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

What Is Sin?
Scripture: Genesis 3:1-7
Code: 90-233

We are involved in a study of origins and looking at the book of Genesis. I would encourage you to open to the third chapter of Genesis. We have gone through Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, and we have studied the text of those two chapters, and we have launched from those texts to study other matters of Scripture to try to fill in our understanding, and that will be the case of Genesis chapter 3. Genesis chapter 3 is familiar to us. It is a chapter that deals with a serpent in the Garden, and temptation, and forbidden fruit, and a woman who was deceived, and a man who followed her in violating God's Word and God's command. Then, talks about a curse and the price that was paid for that disobedience. Familiar to most everybody, to one degree or another, is the record of Genesis chapter 3. And at the very outset I want to just lay down a simple statement that we're going to build on all the way through, and that is this: Genesis 3 is an accurate historical record of what actually happened in the Garden. You may wonder why I'm saying that. The reason I'm saying that is because most people who comment on Genesis 3 turn it into something other than a historical account of a real event. It is as the Word of God says it is.

Now, this chapter, before we get into the chapter, is going to take us some time just to prepare ourselves for it. This chapter may well be the most important chapter in the Bible. Certainly it is true that if you don't understand this chapter you don't understand the rest of the Bible. You cannot understand the solution to the problem unless you understand the problem. You can't understand the cure unless you understand the diagnosis. You will never be able to understand God's remedy for this world if you don't understand the malady under which this world lives and functions. And I say, it may well be the most important chapter in the Bible because it explains absolutely everything about our universe and about life in that universe and all of us who live in it. It explains everything about why things are the way they are, why we are the way we are, and what God is doing in history, and why He's doing it in terms of salvation. Genesis 3 explains the human dilemma. All the problems of the universe have their origin in the events of this historic account. I'll say that again: all the problems in the universe. Physical problems, spiritual problems, moral problems, social problems, economic problems, political problems, all the problems in the universe have their origin in the events of this historic account.

This chapter then is the foundation of any true and accurate world view. And without this foundation, every and any world view is utterly wrong. If you do not understand the origin of sin and its impact based on Genesis chapter 3, then your understanding of the world is wrong. Everything then is misunderstood. Everything is misevaluated. Everything is misread. Everything is misdiagnosed and

hopelessly incurable.

You see, if you go back to the end of chapter 1 it says, “And God saw all that He had made and He had made all that has ever been made so He saw the whole created universe and behold, it was very good.” When God completed the original creation, everything was very good. But frankly, folks, everything in our world now is very bad. It is anything but good, and it has been anything but good through all of human history. When God completed His perfect creation it was very good because there was no disorder, there was no chaos, there was no conflict, there was no struggle, there was no pain, there was no discord, there was no disease, there was no decline, there was no death. Now, we all live our whole lives with all of that. Life is defined by disorder, chaos, conflict, struggle, pain, discord, disease, decline, and death.

We look at the physical world around us and we see it decaying and tending toward disorder and chaos, disintegration and death. That’s the law of entropy, the second law of thermodynamics, that matter continually tends to break down toward disorder. The physical world is breaking down. This is frightening to people when they take a look at, for example, the interplanetary world or the celestial world, the world of heavenly bodies, and they begin to fear that as big chunks keep hurdling through space they have a likelihood that they will at some point collide with this planet in a collision that will literally blast us in to non-existence. And we watch in the national world, just the history of civilization, and we see the cycle of rise and fall, and rise and fall, and rise and fall. We look in the animal world and there is this incessant process of struggle and death. We look in the human world and every human relationship is a struggle.

Human life is a struggle. As soon as life is conceived in the womb, it begins to live and die at the same time. It begins to grow and decay at the same time. And in the spiritual and moral world, everyone finds it easier to do wrong. Have you noticed? It’s much easier to do wrong. In fact, it’s really impossible to do righteous things. Even when you do right humanly, you generally do it to feel better about yourself which is an ill-conceived motive. It’s much easier to do evil than good. It’s much easier to float down on the moral sewage than it is to buck the tide, stay above it. Hatred and crime and war, perversion, wickedness, those things just come with life.

