

Sin

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[0:00] Many years ago during an evening service, the one who was delivering the message playfully observed, whenever Dave Wessner wants to be encouraged, he studies depravity.

Well, the Lord had only been recently teaching me the doctrines of grace at that time, and so his comment took me a bit by surprise. I hadn't recognized that pattern developing yet, but you know he was right.

And he then publicly asked me to explain why that was. Well, even though his observation was correct, I didn't have an answer for him.

But I did begin contemplating that question over the next several years. And so I'd like to begin today by posing the question to you. Only rather than asking the more academic and easier to answer question of why the doctrine of sin is important, I'd like to ask what he asked me.

Why should studying the doctrine of sin or depravity encourage our souls? Anyone? Would you be as stumped as I was?

[1:11] It displays the work of grace in a wondrous, wondrous way. It displays the work of grace in a wondrous, wondrous way. Very good. It points us to God, doesn't it?

I think the question, are we saved from just a little bit of sin or are we saved from very much sin?

And like we said, it magnified God's grace when we discover it's great sin.

So it helps us to see whether we've been saved from only a little bit of sin or a lot of sin. We'll be talking a lot about that this morning. Someone else. Mike. It gives us a true perspective of where we stand and what we can do and what we can't do.

It gives us a true perspective of where we stand and what we can do and what we cannot do. How does that encourage us? Not to put you on the spot. Go ahead. That I know I'm not going to be going off on some rabbit trail that I think looks good or the world thinks looks good.

But goes nowhere because I'm accomplishing it. It's only God's grace. Okay. Keeps me from going down a rabbit trail. Staying in God's will. Yes. Freedom.

[2:26] Freedom. Freedom. So much. How is it that studying the doctrine of sin frees us from so much? Wouldn't it depress us to see how sinful we are?

Roger. I think when he talks about total depravity, he likes using the word total inability. And so that tells us there's nothing we need to do.

Okay. And that's a great version because I have anything to do with it when there's a possibility that I can fail. So total depravity for those on the tape equals total inability.

Roger, you don't have the answer sheet. No. Okay. The encouragement really comes. It's discouraging in a sense to study the sin, but the encouragement comes when you look to Christ.

See, it's all sufficiency. There's where the encouragement is. If you only look at your sin and stay there, it's depressing. But that makes, again, the grace of God look so much greater, the sufficiency of Christ, the blood of Christ, all the much more sweeter.

[3:41] Okay. Very, very good. Dale observed that if we stay at our sin, it is going to be depressing. But if it causes us to look to Christ, then there's so much glory in it, and it is so encouraging.

This is something that even though I was doing, I hadn't made that mental connection. And so I struggled for a long time trying to understand why isn't this depressing me.

And it's because his spirit was taking my contemplation of my sinfulness and bringing me to the cross without me even recognizing mentally what was really working out and going on.

Very key observation. Okay. Well, let us jump in to the lesson this morning. And by popular request, I've attempted to spread the notes across two pages to give you a little more room to write for those of you who are so inclined.

But we are going to consider sin under four heads this morning. The nature of sin, the effect of sin, the deception of sin, and then we'll return to some applications of the doctrine of sin as we began. [4:56] So first, the nature of sin. Packer summarizes sin as plain God and as a means to this, refusing to allow the Creator to be God.

So far as you are concerned. Sin is living for ourselves rather than God, I would like to say. Packer goes on. Augustine analyzed sin as pride, the mad passion to be superior even to God, and as a state of being bent away from God into an attitude of self-absorption.

As we pointed out in our lesson on election, sin is thus in the devil's image. 1 Timothy 3.6, he must not be a recent convert.

Paul's warning to Timothy as it relates to the qualification for elders. He must not be a recent convert or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.

Sin is expressed by the capacity to be able to live within God's world with his glory, the glory of creation, screaming all around us, without giving him the glory that's due to his name.

[6:14] For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him. Romans 1.21. So in a word, sin is enmity against God.

The sinful mind is hostile to, or the old King James, enmity against God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so, Romans 8.7.

What's enmity? Enmity is resentment to his claims, hostility to his word, a fixed and unalterable determination to pursue one's own independence and defiance of the creator.

Again, so says Packer. Isaiah 53.6, we all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. So that is the nature of sin.

