

interested in your thoughts, and the condition of your heart, and even in your words, than He is your behavior. The Bible has a whole lot more to say about sins of the heart than of other parts of your body!

So, what is sin?

Sin is the opposite of good and God.

God is the opposite of sin. 1 Timothy 4 says, "Everything God created is good." BUT what we do is we take what God created as good and we use it in bad ways. It's not that what God created is bad, it's what we do with it that's bad. That's what sin is. We take the good that God has made, and we misuse it and then we abuse it and then we lose it. This is true with all kinds of stuff, money, food, sex... Sex isn't bad, sex isn't dirty, sex is holy, sex is God's idea! But what does sin do? We divert, we subvert, we pervert, and then we get hurt! We divert, subvert, pervert, and get hurt because we misuse the good that God that created.

Let me give you another definition. Sin is not only the opposite of good and God, because God is good:

Sin is the opposite of love.

Sin is always the opposite of love. In fact, Jesus said that as time goes on, history goes on, sin and evil will increase in the world, but people's love will grow cold. Come on, are we seeing that today? Are people more or less loving than they were 20 years ago? People are so rude today! They're more critical! There are trolls all over social media! Civilization is becoming less civil! Why? Because as sin increases, love decreases.

Write this down, sin is the opposite of love and that means:

Sin is always selfishness.

If it's not love then it's the opposite of that. It's selfish! Sin is always selfish. James 3:16 says, "Wherever there is selfishness you find disorder and every kind of evil sin." WHY? Because you were made by God, and you were made for God and until you understand that life's never going to make any sense! God didn't create you so you could just be this selfish little party of one, He made you for something bigger! You were made to know God, to enjoy God, to have a friendship with God, to serve God and to center your life around God.

Think of it this way. What is the middle letter of the word "SIN" in English? Right! We all have an "I" problem! At the heart, at the root of sin is self-centeredness, I want what I want, and I want it now. I want to be God! What is the middle letter in "PRIDE?" That is the root of all sin. What is the middle letter of the word "CRIME?" All crime is self-centered, I'm going to steal your stuff because I want it! I'm going to abuse you because I want something! Crime is always a selfish act, it's a self-centered act.

AND here are the results of living for yourself: **anxiety**, when you live for yourself you are going to feel **guilty**, you're going to feel **panicky**, and because of this you are going to feel **hostility** from everyone around you! You were made by God and for God and until you understand that you'll never figure life out!

All right, number four:

Sin is unbelief in who God is.

At the root of every sin, at that moment, I don't trust God, I doubt something about God. I'm doubting His love, His compassion, His wisdom, His plan, I'm doubting something about God. Unbelief is behind every sin, it's the root, it's a lack of faith. What I'm saying is I don't trust God in this situation, so I'm going to have to take matters into my own hands. I don't believe God is who He says He is, and I don't believe that God will do what He says He'll do.

What that means, listen to me, is **every time I sin, it reveals what I am doubting about God in that moment**. Let me say that again. Every time I sin, it reveals what I am doubting about God in that moment.

For instance, when I become fearful or I become **ANXIOUS**, what I am revealing is that I don't believe the promises of God. There are over 7,000 promises in this book and if you claim them, you wouldn't ever be fearful or anxious again! But we doubt them, so we become fearful or anxious. What about when I'm **IMPATIENT**? When I get impatient what am I doubting? I am doubting God's perfect timing! God has a plan for your life and He's not going to get in a hurry. But we often don't believe that, we doubt it, and that leads to sin. I put some more in my notes. Anytime I get **RESENTFUL** or bitter, it means that I am doubting, or I am showing unbelief in God's wisdom. I'm doubting that He can bring good out of this situation. What about carrying **GUILT**? Some of you are carrying guilt around from a year ago or five years ago, something that happened 20 years ago, that's wrong! God doesn't want you carrying guilt around like that! But what does it mean when I carry guilt around? It means I doubt God's forgiveness and that's a sin! What about when I feel **INADEQUATE**? Anytime you have those feelings of inadequacy, what you're saying is I doubt God's power. Because God has said, "Where you're weak, I'll be strong." Anytime I'm feeling inadequate it's because I'm doubting that God has the power and that He'll give me the power and sustain me.

