own father.

And so does the sinner indulge himself in God's grace, and takes the best that the world has to offer, and the best that life and love can bring to him, and then turns his back on God, and walks into the fold of the enemy, Satan, and sets his camp up in that place.

We might ask the same question that is asked in 2 Samuel 16:17. "Is this your kindness to your friend?" The same question that was posed to Judas: "Judas, are you betraying Me with a kiss?" God may ask the sinner, "Did I give you life to sin? Did I give you mercy to serve the devil?"

Sin is such gross ingratitude. It seeks to dethrone and destroy the source of all that it has received. You know even the things the sinners pervert: money, comforts, sexual pleasures - all given by God, twisted, perverted - and they use them even to curse His holy name. The nature of sin? Sin is defiling. It is rebellion. It is ingratitude.

Number four, sin is humanly incurable. Its nature is such that its incurable. Jeremiah 13:23 says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, that are accustomed to evil." If a leopard can change his spots or an Ethiopian change his skin, then you can make good out of bad. But it can't be done. Sin is an incurable disease. Man does not have the resource to deal with it.

In Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 4, "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone way backward. Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot to the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." In other words, man has a horrible, incurable, pervasive disease that cannot be mitigated or dealt with on human terms.

Titus 1:15 says about man, "his conscience is defiled." He's rotten on the inside. And the conscience is given to man to control his behavior. And if that is defiled, the results will be defiled as well. John Flavel said, "All the tears of a penitent sinner, should he shed as many as there have fallen drops of rain since creation, cannot wash away sin. The everlasting burnings in hell cannot purify the flaming conscience from the least sin."

In other words, he is saying sin is incurable. There is no human cure. Not human will, not reformation, not education, not legislation, not talks, conversation, counseling, not self-righteousness. Sin is a disease that is so deep that it can only be cured by the blood of the divine physician, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

What is sin like? We saw what it was, rebellion against God. What is it like? It is defiling, rebellion, ingratitude, and an incurable disease.

That brings us to a fifth aspect of sin. It is hated by God. This is part of its nature. It is the very antithesis of what God is. Now I know this is obvious, but let me just add some thoughts for your thinking.

Sin is the only thing God hates. It is the only thing God hates. It is the only thing He has antagonism against. God doesn't resist a man because he's poor. He especially loves the poor. God doesn't resist a man because he's ignorant. He cares for those. God does not resist a person because he's crippled. He has made the blind and the deaf and the halt. God does not resist a man because he's ill. God does not resist a person because they're despised by the world.

God is antagonistic only to sin. And Habakkuk had it right when he said, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity." In Jeremiah 44:4, God called out to the prophet Jeremiah with tears and a breaking heart, "Oh, do not this abominable thing which I hate." God hates sin. Because sin separates man from God, sin breaks the very thing for which God made man, fellowship. So sin is defiling, rebellion, ingratitude, incurable, and hated by God.

A sixth, sin is hard work. Sin is hard work. All it causes is pain, and yet it amazes me how busy people are doing it. All it does is bring them grief, and death, and hell, but they work at it. Jeremiah 9:5 says, "They weary themselves committing iniquity." "They weary themselves committing iniquity." It's amazing.

In the 19th chapter of Genesis we read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, a city full of those who were homosexuals. Two angels visited Lot. The men of the city saw those two angels, and they burned inside with lust for those two angels, and they were in male bodies. And they wanted to attack the angels. The angels came for lodging in Lot's house.

Lot thought he could solve the problem by sending his daughters out because the men were pounding and beating on the door and surrounding the house. And so he thought he could save the angels by giving up his daughters. He'd certainly rather, in his own thinking, give up a couple of human beings than to sacrifice God's holy angels. He wasn't ready for the consequence of that.

And the angels said, "Don't do it, Lot." And the angels stepped outside and struck the whole crowd stone blind. And then you know what the Bible says? When they went stone blind, they wearied themselves to find the door. Is that incredible? You'd think after they were stone blind, they'd go home and worry about their blindness, if they could find their way home. But instead of that, they were so dominated by the lust of homosexuality that in their blindness they had nothing to think of but breaking the door down to attack those same two beings. That's how hard people work at their evil.

In Psalm 7:14 the Bible says, "Behold, he travails with iniquity." And "travail" is the word used for birth pains, the most severe kind of human pain known to them in that day. They will literally go through birth pains without an anesthetic or anything, the most severe human pain. They would go through that to do their evil. And probably had reference, that psalm does, to David's enemy Cush, who was chasing David, and literally was in pain but wouldn't stop with his evil deed.

In Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 16, "For they sleep not, except they have done mischief." They don't even go to bed unless they've gotten their evil done. They stay awake figuring out their evil. Isaiah talks about it in chapter 5. Jeremiah talks about it. Isaiah again talks about it in chapter 44, how they work hard at doing evil.

Isaiah says, "She has wearied herself telling lies." Or rather, that's Ezekiel, Ezekiel 24. "She has wearied herself telling lies." You know, it's amazing, but people go to hell sweating. They really do. They work hard at being sinners.

What is sin like? It is defiling, rebellion, ingratitude, incurable, hated by God, and it's hard work. That's why the Bible says when you come to Jesus Christ, you rest. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you" - What? - "rest." Rest from what? For one thing, from the work that sin is. What a wretched thing. The evil of sin is wretched, so wretched is it that millions of people are damned by its power. So wretched is it that it took the very death of God Himself in Christ to remove it from the life of man.

A third question. Not only what is sin, and what is sin like, but how many people does sin affect? People always ask this, How many people does sin affect? And the answer is very simple. The answer is all through the Bible. But let me just give you one verse that will help, Romans 5:12. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; even so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." "All have sinned." Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans chapter 3 and verse 19 says, "that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world guilty before God."

Now sin entered the world through one man. Gentiles don't understand that too well, but the Jewish mind understands it. The Jewish mind understands it because Jewish people see themselves not as

an individual, but always as a part of a tribe, or a family, or a nation, and apart from that identity they have no individual existence.

For example in Joshua 7, when Achan sinned, he sinned, you know what happened? His whole family died and the whole nation of Israel failed in their next battle. In other words, he was acting, in a sense, for a family and even for a nation.

In Hebrews chapter 7 and verses 9 and 10 it says that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek in the loins of Abraham. Levi wasn't even alive or even near being alive at the time that Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, but the Jews always see themselves bound up in their ancestry. And so it is as Paul writes in this argument, he is saying when Adam sinned, everybody bound in the loins of Adam, that ever issued out of human life, became sinful.

So Adam's sin is our sin by propagation. Job 14:4 then says, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." You start out with an evil father and an evil mother, you're going to get an evil kid. It's that simple. And it'll go on like that.

Psalms 58:3 says, "The wicked are estranged from the womb." That's the way they're born. Psalm 51:5 I quoted earlier, "In sin did my mother conceive me."

And so not only is the guilt of Adam's sin imputed to us, but the depravity and the corruption of its nature is transmitted to us. The poison goes from the spring to the well to the people that drink. Now that's what theologians call original sin. You don't come into this world any other way than as a sinner.

Now there used to be a big argument about this, and there was a theologian who said, "No. You come into the world with a neutral situation and you can choose to be a sinner or not" - Pelagius. And Augustine had one answer to him. He said, "Find me one who didn't choose sin and I might believe it." He never did find one, never did.

You come into this world as a sinner. We've all sinned in Adam. We've all come short of the glory of God. We've all been born in corruption. We're all Adam's progeny. And as the progeny of Adam, we bear the corruption that he bore. That's why Paul says in Romans 7:25, no matter what I want to do, no matter how strong my will is, "with my flesh I serve the principle of sin." Because it's in my nature. It's woven into the warp and the woof of my life, my existence.

Adam's sin - I like to think of it this way - clings to every man just like Naaman's leprosy clung to Gehazi. Go back and read 2 Kings chapter 5 and see how the leprosy of Naaman clung to Gehazi. And so the leprosy of Adam clings to all those who've followed Adam. Nobody's left out, nobody. And if the roots are this deep, beloved, then it's a real problem.

You know, even when you become a Christian, the roots of sin are still there. Did you know that? Still there. And we still struggle, don't we? Paul says in Romans 7, "The things I want to do I don't do, the things I don't want to do I do. I find this law warring in my members, sin against righteousness." We find in Hebrews chapter 12 that he calls to us and he says, "Run with patience the race that is set before you, lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so" - What? - "easily beset us."

Why is it so easy for sin to beset us? It's so deep in our nature. We're sinners. No one escapes. That is what sin is. That is what sin is like. And that is who is affected by it.

A fourth question. What is the result of sin? What is the result of sin, the real result? What does it bring to bear in our lives? First, sin causes evil to overpower us. Sin causes evil to overpower us. This is its effect. Just to start at the very beginning, "The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately" - What? - "wicked." Jeremiah 17:9. Sin dominates the mind. It dominates the mind. That's what Jeremiah is saying. Sin overpowers the mind.