And if that be its nature, how does that relate to man? What's the effect of sin on man? And that is our second head, the effect of sin. As we quickly review these effects of sin, I'd like us to personalize each one.

[7:23] Put yourself, put your name into this. This is what sin is doing to you. It's the effects it has on you. First, we are born with sin.

We are born with sin. Psalm 51.5, surely I was sinful at birth. Sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Second, sin is universal.

Universal in that it encompasses every member of the human race. Save Jesus. Romans 3.23, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. 1 John 1.8, if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

But it's also universal in that it affects every aspect of our being. Genesis 8.21, the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart, Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood.

How can this be? How can every inclination of our hearts truly be evil from childhood? Not just some inclinations, but every inclination.

[8:41] Well, thirdly, sin dwells within and defiles each of us. It's because sin isn't something out there, it's something inside of us. It's what we are.

Like poisonous chemicals that permeate the ground beneath the landfill and keep oozing into the water supply, our sinful nature permeates every crevice of our being and taints everything we say and do and plan.

It taints everything that we are. Mark 7.20-21, What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, and so on.

Like a dirty cloth set next to a bright white sheet, our defilement is most pronounced when set next to the blazing glory of the thrice holy God, as we read in Isaiah 6.3-5.

And they were calling to one another, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory. At the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke.

[9:52] Woe to me, I cried. I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips. And my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of glory.

Well, this defilement is often referred to as depravity. And so, fourthly, the effect of sin is that it leaves us in a state of depravity.

Depravity captures the idea that our present state is a perversion of God's image. Ecclesiastes 7.29, This only have I found, God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.

Packer states, Man, as God made him, had a mind to know God's will and a heart to take pleasure in it, love it, and do it. It was man's nature then to be holy as God is holy.

But now, man's mind is darkened to spiritual things. His will is alienated from God's will. His conscience is insensitive to God's voice. He has become not merely weak, but bad in God's sight. [11:07] For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. Romans 7.18. Well, this state of depravity has been rightly called total.

Not because we are as bad as we could be, but because there is no part of man that is as good as it should be. Men frequently do good deeds.

God acknowledges this, such as in Matthew 7.11. If then you, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children. He understands good gifts are going on, but man takes credit for that.

No, we can do good. We aren't as bad as we could be, but depravity speaks and recognizes that everything we do do is corrupt in every way.

Our good acts are corrupt at the core, and that's what makes them filthy in God's sight. Isaiah 64.6. All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.

[12:16] Again, as Packer summarizes at this point, each action is viciously self-regarding in some way. For the sinner's motive is always something more, and therefore something less, than the pure love to God, a pure regard for his will, and a pure desire for his glory.

Well, fifthly, the effect of sin is that it is our master. Sin is our master. Romans 8.8. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Sin controls and rules over us. That which controls us is, by definition, our master, as Romans 6.16 observes.

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey, whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness.

Which is really another way, again, of saying that Satan is our master. John 8.44. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. Matthew 13.38.

[13:27] The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. Or 1 John 3.8. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. Acts 13.10. You are a child of the devil, and an enemy of everything that is right.

And then, sixthly, if we're controlled by sin, that is, if it's our master, then it only follows that sin leaves us in a state of inability. Sin leaves us in a state of inability.

Man cannot come to God. We cannot come to God. Listen to Jeremiah 13.23.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil. Romans 8.7.

[14:35] The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 1 Corinthians 2.14. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Another metaphor used in Scripture that describes this state of inability is death. Ephesians 2.1. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.

The term death is used throughout the New Testament to describe our hopeless and helpless state when we're left to ourself. I can no more respond to the gospel by my own will than I could will myself to come out of the tomb and come back to life.

As such, the spiritually dead man needs to be the recipient of a resurrection call from God, just as Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb. John 3.5.

Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. And here we see the hope that there is something beyond our inability.

[15:51] There is hope for something coming to us, our ability to come out of this death state, this inability state, but it's coming from outside of ourselves. John 6.44.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day. I've spent a lot of time reading many passages of Scripture as we've gone through these points because I feel, number one, this being Sunday school, I'm going to make it a little bit of a school.

But secondly, these doctrines are such under attack and especially the doctrine of sin that I think it's very important for us again to get a heavy dose of what Scripture has to say on this subject.

