

Whatever Became of Sin?

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Text: Matthew 5:29-30

Introduction

Dr. Carl Menninger (Menninger Clinic) wrote a classic book: *Whatever Became of Sin?* Although, the book was published 34 years ago, the question is still relevant today. Menninger said, “*In all the laments and reproaches made by our (modern day) seers and prophets, one misses any mention of ‘sin,’ a word which used to be a veritable watchword of (the Old Testament) prophets. It was a word, once in everybody’s mind, now rarely, if ever heard, where indeed did sin go? What became of it?*” If this quote was true 34 years ago, how much more true is it today?

It’s not that sin has disappeared or that we no longer feel guilty. Most people do have a sense of their own guilt. They feel guilty, not because someone tells them they are guilty, but because they truly and objectively *are* guilty. We are guilty because we have done wrong. And guilt isn’t some dysfunctional feeling that we shouldn’t be having. Guilt is an objective fact. The feelings associated with guilt warn us that we have violated God’s law and justly deserve His displeasure.

We’re all guilty. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed out that not only is the sinful deed wrong but so also is the sinful desire. So it should be clear that we’ve all failed to measure up to God’s standard (Rom. 3:23). Sin, however, is largely ignored as moral evil in our day. We don’t even like to use the term. It’s not politically correct (PC)! We down-play sin; we euphemistically say that we have faults, shortcomings, hang-ups, problems, mistakes, or that we are dysfunctional or sick. Do you know one of the words the media used to describe the Virginia Tech shooter? Troubled!

We simply don’t like to use the word sin. We don’t want to be a sinner. Don Imus said, “*I may have done a bad thing, but I’m a good person.*” Let’s be frank, there is just no interest in the public forum in talking about sin today. To some the idea of a sinful nature is archaic. The idea that people inherit a sin nature from Adam and are corrupt at birth is anathema to the Secular Humanists who have declared war on the very concept of sin. Those who subscribe to moral relativism don’t want anything defined as sin. Everything is just a life-style choice. For example, secular humanists say that homosexuality is not a sin; it’s just a lifestyle choice. Is there something very intellectually dishonest and morally confused about this way of thinking? I think so.

Why doesn't our culture want to talk about sin? There are many reasons. One chief reason is: sin has religious overtones. Normally, when we think of sin, we also, appropriately, think of God. After all, isn't sin breaking the law of God? If we break the law of God, don't we have to answer to God for the breaking His law? Many people don't like to think of that possibility. It's simply easier to talk about a "failure" or a "weakness" than to talk about "sin". First John 1:8, 10 says if we say we have no sin: 1) we deceive ourselves, 2) we make God a liar, and 3) the truth is not in us.

Another reason is that our politically correct culture has taken a decidedly moral relativistic turn. The politically correct view of truth is: it depends upon the culture and/or situation. What is true today may not have been true yesterday and may not be true tomorrow. If you do away with God, truth becomes a relative, subjective, cultural thing. Morality becomes what the culture currently says it is, since there is no absolute standard by which things should be judged. To call something a sin is taking matters a little too far. For it moves the secular humanist in a direction he doesn't want to head. Since secular humanists are by definition atheists, they can't acknowledge the concept of sin without betraying their atheism.

Not only have secular humanists declared war on sin, but they declared war on guilt. Guilt is considered obsolete and unhealthy. Dr. Wayne Dyer, in his book *Your Erroneous Zones*, said the most useless of all erroneous zones is guilt. He said that guilt "*must be exterminated, sprayed clean and sterilized forever. We have to get rid of guilt.*" His solution to the problem of guilt is to extinguish the voice of your conscience. Just sin enough until your calloused conscience no longer bothers you. Secular humanists don't believe that evil is internal therefore it must be external.

Have you ever asked why no one wants to take the responsibility for anything today? Secular humanists don't believe that we have a sinful nature because they don't believe in the concept of sin, therefore they have to look for the source of evil outside themselves. No one wants to take responsibility because no one wants to take the blame and no one wants to take the blame because no one wants to admit that what they did is wrong and that they are guilty. If you subscribe to the idea that morals are relative and not absolute, how can anything you do actually be wrong? If your actions aren't wrong there's no need for repentance. If there's no such thing as sin, there's certainly not any need for a Savior, is there?