It's really all about unbelief. Every time I sin, it reveals what I am doubting about God in that moment.

AND maybe the best place in Scripture that paints the picture of this struggle is what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans chapter 7. Paul, who was probably the greatest Christian who ever lived, said this:

¹⁵ I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. ¹⁶ But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. [Sound familiar? Look at verse 20 now] ²⁰ But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. ²² I love God's law with all my heart. ²³ But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. [That's what we are talking about, the battle that's going on in your mind. There's a problem between your old nature and your new nature, between your desire to do the right thing and the natural human inclination to do the wrong thing] **This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. ²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? [And then the Good News, here it comes!] ²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Aren't you glad the answer is Jesus! Come on! Thank God the answer is Jesus Christ our Lord!

BUT in these verses we see Paul struggling as every one of us struggles. How many of you can relate to Paul's struggle? By the attendance at the gym over the past two weeks lots of people can identify with this, right? But if you were an outsider the temptation would be to sit Paul down and be like, "Just calm down bro! Like you are a pretty good guy. Look at all the things you have accomplished. You don't need to beat

yourself up like this..." If you were an outsider the temptation is to question why this is such a big deal. If Jesus is the solution then why make such a big deal over sin?

This is the second thing I want to help answer today. Here's why Paul continued to struggle:

Sin breaks my fellowship with God.

Sin is at its core a relational issue. If I sin against my wife Cheryl, let's say I lose my temper and yell and say hurtful things and slam doors or something like that, if I do that then the air gets a little chilly in our home, there's a natural break, we are still in a relationship, but our fellowship has been broken. Does that make sense? Well, the same is true with God. Nothing can separate you from God because of Jesus, but this might explain why you feel like your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling.

The Bible says this in Isaiah 59:2: **Your sins are the roadblock between you and your God. That's why he doesn't answer your prayers or let you see his face.**

This is why sin is still a big deal. It's relational. It breaks our fellowship with God. AND:

Every time I sin something dies inside me.

Sin is a silent killer; the Bible says the wages of sin is what? Death! Sin and death go together. Sin is self-destructive, something inside me dies.

I don't know if you've ever thought about it, but evil, E-V-I-L is the exact opposite of live, L-I-V-E. Evil is live spelled backwards. Every time I do evil I'm not living, I'm dying. Evil is the opposite of live, that's why James says this, James 1:15:

Our desires make us sin, and when sin is finished with us, it leaves us dead.

Now, I'm not just talking about physical death here, a lot of stuff dies in your life every time you sin. When I sin, my passion for God dies, my God-given dreams begin to die, my relationships die. Sin kills your potential. Sin kills your joy. Sin casts a dark shadow over your true identity... A lot of people today are going, "I don't even know who I am? Who am I supposed to be? What's my identity?" Why is your identity clouded? Its clouded by sin! We misuse it and then we abuse it and then we lose it! Where does that confusion come from? Not from God, it comes from sin.

Sin causes stuff to die within me. It's the opposite of good and it's the opposite of God. Here's another reason sin was a big deal for Paul and for you and me:

Sin may be a secret but it's never private.

My sin may be a secret but it's never private. It always affects other people even if nobody else knows about it. Everything you do affects other people. Romans 14:7 says:

For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone.

In other words, none of us live in a bubble. You'll hear people say when you question something in their life, they will say, "What's your problem with this? It's my life and what I do with my life is between me and myself as long as I'm not hurting anybody..." You've heard people say that? Maybe you've said that to defend some behavior in your life.

Well, the issue is you are always hurting other people because you don't live in a bubble. In even the most "victimless" of sins you are hurting other people because it limits your potential, it limits the good that you can do and the good that you could have done isn't going to be done now because of the sin in your life. Sin also hurts the people that love you the most. A person engaging in self-destructive behavior due to sin creates distress with their loved ones, even if they aren't direct victims of the sinful actions. Sin can also contribute to negative cultural practices, for example, discrimination and prejudice may not have a specific victim in a given situation, but they contribute to a culture of inequality. Engaging in sinful actions, even privately, can set a precedent that others might follow, perpetuating a cycle of harmful behavior. I think you get the point.

