

Sin

*a deeper look into
the cost of our
redemption*

10 days leading to Good Friday and Easter Sunday 2021

Unclean

For the wages of sin is death...¹

The wages of the righteous is life,
but the earnings of the wicked are sin and death.²

Germs are everywhere!! When we go to restaurants we have to be careful about touching the menus, the door handles, not laying our phones on the tables, and the list goes on and on. And it's not just restaurants; it's playgrounds, classrooms, grocery stores, hospitals – germs are everywhere! And if we knew how many germs there were and what they could do to us, we would wear a hazmat suit everywhere.

It makes you want to continually wash your hands.

In 1988, Akron-based GoJo Industries invented and introduced alcohol-based Purell hand sanitizer. It is marketed under various names, but GoJo holds the patent. And these products are now available anywhere you find germs.

Have you ever been so dirty that you just have to take a shower and allow the water and soap to wash over you to make you clean again?

We just want to be clean.

Germs are microscopic organisms that spread disease, that make us sick, and may even cause us to die. You can't see them without a microscope – an instrument that magnifies the smallest impurity so that we may study and understand it.

Sin is like germs. Many times we can't see it, but we get the sickness it causes. And if left untreated, it will cause us to die.

Over the next several days we will examine sin and its effects on us under a spiritual microscope. It is my prayer that this will be a time when we don't gloss over our sins, but instead look at the effect they have on God. And that we may come to understand more deeply how much God loves us. And the great depths to which God is willing to go, to not just cover our sins, but to forgive them, to wipe them away completely, to make us clean again, to have a right relationship with him.

¹ Romans 3:23

² Proverbs 10:16

Union

Read: Genesis 3

A union joins two elements. It is designed that if it is broken, neither part could return to its original state. Bits and pieces of each side will remain with the other. For example, if you were to glue two pieces of paper together and then try to rip them apart, there would be bits and fibers of each paper on the other. They can never go back to their original state without bearing the scars of separation.

We see this in marriage. The wedding ceremony happens, vows are exchanged, papers are signed, and the marriage is consummated. Now the marriage is binding. Two people are brought together. If that union were to be broken or ripped apart, neither partner would ever be completely separate again. Pieces of each would be left with the other. Each person will always carry part of the other, for the time spent as a married couple has forever changed and influenced who each of them has become. There are things they have done together that cannot be undone. Experiences shared. Property bought. Children birthed. Bonds formed with extended family members that would not have been formed if the two had not been married. This is what the Bible refers to as becoming one flesh.

This is the type of relationship God desired when he created human beings. He wanted them to be such a close union with him that if the bond was broken, he – and we – would never be the same. We were designed to be bonded. We crave connection with others. Not just a passing conversation, but genuine connection. In the Garden of Eden humanity existed in perfect union with God and with each other.

However, that bond was broken by deceit and willful disobedience. This wasn't a simple infraction or an honest mistake. It was an intentional breach of a union, and that changed everything. As a result of our disobedience, we are no longer bonded to God.

In a marriage when a person desires to no longer be bonded with their spouse, they often want to be bonded to something or someone else. A divorce legally recognizes the breaking of the union. However, it is simply not possible for the couple to erase all traces or remnants of their lives together. The same is true with our union with God.

But not only are we no longer bonded to God, we are now in a union with death because of sin.² When humanity chose sin over obedience, it was the start of a willful union with something or someone other than God. In this new union man has joined, we keep running toward death. The effects of breaking our union with God can be seen in all of life. Jeffery Curtis Poor puts it this way:

“The evidence of this is seen all over today. This is why we retaliate rather than forgive. Why we isolate rather than seek community. This is why we seek our own needs and not the need of others. This union has caused marriages to crumble, greed to run our lives, parents to abandon their kids, addictions that destroy, self-harm to be the norm, and makes love, true love, seem impossible. We are united with death.”³

The original union is broken and a new union has begun. But this union is unlike anything the world has ever seen.

To ponder:

- Have you ever thought about this relationship with God as a union?
- When you realized sin broke that union, how did you view sin? As something we do? A power that is holding us hostage? A relationship we have with sin?
- How does having a relationship with sin and death make you feel?

² John 8:34

³ What Is Sin? (why it's more than just missing the mark), Jeffery Curtis Poor, <https://rethinknow.org/2019/11/04/what-is-sin-why-its-more-than-just-missing-the-mark/>

Mistakes

Read Leviticus 4-5, 16

Have you ever watched how politicians apologize? In 2008 North Carolina Senator and Democratic Party vice-presidential and presidential candidate John Edwards was accused of having an affair while his wife was recovering from cancer. He denied it, but later it was proven true. So Edwards took to the airwaves and said, “I made a mistake.” He could not admit what he had done was sin, so he call it a mistake.