So, we have to ask a question. If we come to the end of Genesis 1 and everything is very good, and we take a look at things, we have to ask the question: what’s wrong with this picture? What is wrong here? This is not the way it was at the beginning. Even going through chapter 2, you really have only an expansion of the created work of God on day six. Chapter 2 just expands on the creation of man and woman that’s mentioned from verse 24 down through the end of chapter 1. So, you could put verse 31 at the end of chapter 2. It was really at the same point in terms of God’s creation. God saw that everything that He had made, including man, including woman, including the Garden where He placed them all that’s described in chapter 2, and it was all very good.

But we look at the world today and it's not very good. Evolutionists really amuse me. They are clueless about this, because they're living under the self-deception that man is getting better, that he's improving. The idea of evolution is that man starts from simplicity and mutates upward into complexity. That he starts from a very low and minimalistic level of intelligence and mutates upward to a greater intelligence. That he starts at a base level morally and he moves up to a higher and higher level morally. But the fact of just life itself, the truth about man is a refutation of evolution. Because the fact of the matter is: man isn't getting better; he's getting worse. He's accumulating iniquities at a rapid rate, and with technological advances he is accumulating wretchedness faster than ever.

Man did not begin at the bottom of the moral ladder and slowly, by psychological evolution, rise higher. That's just not true. In fact, if you study human history basically there hasn't been really any change. Men are morally no better than they were in the past, and I suppose in some ways no worse than they were in the past. You can trace the patterns of wretchedness through all of human history. But the advancements that have come technologically, and by science through the centuries, have only enabled man to escalate and exacerbate his corruption.

What has gone wrong? If man began at the top, as Genesis 1 and 2 would tell us, and everything was very good, and man was created in the image of God, he started at the top, and he's been plunging down through the abyss of darkness headed for a deep bottom ever since. What went wrong? What happened here? This isn't the way it was in the original creation. The downward plunge doesn't seem to be able to be stopped. It's like man has fallen from heaven without a parachute, and he's plunging at break neck speed toward hell with nothing to stop him. And his life is basically defined by wickedness and evil in every aspect, every relationship.

What happened is recorded for us in Genesis 3. Let me read you the first seven verses. "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field in which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat. But from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden God has said you shall not eat from it, or touch it lest you die.' Now the serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die.'" You know, what's death? No such thing existed. "'For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil.' When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate. And she gave also to her husband with her and he ate. Then, the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked, and they sowed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings."

That's how the third chapter opens. By the way, you might be interested to know the word "sin" doesn't appear in the third chapter. But this is where it entered into our world. This was it. When Adam and Eve, tempted by the serpent in the garden, disobeyed God, everything went from being very good to being very bad. In Romans chapter 5 is a statement that we'll go back to in weeks to come as we study this issue. In Romans chapter 5 and verse 12, listen to what the Bible says, "Therefore just as through one man," that's Adam, "sin entered into the world and death through sin and so death spread to all men because all sinned." There is the New Testament commentary on the event that I just read you. Through one man, Adam, sin entered into the world and death through sin, the ultimate measure of decay. And so, death spread to all men because all sinned. When Adam sinned, we were all there. We were in his loins. We were his progeny. We have all come from Adam and Eve, and so we inherit what theologians call original sin. When Adam sinned, we all went down because we've all come from Adam.

At the end of chapter 2, you'll notice that the man and his wife were naked and not ashamed. There wasn't anything to be ashamed about because there was no sin. There were no evil thoughts. Nothing to be ashamed about. But you come to the end of the record I just read to you, in verse 7, the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

All of a sudden, there was shame. Why? For the first time in their existence, they had wicked thoughts. Never had a wicked thought before. Apparently, it had something to do with their sexuality. All of a sudden there was shame where there was no shame. This is the great indicator from their viewpoint that they had sinned. And the indicator from God's viewpoint comes when He says in verse 16 to the woman, "I'll multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain, you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, he shall rule over you." Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, you've eaten from the tree which I have commanded you saying you shall not eat from it, cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall grow for you. You shall eat the plants of the field by the sweat of your face. You shall eat bread till you return to the ground because from it you were taken, for you are dust and to dust you shall return."