Ephesians 4:17 says that the "Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, because their understanding is darkened, they are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: they are past feeling, and they give themselves over to lasciviousness." In other words, they are dominated in their minds. Their whole mind is dominated by evil. That's why it says, "The natural man understandeth not the things of God: to him they are foolishness, because they are spiritually discerned." And he's spiritually dead, 1 Corinthians 2:14. Evil dominates the mind.

Secondly, evil dominates the will. Jeremiah 44 I read to you earlier. We will certainly do that which is in our hearts to do, we will "do whatever comes out of our mouths." Sin dominates not only how we think, but it dominates what triggers what we do.

Sin even dominates our affections. Oh yes, it does. Sin dominates the things we love. That's why John had to say, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." Because it's so easy for us to be dominated by sin. And the Bible says in John 3:19, "that light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

So sin dominates the affections. Sin dominates the will. Sin dominates the mind. And ultimately, if your mind and your will and your affections are dominated by evil, your behavior will be evil. That's original sin. It's like the tree in Daniel chapter 4 and verse 23. Though the branches were cut down and the main trunk was cut, the stump and the root remains. And even though you became a Christian, and a lot of that was whacked off, the stump is still there until Jesus comes. And according to John 15, I think the Father is busy pruning off the shoots that keep coming up in our lives as Christians.

The Christian must realize, as well as the non-Christian, that sin is so deep in our nature it's like a sleeping lion and the least thing will awaken its rage. Our sin nature smolders like a flaming fire ready to be ignited, and the slightest wind of temptation fans it into flame. And so if you're an unbeliever, you need to run to Jesus Christ to have it covered. And if you're a Christian, you need to be sure you don't do anything to induce it to wake from its sleep. So the first result of sin is that it overpowers us. And a power that can only be broken by Christ.

Second. The second result of sin in our lives is it brings us under the control of Satan. Who wants to be dominated by Satan? Who would ever choose to be dominated by that evil being? And yet the Bible says in Ephesians 2:2 that those who don't know Jesus Christ "walk according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience." You don't know Jesus Christ, Satan is at work in your life.

Jesus said to those religious people gathered around Him in John 8, "You are of your father the devil." In 1 John 5:19, he says, "The whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one." In Romans 6:16 he says, in effect, you're servants to sin and Satan.

And so, what is the effect of sin in our lives? What does it do to us? First of all, it overpowers us so that our thinking, and our feelings, and our will, and our behavior is dominated by it. Secondly, it brings us under the dominion of the evil adversary, Satan. There's no freedom. There's only slavery. There's no liberty. There's only bondage. Only Satan makes you think you're free.

When somebody comes to Jesus Christ, Jesus says, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free for real." Why does He say that? Because Satan sells a phony freedom. How many movements can you think of today that are called "liberation movements"? Is man free? Has he been liberated? Not on your life. He is in bondage to sin.

It is only the Lord Jesus Christ who can free us. That's why Acts 26 verse 18 says - Paul was called to preach Christ and "to open their eyes" - that is the Gentiles - "and to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin, and inheritance." In other words, the preaching of the gospel opens eyes, turns people from darkness, delivers them out of the power of Satan unto God. Sin dominates and puts us under the power of Satan.

Third result of sin, it makes us objects of God's wrath. Ephesians 2:3, as I quoted earlier, we are the objects of God's wrath. He calls us, "children of wrath." Bull's-eyes for God's guns of judgment. This is serious. Psalm 90 verse 11, the psalmist said, "And who knows the power of God's wrath?" Who can measure it? Who knows it? God's wrath is infinite. And by the way, it's not just a passion. God's wrath is an act of His pure and holy will against sin which defiled His universe.

You have to ask yourself when you read the Bible and you read about God's wrath how sinners can go blindly on in their sin. In Galatians 3:10 it says, "Cursed is everyone that continues not in the things written in the book of the law." And then it says in the next verse, "The just shall live by faith." And if you don't come to God through faith, you will be cursed.

Jesus is the object of our love, and God says in 1 Corinthians 16, "If any man love not the Lord, let him be accursed." God is very serious. Sin overpowers us, controls us, makes us objects of God's wrath. I don't know how a sinner can eat, drink, and be merry when he knows that's a fact. That's like Damocles' banquet, who while he sat eating with a sword hanging over his head by a small thread, still had the stomach to eat. So the sword of God's wrath hangs over the head of the sinner, and yet he goes on eating, drinking, and making merry.