Mistakes happen. Turning the wrong way down a one-way road. Accidentally not giving enough money to the cashier. Pouring salt into your iced tea thinking it was sugar. Mistakes happen when we are careless or distracted. They are simply errors in judgment. However, even errors in judgment can be sins. For example turning the wrong way down a one-way street may be a mistake, but it is also a sin, a trespass over the law and onto the drivers who are coming toward you. But to evade responsibility for sin (either consciously or unconsciously) by labeling a sin as a mistake is a big mistake, er...um...I mean, *sin!*

In Leviticus provision is made for someone who incurs guilt. It is specified what that means: *When a person unwittingly incurs guilt in regard to any of the Lord’s commandments about things not to be done, and does one of them...*² Several verses later: *...unwittingly does any of the things which by the commandment of the Lord his God ought not to be done, and he realizes his guilt – or the sin of which he is guilty is brought to his knowledge...*³

Not knowing does not excuse our guilt. We may innocently not know that we have crossed a line, *committed a sin*, until someone points it out to us. In Leviticus it says that we may do something and not know it or have forgotten it. Soon guilt will settle in, either by an internal God-given sense of guilt or because someone points out our wrong and we realize our guilt. Then an offering to God is required because

of the trespass (which we will talk about in the coming days). It may have been a mistake, but we still must make things right.

What I do find interesting is that the details of the prescribed sacrifice differ according to the identity of the guilty party with the main distinction pertaining to the objects to which the blood is applied. Sin - the more severe the contamination of sin, the more deeply it penetrates the sacred space of the tabernacle and later the temple. The instructions regarding where the blood is to be applied are an exact indication of the severity of the impurity or sin for which atonement is being made.

In the Hebrew, *hata* basically means to err, to miss the mark. And there is a qualifying word, *bishgagah*, which means in error. The two together make it clear: The offender did not know the act was prohibited. It still needed to be made right since it was sin.

Understand that sin is not just what we do. Sin is not defined as just specific acts of moral transgressions. Those transgressions are what we call sins, but they are not sin itself. Sin is a condition under which we all live – it is the human condition. Like a vortex, it's gravitational pull sucks us downward toward the perverse and the cruel.

Mistakes happen. Some are not sinful. Many are.

To ponder:

- What mistakes have you made in the past?
- Were they sinful or not? How did you know?
When did you know?
Did someone point them out to you or did you have an internal nudging, a sense that something was wrong?

Take some time right now to confess to God some of the mistakes you have made.

2 Leviticus 4:2 (TANAKH translation)

3 Leviticus 4:22-23, 27-28 (TANAKH translation)

Sin ~~Hurts~~ Destroys

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him.¹

I worked at a graphite plant for a summer during college. We took coarse graphite and ground it down to a fine powder and mixed it with oil. The graphite was so fine it got into our skin. We couldn't get it off. We couldn't scrub it off. We couldn't bleach it off. We couldn't GoJo it off. We had to allow it to come off naturally. As our skin would make new layers, the embedded graphite would work its way to the surface and finally we could get it off.

Sin is kind of like that. It gets into us, and no matter what we do we can't get rid of it. And to make matters worse we can't just wait and "wear" it off.

Transgression and iniquity are both words we use to define sin. We tend to use them interchangeably, but the Hebrew words we translate into these words have specific meanings.

Iniquity. In the Hebrew it is sin, but this word reveals the root of sin: intent. It is the deliberate decision to do what you know you should not do. We choose to sin.

Where does our choice come from? All sin comes from the heart. The heart is more than a muscle that pumps blood throughout our bodies to give us life. It is the life source of our soul, the root of all we do.² That's why we are instructed to guard our hearts.³

Our hearts become corrupted and are inclined toward evil because of the union we now have with death. We want to please ourselves. We want to carry out all sorts of evil and retaliation and not allow the union with God to ever reign.

