
Title: What is Sin?

Series: Speaking of God

Teacher: Pastor Chad Bresson

Date: October 15, 2006

Introduction

Sin is a disruption

Why is it that the world is so messed up? If God created man in his image, and then declared that creation good, why is it that man does not reflect God's goodness? How did it happen that people are universally corrupt and all of our lives end in death?

Few questions are on the minds of our postmodern skeptics more than these. If our God is as good as he says he is, why is it that we have Katrina, the tsunami, or 9-11? This is a legitimate dilemma that we must be ready to answer.

While today's topic is that of the origin of sin, we will not delve into the origin of evil. Our natural inclination is to attempt to trace back as far as possible the reasons why the world is the way that it is. Evil exists. The scriptures presume its existence. But God has seen fit to not fully tell us the reasons for his allowing evil to exist.

We don't live the lives we were originally designed to live. And we do not live in the world in which we were originally designed to live in. One of the unique characteristics of Christianity as a religion and system of thought is that it provides an explanation as to why this world is so messed up.

Sin mars the image of God in us.

The story of the human race, as presented in the Bible, is the story of God in Christ fixing broken people living in a broken world.

The redemptive story is the story of God's victory in Christ over sin and its results in the world.

What Sin Is

There is no shortage of definitions of sin in scripture. There are more than 50 words or thoughts in the scriptures that express what is meant by sin. It is a pervasive idea in scripture; so much so that it is impossible to define sin in a single definition. Yet we are going to attempt to do just that. Given all that the scriptures say about sin, we can say that "sin" is any lack of conformity in act, attitude, or nature to the character or will of God revealed in Christ (1 John 3:4). Sin is a renouncing of correspondence and agreement between our attitudes and actions and the attitudes and actions of God as they have been revealed in Jesus Christ. Ultimately, it is Christ with whom we have to do. Christ is the Supreme standard by which holiness is measured because it is Christ who perfectly

revealed God's character and will as the image of God. Christ incarnates that standard of perfection. To sin is to violate Christ himself.

Those of you who are following along with Grudem will notice that I have made an alteration to the way he defines sin. We insist, here at the chapel, that there is more involved in sin's definition than God's "moral law". Grudem is getting his definition of sin from the historic confessions of the church. That is the way sin was defined in the Old Covenant. This is the New Covenant. Christ has come, revealing to us the perfect character of God in perfect submission to the Father's will. That moral law has been fulfilled by Christ and is now Incarnated in Christ. It is Christ who is our standard. Use of the words "moral law" makes an assumption that the 10 commandments are binding on the believer. We do not believe they, as an Old Covenant unit, are binding on the believer. The 10 commandments inform us as to God's moral character. But they do not comprehensively define for us what sin is in the same manner as they did in the Old Covenant. So our definition of sin and standard of holiness is defined by Jesus Christ himself.

Always closely related to the definition of sin in scripture is fellowship with God. To conform to God's character and will is to be in perfect fellowship with God, just as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have perfect and unbroken fellowship within the God. Sin is a willful break in that fellowship between Creator and creature and a going of our own way. Isaiah 53:6 pictures it like this: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.

Sin is our unlikeness of God and opposition to his will in our natural and moral constitution (Romans 8:7). Not only are we unlike God due to our creatureliness, we now, after the fall, are unlike the image of God in which we were originally made. The image of God in us is no longer like God's character and will.

God is eternally good in his character; all that he is conforms perfectly to his character and its standards.

God hates sin because it directly contradicts everything he is.

Where Sin Came From

God cannot sin. We must insist on this. We should never blame God for sin or think that he bears the responsibility for sin. It is impossible for God even to desire to do wrong (James 1:13). God is holy. God is light. There is no thought of sin in God. God is perfectly good and righteous.

Yet, God ordained that sin would come into the world. If we are to affirm that God has declared all that there is, and that nothing has escaped his decree, then we must affirm that God ordained sin's existence in our world. Again, we cannot explain it. We are not told in great detail as to why God decided that it should be this way. It just *is*. Nor can we protest too loudly that God has ordained it to be. This very question is inherent to the discussion in Romans 9. And we must say, that we the creatures are the clay. And we have no right to say to our Creator, the potter, why have you ordained things this way? We cannot accuse God of wrongdoing in his ordination of sin.

Sin did not surprise God when it came into the world, nor did it overpower him. The promise given in Genesis 3:15 to the serpent and indirectly, to Adam and Eve, was not Plan B. Revelation tells us that Christ was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Christ’s death was determined before the first star was spoken into existence. God ordained that his creatures would fall and he would have to redeem them.

Sin existed in Satan and his demons before the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and then it entered the world of humans through their decisions (Genesis 3:1ff). Again, we’re not told in detail how it was that sin came to reside in Satan. We know he rebelled against God. And in Genesis 3, the serpent just shows up in the story, almost out of nowhere.

Neither God nor Satan forced them to eat from the tree; they did so willingly and so willingly sinned against God. Sin involved and still involves a deliberate choice.

Sin became something Adam naturally did. Sin became part of who he was.