Now, when God curses them, it's quite interesting. Those curses really are physical. There is a curse on the woman's pain in childbearing and on her conflict in her marriage. There is a curse on Adam in the fact that he no longer is going to be able to just pluck the wonders of Eden. He's going to have to cultivate the ground, he's going to have to fight the thorns and thistles, he's going to have to sweat to bring forth his bread, and he's going to ultimately die. But those things really don't say anything about the moral change that took place. You know, really didn't say too much. It becomes very apparent real quick. First of all, Adam and Eve felt shame and shame is a function of guilt, and guilt is a function of sin, and somehow they had thoughts of wickedness and were so embarrassed by those that they sewed together some leaves to cover themselves. They brought forth two sons in chapter 4;

one of them murdered the other one. And the rest, of course, is history.

The Fall occurred at some point between the sixth day of creation when everything was very good, and when Adam and Eve gave birth to Cain because Cain was born a sinner. The Fall had to occur before that; we don't know when. We don't know how long they enjoyed Eden in its glory. But once they fell, they were changed, they were altered, and they passed on fallenness and sin to every human being that ever lived because they've all come from Adam and Eve. When Adam sinned, he brought death on himself and everybody else. And we're all born to die. We all inherit what I like to call the death force, the death force. And as I said, the moment a baby is conceived it starts to grow and die at the same time. And we battle all through life to keep the death force from being triumphant for as long as we can.

We not only inherit death; we inherit sin because we were all there in Adam. That's the first thing I want you to understand. That's original sin. There's another aspect to it, imputed sin. We'll talk about that later. See, in our time if you don't understand that, you cannot explain the human dilemma. You can't explain that not only did this affect man's moral life and therefore every area of relationship, but it affected the ground, it affected the material universe, the physical universe. And Romans 8 says the whole creation groans under this curse. The reason there is disintegration, death, and all of that in the entire universe goes right back to Genesis chapter 3. So, we're going to be looking at Genesis 3 to see all the things that we can see to help us understand this amazing event.

The evolutionist, the psychological evolutionist, sociological evolutionist has a big problem because if man is getting more and more capable, if he's getting more and more noble, if he's mutating upward, and he has now reached a place where basically good, and actually getting better, why is it that society is not changing? Why is he morally worse? Well, evolutionary psychologists say there must be something wrong with his environment. And it all boils down to: I'm not bad, but you're bad, and you make me bad. So, in this evolutionary process, some of us are going up and others, I guess, are going down. Fairly selective approach.

Psychologists reject sin because they want to exalt man, and they want to eliminate God. So, because they reject sin, they have no explanation for why man is the way he is. They misdiagnose him totally, so they offer really no help. And what do we do? We try to come up with harsher penalties, the, what is it, the three-strike law: three felonies in a row and you go to jail and they throw the key away. We bring back the death penalty. But nothing can end the reign of terror; nothing can end the reign of corruption. You can't do it with counseling. You can't do it with psychotherapy. You can't do it with Prozac. You can't do it, because the issue is sin. The issue is: we've all inherited a corrupted nature.

Of Karl Menninger of the Menninger Clinic wrote this, "In all of the laments and reproaches made by our seers and prophets, one misses any mention of sin, a word which used to be a veritable

watchword of prophets. It was a word once in everybody's mind, now rarely if ever heard. Does that mean that no sin is involved in all our troubles? Is no one any longer guilty of anything? Guilty, perhaps, of a sin that could be repented, and repaired, and atoned for? Is it only that someone may be stupid, or sick, or criminal, or recovering, or asleep? Wrong things are being done," he writes, "we know. Tares are being sowed in the wheat field at night. Is no one responsible? Is no one answerable for these acts? Anxiety and depression we all acknowledge and even vague guilt feelings, but has no one committed any sins? Where indeed did sin go, what became of it?" End quote. By the way, that's in the book he wrote called "Whatever Became of Sin?"