Almost anything we do can be sin:

- We can sin by hating, despising and lusting even if we never act on these desires.⁴
- We can sin if we do the right things for the wrong reasons.⁵
- We can sin if we neglect to do what is good and right.⁶

What we do and what we say all reveal the nature of our hearts.⁷ The Bible teaches that our hearts are full of all kinds of evil, wickedness, greed, and every kind of depravity. Even if it is not visible on the outside.⁸

Our intent to sin has caused twisted thinking. Black has become white, and white has become black. Good has become bad and bad good. Holy is viewed as evil and evil as holy. Our intention to sin has caused an inversion in our thinking. Jesus said a bad tree cannot bear good fruit, and a good tree cannot bear bad fruit.⁹ In other words, good things, good words, good actions will only come out of someone who is good. Evil things, evil words that pierce and destroy, evil intentions and actions will only come out of the evil that is stored within us.¹⁰

Not all sin is called evil. But iniquity is the most grievous of all sin because of the malicious intent. This intent originates in our hearts.

To ponder:

- What does it mean to “guard our hearts”? How do you do that? How successful are you?
- Describe a time you got angry. How did your heart want to respond? Revenge? Retaliation? Attack their character? Personal physical defense? What does the way you wanted to respond say about the condition of your heart? Does this prove the Bible true?
- What are some ways we all sin through thoughts? Omission? By doing right things with wrong motives?

- Describe some ways that you have begun to see the world in an out of focused view of God's ways.
- What do you need to do right now, in your life, to guard your heart better? How do you think Jesus might help you?

¹ Isaiah 53:4-5

² Matthew 12:34-37; 15:18

³ Proverbs 4:23

⁴ Matthew 5:21-30

⁵ Matthew 15:17-20; 23:28


⁶ James 4:17

⁷ Matthew 15:17-20

⁸ Matthew 23:27

⁹ Matthew 7:17-18

¹⁰ Matthew 12:34-37



*Sin ... gets into us,
and no matter what we do
we can't get rid of it.
And to make matters worse,
we can't just wait
and "wear" it off.*

Imprisonment

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual,
sold as a slave to sin.¹

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do,
but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do,
I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it,
but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself
does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

For I have the desire to do what is good,
but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do,
but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it,
but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work:
Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.²

We sing many songs in worship about sin not having a grip or a hold on me. Or our chains being gone. These lyrics are more than just metaphors.

Sin has a grip on all of us. For us as Christians, sin has lost that grip, but the residue left behind still has a powerful lure back into sin. We are not immune.

Sin is not just what we do. It is not defined as specific acts of moral transgressions. We call those sins, but they are not sin itself. Sin is the condition under which we all live – it is the human condition that pulls us downward toward the perverse and the cruel. We are in bondage to sin, enslaved to it. Therefore, sin isn't just something we do; it is a power now within us. Like we have talked about the last few days, we left our union with God and are now united with death. This bond with death is sin.

We know the good we should do, but we don't do it. Paul writes "it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me."³ There is such affinity between the temptation that comes from outside of us and the drive within us. Our will isn't strong enough to overcome, and therefore sin becomes a working principle, a ruler, a power within us.⁴

So here is our struggle: We love God and want to do his will. We know that he is good and that the way he wants us to live is good. But the struggle to do what we know is right is at war with the desire to do what we know is wrong. It isn't that we lack teaching, convictions, commitment or repentance. We lack the inner power to overcome our bodies of flesh without another power living even more mightily within us.

Rich Villodas puts it this way: *Sin is not just something we do, but a power humanity is under. We can't educate ourselves out of its grip. We don't overcome it through progressive achievements, nor by moral consistency. The antidote for sin is found in a power outside of ourselves...*⁵

The power of sin is strong. Do not underestimate it!!

Prayer:

Father, show me any sin that has a grip on me. Forgive me for these sins as I confess them to you. May my life be pleasing in your sight and bring you glory. Amen

To Ponder:

- Have you ever considered that sin is more than just something we do, but it is a power over us? How has that played out in your life?
- When someone becomes a Christian, the power is broken. Why then, do you think we all keep coming back to a desire to sin?
- If Jesus destroyed death, what effect do you think that has on us since we are in a union with death? Why then, do you think Jesus just ripped the power away from death, rendering it powerless over us?
- What do you need to confess right now? Go ahead and confess it to God. He won't be surprised or shocked. But He will graciously hear what you have to say and weigh it against your hearts desires.