There's only one problem with this kind of thinking. It is wrong! It's absolutely wrong! Sin exists and there is a God who takes sin very seriously. The Bible is clear when it calls "sin" a violation of God's law. It's also clear when it declares that we have all committed sin and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Try this out for size: Even if you only committed one sin a day for an average lifetime, you would have over 29,000 sins on your record. Most of us manage to commit a few more than one sin a day. If you went into a court of law as a multiple offender with over 29,000 crimes for which you were guilty as charged, do you think you would be in just a little trouble?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us a powerful and radical evaluation of sin. From even a casual reading of Matthew 5:29-30, there's no doubt: Jesus took

sin seriously! There should be no doubt in your mind that He **still** takes sin seriously: “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

For Him to advocate the tearing out of eyes and the cutting off of hands shouldn't only get our attention but should also cause us to be alarmed at how casually we take sin. Do you take sin seriously or do you seriously sin? We will do one or the other. Jesus' message is clear: Deal seriously with sin because sin is serious business. How you deal with sin is extremely important because sin can make or break you. In fact, you may be in the process of being destroyed by sin right now! So, how do you view sin? How do you deal with sin in your life?

Jesus was radically clear in His prescription for dealing with sin and its effects. Let's consider the concept, consequences and cure of the spiritual disease of sin. It's my hope that as a result of this study we will all learn to take sin more seriously.

I. The Definition of Sin (The Concept)

For many, their concept of sin is: “what others do wrong that I don't do.” If we would take sin seriously, we must understand the biblical definition of sin. First John 3:4, “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.” The root word for “sin” in the original languages means to “miss the mark”.

What's the mark we miss? God's best for my life: His perfect will revealed in His Word. In relation to God's law, we fail to measure up to the moral standards God sets for us. God's mark or bull's eye or standard is His law. *Sin is the transgression of the law.* Question 14 in the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, “*Sin is any lack of conformity to or transgression of the law of God.*”

What does sin involve? Sin involves: 1) a false start (a lack of love and loyalty to God); 2) a wrong road (the way of sin is broad and leads to destruction); and 3) a missed goal (coming short of the glory of God).

Where does sin lead? Sin takes you: 1) to a place you don't want to go; 2) to do something you don't want to do; and 3) it keeps you there longer than you want to stay.

Many Christians probably associate sin with the commission of various wrong deeds. And there is no doubt that these are sins. Sins are violations of the law of God. But sin is more than that. Sin is anything that is contrary to God. Sin is that which stands against God. Sin is contrary to the attributes of God: In short, sin is a dare to God's justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, the contempt of His love, the despising and rejecting of His grace.

Specifically, sin:

- 1) Deposits God's sovereignty – right to rule (Ex. 5:2)
- 2) Denies God's sufficiency in meeting our needs (Gen. 3:5)
- 3) Challenges God's justice (Mal. 2:17)
- 4) Provokes God's jealousy and tempts His wrath.

- 5) Denies God's omniscience in thinking God doesn't see our sin (Gal. 6:7)
- 6) Despises the riches of God's goodness (Rom. 2:4)
- 7) Turns God's grace into wantonness (Jude 4)
- 8) Upbraids God's providence (Psa. 50)
- 9) Scoffs at God's promise (2 Pet. 3:3-4)
- 10) Reproaches and rejects God's wisdom (Isa. 29:16)

Sins are symptoms of the disease of sin. It's the disease of sin that causes us to commit acts of sin. These acts of sin we call sins. But Jesus made it clear that adultery, for instance, is committed in deed because of the evil desire of the heart. In other words, adultery is committed in the heart long before it's committed in action. Jesus said in Matthew 15:19, *"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders."* It's because our hearts have become corrupt through the disease of sin that we commit sinful actions.

The Bible teaches that sin entered the human race through our original father and mother, Adam and Eve. When they disobeyed God, the entire human race became corrupted by sin. We come into the world already corrupted and we act out this corruption by committing acts which violate the law of God. We are by nature children of wrath. We commit acts of sin because we are sinful by nature. Paul says in Romans 5:12, *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned."*

The Bible speaks of people who haven't come to Christ as "slaves to sin". Only Christ can free people of that slavery (John 8:32-36). But even after being freed, we still have the capacity to sin. We can still willfully violate the law of God. Whether as an unbeliever or a believer we violate the law of God, sin is still sin and it's taken very seriously by God. Wise people take sin seriously; Fools just don't give a rip.

Sin is called a work of the devil (1 John 3:8) On the other hand, all God's works are good! As the root is, so is the fruit. God is good and does good (Psa. 119:68); Satan is evil and does evil. Sin is contrary to the will, works and ways of a holy God.

Here are several powerful questions for all of us to ponder:

- Do you take sin seriously, or do you seriously sin?
- Do you understand that to violate the law of God is to sin against His holiness?
- Do you understand that it's not simply a mistake; it's a violation of His righteousness?
- Do you understand that a wise and loving God calls sin evil?
- Since sin is contrary to His very nature, do you understand that God hates sin?
- Do you understand why a holy God must punish sin?
- Do you understand why sin can separate us from God for all eternity?

II. The Danger of Sin (The Consequences)

God hates sin because sin is deadly and destructive. In addition to sin displeasing and dishonoring God, sin confuses and corrupts humankind. Sin deceives, debases and destroys. If we would take sin seriously, we *must comprehend its true danger*.

