

Lessons from the Gospel According to John Part 2 – The Sin Problem

Sin is a word we don't hear much nowadays. People today are very uncomfortable with it, probably because a lot of what we consider "normal behavior" is, in truth, sinful. We know in our hearts that sin is a problem, and it's our problem, but we would rather not think about it.

What is sin? Anything that separates us from God is sin. It might be an action we know is wrong, like stealing or hurting someone, or it might be simply turning our back on God and avoiding His fellowship, denying His lordship over us.

Why do we sin? First, because every one of us is descended from Adam and Eve, and we inherited from them the same rebellious nature that caused them to disobey God in the Garden of Eden (read Genesis Chapters 2 and 3). To put it simply, we sin because we want to do what we want to do, whether or not it agrees with God's will.



A second reason is that we have desires, and we try to satisfy them in ways that separate us from God. It is part of our makeup as human beings that men and women should experience sexual desire. It is because of our sin nature that we allow ourselves to satisfy that desire outside of God's planned place for that satisfaction, which is a committed marriage. And of course there are many other desires that we give in to—for example, the desire to get revenge rather than to forgive.

Unfortunately, the world we live in, both in a broad sense (our whole country) and a narrow sense (our own little neighborhood) urges us to selfish and sinful acts. I despise the TV commercials where someone selfishly refuses to share some desirable product, or steals it from the one who has it. Nothing is so wonderful that we should sin in order to have it. And how often have you



heard someone say, "I don't get mad; I get even," or, "I'm looking out for number one." Jesus wanted His disciples to be "in the world, but not of it." Too often we adopt the sinful ways of the world around us.

And don't forget that you have an enemy, the devil, whose desire for you is that you be eternally separated from God. He "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour," says 1 Peter 5:8. And he has the power to play with our minds and our emotions and lead us into sin, unless we resist him by remaining steadfast in our faith, as Peter says. .

So—our very nature, plus the world, the flesh, and the devil, all work to cause us to sin.

What is the effect of sin? When we sin, we separate ourselves from God. We go away from Him. We put ourselves in a position where our prayers are not heard (see Isaiah 59:2) and we are not listening for the Holy Spirit's guidance. "Apart from me you can do nothing," said Jesus. (John 15:5)

And the more we sin, the farther we separate ourselves from God. If our conscience formerly bothered us, it ceases to do so. We become, as Jesus said, slaves to the sin we commit.

Sin always has consequences, too. Sometimes it results in direct punishment—you steal or assault someone, and you go to jail. Sometimes it is more subtle—you injure someone with words, and bitterness invades the relationship. As it was in Adam's day, so it is now—sin results in death, of one sort or another. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) Fortunately for us, that's not the end of the story.

Grace—God's antidote for sin. God created us in His own image and gave us free will, knowing full well that we would be rebellious and sinful creatures. We were created, not to suffer the agony of eternal separation from God, but to enjoy the ecstasy of eternal fellowship with Him. And so, even before the creation, He had a plan to redeem us.

Jesus put it this way: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:16-17)

Jesus came to save sinners—to save you and to save me. But two things are required in order for a person to be saved. The first is forgiveness of sins. That is taken care of. When He died on the cross, Jesus took the punishment for all of your sins and all of my sins. All the sin debt is paid.

The second requirement is that we receive the gift of grace that Jesus died to give us because, as with any gift, if you don't receive it, you don't have it.

How does one receive the gift of salvation? Well, it obviously goes beyond simply saying, "Yes, Lord, I receive it." Saying "Yes" to Jesus is important, but it has to be said with our lives, not just with our lips. Fortunately, God's word give us a process to follow, so that we can know we have received the gift of eternal life:

1. **Confession.** First we have to admit that we are sinful, and in need of redemption. Then the Holy Spirit can begin His redeeming work in us. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)
2. **Repentance.** To repent means simply to make a U-turn and go in the other direction. Instead of continuing down the path of sin, we need to turn around and let God set us on the path of right living. (See Acts 3:19 and 26:18) "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)
3. **Restitution.** An important part of the process is to try to undo any wrong we have done. (See Leviticus 6:2-5) Notice that this combines aspects of confession and repentance: admitting that you did wrong, hopefully asking for and receiving forgiveness, and then reversing the consequences of your wrong deed.
4. **Restoration to fellowship.** This means returning to regular worship and participation in a church; but it also means resuming (or starting) a habit of spending time with the Lord in prayer and in studying His word.



One more thing needs to be said here. You have a choice about this. You can receive God's gift of salvation, or you can reject it. There are a few ways of rejecting it. One way is to utter blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. I don't know exactly what this means, but some people think it simply means to reject the Spirit's prompting to receive God's grace. Another way is to deliberately continue in behavior that you know is sinful. This, too, is rejecting the Holy Spirit. And a third way is just to postpone the choice for too long. "I'll decide tomorrow" doesn't work when you run out of tomorrows.

We've been all over the place without focusing on what John's Gospel has to say about sin. Let's do that now.