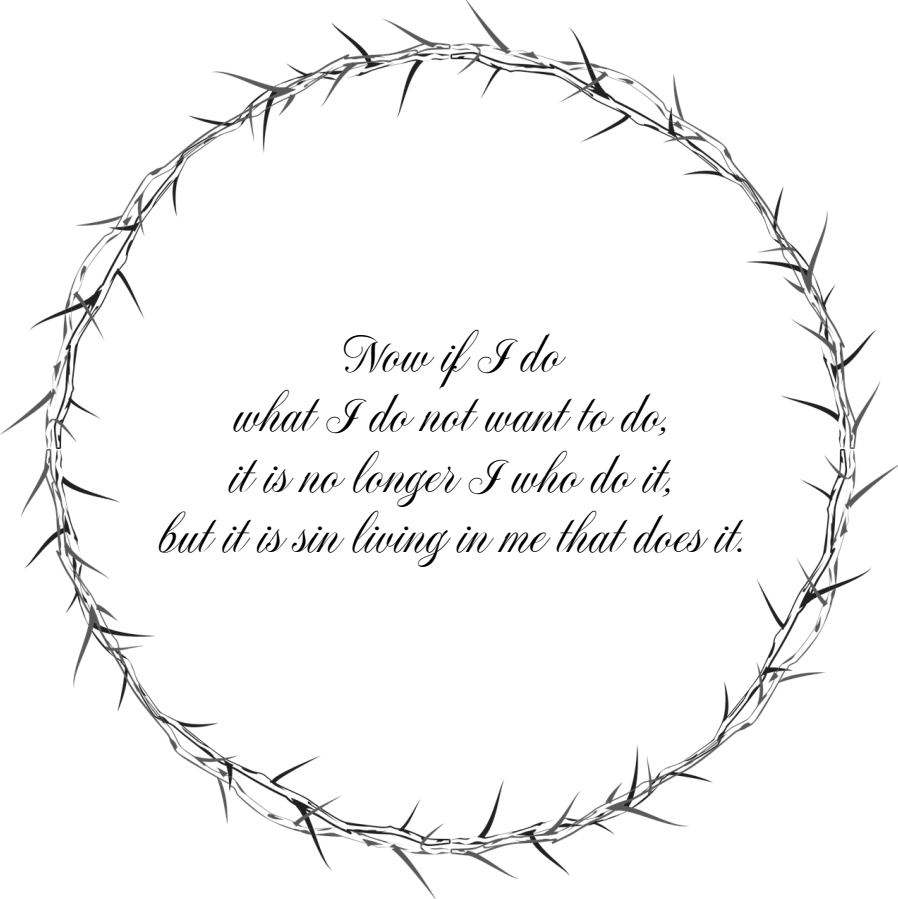
¹ Romans. 7:14

² Romans 7:15-21

³ Romans 7:17-20

⁴ Romans 7:21

⁵ Rich Villodas' Twitter account



*Now if I do
what I do not want to do,
it is no longer I who do it,
but it is sin living in me that does it.*

Trespass

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions
(*Some translations render this trespasses*) and sins,
in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world
and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air,
the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.
All of us also lived among them at one time,
gratifying the cravings of our flesh
and following its desires and thoughts.
Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.¹

“No Trespassing” signs are everywhere. There are many reasons why they are posted: It could be that people are tired of others trampling on their property or stealing from them. It could be that the place is so dangerous they don’t want anyone to get hurt.

We all understand the surface meaning of trespass: We step over the boundary line of another person’s land or property without permission.

But trespassing has a deeper meaning than just stepping over a boundary. It is doing anything that would offend, harm, or annoy another person. For example, if you were to just drop in on someone and demand they drop what they are doing and give attention to you, this is a trespass. When you press upon their time and/or their patience, it’s a trespass. The definition of trespassing at this level could also include words that negatively impact a person or even committing a criminal act towards another person – even if it was never intended, but you still crossed the line.

But to trespass has an even deeper meaning. It means to voluntarily violate any law or command given by God.

God has posted “No Trespassing” signs all over the place, and we have violated his boundaries. Consider Theft: the taking of things that don’t belong to us. Or Adultery: the taking of another person who doesn’t belong to us. Or pride: the taking for ourselves the glory that belongs to God. Or character assassination: the taking of a reputation that wasn’t ours to take.

We trespass so many times and in so many ways. How can we possibly keep track of how many times we have crossed these lines?

Intentional or unintentional, a trespass is a sin.

God’s word tells us that when we trespass, we have to make things right. And according to the Old Testament Law, making things right carried a penalty: usually one fifth of the value of the property.² In the New Testament, the Law (Law of Moses) was still being followed. Understanding this background, let’s look at a conversation between Jesus and a man named Zacchaeus. During their conversation, Zacchaeus recognizes his sin, confesses his guilt and offers to pay back all the people he had trespassed against by going above and beyond the requirements of the Law of Moses.³

Jesus taught that before we offer our gifts to God in worship, we are to reconcile with those whom we have trespassed against (someone has something against us).⁴ Then we are to come back and bring our offerings before God.