How dangerous is sin? Well, according to Jesus, it's dangerous enough to cause one to be thrown into hell. If that's the consequence of sin, then sin is very dangerous indeed!

Sin not only produces guilt but it also pollutes us. It causes us to be morally unrighteous and culpable before God. We will have to account to God for our violation of His moral law. The Bible teaches that "*all have sinned*" (Rom. 3:23) and that "*the wages of sin is death*" (Rom. 6:23). This death is an eternal death. It's an eternal condemnation referred to as "hell" – eternal separation from the presence of God.

Sin is deceptive, subtle and perverts our very nature. Why would our hand cause us to stumble, or our eye cause us to sin, if sin hadn't corrupted what should be good? Sin, left unchecked, will destroy you from the inside out. If you do whatever comes naturally, you're guaranteed to screw up your life and relationships.

God hates sin because it destroys those He loves. This is one reason why God takes sin seriously. How about you? Do you take sin seriously or do you seriously sin? If we don't see the danger and destructiveness of sin, we'll never take sin seriously.

III. The Destruction of Sin (The Cure)

If we would take sin seriously,

- 1) we must firmly commit to its destruction (Gal. 5:24);
- 2) we must take measures to destroy it before it destroys us (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5).

Jesus gave a radical solution to the problem: Tear your eye out and cut your hand off rather than allow them to cause you to stumble. It sounds extreme doesn't it? Well, it is extreme! Like a cancer, sin is so vile and vicious that:

- 3) We must go after it with a vengeance;
- 4) We must commit our efforts and resources to destroying it;
- 5) We must, like a cancer, cut it out, poison it, or bombard it with the lethal radiation of the grace and power of God in order to destroy it.

It should be obvious to us all that Jesus, while speaking in radical terms, wasn't simply prescribing the amputation of body parts in order to deal with sin. In that day the right eye and right hand were considered to be extremely valuable. It should be obvious that if you pulled out your right eye you would still have your left eye. What the right eye saw, the left eye would also see. If you cut off your right hand, you would still have your left hand. What the right hand did, the left hand could do.

Jesus was simply saying sin is such serious business that if the most precious thing you have causes you to sin, get rid of it. Deal radically with sin. Deal radically with what causes you to sin. Don't make excuses for your sin. Making excuses for sin is a clear evidence of a lack of honesty and a lack of genuine and complete repentance. Anyone who makes excuses for their sin is not serious about dealing with their sin.

The Scripture is clear in how to deal with sin. In Romans 13:14, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." Again, He says in Romans 8:13, "For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die;

but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Galatians 6:7-8 says, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” We must take whatever steps are necessary in order to avoid sin. That doesn’t mean that we’ll be perfect, no one is. But imperfection isn’t our standard. Our standard is to be like Christ.

Do you take sin seriously, or do you seriously sin? What are your pet sins? What are the sins that you find yourself committing over and over again? Anger, selfishness, greed, lying, stealing, lusting, gossiping, back-biting, or cheating all could be on the list. Some of you today need to deal with those sins before you do anything else. “*Let us lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely*” (Heb. 12:1-2).

The Scriptural method for dealing with our sins is to repent. That means that we must confess our sins to God and commit ourselves to turn away from those sins. If you would take sin seriously, you must repent before God. Are you willing today, right now, to humble yourself before God and turn away from your sin? If you are, God will give you the power to forsake it. He will give you the power to avoid sin. He will give you the strength to restrain your desires and to avoid feeding the flesh. Only He can empower you to live this way. You must respond to the Spirit’s leading.

Conclusion

Finally, if you’re seriously struggling with sin today, you may be in one of two conditions:

1) You may be a Christian who has made the choice to disobey God to the extent that it has become a habit. If that’s your situation, you need to humble yourself and repent.

2) You’re not a Christian. You have never cast your life at Jesus’ feet. You have never been born again by the power of the Spirit. You may have prayed before. You may have even joined a church. But you’ve never personally accepted Christ and committed yourself completely to Him.

If that describes you, then your only hope for deliverance from the power and penalty of sin is to cast yourself completely on the mercy of God and beg for His forgiveness. He owes you nothing. You justly deserve hell. Every person does. Your only hope is to come to Him. He’s the only one who can save you. He’s the only one who can deliver you from the penalty and power of sin. You are guilty. He can free you of guilt because He can forgive your sin (Rom. 8:1).

Psalms 97:10 says it well: “Hate evil, you who love the Lord.” Proverbs says, “The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.”

We must take sin seriously, because sin is serious business: It’s dangerous, deadly, lethal and ultimately fatal and final. We must take sin seriously, because God takes sin seriously. In fact, sin is so serious that it cost Christ His life! You think about that.

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