Adam’s sin caused us to inherit a sinful nature, one that is naturally opposed to God, his character, and his will (Psalm 51:5, 58:3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:18). Every person who has ever been born has had the same sinful nature as Adam. When we are born, we are already at odds with our Creator. Adam’s rebellion is inherent to who we are as creatures. We do not have to teach children to be sinners. They are born sinners bent on disobeying God (and parents).

Although our inherited tendency to sin does not mean we are as bad as we could be, it does mean that we are unable on our own to do anything that pleases God (Isaiah 64:6). This is an important point to make as we consider what we call man’s “depravity”. Is there a distinction between our unbelieving next door neighbor who seemingly has a nice family, is kind to the neighborhood children, spends time at the local soup kitchen, and raises money for United Way, and the drug-addicted child molester behind bars who has raped and murdered his family and children? Yes, we can make these distinctions. God, in his common grace, has placed boundaries on evil. Most people we know are not as bad as they can be. Now, we must also insist, that although one is not as bad as they can be, they have the same sinful nature that makes it possible for them to be as bad as they could be. We are capable of being as bad as we can be. God has placed limitations on evil and our capabilities of carrying evil out in our sin. One of those limitations is found in Genesis 6:3 where God placed limits on man’s life expectation. Apparently, given enough time, as man had when he lived to be 900 years old, man will tend to be as bad as he can be.

Man’s fall made it impossible to please God. Hebrews 11:6 says without faith, which is our condition outside of Christ, it is impossible to please God. We lack any spiritual good in ourselves, and therefore, we are unable to do any spiritual good before God.

Every part of our being is affected by sin—our intellects, our emotions, our desires, our hearts, our goals, our motives, and even our physical bodies. This was an important statement of the reformation. The reformers stuck this flag in the dirt. There is no part of our being that has escaped the wrecking effect of the fall. The Catholic Church wanted to place limits on the extent to which man has fallen. The Catholic Church still teaches that man is basically good... or that we have some good in all of us. And the reformers said, “no, the entire person has been affected.” There are none that are good. The image of

God in man has been irreparably damaged and in need of correction that only God can supply.

Our actions, our attitudes, and our very natures all make us guilty of sin. In our definition of sin, we including not only act and attitude that involves a lack of conformity to God's will and character, but also nature. We do not have to do anything to not conform to God's will and character. But we must go one step further. We received not only Adam's sinful nature, but also his sin-produced guilt (Romans 5:12,19). There are those, even in conservative evangelical circles who would deny this. Yet the Bible is clear that Adam's guilt has been passed on to every single person who has ever lived. If that guilt is not inherent to our fallen human existence, the cross is no longer about clearing those who are guilty.

The reason many get wishy-washy with this idea of Adam's imputed guilt, or guilt that has been passed on to us because of his rebellion, is because of the emotional issue of infant salvation. Some who affirm that we have sinful natures will deny that we are born *guilty* of sin. In order to be guilty of sin, some believe, we have to willfully disobey God. But this is not what the scriptures teach us. Romans 5 is clear that Adam's guilt has been passed on to every human being who has ever lived, save one: the Second Adam. That imputation of guilt includes infants and unborn children. Regardless of what we say we believe about the salvation of infants and unborn children, we must not make the mistake of denying imputed guilt. Yet many do deny imputed guilt when they insist that one must commit a sin in order to be damned. Such a notion is foreign to both Romans 5 and Romans 9 (Esau was damned before he was born).

We may not like the way God designed it, but Adam was our representative in the garden. Adam acted on our behalf. When Adam sinned, God thought of us all as having sinned.

God considers the human race as organically whole—a unity, represented by Adam as its head. Jesus and Paul spoke of Adam and Eve as the archetypes of all of humanity. What happened to them and what God said to them happened to us. What they became, we are. What God said about them is true of all of us.

And the same can be said of the new creation. God considers a new race of Christians as organically whole — a unity, represented by Christ as its head. Christ is the Last Adam who stood in the place of His people. What happened to Christ, happened to us. We have died with Christ, and we rose with Christ. And we now live with Christ in the heavens. Christ obeyed the law on our behalf. And His righteousness, as a result of his obedience in life and death, has been imputed to us as if it were our own righteousness. Christ lived, obeyed, died, rose, and now rules as The Man we could never become.

How Sin Affects Us

There is no one who does not sin (1 Kings 8:46; Psalm 14:3; Romans 3:10,23). All of us have violated the character and will of God as it has been revealed in Christ.

Death is the penalty for all sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). Contrary to the evolutionists of our day, death is not normal. Contrary to the theistic evolutions of our day, death in all of creation is not normal.

Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God gives us freedom from sin's condemnation (Romans 8:1; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24). We are not always given freedom from all of sin's consequences. But we are free from its consequence of condemnation. We are forgiven and given Christ's righteousness; thus God views us as righteous and holy.

When we sin as forgiven Christians, our legal and positional standing in Christ before God is not affected (1 John 3:2). There is never a time when God does not look on us with favor, because he always see us as being in Christ. Does this mean God does not correct us? No. But it does mean that God, in his correcting, does not punish us. Christ has taken punishment from God on our behalf so that we are always in God's favor.

Sin can affect our relationships with God and others.

Even though all Christians still sin, we should not participate in a long-term pattern of greater and greater disobedience to God's revealed will.