

SLIDE 1. ANCHORED: A Study of What We Believe and Why

Teaching: **Article 4: Sin and Evil**

Sunday November 12, 2023

Welcome to SIN SUNDAY!

SLIDE 2. APPETIZER

"Preferring anything above Christ is the very essence of sin. It must be fought." Conf John Piper

SLIDE 3. MAIN COURSE. Here's what our Confession of Faith says about SIN + EVIL – in short - **We believe sin is individual and corporate opposition to God's good purposes and leads to physical and spiritual death.**

So, taking from last week's teaching, we believe that God created the world and pronounced it good. This is the story of Genesis 1.

Then, God created man and woman in His image. This is the story of Genesis 2.

Then, things go sideways.

Genesis 3 is the account of the fall of mankind – from ease of being with God to not - when a being – described as a serpent – tempted Adam and Eve to make a choice apart from God's good purposes – and so – sin and evil entered the world – intruded and corrupted God's good creation – when these representative humans ate the fruit that God prohibited.

From the beginning – then – sin and evil are problems that require a solution.

From the beginning – then – things are not as they should have been.

The consequences of this choice – and our choices like it ever since – are disastrous: sin alienates us from God, each other, and creation.

And - as if this isn't bad enough – sin also corrupts us and the way we see ourselves.

Every aspect of human nature is affected by sin – such that no faculty – whether conscience or reason – provides an undistorted point of contact with God or sense of self.

We are image bearers of God, but we are broken.

We can reflect the glory of God, but only as well as a broken mirror reflects the image before it.

So, we often see ourselves as nothing more than our sin.

Sadly, we are so corrupted by sin – as it entered the world and exists in the world even now, and as we yielded to it and yield to it today – we cannot save ourselves from it.

Which might sound like too much – or like a disrespect to humanity – but it is how the bible describes us – *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Ro. 3:23) – and – if we're being honest – we don't have to look too far to see the evidence of sin and evil – anything which opposes God's good purposes – at work in the world and its devastating effects.

Sin's consequence of depravity requires a solution outside us.

We believe that solution is Jesus Christ.

That is the story of Easter!

Sin is a power.

Paul differentiates between *sin* and *sins* in his letters to the churches in the NT.

He depicts sin as ruling over this time – enslaving creation and its creatures – incl. you and me – putting it and them and us under the power of death.

Speaking to people who believed in and followed Jesus Christ – Paul said this...

*As for you, you **were** dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world (powers opposed to God's good purposes) and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient (the agent behind sin).*

All of us also lived among them at one time (dead), gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts, Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3).

Which is not to say that God is inherently ticked off at us!

It is to say this: that we are born into a world that is ruled by a power and an agent in opposition to God – though only as allowed by God – as in the story of Job – so that not even by our choices to sin (or because we sin) are we objects of wrath but by being vulnerable to a world opposed to the God who loves us and created us.

Which is to also say this - that God's wrath is just that - the result of our choices apart from God's good purposes when we are tempted by the power and agent behind sin – some of the effects we know by name: isolation and shame and despair and hopelessness and confusion and fear and division and coveting and violence.

Adam's choice to eat of the forbidden fruit was the sinful action that allowed the power of sin to gain entrance into the world and consequently to pull all people into its rule.

SLIDE 4. As Paul says in the book of Romans: ***...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all men, because all sinned... (Ro. 6:12).***

All have sinned – except Jesus!

The gospels depict the power of evil as embodied in unclean spirits or demons – which can exert great physical and moral influence over people - the chief of these agents being Satan – aka. the devil or Beelzebub (Mt. 12:24-29) – or that “ancient serpent” (Rev. 12:9) – which is a shout-back to Genesis 3.

Jesus – though – resisted the temptations of the devil in the wilderness – as described in Luke 4. And - Jesus confronted and casted out unclean spirits throughout his ministry life.

Take that sin and evil!

Paul described these powers of corruption as principalities – as groups or nations or structures susceptible to demonic forces. Structures such as governments, military forces, economic systems, educational or religious institutions, family systems, and structures determined by class, race, gender, or nationality *can* incite people to do evil they would never have chosen on their own.

So – taken together – this is what we’ve learned so far...

That sin is opposition to God’s good purposes.

That sin is a power that entered the world and is currently at work in the world.

That sin is embodied in demonic forces who are led by Satan.

That we have been corrupted by these forces.

That this is a serious problem that we cannot solve for ourselves.

That Jesus Christ – however – does.

Although God provided ways of dealing with sin throughout the OT – God’s final solution to the problem of sin was to send Jesus Christ into human history.

Jesus broke the power of sin and evil and death by virtue of his obedient life, death, and resurrection.

God took the initiative to provide forgiveness and reconciliation and restoration with Him – and so - life in His kingdom – through Jesus Christ.

In Christ – God raised up a Savior with power that is stronger than sin and evil – who – when we choose to believe in Him and follow Him – liberates us from the corruption and oppression of sin and evil.

Even though it may not feel like it. Even though it may not look like it.

Because we continue to experience the effects of sin and evil.

SLIDE 5. So – How do we live a life of freedom from sin and evil in this world?

1. Know what sin is and its consequences.

Contrary to what some may think – God is not some old, angry deity in the sky whose main occupation is to monitor our behavior and punish us when we sin.

God loves us and created us out of love to be loved – because that - is what love does!

So, God initiated a covenant with humanity – an agreement which established a relationship with God and people – begun in Abraham and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Living within this covenant is described as SHALOM – the OT idea that integrates God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and peace.

