

A Look at Sin

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[0 : 00] Well, today we are beginning a new series of Sunday School lessons that should take us through the end of this year. We are going to do seven lessons on J.C. Ryle's book entitled Holiness.

If you've never read anything by J.C. Ryle, I think you absolutely should. And this is he's not an author that you have to really strain your brain and your mind to figure out what he is saying.

He's very easy to read his his kindness, his clarity of mind, the sweetness of his soul, the sweetness of the Lord really does come through in his writing.

He is he's easy to read. He's enjoyable to read. He's convicting. The Lord prepared a wonderful servant for the church.

And though he's been dead for now about 120 years, he's still blessing the church. J.C. Ryle, let me just give you a little bit of a biography about him, because I think that's interesting.

[1 : 18] He was born to very well to do parents. Growing up, he lacked nothing. His father was a banker. He went to the finest schools that England had to offer.

And he did very well in all of those in all of his classes. He he wasn't a prodigy prodigy or anything, but he always was in the highest honors.

He was not just a good student. He was Sam, you'll appreciate this. He was literally one of the best cricket players in all of England at the time.

And I'm not being. I'm not exaggerating. He played on the highest league and team and whatever. And he was he was a real cricket stud.

So Sam would appreciate that. But as he came down to the finals in his last year at Oxford, he became sick with a severe chest infection.

[2 : 21] So something we can relate to there. And for the first time in 14 years, he took out a Bible and began to read it. And he was reading it and reading it.

Then one Sunday, he soon after that, he came late into church, but he arrived in the part of the service where the scripture reading was going on.

And the scripture reading that morning was from Ephesians. And as he listened to the word of God being read, the Lord opened his eyes and he was made a new man and he was given faith.

His eyes were opened when he heard in the in the King James for by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. And so he was converted through the reading of the word of God.

No sermon, no comment, just reading. Well, did his life get easier after that point? Was it smooth sailing and a bed of roses for J.C.

[3 : 27] Ryle? Well, not at all. In some ways, all of his best days of worldly success were were behind him being the great cricket player, being a great student, all of those sorts of things.

Living in a well to do family. Those things faded behind him. He thought he would go into politics. And so he thought he would study law. He kept at it for six months and then his chest infection came back and that put a halt to his law studies.

And at the same time, his father's bank went under. They went bankrupt. They lost everything. And so with no money behind him, politics was out of the question for J.C.

Ryle. Well, what do you do if you are educated in England and you have no job prospects? Well, what do you do with an Oxford degree?

Well, you can go and become a clergy member. And that's what he did. That's what he became. We might think that a bit problematic and maybe he did, too, later in his years.

[4 : 34] But that's the door that was open for him. And. He said long afterwards, I have not the least doubt it was all for the best.

If I had not been ruined, I should never have been a clergyman, never have preached a sermon or written a track or a book. So the Lord's providence and it finds its winding trail right down to Grace Fellowship Church on this November 2021.

J.C. Ryle was married three times. His first two wives died while he was while they were young. He had a number of children. He served in rural parishes and urban parishes.

He had a real heart for blue collar workers, the miners and the factory workers and the farmers of 19th century England.

And he wrote for them. He wrote so that they could read and understand. And we can thank God that he did. We can thank God that J.C. Ryle was ruined.

[5 : 46] Because of what he worked and what he he did through it. And so he had the the best education that Oxford could offer. And then he went into the Lord's School and he got the best education there.

On Wednesday night, the young men are going through his book, Thoughts for Young Men. And we, too, are now going to spend just seven weeks with him talking about holiness.