My sin may be a secret but it's never private. It always affects other people. Here's another reason Paul struggled:

Sin does long term damage.

We often think that because I don't see the damage right away that maybe there won't be any damage. This is why so many men (and women too) struggle with porn.

But it's like planting a seed, if I plant a seed, I don't immediately see the sprout, it takes weeks for the seed to sprout and push up through the ground. And then it grows, and it grows, and sometimes it takes years! And for many of those years it may seem manageable, like I can just keep this cut back then it won't be a big deal, but eventually it becomes a tree with roots that go deep into the ground. Because you plant in one season, and you harvest in another. If I'm planting sin in one season, I'm going to harvest it. It just isn't in this season; it's going to come out later and there are long term consequences.

The Apostle Paul says it like this in Galatians 6:7-8:

⁷ Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. ⁸ Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.

We now know that when you do a behavior over and over and over and over, it actually changes your brain. This is science stuff from the past 10 years. Science is finally catching up with the Bible! Everybody used to think that the brain was pretty much set in stone by the time you were an adolescent, 13, 14, 15 years of age and that your brain wasn't going to change after that. That's just not true. We now know what scientists call brain plasticity, that your brain can be molded for good or bad.

AND this is a good thing! It means if your brain has been naturally molded in this direction toward depression, it can change! Or if my brain has been naturally molded to be angry and have a temper, it can change! If my brain has been molded to be fearful and anxious, it can actually change!

But I've got to change the way I think, this is what the Bible calls repentance, changing your mind. That's what repentance literally means, to change ones mind. Jesus says with the help of My Spirit living within you, you can change your mind, and when you change your mind, it changes the way you feel. And when you change the way you feel, it changes the way you act. You can break the chain! You don't have to keep perpetuating the family cycle of abuse or the family cycle of fear or the family cycle of addiction in your life!

As your pastors, as your friend, I want generations from now to be able to go, "I got blessed because my grandfather or my grandmother, or my great grandfather did the right thing!" They weren't thinking, "Well, I'm doing it in secret and I'm not hurting anybody." NO! I want my grandkids and great grandkids to go, "I'm being blessed because my great grandfather was Brian Moon and he didn't do it all right all of the time, but

at least he tried! And he fought the good fight! And he yielded His life to the Holy Spirit! And his heart was in the right direction!" Come on who else wants that in the house!

One more way Paul saw sin as a problem to wrestle with even though Jesus was his solution:

Disobeying God is neither fun nor funny.

We fall for one of Satan's biggest traps, Satan wants to make us laugh at sin because if we laugh at it, it lowers our resistance to it. Anytime Satan wants to introduce a new sin to society, you know how he does it, through comedy! It's true! Then after a while we go, "Oh, that's not so bad."

BUT sin put Jesus on the cross! It's not a laughing matter. This is why Paul then goes on in Romans to write this: (Romans 2: 5-8)

⁵ But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ He will judge everyone according to what they have done. ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness.

That's pretty sobering. Nobody wants to read that verse, let alone preach on it, but it's there.

BUT here's the good news, you can skip the judgment! You can bypass it because that's what the cross is all about! Jesus dying on the cross is the answer to everything we just read! God so badly didn't want you to go through that judgment that He came to earth Himself to die on the cross for you and take all the wrath and righteous judgment for us! SO, come on, let's never laugh or take lightly... how serious sin is.

I said at the beginning that I wanted to define what sin really is, why it's such a big deal, and then what the solution is, and His name is Jesus, all we have to do is repent and place our faith and trust in Him. BUT the Good News is even better than that.

Because I know for many of us as followers of Christ we still stumble along. Like, how do I break free from some of these persistent sins? I don't want to keep sowing this stuff into my future! Amen? Everybody's got their own area that they stumble. Maybe its anger. Maybe it's a loose tongue. Maybe its drugs, alcohol, pornography. Maybe you battle anxiety. Maybe its self-righteousness and feeling superior to others. All of us have compulsions and areas where we are weak and prone to Satan's attacks. BUT how do you break free from those persistent things?