And, of course, there's just no interest in the public forum in talking about sin today. I mean, that is absolutely archaic. Sinful nature? To say that people are corrupt at birth? To say that they inherited a wicked nature from their parents because they were all genetically, as it were, in Adam? They were all there and sinned in Adam in his loins, and everything that came out of that cursed man and that cursed woman bears that curse? Unacceptable. To say that people are all born with an evil bent, that they are all born with a desire to violate the law of God and to dethrone God and replace them with themselves, to say they are incapable of doing anything good, to say they are rotten to the very core, that everything about them, everything they think, everything they say and everything they do is only evil continually, to say their heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; frankly, folks, that is just not acceptable in the public forum.

Our culture has really declared war not only on sin, because they don't want anything defined as sin. Everything is just a lifestyle choice; nothing is a sin. So, our culture has declared war on sin and consequently declared war on guilt. The very idea of guilt is considered medieval, obsolete, and certainly unhealthful. There was a mega-bestseller 20 years ago by Wayne Dyer, Dr. Wayne Dyer; it was called "Your Erroneous Zones." And he said the most useless of all erroneous zones is guilt. He said, "Guilt," quote, "must be exterminated, spray-cleaned and sterilized forever." We have to get rid of guilt. And he says here's how you do it. Quote, "Do something which you know is bound to result in feelings of guilt. Take a week to be alone. If you've always wanted to do something, despite the guilt engendering protestations from other members of your family, these kinds of behavior will help you tackle that omnipresent guilt." In other words, if you feel guilty about certain things, do them and just keep doing them till you don't feel guilty anymore. He says, "Defy your guilt, spurn your husband, spurn your children, attack that sense of self-disapproval head on. Do something that is sure to make you feel guilty and just keep doing it till you don't feel guilty anymore. Refuse to hear the cries of conscience, the duties of family responsibility, the appeals of your loved ones. You owe it to yourself. Sear your conscience." Nobody treats guilt seriously anymore.

You know, when people feel guilty nowadays, it's because they ate too many French fries. Those are the guilty pleasures. There was a headline in an advice column that caught my eye. It summed up the universal counsel of our generation, the headline said: "It's not your fault." Stop blaming yourself. The article said, "Your compulsive behavior is not your fault. Refuse to accept the blame. And above all,

do not blame yourself for what you can't control. Heaping guilt on yourself only adds to your stress, low self-esteem, worry, depression, feelings of inadequacy and dependence on others. Let go of your guilt feelings." And that ubiquitous Ann Landers has said, "One of the most painful, self-mutilating time and energy consuming exercises in the human experience is guilt. It can ruin your day, or week, or your life. It turns up like a bad penny when you do something dishonest, hurtful, tacky, selfish or rotten. Never mind that it was a result of ignorance, stupidity, laziness, thoughtlessness, weak flesh or clay feet, you did wrong and the guilt is killing you. Too bad, but be assured, the guilt you feel is normal. Remember, guilt is a pollutant and we don't need any more of it in the world."

You don't want to feel bad about anything. Boy, what a serious issue this is because you cut off people from the possibility of repentance. I love that story of the guy in New York City who, you've probably heard it; you read about it or heard it on the news. He robbed a store, and the store owner grabbed a gun and shot him and paralyzed him, so that the lower part of his body he was paralyzed and he was then confined to a wheelchair. When the case came to trial, the attorney for the robber who had been shot by the man took the case on the basis that this man who shot him did not understand that the man who committed the crime was a victim of society, that he was driven to crime by his economic disadvantages. The lawyer said he now is a shooting victim of the insensitivity of the man who shot him. And he said because of that man's callous disregard of the thief's plight as a victim, the poor thief is going to be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He deserves some compensation. And the jury agreed. And the store owner paid a huge settlement. What always fascinates me when I think about the story is within two months, the man was arrested, committing another armed robbery in his wheelchair.

A woman who abused and brutally killed her own infant was acquitted of all charges because she had PMS. And you all remember the San Francisco city supervisor who was murdered. And when the person went on trial, it was the famous Twinkie Defense, the fact that he was not responsible for what he did. He was acting irrationally because he ate too many Hostess Twinkies. And the famous Twinkie Defense was born.