So, what happens in this reconciliation process? There is confession of wrong doing (our sin). There is an asking for forgiveness. And if a Christian brother or sister asks for forgiveness, we must grant them forgiveness.⁵ God not only expects us to treat each other this way, but he, himself, will treat us with forgiveness if we confess our sins to him.⁶

As we close out our time together today, would you recite this famous prayer out loud:

Our Father, which art in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom and the power and glory forever.
Amen.⁷

To ponder:

- What trespasses have you committed, intentionally or unintentionally, in your life?
- How do you expect God to forgive you of your trespasses? Notice in the Model Prayer there way we ask God to forgive our trespasses - as we have forgiven those who trespass against us.
- Is there someone with whom you have trespassed against but never reconciled?
- The reconciliation process includes a confession of our wrong doing, an asking of forgiveness then a changed behavior in which we will not trespass again. Do you need to take a step towards reconciliation with whom you may have trespassed against? Which step? Why not start today?

¹ Ephesians 2:1-3

² Leviticus 5:15-16

³ Luke 19:8

⁴ Matthew 5:23-24

⁵ Matthew 6:14; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13

⁶ 1 John 1:9

⁷ Matthew 6:9-13



*Forgive our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.*

Transgressions

Read Genesis 27

Disrespect is the greatest blow that can be rendered to a man, especially a husband. Rebekah greatly disrespected her husband. She deceived him in one of the worst ways possible in our story today. Her manipulation because of her favoritism towards Jacob caused her to transgress upon a blessing that rightly belonged to her other son, Esau.

I read recently about a mother of a 12-year-old daughter who was given permission to attend a friend's party. As the daughter was leaving the house, her father would not let her leave until she wiped the brightly colored makeup off of her eyelids. He sent her back upstairs to take care of the problem. Mother followed her daughter upstairs and told her daughter that she would distract her husband that so the daughter could leave with the makeup intact and dad would be none the wiser. The story told of how this was a pattern of manipulation that carried on until the father died. What lesson do you think the daughter learned from her mother?

We have seen that a trespass may be a simple mistake. Like turning the wrong way down a one-way street. It could be a mistake, but you are still trespassing on the lanes of other drivers.

What Rebekah did was not a trespass but a transgression. Transgressions are similar to trespasses but a little bit worse: They involve the will of the heart. It is the deliberate choice to disobey, to deliberately trespass. It is when we knowingly run a stop sign. Or tell a blatant lie hoping to get out of trouble. When we cheat on a spouse or cheat on an exam. When we have a blatant disregard for authority. Or when we knowingly fail to do our duty. These are transgressions.

The Apostle Paul lists sins covering the gamut of transgressions, from greed to impure motives. Each involves the deliberate crossing of a line into an area where we are not supposed to go. There is something else interesting: Paul's use of the term flesh or sinful nature, depending upon which translation you read, lists very few sins as sensual. Most concern the mind or tongue.¹

Have you begun to notice by now the power each of these has over our lives?

We are caught, trapped, and imprisoned because of sin. What a wretched state in which humanity lives.

To ponder:

- If you were the mother of the 12-year-old, what would you have done?
- If you were Rebekah and favored Jacob, and you knew that your husband favored Esau, would you have devised a plot to deceive your husband so your favorite son could get the blessing that rightfully belonged to his brother? Why or why not?
- Have you ever thought about the difference between trespasses and transgressions? How does the intent make the sin worse?
- Does it surprise you that Paul's list of sins is mostly about the mind and the tongue and not about sensual sins? Why or why not?
- In your life, what way are transgressions more sinful than trespasses?
- What motives are you becoming more aware of in your life?
- What motives do you need to confess to God because you now deem them as sinful?

¹ Ephesians 5:3-7
Colossians 3:5-10

Iniquity

Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds!
At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.

They covet fields and seize them, and houses and take them.

They defraud people of their homes,
they rob them of their inheritance.¹

It was more than a glance. It was the second glance that turned into a gaze that got him in trouble. It was the gaze that came from the lust within his heart. He was the king, but with lust it doesn't matter who you are, small or mighty, pauper or king. Lust will treat us all the same. The king's heart grew harder with every lingering moment of the gaze. We don't know the time frame, but with lust I can't imagine it was very long until the king sent for the woman who was the object of his gaze, his lust now grown from that first impure thought into a blatantly deliberate act of adultery. His hardened heart wasn't finished. She told the king she was pregnant with his child since her husband had been at war for the last year. Now what was a king to do?