This isn't just in our confessional. Our confessional has come from what the Word of God says. And of course, we could have taken these few verses I've read and explode them to many, many more. But it's at this point of inability that I think we have one of the greatest struggles within the church today. We need to first understand that this inability is not an inability of God's design, but of man's choice that flows from his depraved nature.

[17:15] In other words, we cannot please God because we will not please God. Matthew 23, 37, Jesus praying over Jerusalem, we see both the heart of God and the person of Jesus Christ and we see the heart of man.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

It isn't that God didn't create us with the ability to make choices. That's not the inability being spoken of in Scripture. It's that we literally cannot make the choice to submit ourselves to God because we're so bent on going our own way.

God does not limit our choices. Rather, because we are sinners, we're now bound to some self-imposed restrictions. I've used this illustration before, but I believe it helps capture the idea of how our nature limits our option of choices.

suppose your family goes on a picnic into a beautiful meadow and mom's preparing the meal while the children are off playing under some trees and off in the corner of the meadow you can see some deer that are cautiously eyeing the family on the other side of the meadow.

[18:41] Some birds are chirping happily overhead in the tall grass to the mother's where. There's a snake slithering along the ground. Finally, the meal is ready and so mom announces whoever's hungry may come and get it.

But something strange happens. It's only the children that get up from under the tree and bound to the table to get the food. The deer remain at the other end of the field. The snake runs the other direction.

The birds continue to chirp overhead. Even though the mother may have intended the invitation for all the creatures with an earshot, only her children responded.

Why is that? Because it's not in the nature of the deer or the snake or the birds to have fellowship with humans. She could have given that call a thousand times and none of those other creatures would have ever responded and so it is with us.

When we sinned in Adam our very nature changed. We would never choose to run to God any more than a wild deer would choose to eat out of the hand of a human. Although God's call sincerely goes out no human will respond to that call because we have an aversion towards God and will not submit to his law.

[20:01] But the effects of sin aren't merely related to God. Sin first and foremost is an affront to God and as such sin leaves us in a state of condemnation which is the final point on your first sheet.

sin leaves us in a state of condemnation. Romans 1.32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Romans 2.8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil there will be wrath and anger. Matthew 25.41 Then he will say to those on his left depart from me you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

I would venture to guess that I am not the only one in this room who has ever wondered about the fairness of God's seemingly severe punishment for our sins. I commit some relatively minor evils. I mean I am not a bad guy I have never murdered anybody or done anything terribly wrong and I do it for a few short years and God's response is that he is going to pay me back with eternal condemnation and hell and torments beyond description forever and ever and that's a payment for a few short years of my sinning against him.

[21:43] How is that fair? I'd like that to open up here. How is that fair? Any thoughts? Ed.

Ed observes that even in hell our hatred if we end up there our hatred for God will never change our rebellion will never change and so we continue to keep heaping up punishment that must be paid.

Thank you for observing that Ed. I had thought through that I did not bring it out in the lesson here but that's a very applicable point. Someone else, to kind of expand on that a little bit we have a tendency to look at the deeds and that we're being so called rewarded justly according to our deeds in that time in hell eternity in hell we're going to like Ed said it's the heart it's the rebellion that is the issue and our focus in a sense has to come off the deeds that's just the indicator of the deeper problem and so it's that alienation from God it's that turning from God that part of hatred towards him that's what's being judged.