We have so much of that in our society. Similar tactics, passing blame away from us. And when children are disobedient, they say they're hyperactive or they have attention deficit syndrome, or whatever other syndrome they could invent so they could sell people the drugs they want to sell them. And when somebody commits moral sin, they say they're addicted to sex, and then they're recovering sex addicts. And we have to remember, like AA, you'll never really recover, so you're whole life you're recovering, so don't feel bad if they slip up here and there. It's just an addiction. Everything wrong with mankind is described as some kind of an illness. And you know that; that's just the way the world chooses to avoid the issue.

So, we alone, I think, as Christians who understand the Bible and believe the Bible, we get it. We've got all these people trying: all the politicians, and all the moralists, and all the educators, and all the

university people, and all the sociologists and everybody trying to fix society, and it can't ever be done by these people because they don't ever deal with the reality of what is in the heart. All humanity, all humanity, nobody escapes, has a vile, rebellious, corrupt nature. The thought-life is corrupt, the emotions are corrupt, the will is corrupt, and the behavior is corrupt. And Genesis 3 is crucial to understanding that.

By the way, you'd be interested, there are some things that are not in Genesis 3. The word "sin" is not there. And the word "Satan" is not there. We'll say more about that as we get in to the text itself. But the rest of the Scripture makes it very clear. There's not even any statement there as to the fact that the sins of Adam were passed down. It's very apparent because immediately in the next chapter you have conflict and murder among the two sons of Adam and Eve. But we have to understand the rest of Scripture to interpret Genesis 3. So, when we go through Genesis 3, we're going to be looking at some other passages to help us to interpret them. It's really important for us to have a good biblical doctrine of sin.

As I often like to do in studying the Old Testament, I've got some Jewish sources 'cause I wanted to read about what the Jewish scholars, rabbis and commentators of Judaism think about Genesis 3. Interestingly enough, Judaism, as such, has always rejected the existence of sinful depravity in man inherited from Adam. They reject that. Basically, they believe that what Adam did, Adam did, and he did it because he chose to do it. And Cain and Abel, they did what they did because they chose to do it. And that's how it is, there's no depravity that passes down. There's no imputation of guilt to us because of the sin of Adam by God. That was just an isolated situation in his case, and we have the choice to do right or to do wrong. And that's how they maintain salvation by righteousness because they don't have a doctrine of depravity. They don't have a doctrine of original sin. They understand Adam's sin as affecting Adam, and the rest of us all have the same choices, either to obey God or disobey God, that Adam and Eve had, and we don't inherit anything from them. That is not what the Scripture teaches.

For example, according to Isidore Epstein in the publication called "Judaism," from Pelican Press back in 1959, Isidore Epstein says, "Judaism denies the existence of original sin. True, the idea that the sin of Adam had brought death on all mankind is not unknown in Jewish teaching, but the reference is invariably to physical death and is not to be confused with the spiritual death from which in Christian doctrine none can be saved except through faith in the risen Savior." Isn't that interesting? They understand the message of Christianity, and they want to cut it off at the front end. They want to deny original sin so that they can deny that men are in a condition which requires Jesus Christ to be their Savior. And the quote closes, "Man can therefore achieve his own redemption by his own penitence." He doesn't need a Savior. You get rid of the Savior and you get rid of original sin. Everybody makes his own choice, and if you have to make a bad choice, just tell God you're sorry, and make more good choices than bad choices and your good choices will outweigh your bad choices and you'll get in to heaven.

Cassuto, the Jewish commentator that I read so frequently says, “The central theme of Genesis 3 does not aim to give a philosophical explanation of the origin of evil in the world.” End quote. So, what he’s saying is typical of the Jewish commentators: this has nothing to do with the origin of evil in the world. This is one man and one woman, they made a choice and everybody else is in the same situation.

But they’re wrong. Scripture clearly indicates this is where evil began. And it is the New Testament that is most definitive. And again, you have to know that verse, Romans 5:12, that’s the key verse. When Adam sinned, everybody sinned in Adam. And when Adam received the penalty of death, we were all then sentenced to die.

Christian Scientists tell us that sin is an illusion. It’s not. The liberals tell us that sin is merely finiteness; to be human is to err. And the dualistic philosophers tell us that sin is the flesh as opposed to the spirit, which is pure. Now, those are all wrong. We will get a biblical understanding of sin in our study.