Listen, only Christ can save us from that wrath. First Thessalonians 1 tells us that "we wait for his Son, who delivers us from the wrath to come." Aren't you glad you're a Christian? You've been delivered from the wrath to come.

Sin causes evil to empower us. Sin causes Satan to control us. Sin causes us to be objects of God's wrath. And a fourth, sin subjects us to the miseries of life. You know, just follow the path of sin, and you'll just go from one misery to another. Job 5:7, "Man is born to trouble." "Man is born to trouble."

Romans 8:20, Paul says that "the creature is subjected to vanity." In other words, to uselessness, emptiness, something missing, a heart that's never satisfied, and a thirst that's never quenched, a hunger that's never filled.

And with Solomon, man says, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. I looked over everything and I said it all means nothing." Solomon tried it all, and it all came out emptiness, bitterness, sorrow, meaningless, and uselessness.

Sin degrades man of his honor. Reuben, because of incest, lost his dignity in Genesis 49. And so has man lost his dignity. Man has been robbed of peace and "there's no peace to the wicked," says the Bible. But "they're like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters churn up mire and dirt."

Judas was so vile and evil that he followed the path of trouble until finally, in absolute horror and desperation with a conscience that was shouting so loud he couldn't stand to hear it, he took a rope, tied it around his neck, hanging from a tree - hanged himself. His rope broke and his body was crushed on the rocks below. He was trying to escape his conscience and all he did was wind up in hell, where his conscience was louder than he ever heard it before, and will be forever.

Listen, that's the result of sin. But there's one other result. Sin finally damns the soul to hell. People think they can sin and get away with it, but you can't. It was amply illustrated in the newspaper.

"An autopsy Thursday revealed that a man who died Monday after arriving at Los Angeles International Airport had half a million dollars worth of cocaine packed in 11 rubber containers in his stomach. Coroner Thomas Noguchi said that one or more of the containers appeared to have leaked causing Edsel Madski, 37, to die of an overdose of the drug. Officers of the Los Angeles Police Narcotics Squad said this is a common way to transport illegal drugs. Police said Madski was en route to Alaska when he got off the plane at the airport and collapsed. He died in a nearby hospital."

Sin is that way. You may think you can contain a lot of it in your life, but it will leak out and kill you. It will leak out eventually and kill you. Sin damns the soul to hell. All you have to do is read Revelation chapter 20; read about the great white throne and how people are cast into the lake of fire. Realize that 50 million people die every year. Do you know that? 136,986 die every day, 5,707 every hour, 95 people die every minute. And you want to know something? There are four billion two hundred fifty million in the world and they'll all die, sooner or later. They are being replaced, by the way, at two and a half times the death rate. So not only are people all dying, but more of them are being born to die, all the time. Hell is yawning waiting for its victims.

Henry van Dyke said, "Remember that what you possess in this world will be found at the day of your death and belong to someone else. But what you are will be yours forever." Sin will damn a soul. Don't like to talk about hell, but Jesus talked more about it than anybody in the whole Bible. Spurgeon said, "Many people are hanging over the mouth of hell by a solitary plank and they don't know it, but the plank is rotten." And so we see the deadly evil of sin.

We've answered some questions about sin. What is it? What is it like? How does it affect us? But there's really a final, fifth, and most helpful question. What do you do about it? What do you do about it? Well, can I simply say this? "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is" - What? - "eternal life." That's the key, isn't it? "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life."

When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the penalty for your sin and He offers you forgiveness. In Romans 4:7 the Bible says, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Happy is the man who knows it's all forgiven. Happy is the man who knows God covered it with righteousness. Happy is the man who knows that God will never charge it to his account. Happy is the man who knows the debt is canceled. Happy is the man who knows the price is paid. Happy is the man who comes to Jesus Christ and takes the free gift. That's happiness.

That's what Jesus is trying to say in the Sermon on the Mount, you see? He's trying to say, "Sin is such a tremendous problem, that I want you to see the reality of it, and I want it to drive you to Myself

and My sacrifice on your behalf.” You say, “Well, I’m a Christian. I’ve heard this message.” Yeah, but if there’s the littlest taint of indifference, then you’ve lost some of the sense of gratitude that you ought to have in your heart for what God has done for you. I hope by seeing sin again you’re grateful for your forgiveness.