Okay so the rebellion the hatred toward God is what's being judged absolutely that's the root of the issue but I'd like to again playing the devil's advocate ask the question if I have a child who shows rebellion towards me and I can forgive that child and we can go on why must God judge me for all eternity when I rebel against him Jim it has to do with the holiness of God the total color of God it's not like he's equal to us and we see sin against him and he's equal to us he is holy infinitely above us okay and we're sin against him and he's in the end so Jim has observed that it has to do with the holiness of God and his infinite nature and we're sinning against that infinite nature very good Karen I wonder what Jim said I was thinking who are we to decide what is fair as we stand before holy God we we have no realm to decide and judge what is fair holy God very good ultimately we shouldn't even be asking the question right because who are we as creatures to even ask what is fair absolutely Karen we take sin too lightly we don't think it's all that bad and we don't see how a little bit of sin from our lifetime they play through that because we just think sin isn't that bad or that offensive as Jim said you don't realize how holy that is how low that is so I think it's an indication of the person thinking sin is a light thing okay very good seeing sin as being very light we don't appreciate how bad it is which we're going to cover in a minute one more point going back to your question dealing with yourself for example there are degrees of punishment so not all men are punished the very same but they will be punished what their sin deserves okay that observes there are going to be degrees of punishment now well to ask the question as somebody has already observed is really to reveal lack of appreciation for the awfulness of our sin and I'd like to use another illustration that I heard many years ago on a series on the topic of hell by Pastor [26:18] Donnelly out of Scotland is it Ireland Northern Ireland sorry for anybody listening who's from that area I know that they're different in the illustration a child is playing out in the front yard and you observe them finding a worm and picking the worm up and playing with the worm and then pulls the worm apart starts pulling the worm apart several times and you go that's not very nice and you walk out and you give them a little reprimand that we should be nice to God's creatures you shouldn't pull the worm apart if there's no reason for doing so and you go back in well a few years later the child's growing some and you see them playing out in the front yard with a little kitten and as the child is playing with that kitten it grabs the head of the kitten and twists the head off now we're set back with a little more horror over what we just saw that's not a good sign and what would allow that child to do such a thing and we go out and give them a much stronger reprimand and maybe ground them or do some discipline or something but this is getting serious a few years later the child is out in the front now as an older teenager holding a baby and as we watch to our complete horror the teenager twists the head of the baby off and I'm sorry for the graphicness but I want you to get the impact of the illustration at that point it's no longer something that needs discipline it's murder and even our laws of our land is going to bring severe punishment onto that young person now what is the difference between each of those dastardly deeds in the same for each one the child performed the same act but the wickedness of the deed grew exponentially with each case why is that so well because we assign greater worth to each higher level of life form and how do we assign badness and evil in our minds well the understood evil of a deed really when we evaluate it and think about it has really nothing to do with the amount of time it took to commit that deed it can take a split second to murder someone and the deed itself isn't really also the overriding factor in all cases the child pulled apart a creature know what determines the understood level of evil that has been performed has to do with who that deed was committed against so I now ask how far is a worm above a cat how far is a cat above a baby we can kind of judge it just by the feeling of reaction we have within to each well how far above man is

God he's eternally above man God is infinite man is finite how long would it take for justice to be served to atone for a finite creature rebelling against his infinite God well by definition it would take all eternity wouldn't it is God's punishment really unfair again it's not for us to even ask the question but he's given us the reasoning ability to even be able to see the complete fairness of such a

punishment so the horror of our sin yes it's horrible to be a rebel but it's indescribably horrible it's infinitely horrible when that rebellion is committed against an infinite God but justice could be served for the sins of finite creature against his infinite

God if a person of equal infinite worth were to serve the sentence in place of that finite rebel and that is exactly what Jesus Christ did for his people this is love not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins he accomplished in a few hours on the cross because he is an infinite perfect God he accomplished what would take every one of us all eternity to accomplish in hell and on that cross we see through one glorious picture the indescribable horribleness of sin because of what it cost to atone for it the holy righteousness of God and the loving mercy of God so what hope can there be for one who rejects the God supplied atonement of his son on their behalf this is the ultimate expression of rebellion and depravity well having considered the nature and effect of sin

I'd like to turn next in our study to the deception of sin the deception of sin I fear we're not going to make it through today does a weak view of sin really matter anyway!

I mean if I believe Jesus to be the son of God and trust in his substitutionary work on the cross in the end doesn't this become just mere boring academia?

[32 : 41] I'd like to demonstrate that our view of sin will profoundly affect our understanding of the gospel through which we are saved and that makes it anything but boring academia to put it another way a confused understanding of the gospel can usually be traced back to a view a weak view of sin when man rejects God's commentary about man he's left with his own blind interpretation of man's actions in nature which leads to a corrupted philosophy about man in other words left to himself fallen man is going to misinterpret his experiences especially as it relates to himself for example when a man sees good coming from himself or another person he concludes that there must be something good within the man that produced that good and this process has led to a philosophy in which fallen man sees himself very quickly running through this list being innocent at birth but what does

God have to say on the matter surely I was sinful at birth sinful from the time my mother conceived me being basically good at heart but what does God say about the matter the heart is deceitful! above all things and beyond cure who can understand it man sees man as being corrupted by his environment rather than the other way around and as we've already read in Mark 7 21 for from within out of men's hearts is where all of this evil flows well when this worldly philosophy is allowed to infiltrate the church infiltrate Christianity the gospel is corrupted because at least some men are now seen as capable of reasoning their way to God even though God says in 1st Corinthians 2 12 to 14 we have not received the spirit of the world but the spirit who is from God that we may understand what God has freely given us this is what we speak not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the spirit expressing!