Let me give you a definition of sin at this point. Sin is any personal lack of conformity to the moral character of God, or the law of God. Then, sin is a disposition of the heart, it is a bent. It thinks evil, it speaks evil, it acts evil, and it omits good. Let me give you those four because those are the four ways in which you sin: you sin by thinking evil, speaking evil, acting evil, or omitting good. You sin when you do, when you say, when you think, or when you don’t do, say, think what God commands you to. So, it is commission, as you’ve often heard, or omission.

Now, before we look at the seven verses, I want to give you a broad look at the subject of sin as it is outlined in the Bible. And then, we’re going to come back and see how it originated. Before we look at the story of Genesis, how it all originated, I want you to have an understanding of the theology of sin, because this is essential for our understanding. Then, when we go back into Genesis, we’ll be able to see clearly where the root of all of this began. And I guess the best way to do this is to suggest to you that I want to answer just five questions, okay? Five questions. I don’t think I’ll get through them all tonight, but I’ll do a couple of them. And this is pretty familiar stuff, but we’ll just lay a foundation. I never know who’s listening to this, or who might hear the tapes, or who might hear the radio program, and I want to be sure we cover these issues.

The first question is: what is sin? And I’ve just given you a definition. What is sin? Now, we know what sin is. It is any violation, any violation of the character or law of God, the moral character or the law of God. Summing it up, 1 John 3:4, 1 John 3:4 says, “Sin is the transgression of the law.” Sin is the transgression of the law. That is one definition of sin. Another way to translate that, everyone doing sin is doing lawlessness, *anomia,* lawlessness.

In other words, it's ignoring God's law, it's violating God's law. That is sin. Any violation of God's law is sin. Sin and lawlessness, in that Greek construction of 1 John 3:4, are identical. It's living as if there was no law of God, calling your own shots. It's further defined in Romans 14:23: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Anything that you do that isn't done as a direct act of faith in God is sin. In Romans 14:23, to know to do right and not do it is sin. In 1 John 5:17, "All unrighteousness is sin."

So, the Bible gets around that issue in many ways. When you do something that goes against real trust and faith in God; that's sin. When you know to do right and don't do it, that's sin. When you know something pleases God, something that God has commanded, you don't do it; that is sin. All unrighteousness is sin. All sin is lawlessness. And all of those things are just coming at the same issue that sin is any violation of God's moral character or His law. To put it another way: sin is going beyond the bounds that God has established. That gives us a substantial understanding of sin. As you go through the Bible you'll find all kinds of words. I'm not going to go through all these Hebrew words and all the Greek words of sin. There are just many, many of them. It's enough to know that sin is defined as any breach of God's law.

Now, where is God's law revealed? Scripture, right? Scripture. So, we have a problem in our society today, folks. We don't believe that man is innately a sinner; we think he's basically good and something happens to him environmentally. But if we do acknowledge that he does evil, how do we define that evil? What is our standard for what is evil? What is it? Well, once, our standard for evil in America, our standard for morality in America was established by the Bible, right? By the Bible, I mean, that's what the nation was founded on. That's what basically our laws were written on. Our view of morality, our view of crime, our view of justice all came out of the Bible. And once, there were certain behaviors that were considered to be against the law. And that's changing. That's changing rapidly. It's changing in the sexual realm. It's changing in the homosexual world. It's changed, of course, in the world of abortion, euthanasia. Boy, watch what happens with the genetic engineering that's going to come in the very near future as they now can determine the ability to handle the genes and decide who gets born and who doesn't, and et cetera, et cetera.

As we continue to move down deeper and deeper into the morass of sin and dislodge ourselves from any set standard, being the Word of God, we have no way to define morality anymore except to take a survey, right? To take a survey. That's what you do. The politicians do it. They give back what they think the constituencies would vote for. They want to get elected so they basically say, "I believe this," because they polled the constituents and that's what they say. And that's how we develop our morality. And you watch, as our society sinks deeper and deeper into sin, and distances itself consistently and completely from the Word of God, it's going to be harder and harder to define morality. There won't be anybody who can walk into a court and hold up a standard. You can't walk into a court today and hold up the standard of the Bible as the standard of morality. All we have left is tradition, and tradition will be overthrown by surveys, it will be overthrown by vote, it will be

overthrown by referendums, it will be overthrown when the people want to overthrow it. So, it's not going to get any better, it's going to get worse. The reclassification of behavior. We don't have a standard.

