

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Absolutely Certain: Why is sin so bad?

Good morning. The title of today's talk is, "Why is sin so bad?" Well, why is it so bad? First of all, what do we mean by sin? If we go back to the beginning, to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we find that they chose to go their own way by obeying the serpent's suggestion to eat the forbidden fruit. They thought that eating the forbidden fruit would make them happier than if they obeyed God. They thought that they would become like God, knowing good and evil. And then it went horribly wrong and has been that way ever since.

I expect most people would dismiss the account of Adam and Eve as no more than a myth, not worth taking seriously, but it does account for that principle of evil found in us all. It is also God's account of how life started and therefore true and certainly more reliable than any human speculation on our origins. There is no other creature on the planet which can do so much harm as humans, not only because of our greater intelligence, but because of our propensity for sin. Humanity just seems to have that twist which tends towards evil despite our best efforts. Of course, not all of us are planning evil all the time but, if we're honest, we find that the wickedness of others, on a small or a large scale, finds an echo in our own hearts.

Basically, sin is living without God. It means we think we can manage without any reference to Him. It means that we put our opinions, our likes and dislikes, our will before God's. As far as we are concerned, we are more important than He is. It means that we continue with our perpetual desire to be the centre of our universe. You'll remember how Cain, the first murderer, "...went out from the presence of the LORD ... And he built a city..." as we read in Genesis 3:16 and 17. That was the beginning of society without God.

Sin is not only committing the really obviously bad sins; it can be no more than just ignoring God, and so sin affects all areas of our lives. It is no exaggeration to say that the ordinary human life is a sinful one, made up each day of continual sins all our waking moments. It's the little self-indulgences, the pride and the self-will which give the game away. There is no escaping this because it is in our nature; we were born sinful. Only Christ was totally without sin – without a sinful nature and without sinful acts.

It doesn't mean that we are not religious. It doesn't mean that we never go to church. It doesn't mean that we think there is no God. But leaving God out of our lives does mean that, just as God played no part in this life, so He will play no part in the next life; we shall be lost forever. It also means that we live in a society without God, which as we can see as we look around, is not very nice.

Does it really matter if we're all like this? We've been this way all our lives and so has everybody else we've known. Some will have been better than average, and some will have been worse, but they will all have been sinful. It's what we're used to. On the whole, we're reasonably happy with this situation unless someone does something really dreadful. What this is depends on our standards and our outlook on life. Generally, we're fairly content with our own moral performance. Most of our actions we would not question but there are occasions when what we have done may appal us and fill us with shame. It depends. For instance, you may lie successfully and be ashamed, or relieved, or very pleased that you carried it off. More likely, you may just shrug your shoulders because that's life and telling lies, in your opinion, doesn't really matter. But what about when you discover that someone lied to you? Now that's very different, isn't it!

If we're so used to sin and its consequences, why does it matter so much? First of all, we read in Genesis 2:17 "...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die." In other words, disobeying God would result in something far worse than just irritating God a bit; death would follow. Death means separation. When someone dies physically, they are separated from the living and from this world. When they die spiritually, they are separated from God. Adam and Eve did eventually die physically but the day they disobeyed God, they died spiritually and so were separated from Him. Adam and Eve thought that, by listening to the serpent and disobeying God, they would be superior to what they were. Instead, they were diminished. All they gained immediately was a bad conscience, the need to cover themselves up from each other and to hide from God. The long term consequences were a broken relationship with God and a ruined one with each other, the earth would be less fertile, it would be hard work to get food out of it, and it would bring forth thorns and thistles. Added to that, Adam and Eve would return to the earth from which they had come; they would die.

There was no going back to the state of innocence. Cherubim and a flaming sword barred the way back into the garden and into the sphere of existence which it represented. We are still in that state. Attempts to create a perfect society, fair and just to all its citizens and bringing out the best in everyone – are doomed to failure. These can never succeed because the raw material – we human beings – is so flawed.

Our sinful nature soon shows itself. You never have to teach a child how to be naughty, how to be disobedient or how to be unpleasant to its siblings. Of course, individual children vary enormously and the atmosphere of the home, the way the parents and other adults behave, and how the children are brought up make a big difference but the underlying sinful condition is still there, no matter how nice a child may be. And some children are very nice indeed. I must make it clear that God does not hold small children responsible for what they do; that would be quite unjust and God is absolutely just. We remember the words of Jesus Himself in Matthew 18:10: "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven." However, sooner or later we are responsible before God for our actions, words, thoughts and motives.