In just the few minutes we have left I want to give you some practical application if the Holy Spirit is working on you right now, not to condemn you, but to convict you to live a life worthy of your calling in Christ. A few thoughts and it all begins here:

Continually try to understand what Jesus did.

And I say "try" because I could spend my entire life trying to fully comprehend the cross. Don't ever fool yourself into thinking you have the Gospel all figured out. Just because John 3:16 is simple doesn't mean its simplistic! Continually try to understand in fresh ways what Jesus did for you!

On the cross, Jesus not only paid for the penalty of your sins, so you don't have to pay for it, but he also paid to break the power of sin in your life! Jesus, when He went to the grave and then rose again on the third day, when He did that He broke Satan's power in your life, and you now have the power to say no that you didn't have before. If you trust him, you have a power to say no that you didn't have before. It's more than willpower, because willpower isn't enough, it's more than willpower it's Holy Spirit power in your life!

A couple quick verses, 1 Peter 2:24 & 2 Corinthians 13:4:

He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.

Don't dwell on your sin, meditate on the meaning of that verse! Now 2 Corinthians:

His weak, human body died on the cross, but now he lives by the mighty power of God. We, too, are weak in our bodies, as he was, but now we live and are strong, as he is, and have all of God's power to use.

Now, I have the power of God to say no, to say I don't want to do that anymore. I used to not, I used to be defenseless against that sin and I would get impatient, or I would get nervous, or I would get worried, or I would get angry, or I would get lustful, or I would get whatever it happens to be, BUT you now have a new power, it's God's Spirit inside of you!

Continually try to understand what Jesus did. Focus on that, not on your sin! Here's another thought:

Put on your new nature.

Just like you put on a coat or a pair of shoes, every day make the choice to put on your new nature that Jesus provides. In Ephesians 4:24, Paul says:

Yes, you must be a new and different person, holy and good. Clothe yourself with this new nature.

So how do you do all that practically? Well, we actively participate in the process of transformation. We regularly engage in prayer, reading the Bible, and learning to love and serve other believers.

We seek to develop a mindset that aligns with the teachings of Christ. We practice honesty, integrity, and purity in daily life. We make decisions that align with Biblical principles.

We can also identify and discard attitudes and behaviors that are inconsistent with a Christ-like life by regularly examining our thoughts and attitudes and repenting of any sinful patterns. Challenge the lie behind every temptation, remember that? Every time I sin, it reveals what I am doubting about God in that moment.

We can also daily embrace our identity in Christ like we just talked about. Ground your sense of self in your identity as a new creation in Christ. Meditate on Scripture that reinforces your identity in Christ. Remind yourself regularly that you are a child of God, forgiven and transformed by His grace!

We can also live with a sense of being set apart for God's purposes. Choose to make choices that reflect Jesus and be mindful of how your actions impact your witness and strive for a life that glorifies God.

And engage in Christian community for support and growth. Participate in the church not just spectate. Encourage and be encouraged by fellow believers on their faith journey.

AND that last part is vital for the final practical application if you feel God's conviction today:

Confess your sins to each other.

And this is where I lose some of you, you are like, "You want me to do what?" But look at what Jesus half brother writes to the early Christians. James says I know Jesus is the answer to sin, but if you want to be healed then:

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Because that is what we are after, right? You want healing! I believe many of us here have said "Yes" to Jesus and His forgiveness. More of us need to put on our new self and choose to work with the Holy Spirit to live lives worthy of our calling. BUT all of us want and need healing. Healing in our souls, healing in our thoughts, healing in our desires, healing in our emotions, we all need healing.

James says this is the way, confess your sins to each other. This doesn't mean confessing your deepest darkest sins to every person you meet, but it involves opening up and being transparent with one or two other believers who can provide support, accountability, and prayer. AND I can explain why this works, there is a mystery to it, and it is sooo uncomfortable, but I know beyond a doubt that God has used this to bring about healing in stubborn areas of my life.

James goes on to say this:

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

The only righteousness I claim is from Jesus, but I do believe He sent me this morning to pray over you. That in His power healing would take place and chains would be broken for the biggest problem you have in your life.

[PRAYER TIME]