God's view as man then has been turned upside down rather than being angry towards God God is seen as impotently hoping that men will let him be a part of their lives we turn the whole thing around even though God says kiss the son lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way for his wrath can flare up in a moment blessed are all who take refuge in him this leads to an evangelism that assumes man is able of his own volition to choose to repent of his sins and to follow Christ even though God says can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil or in

John 6 65 this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the father has enabled him and then rather than using God's ordained means of grace such as the preaching of the word and the word we think that we can convince people to be saved or seek to emotionally manipulate them into some kind of decision even though God says you refuse to come to me and have life and after making their decision people are beseeched to never again question the salvation that they supposedly received from that decision even though God says they claim to know God but by their actions they deny him they are detestable disobedient and unfit for doing anything good a very brief cursory summary but I want you to get the impact that this doctrine of sin has profound effect on all that we believe both in the world and we see it everywhere out there in the world how the world and its philosophy of man has turned everything on its head everything that is true and right that

[37 : 08] God has said but I also want us to see that it has infiltrated the church in this weakened view of sin its horribleness our inability and all that we talked about is going to profoundly affect even the very gospel that we profess and how it is presented weakening it to the point where it may

not be any gospel at all well again briefly I'd like to return to where we started applications of the doctrine of sin first salvation from sin first application salvation from sin what's a prerequisite for being saved from sin is it not becoming conscious of one's sin Christian don't tune me out at this point what is a prerequisite for anyone who's going to come to Christ is also a prerequisite for us to gain any kind of victory over our besetting sins to use some of the metaphors of scripture one must see himself as sick

Matthew 9 12 to 13 on hearing this Jesus said it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick the lost Luke 19 10 for the son of man came to seek and to save what was lost how does contemplation of sin and confession of my sin along with God's promised response lead to encouragement and hope because it's only when we recognize our sin we become sick and lost before our God that we can flee to Jesus as our great physician and then we can claim 1 John 1 9 that if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness if you come home from a sliver and day in a grimy filthy pit is not a cleansing shower refreshing so will not going from a state of sinful filth to glorious purity in Christ lead to indescribable encouragement and joy whether it's the first time we come to him to salvation or the thousandth time for cleansing from our sin as his child becoming conscious of sin implies much more than simply being aware of its presence and this much more is at the heart of drawing close to God which is our second point of application drawing close to God the longer I contemplate the sinfulness of my flesh and my evil actions against my God the more broken hearted and crushed I will become how we might ask does becoming broken hearted and crushed lead to encouragement well because God tells us in Psalm 34 18 that the Lord is close to the broken hearted and he saves those who are crushed in spirit as I allow my broken heartedness to lead me to the savior and confession and repentance and trust in the finished work of Christ on my behalf the closer I will find my Lord drawing to me and there is no greater encouragement and blessing than to have my God wrapping his arms around me and pulling me to his breast if I wish to know a closer walk with God I must live a cycle of brokenness and confession! Third contemplation of my sin in the context of God is essential for overcoming fear and uncertainty! The longer I contemplate my sinfulness the more lost and unsure of myself I will become the essence of sin is self sufficiency and self reliance true brokenness over my sin will lead to abandonment of this self trust and again as someone pointed out if I stop there I'm in deep trouble but if it leads me to Christ and it leads me to promises such as Proverbs 3 5 to 6 trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight everything will change are you fearful of the future are you over your head are you confused over which path is the right way to go contemplation of personal sin leads to brokenness over one's sin which when confessed!

[41 : 56] beneath the cross of Christ is going to lead to trust in God self reliance is replaced with faith in God fear is supplemented by trust in the omniscient wisdom confusion is exchanged for confidence in my savior's straight paths in the end fear and confusion are transformed into peace and trust Isaiah 26 3 you will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in you