So sin cuts us off from God and is the reason we all die, as it says in Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all have sinned ..." Death is not necessarily the result of any particular sin but because we all do sin and death is the natural outcome.

What next? Well, because Adam and Eve sinned, we live in a fallen world. People do not get on with each other as they should. We can't always get on with ourselves. There is so often a lack of inner peace and instead a restlessness, a striving or just a longing for something more, something different. Sin is the reason for everything bad around us and everything bad within us. Even the natural world is not immune from the effects of sin. It is not as it should be; it was not "nature red in tooth and claw" to begin with. Genesis 1:31 says, "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good." We also read in Romans 8:20-22, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs until now." And that is what we see around us – everything from mountain ranges to ants is subject to decay, deterioration, sickness, injury and death. Even the universe as a whole is gradually running down and slowly getting colder. One day, even the Sun will burn out but not for a very long time. In any case, God has other plans for the universe and for humanity as we saw from the quotation from Romans but, left to itself, the starry expanse of sky above us would sooner or later go dark.

It is a problem which is completely beyond human intelligence, power or wisdom to correct. It may seem reasonable to expect civilisation or religion to bring about an improvement but it is only on the surface. Humanity's amazing and God-given intelligence has produced some astonishing achievements. In technology, architecture, medicine, art, music, and philosophy we see how, down the ages, humanity has been capable of great ideas. But the morals don't match the achievements. The most civilised and cultivated of people and societies can and have been capable of the most depraved behaviour.

An example which we are all well aware of is slavery. This abominable practice was carried out in the 18th and early 19th centuries by people who lived in European societies in which the lofty ideals of philosophers were enjoyed, magnificent paintings and buildings were produced, excellent poetry was written, and wonderful music was composed. Those who profited from the slave trade were not just the dregs of society who would do anything for money but the upper classes as well. And all this was carried out by supposedly Christian countries! In addition, wars ravaged Europe during much of this period. Peoples which became colonies discovered that the colonisers not only came with superior and beneficial technology but also with superior weapons which they were very happy to use with devastating effect.

In this life, sin has another dire effect. Not only does it spoil us but it blinds us spiritually. A telling example of this is found in the Gospels. The Lord Jesus did many of His miracles in public. He healed people, cast out demons, on one occasion He fed five thousand men plus women and children from five loaves and two fishes, and on another occasion He fed four thousand from seven loaves and a few fish. These He did in front of large crowds. However, in spite of these demonstrations of the Lord's unique power, very few believed on Him sufficiently to become His followers or to believe that He was the Messiah whom God had promised for centuries would come and deliver Israel from its enemies and also save Israel from its sins. The Jews of that period believed in the coming of the Messiah and were waiting for Him but when the Lord Jesus showed unmistakably that He was the one, the vast majority of His own people did not see that He was the Messiah at all. For most of them He was no more than a teacher, a miracle-worker or a prophet. The common people often gathered to hear Him speak but the leaders of Israel were desperately opposed to Him and, as we know, eventually had Him crucified. By the time of the crucifixion, the Lord's followers numbered only about 120. It made no real difference to the many people who had seen His miracles or had even been healed by Him themselves, as far as faith in Him and personal devotion to Him were concerned. They were completely blind spiritually.

Now, how much more for ourselves so many centuries later. If the people who actually saw and heard the Lord in action failed to respond to Him, it is not surprising that today the majority of people react negatively when they hear of the claims of Christ. Many just do not understand nor do they wish to. Jesus Christ is of no interest to them at all. They are not even listening. In addition to that, people will very often come up with a completely spurious and inaccurate opinion about the Lord's person and work of redemption, and they definitely do not accept any notion of God's punishment for their sins. They may say they respect Christianity but what does that mean? Not very much. They may say He was a good man but that's not enough.