I don't know that I look forward to meeting maybe Luther or Calvin or some really high theologian in heaven they might seem a little too much for me but I do I think I'd be very comfortable with John Charles Ryle and his very humble way of doing things he was down to earth he was a humble sweet man and that's the kind of holiness he wants to help us onto in this book not rarefied air not out of this world but humble holiness he begins his preface by saying commenting on what was going on in England at the time and he said there's lots of meetings going on lots of camp meetings lots of excitement a lot of exciting speakers a lot of exciting spiritual emotions going on very interesting and he doesn't outright say those are bad he doesn't say that at all he just says that's interesting that's that's we want to look at that all these religious emotions and experiences but it didn't impress him it was interesting but it wasn't super impressive to him what would have impressed J.C. Ryle now as a older not not elderly but an older Christian well listen to what he says do these who attend these meetings become more holy meek unselfish kind good tempered self-denying and Christ-like at home so that's what they are in these meetings what are they like at home do they become more content with their position in life and more free from a restless craving after something different from that which God has given them and I love this this sentence do fathers mothers husbands and other relatives and friends find them more pleasant and easy to live with that's the kind of holiness that J.C. Ryle is interested in us getting and I think that's the kind of holiness that the Bible is after and I think isn't that beautiful that wow something has happened because these people that used to be just so hard to get along with are now pleasant to be with can they enjoy a quiet Sunday and quiet means of grace without noise heat and excitement above all do above all do they grow in charity that is love especially in in charity towards those who do not agree with them in every jot and tittle of their religion so that's the kind of religion that's the kind of holiness that Ryle is is after it's not some rarefied air it's not some out of this world sort of thing or remoteness that turns people off that turns people away no holiness is beautiful attractive love

I want you to think back in your minds to a couple Sunday school series ago that we did on delighting in the Trinity holiness is God's overflowing overflowing outflowing pure love God is holy holy holy because he is so not like us in our selfishness and our shabbiness and our grubbiness and our self-concern no holiness should be attractive should be winsome right now my wife is is talking with a woman who has some interest in Christianity but she has some real questions about God and about evil and about she's thinking as she looks out in the world and she she said like it doesn't seem to make sense that there's a God but then she also says but then I look and I say it doesn't seem to make sense that there would be no God what do you do with that and I really appreciate that she's thinking and that she's being honest but she said she's known Christians and they are some of the kindest people she's ever met and that's a problem for her she doesn't know what to do with that why are these Christians so kind and there's something there and she's asked herself why can't I believe well that's a good problem to give to a person isn't it brothers and sisters that's the kind of problems we want to give to people where they're saying maybe I don't know all the answers but there's no denying that there's something there holiness is our light shining into the darkness 1 Peter 2 verse 9 but you are a chosen people a royal priesthood a holy nation a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light and then Peter says dear friends therefore I urge you because you are these things this is what holiness met and what Peter was filling in this is what holiness looks like you're shining into the darkness

I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day that he visits us so holiness it's love it's light it's living like God who himself is love and it's that kind of humble attractive holiness that makes people more pleasant to live with that J.C. Ryle is talking about in this book so does that sound good?

[12 : 41] that sounds something like that we want well where do we begin? where do we begin? where do we begin with this series on holiness?

Ryle says you need to begin with its opposite and you begin with sin so all the other men who are going to be teaching this class are going to be talking about more of the positive side but today my task is to lay the foundation is to dig a hole and make us to look into the hole and so in some ways I have the most unenviable task because we're going to look at sin you have to dig deep Ryle says if you're going to build high you have to dig deep if you're going to build high and so I'm getting my shovel out and we're going to dig this hole together and next week Lord willing we're going to start building out of that that hole wrong views about what holiness is usually come from wrong views about sin so without knowing what sin is without knowing the problem the extent the guilt of it the damage that sin brings without knowing sin

Christianity really is just a bunch of words it's just a bunch of words that don't have any meaning sin is not a topic that unholy people understand they very well might understand and see it in others but they don't really understand it or see it in themselves so they could be completely eagle-eyed about the sins of others and completely blind to what's going on in their own lives so take your Bibles and turn to Psalm 36 Psalm 36 so Psalm 36 is the Psalm of David it says an oracle is within my heart an oracle literally meant a burden a burden from the Lord and so it would be something that the Lord put on to a prophet and it weighed upon them until they spoke it and the speaking of the oracle was like the unburdening of their heart so this is

