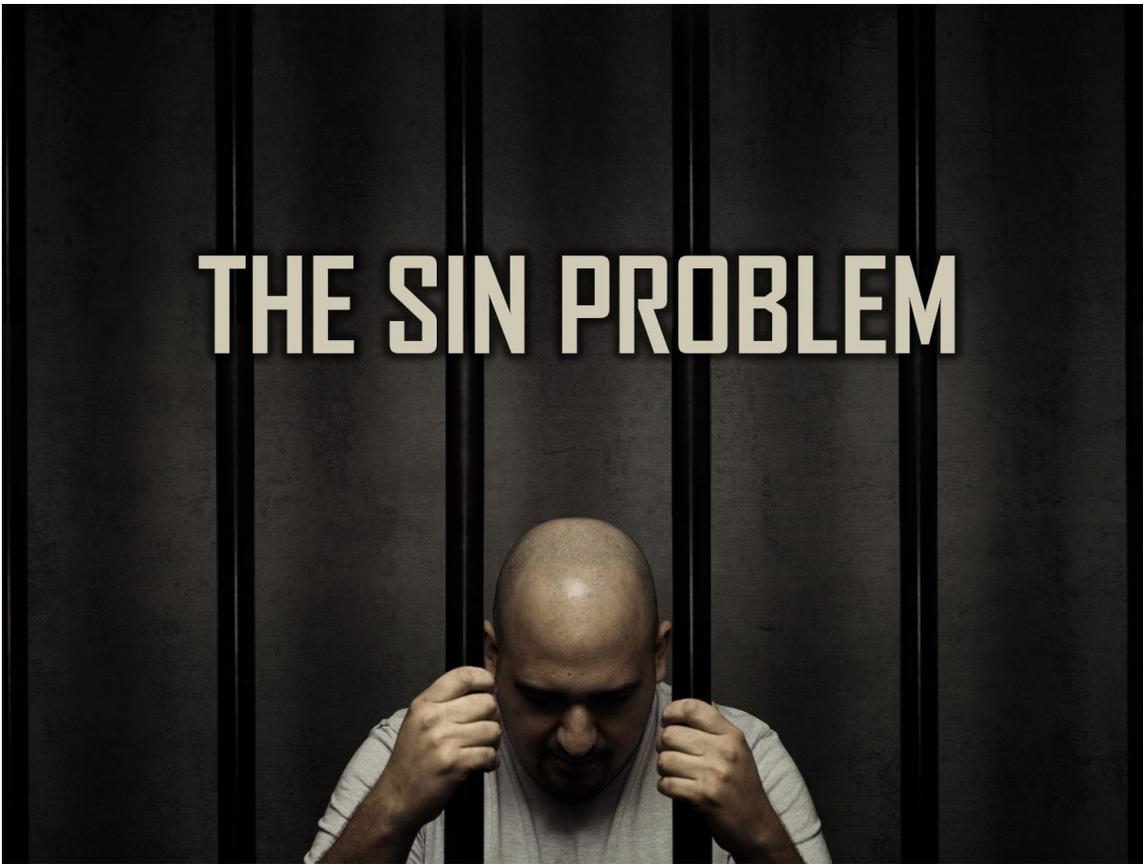


THE SIN PROBLEM



During my last sermon, we saw that God, even though He is infinitely higher and greater than we are, desires a relationship with us. Anybody who believes in God, just about, will also believe this. There are millions who don't bother to go to church, yet hope to spend eternity with Him.

However, God's love and yearning for us is not the sum total of His nature. We also saw that God is a holy God. He is perfectly good, and He is perfectly opposed to evil. This notion, by contrast, is not nearly as popular. Very few of those people who want to go to heaven also want to consider that because of their actions, they might not be headed there.

As a result, if we want to share the good news with others, we also have to be prepared to tell them the bad news. Only if we confront the ugly truth about human evil can we appreciate the beauty of the sacrifice of Christ. In our third half-hour study sermon, then, let's consider what the Scriptures tell us about the sin problem.

Understanding this problem begins with understanding that **GOD EXPECTS US TO OBEY HIM**. Here, consider Romans 2:6-8. There's a lot in this passage for us to consider. First, it tells us that the day will come when God is going to judge every human being. He's going to sort mankind into two groups: those who did well on the one hand, and those who did not obey the truth on the other. God knows everything and is perfectly wise, so every one of His judgments will be perfect.