What many modern writers describe as – FLOURISHING.

Living without this covenant is described as WRATH – the NT idea that God gives humans over to the consequences of their wickedness when we suppress the truth and forget Him (Ro. 1:18, 21, 28).

What many modern writers describe as – HELL (on earth).

We know this by experience.

We flourish when we live as covenant people in healthy relationship with God. We demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. This way of living isn't just good for us – it's good for others.

The Spirit of God works these things in us and out of us as we depend on and cooperate with Him.

Conversely, life is a living hell when we oppose God's good purposes.

Take this simple command in the bible: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up others according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen* (Eph. 4:29).

We have a sense of SHALOM when we say things that build others up.

We have a sense of SHAME when we say things that tear people down. We regret what we say. We isolate and it festers. We justify and rationalize. We hope people will forget. We live in darkness. We gnash our teeth.

A micro-slice of hell.

Sin – then – in this sense – is stepping out of covenant relationship with God or never stepping into one in the first place.

But we might also think of sin as the sinful things we do.

And luckily – someone has taken the time - at **truediscipleship.com** - to make an alphabetical list of sins listed in the NT.

Here's a sample: adultery, bitterness, complaining, deceit, envy, fornication, greed, hypocrisy, judging, lying, murder, pride, quarrels, slander, treachery, unforgiveness.

Now – when you heard that list – it's impossible to imagine that anything on that list would be something God would desire for us to do.

So, as disciples of Jesus – as apprentices of Christ – we try to focus on godly things, we try to emulate Jesus, and we try to depend on the Spirit of God.

And that's good! We should. Depend on God, and make an effort.

But discipleship isn't about avoiding sin – or sin management – or keeping a tight list.

It's about knowing Jesus and following Him – and knowing that we are forgiven and loved – and that *nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Ro. 8:39) – and then walking in that love - to love others.

And when we do sin – to confess our sin as a reminder of our forgiveness.

2. Confess your sins to God and receive His forgiveness.

Acknowledge the conviction of the Holy Spirit in you when you sin. Be honest with God about how your sin dishonors Him – how it is such a contrast to His holiness – and His desire for you to flourish.

Name it. Agree with God that it hurts you and Him and others. Say it out loud.

Because when we don't – we will like the Psalmist who wrote long ago: *When I kept silent (about my sin), my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long* (Ps. 32:3).

"I blew it Father. I lusted after that woman. I committed adultery with her in my heart. I did more than linger. I dishonored my wife. I objectified a co-image-bearer. I debased womanhood. I feel guilty. Thank you for pointing it out to me. I see that that way is the way of death and hell. Thank you for your forgiveness."

"I have fallen again Jesus. I was complaining out of a critical heart. I heard myself doing it. And even as I was saying it, I was saying to myself, "Stop!" I want to go back and not say it. I want to say something positive. I feel crummy. Thanks for alerting me. Thanks for your patience with me. At the end of the day – I want to be someone who contributed – not someone who complained. That's a better way. Thanks for your forgiveness.

Let's practice!

I'm going to give you a little bit of time – for some personal reflection and then – confession. In this case – not out loud :)

SLIDE 6. Let's begin by reading these 2 verses together: ***Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps. 139:23-24).***

TIME FOR REFLECTION.

SLIDE 7. Now – if it makes sense – based on your relationship with God – and if you just confessed something to God, please say with me: **Thank you for your forgiveness, Lord!**

Now to something that might be even harder...

SLIDE 8.

3. Process forgiveness between you and others.

In so far as it is possible.

We believe that God's forgiveness of us is related to our forgiveness of others.

We believe this because this idea is embedded in the prayer Jesus taught His disciples: *...forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us* (Mt. 6:14).

We believe this because none of us are perfect and so all of us need to seek forgiveness of someone else at some time or another.

We believe this because it seems ludicrous (if we're being honest with ourselves) to withhold forgiveness of others when we have been forgiven so much and so completely in Jesus Christ. This is the heart of the parable of the unforgiving servant in Mt. 18.

We believe that God's forgiveness of us is related to our forgiveness of others because the kingdom of God – on display in the church – is the body of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12) – such that unconfessed and unforgiven sin within the body is like a virus that hurts the whole body.

In other words – we believe that – my sin, your sin, our sin - effects the spiritual health of the entire congregation. We need to check it with our Lord – and check it with each other – both on the side of forgiving others and seeking forgiveness.

So – let me encourage you to process forgiveness between you and others.

Because of time – I'm not going to walk through any steps - per se – on how you might do that – I will only refer you to what Jesus says about this in Mt. 18:15-20. Feel free – though – to reach out to me through the week if you'd like to chat about it.

And now for our TAKEOUT...

Article 4: Sin and Evil: Liturgical Version

Out of the depths we cry to You, O Lord; in Your mercy, hear our prayers.

**We confess that formerly we were dead in sin,
cut off from You,
cut off from each other,
rebels wondering in a wilderness of our own making.
We long to put off the sin that so easily entangles,
but in our own strength, Lord, we cannot.**

Father in heaven, do not lead us into temptation!

**The human heart is deceitful above all things;
how dare we trust in ourselves?
Pride and greed make their home within,
and we so quickly turn to worship anything but You.**

Father in heaven, rescue us from the Evil One!

**The devil prowls around,
like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.
Powers and principalities rage against us,
seeking to deceive and enslave.
Yet greater is He that is in us,
than he that is in the world.**

Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.