David is saying this weighs upon my heart this is here the Lord has given to me and I've been thinking about it an oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked there's no fear of God before his eyes so the wicked have no concern no practical concern no concern that touches their lives about their guilt before God the danger that they are in they don't fear his judgment they don't fear his wrath they don't fear his righteousness they don't fear his power they just go on their way well why do they do that and David tells you why the sinful man the unholy man the wicked man has just no fear you ever see someone and says don't they fear God well why don't they why are they so confident why are they so unfazed and untouched well for in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin he doesn't know his sin other people sin he might see that well enough but his own sin he thinks too highly of himself to ever think that he might have a problem unholy people have this in common they think that somehow they're impervious to what God is saying or doing or thinking they have no fear so you can think you are innocent when you aren't that's what this is saying but that's exactly where God begins to teach people this is where God finds people flattering themselves unconcerned with no fear of God and this is where

God begins to teach people he shows them the true nature of sin and this is where holiness begins in our lives this is the foundation this is the first step with a real personal knowledge of our sin and so God says let there be light and what begins to happen is things that used to be dark and we didn't see them now all of a sudden we do see them the new creation begins like the old creation begins with let there be light and the darkness flies away and so now there's sin here oh no now there's sin over here and now there's a God and I'm in trouble and what a wretched man that I am and now you need a savior without sin you don't need a savior without a God who's angry with you you don't need a savior you don't fear God you don't need a savior but when God says let there be light and the spirit comes in and he tears our flattery our armor of flattery apart and it's left in and we're in filthy rags and now we say who will save me and God turns our hearts against our sin and we repent of it and so the sinner says have mercy on me a sinner and that's who the father saves that's who the father forgives that's who the father gives the spirit and writes his laws on their their hearts that's where holiness begins and so that proud person who was so unpleasant to be around well now you're a humble kind person a lost and found person and when you've been rescued it changes your demeanor changes you but it begins with sin it begins with sin so Ryle says let's begin with what is sin we all know how to use that word but what is it a definition well

[19 : 50] Ryle says we need to first before we talk about things in particular we need to talk general because sin isn't really first of all first of all anything that we do it's something that we're born into sin is our is the power sin is the bent the twistedness the crookedness our wrongness our fault our corruption and this is just summed up in that little phrase we sin because we're sinners we sin we do actual sins because we are sinners so just like someone with COVID coughs the coughing isn't COVID coughing is the proof that you have something you know a person with a bad tooth has bad breath well the bad breath isn't the cause of the bad tooth the bad tooth is sin is the darkness of our hearts it's the stubbornness of our hearts it's the twistedness of our hearts so sin is that rebellion that self-centeredness that bent-in-ness we take everything and we make it about us

I just wonder why are we so strongly engaged and so it feels like it's so important what goes on in other states and other countries and well because in politics and things like that we we get involved so heavily we're so emotionally engaged because I mean for one reason we don't like what it's saying about us or what they're going to do to us it could be that I think it was Stuart Olley who made that this very simple illustration of if you find a class photo from 30 years ago who's the first person that you look at well chances are you weren't the most interesting person in that class chances are you weren't doing the greatest things but chances are that you're going to be the most interested and have the most to say about you so it's that bent-end-ness and that's a very

I mean that's in a certain way that's a very silly illustration but it just shows you that what we do is we come in and we bend every situation in on ourselves and so we're born going our own way not God's way and not righteousness way we don't care about right or wrong we all we care about is getting what we want you have to teach a child right and wrong you don't have to teach a child to say I want this I'm going to get it so Ryle says sin is that vast moral disease which affects the whole human race every class every place every person and there was only one person who was ever free from it the Lord Jesus and so we sin because we are sinners so now that we have that laid out that's where we start because sin is not something that gets imposed upon someone that's otherwise good sin is what comes out of a person who is a sinner so what then is a sin a sin simply is