However, there's something more that this passage implies. Notice that Paul describes evildoing as disobedience to the truth. In other words, God isn't going to punish anybody because they look funny. Instead, He is going to pour out His wrath on people who have failed to live up to a true standard. Scripturally speaking, we can call this standard "the law of God".

There are two ways that we can learn God's law. The first is by reading it in His word, which is the perfect statement of that law. The second, though, is that moral sense that every one of us has in our hearts, a moral sense that God put there. The whole world over, everybody knows it's wrong to murder. Everybody knows it's wrong to cheat on your spouse. Everybody knows it's wrong to lie. People can drown out the voice of their conscience, they can disobey it, but it's always there, and God expects even people who haven't read the Bible to listen to it.

When we don't do what we know is right, we sin, and SIN IS LAWLESSNESS. John tells us so in just as many words in 1 John 3:4. John here, of course, is not concerned with the laws of humankind, which may be righteous or unrighteous. Instead, he is concerned with the law of God, and every sin we commit is a violation of that law.

This is important to recognize because people often don't want to admit that their conduct is sinful. Yeah, they slept around all the time before they got married; yeah, they just lied to their spouse because they didn't want to get into an argument, but everybody does that, right? That doesn't make you a bad person, right? That doesn't make you a sinner!

Well, yeah it does. This is the same standard that we apply to human law. After all, if a man gets caught breaking into somebody else's home, when he's on trial, the fact that he didn't kill anybody is irrelevant. You don't have to be a murderer to be a lawbreaker. It's enough to be a thief.

In the same way, none of us have to be Hitler to be a sinner. We only have to have sinned. Any sin, whether we think it's significant or not, turns us into somebody who has broken the law of God.

This is true even if we refuse to admit it ourselves. All kinds of people argue that their practice of homosexuality isn't a sin. However, according to Paul, nature itself teaches them differently. They should know better, and because they should have known better, they are lawbreakers too.

The result of this is that ALL OF US HAVE SINNED. Here, let's look, of course, at Romans 3:23. God is perfect. His standard for righteousness is perfection. None of us have lived up to that standard because at some point, every one of us has sinned. God is glorious in His perfection, but all of us fall short of that glory.

In my experience, people often don't want to admit this about themselves because they want to hold on to the self-image that they are good people. All of us read that

passage in Romans 2 about how God deals with the righteous and the wicked, and there's some part in all of us that says, "Yeah! I'm in there with the righteous people!"

The problem is, though, that every one of us knows better in our hearts. We proudly hold ourselves up as righteous while refusing to consider all the evidence that we are not—and there is a lot of evidence against all of us! None of us are people who have sinned once or sinned twice.

Instead, every one of us has lives that are marred by a continual pattern of selfishness and pride. Over and over again, we've proved that we care more about ourselves than about God and His law. We knew the right thing to do, but repeatedly, we've chosen not to do it. In other words, because of our actions, every one of us has become someone the holiness of God can't tolerate. That's where we are without Jesus. We are sinners, plain and simple.

That's not a little problem. That's a great big problem because SIN LEADS TO DEATH. Look at Romans 6:23. As always, Paul's language here is significant. He tells us that the wages of sin is death. A wage is something you earn. When I worked at McDonald's back in the mid-'90s, every two weeks, I got a paycheck containing my wages for the past two weeks' work. If I hadn't worked, there would have been no wages.

So too, all of us must admit that death is something we have earned with our sin. God is not being arbitrary or unfair in condemning sinners. We knew better, we could have done better, but we chose not to. We don't get our paycheck until the end of our lives, but if we continue on in our sinful ways, we will surely receive death as our just due. Nor is this some mere physical death penalty. Instead, it is spiritual death, an eternity spent far from the presence of God in the torments of hell.

However, as this verse points out, there is still hope for the human race. The hope isn't that we can earn eternal life. Because all of us are sinners, we have already failed to do that! Instead, our hope is that we can receive eternal life as a gift from a loving and merciful God.

How can that be? How can a God who cannot stand sin in His presence receive sinners into His presence for eternity? The answer is that we can have eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, and future sermons in this series will explain exactly how.

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