What do you do about it? You come to Jesus Christ. You say, “But as a Christian, I know that the branches are chopped down, and the trunk has been laid away, but there’s still the root there, and the shoots keep coming out. And how do I deal with sin in my life?” Well, we’ve studied that a lot. We’ve studied it a lot. The answer’s simple, twofold. Recognize it’s been forgiven, it’s been forgiven. He’s forgiven you all your trespasses, for His name’s sake. It’s been forgiven.

Secondly, recognize you have the power to say no. You have the power to say no. Colossians 3:5 says, “Mortify the deeds of the body.” Kill it. You say, “John, how do you say no to sin?” Say yes to God. Sin will fight against that which you know is righteous, and depending upon the dominance of your life by the Spirit of God, you will say yes to one or the other.

But first of all, what do we do about sin? That’s the last question. You come to Jesus Christ and He forgives it. Then as a believer, when it raises itself in our lives, and when the temptations come, we stand on the confidence that it’s already forgiven. So we don’t get into some emotional guilt trip, some distrust of God. And then we move to the strength provided for us in the power of the Spirit of God.

And the key to that, beloved - believe me now - the key to that is to be so saturated with the Word of God that it dominates your thinking. So that when the temptation comes, you react with the Word of God. And this is going to be the theme when we get to the sword of the Spirit in our Sunday morning studies.

What I’m trying to say to you is we have to deal with sin dramatically. You know how Jesus closed this little section in Matthew 5? He closed it by saying if it means it, yank your eye out. If it’ll help you to get rid of sin, cut your hand off. Do anything - desperation, dramatic - to stand aside from this evil thing, because how terrible it is.

I want to tell you a story in closing. In Irish history there is a great badge of baronry, it’s called, called the Red Hand of O’Neill. In Ireland, in its early history, there were land territories that were given to certain barons, and they ruled that land territory. One of those baronies is called the Red Hand of O’Neill. It’s the motto of the ancient line of the O’Neills. Here’s how it came to be.

A group of people were on an expedition going to Ireland, and they were coming in boats. They were coming to a shore that had not really been claimed by anybody. And the captain, who was a very daring man and an adventurous man, gave a shout to everyone coming along, each family apparently having its own boat, that whoever first put his hand on the land would be the one to possess it, and

would become the baron of that land.

One of the men was O'Neill, from whom descended not only the O'Neill clan, but the princes of Ulster. And O'Neill was determined he was going to get that land. And so frantically, he rowed, and rowed, and rowed. But there was another who was faster than he and was gaining, and finally was beside him, and finally gained on him, and went by him. And when the rival boat took the lead, he was shaken to the very feet, and he desperately wanted the land, and he didn't know how to get it.

And his biographer writes these words, "With a grim look of mingled wrath and triumph at that rival boat, this strong nerve, iron-minded O'Neill dropped the oars, seized a battleaxe, cut off one of his hands that had so lately plied those oars, and threw it on the shore he determined to possess. And now," says the biographer, "the bloody hand is the badge of barony in general. The badge of the O'Neills."

And I add, if a man would cut off his hand to gain an earthly possession, what would you do to gain the fullness of a divine blessing in dealing with sin? It's serious. Men do those kinds of things to gain the earth. What would you do to deal with the sin in your life? Let's pray together.

Father, we know there's a glory land for us, a land to be conquered for Christ, and we have to sacrifice our own will, first of all in coming to Jesus Christ to gain that land. We have to give up, as it were, our hands and our feet, our hearts, our minds, all we are to Christ.

We have to cut off all of ourselves in a sense, and say, "Christ, You live through me. I cast away my hands for Your hands, my feet for Your feet, my heart for Your heart, my mind for Your mind, my mouth for Your mouth, my eyes for Your eyes, my ears for Your ears."

Lord, help us to see the seriousness of sin. If there are some dear ones in our midst tonight, O Lord, who've never come to Jesus Christ, may they have tonight seen the issue of sin, its power, tremendous threat, and may they come to the foot of the cross to receive the gift of salvation that is theirs free for the taking.

For those of us that are Christians, Lord, help us to know what it is to kill the deeds of the flesh, to hate sin like You hate it, to love You in a true way, a sacrificial way, doing whatever it takes to gain the fullness of blessing You have for us, to take full possession of the treasure lying at our feet.

O God, help us to deal with sin in our lives. First to come to Christ, who alone can wash it away, and then as Christians to constantly confess, repent, and seek to live a pure life that we may know the fullness of Your grace. In Christ's name, amen.

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