Jesus knew all about sin. When they challenged Him about the woman who was caught committing adultery He said, "'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her," knowing

that they were all aware of their own sinfulness. After they all left without condemning her He told her, "'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'" Later He said, "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."

Jesus came in order to be God's remedy for our sin. "'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'", said John the Baptist. And Jesus said, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." He came to "lay down His life" and die to purchase our salvation.

But there's more to it than that, of course. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," He said. "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life."

He goes on to describe an intimate relationship that must exist between the believer and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

This, then, is God's remedy for sin in all of us: forgiveness of our sins, the penalty having been fully paid by the suffering and death of His Son; and a call to an intimate, personal relationship with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We can reject His remedy, and suffer the eternal consequences; or we can enter in, trusting Him to complete the work we are allowing Him to begin in us.



May we all fully enter in—

Brother Roland

I Choose Love

It's quiet. It's early. My coffee is hot. The sky is still black. The world is still asleep. The day is coming.

In a few moments the day will arrive. It will roar down the track with the rising of the sun. The stillness of the dawn will be exchanged for the noise of the day. The calm of solitude will be replaced by the pounding pace of the human race. The refuge of the early morning will be invaded by decisions to be made and deadlines to be met.

For the next twelve hours I will be exposed to the day's demands. It is now that I must make a choice. Because of Calvary, I'm free to choose. And so I choose.

I choose love ...

No occasion justifies hatred; no injustice warrants bitterness. Today I will love God and love what God loves.

I choose joy ...

I will invite my God to be the God of circumstance. I will refuse the temptation to be cynical ... the tool of the lazy thinker. I will refuse to see people as anything less than human beings, created by God. I will refuse to see any problem as anything less than an opportunity to see God.

I choose peace ...

I will live forgiven. I will forgive so that I may live.

I choose patience...

I will overlook the inconveniences of the world. Instead of cursing the one who takes my place, I'll invite him to do so. Rather than complain that the wait is too long, I will thank God for a moment to pray. Instead of clenching my fist at new assignments, I will face them with joy and courage.

I choose kindness...

I will be kind to the poor, for they are alone. Kind to the rich, for they are afraid. And kind to the unkind, for such is how God has treated me.

I choose goodness...

I will go without a dollar before I will take a dishonest one. I will be overlooked before I will boast. I will confess before I will accuse. I choose goodness.

I choose faithfulness ...

Today I will keep my promises. My debtors will not regret their trust. My associates will not question my word. My spouse will not question my love. And my children will never fear that their father will not come home.

I choose gentleness ...

Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.

I choose self-control ...

I am a spiritual being. After this body is dead, my spirit will soar. I refuse to let what will rot, rule the eternal. I choose self-control. I will be drunk only by joy. I will be impassioned only by my faith. I will be influenced only by God. I will be taught only by Christ. I choose self-control.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. To these I commit my day. If I succeed, I will give thanks. If I fail, I will seek his grace. And then, when this day is done, I will place my head on my pillow and rest.

— Max Lucado

Got a question? It may be the same question that is occurring to someone else. Maybe you'll share it with me so I can take a shot at answering it in the "Good News Guide." That way others can benefit from your asking it. Send it to me:

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The Sin Problem

As you solve this puzzle, think about how easy it is to fall into sin, and how it can take over your life. Jesus came to break the power of sin over our lives, and to set us free to be God's own children. But Satan still wants to destroy us, and his usual weapon is sin. Don't let it be effective against you.

Puzzle:

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Words:

Why we sin

ADDICTION
 NOT BEING LOVED
 CARELESS TALK
 CARELESSNESS
 DISRESPECT
 FALSE FRIENDS
 GREED
 IGNORANCE
 LACK OF COMMITMENT
 OCCULT INVOLVEMENT
 PEER PRESSURE
 PRIDE
 RACIAL PREJUDICE
 REBELLION
 SELF INDULGENCE
 SELFISHNESS
 UNFORGIVENESS
 UNHEALTHY HABITS
 UNSAVED COMPANIONS

WAYWARDNESS
 WORLDLY ENTERTAINMENT
 WRONG PLACES
Consequences of sin
 BROKEN DREAMS
 DEBTS
 DISCOURAGEMENT
 DISEASE
 DISHONESTY
 ESTRANGEMENT
 FRUSTRATION
 HOPELESSNESS
 IMPRISONMENT
 LOSS OF FAMILY
 POVERTY OF SOUL
 PUNISHMENT
 SELF-CONDEMNATION
 SICKNESS
 UNBELIEF
 DEATH

HELL

Overcoming sin
 AVOIDING TEMPTATION
 BIBLE STUDY
 CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
 CONCERN FOR OTHERS
 CONFESSION
 FAITHFULNESS
 FORGIVENESS
 GENEROSITY
 KINDNESS
 OBEDIENCE
 POSITIVE ATTITUDE
 PRAISING GOD
 PRAYER LIFE
 REPENTANCE
 SURRENDER TO GOD
 THANKSGIVING
 THE HOLY SPIRIT
 TRUSTING JESUS