How do you go to a generation like that and tell them they're sinners? Based on what? Based on what standard am I a sinner? And you say, well on the standard of the law of God, on the standard of the Bible. The Bible is not our standard. I think we have no other choice but that to hold the Bible up as a standard and to say to the sinner: it is the standard. And because it is the Word of God, and it's up to you to determine by reading it carefully and thoughtfully that it is not the Word of God. That's the challenge I put out. Oh, you don't think the Bible is the Word of God. Have you read it? Have you studied it? Are you really sure about that? I never had anybody say to me: yes, I've studied it thoroughly from cover to cover and it's not the Word of God.

But I don't think we have anywhere else to go, because this is the standard. We're just not going to have a society anymore propped up by biblical standards. And you watch the continual escalation that goes on as we redefine morality in terms of popular referendum, popular vote, and survey. That redefining of morality without a standard leaves our society in a death dive, because sin is breaking God's law. Sin is violating God's moral character. And there's nowhere to know that except on the pages of Scripture. And if you don't believe the Scripture establishes morality, righteousness, and unrighteousness, then you have no standard, and you have no definition of sin. That's the real issue in our society today. How do we tell our society about a Savior who will save them from sin when their definition of sin is basically non-existent?

What is sin to them? You tell them it's a violation of the law of God. "Well, where is that?" Well, it's in the Bible. "I don't believe that." But, you know, it's still the Word of God that the Holy Spirit uses, right? So, I don't equivocate. I just keep preaching the Bible and let the Spirit of God take it and use it to convict the hearts.

So, what is sin? Sin is a violation of the law of God. It's a violation of the moral character of God and His laws as revealed on the pages of Scripture. That is sin. That's all we need to say about it. That's all we need to say about it. So, you study the Bible and you're going to find out what God commands us to do and not to do. You're going to find out the essential elements of God's nature. And whenever we violate those, we sin.

Now, let's go past the definition for just a moment and look at the nature of sin just briefly. The nature of sin. First of all, sin is defiling. I'll just give you a few things to think about. Sin is defiling. These are things that characterize sin, not defining it, but characterizing it. This is kind of how it manifests itself. It is a violation, yes. That's what it is. But how it shows up, it first of all is defiling. It is a pollutant. It is to the soul what scars are to a beautiful face, what stain is to white silk cloth. It is ugliness across the face of beauty. It is a kind of ugliness that is defined in Scripture in very graphic terms. In 1 Kings

8:38, sin in man's heart is compared to ugly, oozing sores from a deadly plague. In Zechariah 3:3, Joshua, the high priest's sin is like a filthy garment that's being worn by a person. When you go down in the inner city somewhere and you pass by the street people who have lived in the same clothes and slept in the same clothes on the street for years, and that's the filthy garments that are a picture of sin. Sin scars the image of God and man. Sin stains the soul. It degrades man's nobility.

Interesting statement is made in Zechariah, the prophet Zechariah, talking about sin. There's so much about it, of course, all through the Bible, but in Zechariah chapter 11 and verse 8, there's a very interesting statement where God actually says there is a loathing. He says, "Then I annihilated the three shepherds in one month for My soul loathed them," is what it actually says. "My soul detested them and they also detested Me." Sin causes you to hate God, and to loathe God. And God says, My soul loathed them. My soul loathed them, and they loathed Me. And when a sinner sees his sin, he sees it as defiling. He sees it for what it is. Ezekiel 20 verse 43 says, "And there you will remember your ways and all your deeds which you have defiled yourselves, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things you've done."