I mean if we want to keep the metaphor going here or the illustration a sin is what we do when we are in the grip of that sin a sin is what we do when we act out of our sinfulness so what is a sin the Westminster Shorter Catechism says sin is any want or lack of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God and let me just put that into modern language sin is not doing what God's law says to do or doing what it says not to do sin is doing saying thinking or imagining anything that's not in perfect conformity or harmony with the mind and law of God and so that can go two ways sin is when God says do this and we don't do it or sin is saying

God saying don't do this and we transgress we go over we cross the line first John the apostle John says sin is the transgression the breaking of the law it's not doing what it says to do or doing what it says not to do and it can just be in your heart that's not enough to kill your neighbor Jesus says you you can't hate him it's not enough to not sleep with your neighbor's spouse you you aren't even to lust after her in your heart you see the heart in all of the commandments with number ten you shall not covet you can't show me someone actually coveting because coveting is first done here in the heart and then it begins to act out and that's how all the ten commandments are it begins with wanting something that

[25 : 37] God says you're not to have or wanting something else other than what God tells us to want sin sin is not loving God with all of our heart mind soul and strength and our neighbor as ourselves and so we can see from there that sin can be in the heart it can be in the mind it can be in the soul it can be in your bodily strength it's falling short of the glory of God in any of those places so sin is leaving something undone that God says you should do this James says anyone then who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it sins the longer I go through life it really is more and more the sins of omission that concern me in my own life the sins of not doing what I should do one old pastor on his deathbed prayed

Lord forgive me of all my sins and especially my sins of omission so holiness then is not just freedom from transgressions it's a life of positive good deeds it's a life of doing the things that God calls us to do so if we're called to be a holy nation Peter says what is that what is a holy nation to look like it's not just freedom from the transgressions not just not doing what we're not supposed to do we're supposed to be a people whose good deeds are seen by men experienced by men holiness is doing the good that we should do holiness is doing the good that we should do to the smallest child the baby the unborn the elderly the our boss our fellow workers our husbands our wives the children the older people it's doing the good that God calls us to do to live a life of love but so holiness is those things it's not doing what we're not supposed to do and doing what we should do but someone might ask well what if you don't know we have we can be very slippery creatures well what about if you don't know that you're sinning is that something else like I didn't know

I wasn't supposed to do that I didn't know that God had a problem with that well is that something else is that some other category is that not so bad is I didn't mean to I didn't know an excuse well let me just say in a certain way certainly worse to know and to sin anyways the Old Testament law had extra strict punishments for those who knew what they were supposed to do and or not do and they did it anyways that there were sins of high handedness is what the Old Testament calls it where you're shaking your fist in God's face and saying I know I'm not supposed to do this but I'm going to do it anyway well that's certainly worse but the law also talks about sins of ignorance it's not enough to say

I didn't know you didn't know but you still did it you didn't know that was an act of that sinful flesh that you have in you but it was it was so what else would it be in Leviticus even sins of ignorance needed sacrifice and atonement so that's God is teaching us something here he's teaching us we can't sort of hide in a cloak of ignorance and say I didn't know that that was evil and so I'm really innocent no it was still it was still sin it was still an act of your flesh now let's talk about sin's extent so we've talked about what it is let's talk about sin's extent how far does this moral disease go what does the Bible say how far and how deep does it go we need to be very careful here we can't trust our own heart here in this matter we can't trust our own heart so we need to ask what does the

Bible say every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time that's God's evaluation of men and women before the flood he looked and he was grieved that he made man why is he so grieved because every inclination of the thoughts every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time Jeremiah the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and that's why we can't trust ourselves we can't trust ourselves to know how far sin goes or how deep it goes or how guilty it is because we began with Psalm 36 man flatters himself too much to see his own sin and that's not just something that unbelievers do I can do that sin is deceitful and it deceives us what does it mean to be deceived deceived doesn't mean confused sin means you are you're deceived means you absolutely believe that you have good reasons for believing something that just isn't true that's what it means to be deceived you can be absolutely convinced and have a whole list of arguments for why you're right and be wrong that's what it means to be deceived deceived doesn't mean uncertainty you're certain but you're wrong so we have to ask what does the bible say we can't trust ourselves here so what does the bible say it says sin is pervasive from the youngest to the oldest geographically it's pervasive it's the biggest problem in every man there's no exceptions it's your biggest problem and again you can say

