

The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin

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Matthew 5:27-30

THE TEMPTATION TO REDUCE GOD'S STANDARDS

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

Let me ask you a question...what is the purpose of God's Law? Paul asks in Romans 7:13, "Did that which is good (the law), then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become *sinful beyond measure*." The primary purpose of the Law was to honor God, but the Law also stands to highlight or expose the exceeding sinfulness of sin. In doing so, it was also meant to function like a guardian or a schoolmaster pointing us to our desperate need for a Savior. Paul told the Galatians, "The Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith" Galatians 3:24. The Scribes and Pharisees saw the Law as the end to itself instead of a means to point us to grace. John MacArthur says:

The purpose of God's law was to show that, to please God and to be worthy of citizenship in His kingdom, more righteousness is required than anyone can possibly have or accomplish in himself. The purpose of the law was not to show what to do in order to make oneself acceptable, much less to show how good one already is, but to show how utterly sinful and helpless all men are in themselves. To Jesus' legalistic, works-oriented hearers, this was doubtlessly the most radical thing He had yet taught. If the meticulously religious and moral Pharisees could not get into heaven, who could? ¹

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN AND THE GOSPEL OF SALVATION

Our culture likes to explain sin away psychologically. I can't help my desires and my actions; this is just the way I am. Our children are taught in school that man has evolved and is still evolving.

¹ John MacArthur, *Matthew - The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 276.

We have all been influenced by the idealism that has been controlling thought for the past century, namely the idea that man is evolving towards perfection and education and culture will help finish the process.

A brief reading of Romans 1:18-32 will dispel this lie. The problem with this thinking is that it removes the reality of a sin nature. If we have no sin nature then there is no need for a savior. There is no need for the incarnation of Christ apart from man's unfixable sin problem. The doctrine of regeneration is meaningless apart from a correct doctrine of sin.

Being born again. John 3:3

Becoming a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17

Being at peace with God. Romans 5:1

The only way to understand the New Testament doctrine of salvation is to start with the doctrine of sin.

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN AND EVANGELISM

There is no true evangelism apart from a correct understanding of sin. Evangelism, if you can call it that, that offers Jesus as nothing more than a friend, a help in troubling times, or a way to a new life without the conviction of sin will result only in followers of a false Jesus whose yoke is easy, burden is light, and commands are empty. IF we are to point people to a sufficient savior, we must bring them face to face with the Law of God, which silences every mouth before a holy God. Paul reminds us in Romans 3:10-19:

"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." We know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

As you read through the gospels, you don't see Jesus pressing people for a "decision". Instead, He almost seems to put blatant obstacles in their way.

As they (Jesus / Disciples) were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead,

but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." *Luke 9:57-62*

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. *Mark 10:17-22*

Our evangelism must present:

1. The holiness of God.
2. The sinfulness of man.
3. The righteous demands of the Law.
4. The punishment for violating the Law.
5. The sacrifice of Christ in sinners place.
6. A call to faith and repentance.

Guilt (Romans 2:15) leads a man to Christ in humility. Mere intellectual belief in Jesus is not the requirement for eternal life. A person must believe that that Jesus is the one who delivers him from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:10-14). This presupposes a clear understanding of the New Testament doctrine of sin.

DOCTRINE OF SIN AND PERSONAL HOLINESS

Not only has our evangelism become superficial as a result of an improper view of sin, but so has our understanding of what it means to be holy. One of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is that we would begin to be glibly satisfied with ourselves because we are not guilty of some of the more "gross" sins in the Bible. In Matthew 5:27-30 Jesus is taking the Pharisees to task because they consider themselves to be right with God without ever examining their hearts. Holiness isn't merely a matter of conduct; it's a matter of the heart. It's not only a man's deeds that are important, but also his desires. It is the doctrine of sin that leads us to understand that we are desperately in need of a power greater than ourselves to save us and change us. Preaching the doctrine of sin will reveal the corrupt nature of a man's heart. When he sees himself for who he really is, he will abhor himself and become poor n spirit. He will mourn over his sin, hunger and thirst for righteousness, and cast himself upon the grace and mercy of Christ.

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN AND THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S LOVE

It is the doctrine of sin that magnifies the greatness of God's love to us – helpless sinners. Why is it difficult at times to love God as we should. Remember the Great Commandment is that you should love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30) All sin (idolatry) can be traced back to a love of something else over a deep and abiding love for God. Even as believers, we often fail to understand what He has done for us in Christ. When we see the nature of our sin in the sight of God and realize that even while we were still yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8), we begin to understand the immensity of God's love for us in Christ. If we want to grow in our love for God, we must understand the biblical doctrine of sin, how much of an affront it is to God's glory, and what He has done to reconcile us to Himself in Christ. A biblical doctrine of sin reveals the greatness of God's love to us!

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN AND THE HEART

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. Matthew 5:27-30

1. The depth and power of our sin.

Jesus' words are penetrating here. He doesn't say that as long as we abstain from the act of adultery that we are okay. He says, “Whoever looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Remember sin is not just confined to the realm of deeds or actions. Sin is ultimately a disease of desires. Sin(s) in all of their various forms are just the symptoms of an underlying disease of the heart called sin. Just like any other illness, it is not the symptoms that ultimately kill a person, but rather the underlying disease. The fact that we have not committed the physical act of adultery doesn't mean that we are guiltless. Sin resides in our heart. Lust or idolatry is just a symptom that confirms our disease. Jesus tells us that our symptoms are from the disease within.

“What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” Mark 7:20-23

2. The subtlety of our sin.

From time to time we might catch ourselves saying, "Boy, I sure was tempted, but I'm thankful that I didn't give into _____." We must not be content with the mere fact that we didn't act sinfully when tempted. A better and more searching question that drills down to the depths of our hearts would be, "Why did I want to do it?"

3. The perverting nature and effect of our sin.

Sin perverts what is good. Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away." What do we learn from this statement? We learn that sin takes the very instruments which God has intended for righteousness and turns them into our enemies (Romans 6:12-14). There is nothing wrong with a man being desirous of a woman or a woman being desirous of a man, but sin has made those God-given desires our enemies. Sin twists and perverts everything. Even the precious gifts of hands and eyes are subject to the heart disease called sin.

4. The destructive nature of our sin.

Lastly, look at what Jesus says in verse 30. He says, "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell." Sin destroys a man. It leads to hell. Remember the wisdom of Proverbs 14:12? It says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." Paul tells us in Romans 6:23 that the wages (payment) of sin is death. The Prophet Habakkuk, speaking about God's eyes says, "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, Habakkuk 1:13

I hope that we cannot rest content thinking that if we have not committed the act of murder or the act of adultery that we are doing well. Inside the caldron of our hearts resides the vile and heinous disease called sin. Jesus' words here are an encouragement for us to examine our actions, but also our motives, thoughts, and our imaginations. This text is meant to reflect the foulness of our sin back to us in hopes that we would mourn and so hunger and thirst for righteousness. It is also meant to highlight how desperately needy we are for a savior who will bear our sin burden (2 Corinthians 5:21). Thank you God for crushing your Son!