



What is the Problem With Sin?

Sermon Series: A Look at the Seven Deadly Sins

Luke 5:27-32

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I am sure at some point you have heard of the Seven Deadly Sins. This list, which includes pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath and sloth, has its origin in the early fathers of the church. You will find in the Bible, in Proverbs 6:16-19 and in Galatians 5:19–21, similar lists of sins that God especially hates.

So, I would like to take a few Sundays to look at this traditional list of sins and how we can overcome them.

I believe that if we took a survey among us we would find varying opinions and thoughts about sin. It is not a topic that all of us are comfortable in thinking about and even less comfortable in talking about. Our culture often glamorizes sin and gives praise and stature to “bad boys” and “bad girls”.

But we Christians do not follow the popular culture, do we? We have another standard for behaviour and that is the Bible. What does the Bible say about sin? Let’s take a brief look.

In 1 John 1:8-10, it says *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

Saint Paul, in Romans 3:23, speaks quite to the point in saying, *For all*

have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Psalm 51 is a great statement on sin and confession and forgiveness. In verse 5 it says, *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

What is sin? Bible scholars have identified thirty-three Greek words in the New Testament which describe sin.¹ The most frequently used is the word *hamartia* (ha-mar-TEE-uh). Each of you who took the Pastor's Class from me will remember our learning about this word.

Hamartia means "missing the mark" and it is illustrated by the image of a soldier shooting an arrow at a target and the arrow goes wide to the right or wide to the left, missing the target. What is the target? The righteousness of God. None of us, on our own, can hit that target.

Yet, attaining the righteousness of God is essential if we are ever to be in God's presence. All have sinned, we know, so we all need that means to be able to be with God.

As we read in our Scripture lesson for today, Jesus happened to come upon a Roman tax collector named Levi. The tax collectors, also called "publicans", were very much disliked by the Jews of that day. For one thing, the publicans were fellow Jews who were collaborating with Rome, the occupying nation. And, often they were greedy and corrupt, taking in far more in taxes than was legal.

So, in the New Testament, these tax collectors were often seen as the epitome of sin. And here we find Jesus engaging Levi in a conversation and even going so far as to invite him to join Jesus' band of disciples. This was unheard of in that time.

What did Levi do? He got up and followed Jesus. But he went a step further. He celebrated the occasion by throwing a big banquet and inviting

many of his fellow tax collectors and friends. Now, this was an event that no self-respecting Jew of that day would go near, but guess which Jew did attend and help Levi celebrate?

Of course, Jesus! And it was scandalous in the eyes of other Jews. To sit and celebrate and eat with these sinners/tax collectors was simply not done by a self-respecting Jew. But Jesus silenced them when he said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Now, if you have not figured this out at this point, "Levi" became known as "Matthew" and was one of the twelve who most closely followed Jesus.

And so in Levi's case, coming out of his life of sin involved a total change in his life, moving from his questionable life of sin to a completely different orientation. And that was a cause to celebrate!

One of my all-time favorite stories -- perhaps apocryphal -- concerns President Calvin Coolidge². Maybe you have heard this, but it bears repeating. As you may recall from your history studies, President Coolidge had the reputation of being a man of few words.

On a particular Sunday morning, President Coolidge prepared to leave the White House to attend church services at a nearby house of worship. On that day Mrs. Coolidge was not feeling well, so she stayed behind.

When Mr. Coolidge returned home, Mrs. Coolidge asked how the service went. "Fine" was the answer given.

"Were there many people there?" she asked. "A few" he answered.

By now becoming a little frustrated by the lack of details from her husband, Mrs. Coolidge then asked, "What did the minister preach about?"

“Sin” was the one-word reply.

With a little more frustration, Mrs. Coolidge tried again. “Well, what did he say about it?”

And President Coolidge replied, “He was agin’ it.”

Unfortunately, in the experience of many Christians, they have been exposed, in church, over the years to what might be called an unhealthy obsession with sin. Many have unpleasant memories of being verbally berated Sunday after Sunday with the fact that we are sinners. Many did not experience much love and grace in their religious training.

I recall speaking with a young woman a few years ago who still vividly remembered attending church with a friend of her when she was a little girl. The minister railed on and on about sin and its dire consequences to the point that she went home scared to death. A vivid memory even after all the years since.

This is not what I want from us. I want each of us to be aware of our sin nature, to be aware of the awfulness of sin, and to be aware of the consequences of sin. But I also want us to know about the love and grace of God which can forgive our sins and set us on the right path.

Saint Paul is helpful when he says, in 1 Corinthians 10:13, *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

I am always blessed each week in my daily devotional reading how often the writer speaks to the topic of that week’s sermon. Just yesterday, Oswald Chambers, in his classic work, *My Utmost for His Highest*³.

He wrote,

Sin is a fundamental relationship— it is not wrong doing, but wrong being— it is deliberate and determined independence from God. The Christian faith bases everything on the extreme, self-confident nature of sin. Other faiths deal with sins— the Bible alone deals with sin. . . . The revealed truth of the Bible is not that Jesus Christ took on Himself our fleshly sins, but that He took on Himself the heredity of sin that no man can even touch. God made His own Son “to be sin” that He might make the sinner into a saint. It is revealed throughout the Bible that our Lord took on Himself the sin of the world through identification with us, not through sympathy for us. He deliberately took on His own shoulders, and endured in His own body, the complete, cumulative sin of the human race. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us...” and by so doing He placed salvation for the entire human race solely on the basis of redemption.

Thanks be to God!

So, there is the condition of sin, from which the blood of Jesus saves us. And there are the individual sins we commit from day to day which must be confessed to God.

In 1759, just two years after coming to faith in Christ, the hymnwriter Joseph Hart wrote this⁴:

*Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love and power.*

*Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all.*

*Let not conscience make you linger,
Not of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him.*

*And then the Refrain,
I will arise and go to Jesus,
He will embrace me in His arms;
In the arms of my dear Savior,
O there are ten thousand charms.*

If you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all. What a wonderful and gracious invitation to each of us. Bring your sin burden to Jesus and let him bear it for you.

Let us pray together:

Heavenly Father, all praise and honor and glory are Yours. How thankful we are that You provided the remedy for this fatal malady we all carry within us, our sinful nature. May we unburden ourselves upon Your loving heart, and may we go forth from here as new creatures in Christ Jesus. May Your Holy Spirit teach us daily the things of Christ, that we may be channels of Your glory and righteousness. Amen.

Amen.

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1. See the article, “Thirty-Three Words for Sin in the New Testament”, by John F. Walfoord, at <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-1>.

2. John Calvin Coolidge, Jr. (1872-1933), was United States, 1923-



the 30th President of the United States, 1929.

3. Available online at <https://utmost.org>.

4. Joseph Hart (1712-1768) wrote at least 35 hymns and was a very popular preacher in his day. He is buried near another hymnwriter, Isaac Watts, and the author John Bunyon. See www.cyberhymnal.org.