Not only that, but people down the ages have twisted Christianity into something they find more acceptable. Very often it has been salvation by good works; trying to earn one's salvation, a completely hopeless idea. Nowadays, it is more about using what are supposed to be Christian ideals for social and political purposes but this leads only to social and political improvement in this world. This may be very necessary. We can think of situations around the world where there are gross injustices which ought to be put right. But these policies with the label of Christianity attached to them are a watering down of Christianity. They will not put us right with God; they will not make us His children; they will not ensure our entrance into heaven. Worse still, a society which purports to be Christian will include many people who are not genuine Christians at all although they may profess to be, and who will behave in an unchristian way quite hypocritically and bring dishonour on the Lord's name.

Another unhappy effect of sin is that it weakens us so that we cannot do what we know to be right. You remember the old saying, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." But good intentions are not of any value unless they are carried out, and sin prevents us from doing that. We know to do better but we do worse. Of course, we sometimes deliberately do things which we know to be wrong and for which there can be no excuse. In any case, even if we were able to live from now on in a way that completely pleased God, that would not wipe out all the wrong things we had done in the past.

However, the bad effects of sin are not limited to those we have already mentioned. They were just its effects in this life. It gets worse. We have to face the fact that what we are in this life will irreversibly affect what happens to us in the next. We read in Romans 14:10-12: "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: 'As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." So, according to God's Word, the Bible, we do not just go out like an when we die. The real us carries on in another sphere of existence. Where do you think you will be after death and after God's day of judgement? What we are now – whether we are sinners or whether we are saved – determines what happens to us on that great day when there will be no second chances, no more opportunities to get it right. We read about the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, in Revelation 21:27: "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

This talk so far has been almost all bad and depressing news, even though it's true. We need some good news. There was a clue to what the good news might be in what I have just quoted: "... those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." There is a category of persons who are going to heaven. They are not defiled and they do not defile. They are fit for heaven, for the presence of God Himself. How can this be if we are all so ruined by sin as to deserve the wrath of God? Now the Lamb is another name for the Lord Jesus because He is the one whose sacrificial death on the cross has enabled God to forgive us all our sins. We read in Ephesians 1:7: "In Him [that is, Jesus] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His [that is, God's] grace". In Romans 8:1 we read: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." We cannot make ourselves acceptable to God or fit for heaven by our own efforts. But there is one who can – the Lord Jesus Himself. A man about commit suicide said to the Apostle Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" – Acts 16:30-31. This advice holds true for us all today. Faith in Jesus is what counts; nothing else will do. Of course, we need to repent of our sins as well. Have you done this already? Have you asked the Lord Jesus to save you? Have you said sorry to God for your sins? Then you are saved, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, has cleansed you from your sins. You are already acceptable to God and His child that He loves. How much does He love you? He loves you enough to have sent the Lord Jesus to the cross to die for you. In John 3:16 we read: "For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." So there you are. That's how much God loves us and wants us to share eternity with Him. God does not want to judge us. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us: "[God] is longsuffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

Before we finish, there is one more very important reason why sin is so bad. As an example. Many of us have skin blemishes and they are often small and of no consequence. But every so often, someone has one which is cancerous. No matter how small it is, once it is detected, your GP will send you off to hospital and the staff there will take it very seriously indeed. And yet we might say, "But it's nothing much. Why all the fuss?" Because if it is not properly dealt with, it could be fatal.

Our sins are the reason for the Lord Jesus dying on the cross. If we didn't sin, God would not have required a sacrifice to cleanse us from our sins before He could accept us. We may think our faults are nothing much. However, it's not our opinion which counts; it's God's opinion that matters. He cannot tolerate even what appear to be the most trivial of our failings, lapses and just plain sins. We will see more clearly why sin is so bad when we get even just a glimpse of how awful a thing sin is and what it has led to, and when we have just some realisation of the lengths God has gone to – the giving of His own Son to die for us – in order to secure our salvation and our reconciliation with Himself. In addition, the Lord Jesus did not die only to save us from our own sins as individuals, but to save us from this present evil world (or age), that it is, the whole world system which is opposed to God and is energised by Satan, as we read in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians 1:4. And why has God gone to such lengths at a cost to Himself beyond our understanding? Why didn't He just leave humanity to its own devices and eventual doom? Because He loves us more than we can tell. Only the cross truly reveals the heart of God towards us.

In view of these things, can you now see why sin is so bad? And are you going to repent towards God, believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and then do your utmost to avoid sinning? I have been praying that you may do so.

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