[33 : 12] I have other problems no this is the biggest one it's pervasive through all that you are it infects and diseases and ruins our minds so we don't think God's thoughts after him we think wrong thoughts we think high thoughts of ourselves and low thoughts of God it infects our affections our desires the things that we like and we don't like and so we're a holy nation and so Peter says abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul so that's what it is evil desires they're there they're there so what I want what I crave those can be outright bad things or they can be good things that I want instead of what God is giving me sin infects our minds and our desires and our will so sinful flesh will not submit to God's law nor can it do so why why can't it submit to

God's law is it some sort of functional problem where the will is like broken and no that's not that's not the picture here we can't submit to God's law simply because the flesh absolutely does not want to and it can't be persuaded otherwise in your pursuit of holiness I guarantee you you've never been able to talk your sinful flesh out of wanting what it's wanted you've never been able to convince it otherwise it does not want and it cannot want so the sinful will is dead set against God it's just like the devil the devil knows that his time is short and so he surrenders and bows the knee because that's the thing that makes sense is that what it says no he knows his time is short and so he rages all the more so our consciences are infected right and wrong we can't see it and furthermore we don't want it that's not important to us what we want is important to us it's all men so it's you included all that we are it's not that there's nothing good in us ever that's not what it means but it does mean that every part of us is twisted!

we're going to be done what about its guilt what about its vileness its offensiveness I find it very interesting I don't know exactly how to say this but I find it very interesting that when we talk about sin when we're trying to talk about its guilt and its vileness and its offensiveness we talk about the sinfulness of sin that's an interesting phrase like sin is the worst thing and we just don't know how terrible it is men and we can just say this that men have no idea of the sinfulness of sin men sinful men cannot grasp the vileness of their sin maybe to some degree they can begin to maybe to some degree they can learn to more and more as believers

I'm saying but we are colorblind people walking through an art museum we don't see it clearly we might see in black and white which that which is just wicked red we're not good at telling the sinfulness of sin do cows know that they smell really bad you know I wonder do cows realize that they stink I was at Bob Evans a couple of weeks ago and I think I was downwind from a farmer and the only reason I think I was it smelled like that every now and then I caught a whiff of down on the farm and but what I'm saying is I don't think they could smell it!

! Deaf people can't tell a good singer from a bad singer blind people can't tell an ugly person from a beautiful person fallen men fallen man doesn't have any idea about the sinfulness of sin but just consider these two things consider its punishment everlasting destruction lake of fire the soul that sin shall die and it's dying the second death and we can't say that's there's no use in talking about well that doesn't seem fair when we argue like that we're supposing we know the extent and the measure and the guilt of sin because we would have to have a clear and accurate picture of the guilt and the vileness and the wickedness of in order to say what's fair or what's not fair about punishment and that's precisely what you and

[38 : 59] I are not good judges about and that's for God to decide you know criminals are hardly fair judges of their own cases so consider it's punishment consider then what it took to save us the son of God the son of God deity fully sharing in the father's majesty and glory and honor had to become man and had to be pierced and crushed and wounded God had to trod down his son with ruthlessness without any compassion he had to strike his son body and soul to remove the guilt of our sin so ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great here may view its nature rightly here its guilt may estimate mark the sacrifice appointed see who bears the awful load tis the word the

Lord's anointed son of man and son of God now if that is the sinfulness of sin then what a work that God does in saving us from the guilt of that sin and what a work that God is doing in taking us and reshaping us and changing us to be like him what a glorious work is sanctification that is going on in your life right now believer that a sinful person is becoming like God what a wonder that he is doing this work in us and we're going to see that next week so we talked about sin but here from on out we're going to be talking about sanctification and growth and holiness and how that happens and how God does that and how we participate in that well I pray that God would help us and bless us this day we're dismissed