When you really look at yourself, you see the defiling of sin and you loathe yourself. Sin pollutes, sin defiles, sin corrupts. Paul calls it in 2 Corinthians 7:1, the filthiness of the flesh and spirit. Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, wrote, "Sin is called poison, sinners serpents. Sin is called vomit, sinners dogs. Sin is called the stench of grave, sinners rotten sepulchers. Sin is called mire, sinners pigs." It is defiling, degrading, it stamps the devil's image on the human soul.

Sin is, secondly, rebellion. It is not only defiling; it is rebellion. It establishes not only a defilement, and a filth, and a pollution, and a corruption, but it establishes a life of rebellion. It is, by its own nature, as Leviticus 26:27 says, "Walking contrary to God." It is just walking in constant opposition, in constant rebellion. A sinner tramples on God's law, tramples on God's character, willfully crosses God's will, affronts God, spites God, mocks God. And the Hebrew word for "sin," one of the Hebrew words, *pasha,* signifies rebellion. Is it, at its core, rebellion. That's what it was for Lucifer. That's what it was for Eve. That's what it was for Adam. That's what it is for all of us. Perhaps a good definition, Jeremiah 44:17, "But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goes forth out of our own mouth." That's it. God, we will do exactly what we want to do.

Sin is God's would-be murderer. Sin would not only unthrone God but ungod God, and replace Him with us. If the sinner had his way, God would cease to be God, and the sinner is the only god in his world. So, sin is defiling, and sin is open, incessant rebellion.

Let me give you a third one. We'll pick up here next time. Sin is ingratitude. I mean, everything we have, everything we are is from God. We live and move and have our being in God. Acts 17:28 says, "He makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, sends rain on the just and the unjust." He's given us everything. And Romans 1, Paul says, "That the wrath of God is revealed from heaven because

when they knew God, they didn't glorify Him as God. Neither were thankful," verse 21. Sin is just ungrateful.

All the food the sinner ever eats, God gave him. All the air the sinner ever breathes, God gave him. All the joys the sinner ever experiences, God provided. All the love he ever experienced in the human world, everything. All of his senses are from God. All of the pleasures of life, to meet those senses, are from God. Every beauty of life is from God. It is God who has given wisdom to us. He's given wisdom to the mind of every human being to think, and feel, and work, and play, and rest, that life might be full and useful. And it's God who made us love, and made us laugh, and made us cry. It's God who gave us special skills and abilities to excel in some areas, and to know some measure of self-respect and value. It's God who gave us the capacity to care for each other and have relationships. It's God who providentially preserves us from getting every disease and dying every death. God literally surrounds the sinners with mercy. They abuse them.

It's like Absalom, you know. As soon as David, his father, had kissed him and embraced him, he went out and plotted treason against His father. So, the sinner eagerly takes the kiss of God that God provides in the created world, and embraces God's graces and God's mercy, and then betrays Him by being the friend of God's enemy, Satan. Sin is serious ingratitude. It's damning ingratitude. And the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against that ingratitude. Sin is defiling. It is rebellion. It is ingratitude. Well, a few more and a few more questions next time, then we'll start to look at the text.

Father, tonight we've just really begun our study in what is such an unhappy subject to be considering, and yet so necessary. We have to understand the heart of man. We have to understand our own hearts, have to understand our sin, its severity, its incurable power from the human perspective. We have to understand its pervasiveness, its deadliness. We have to understand sin because it's the defining element in our universe. It's why things are the way they are. It's why the creation is no longer very good but very bad. It's why everything dies. Father, we have to understand sin because, most of all, it's why we need a Savior. And You've sent Him, even the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that sin is humanly incurable, but You have sent Jesus to save His people from their sins. And You save sinners who repent and ask You for forgiveness. What an amazing reality, that as bad as sin is, as defiling, corrupting as it is, as openly rebellious as it is, as ungrateful as it is, You still forgive it when the sinner comes and asks, even as we heard give testimony to in baptism tonight. We want to understand the world and we want to understand it the way it needs to be understood and that's the way You see it, and we are able to if we follow Your Word. And we know what's wrong in our world. We know what's wrong in the lives of people. We know what it is: it's sin, and there isn't any human solution. But there is a divine one. May You bring many, many sinners to repentance and salvation. Use us to that end, we pray in the name of Your Son and our dear Savior. Amen.

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