King David's hardened heart caused him to contemplate murder. Instead he brought her husband, Uriah, home from the front lines so he might sleep with his wife. What David didn't count on was Uriah's sense of honor and loyalty to his men still in battle. He slept on the front stoop of his house instead of with his wife in a warm bed. The case for murder became stronger now. The cover-up didn't work, so the king had to resort to more drastic measures. Murder seemed like the best option. But he couldn't do it himself, so he devised a plan to have Uriah killed...during battle. The plan was conceived and when given birth, Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, died in battle. The king's men were none the wiser. The plan worked and worked very well.

Until...

Until about a year later, one guy, a prophet named Nathan, had the guts to go before this mighty king and confront him. Upon hearing the words of the prophet Nathan, the king fell to his knees and repented with great sorrow. We see his cry to the Lord written in Psalm 51 where he immediately recognizes the nature of his sin: iniquity. The mighty King David fully understood the progression of iniquity.

Iniquity is deeply rooted. It means a premeditated choice that continues without repentance. It is when we deliberately choose to sin and actually find delight in sinning. It is distinguished in scripture from less severe sin as being wicked, evil, or immoral in character because of the continual and deliberate nature of this type of sin, even to the point of finding joy in sinning. This is the idea behind the word *perversion*.¹

Iniquity is sin at its worst. It is premeditated, continuing, and it escalates. If left unchecked it leads to a state of deliberately sinning with no fear of God. If we deliberately sin with no fear of God, and we keep on deliberately sinning with no fear of God, sin will become our god.

Most iniquity is evil. It starts in the heart as bitterness², lust³, or stubbornness⁴. All three of these conditions of our heart lead to murder, rape, serial adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies⁵, sexually immorality, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, thievery, greed, drunkenness, slander, swindling⁶, and other more vile sins.

So if it starts in the heart and leads to outward acts, all of which is “doing our own will,” the power of iniquity is strong⁷. There is an antidote:

Blessed are the undefiled in their ways, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.⁸

To ponder:

- Do you believe all sin is the same? Why do you think the Bible distinguishes between trespasses, transgressions and iniquities?
- Which of the three, trespass, transgressions, iniquities, do you think God finds more abhorrent?
- Iniquity means a premeditated choice that continues without repentance. *It is when we deliberately choose to sin and actually find delight in sinning.* How does that statement strike you? Agree? Disagree? Why or why not?
- In our union with death, we find delight in sin. Now that we've realized our sins – trespasses, transgressions and now iniquities – over the last several days, what is changing in the way you look at sinning? Still find it delightful?
- Read Isaiah 53:4-6. How do you feel about this passage now that you understand trespasses, transgressions and iniquities?
- Christ took all sin to the cross with Him. Are you appreciating the sacrifice of Christ more now than ever before?

¹ Micah 2:1-2

² Acts 8:32

³ Job 31:1-12

⁴ 1 Samuel 15:23

⁵ Galatians 5:19-21

⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

⁷ Isaiah 53:6

⁸ Psalm 119:1-3 KJV



*Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.*

*Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.*

Evil

This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward join the dead.¹

Evildoers devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war every day.²

Sin always hides under the appearance of what is good.

- Boasting is a manifestation of a longing for honor.
- People hope to be released from hardship by breaking promises or vows.
- Sex outside of marriage entices with promises of excitement and physical pleasure.
- Taking something that belongs to someone else is an attempt to fill an emptiness.
- (Fill in your personal struggle with sin here.)

God has determined, no, God has ordained, what is wrong and what is right. Any deviation from his ordination constitutes evil. When he created mankind, God created us with free will, the ability to choose between right and wrong, between good and evil. It was necessary that we have a genuine will of our own, separate from God. Could there be a relationship or love otherwise? The possibility of love between man and God flows directly from man's God-given freedom to choose. And with it come a risk and the potential for pain. We know from the creation story that Adam chose wrongly. What we often don't realize is that as a result of Adam's choice, sin has much further reaching tentacles that anyone could have imagined or expected. This is why evil needs to be recognized as an aspect of a relationship, *a union*, rather than a separate, stand-alone entity or idea. Humanity is held in its grip, under its power.

Not all sin is called evil. Turning the wrong way down a one-way street is not evil, but it is a sin. Accidentally running over your neighbor's cat is not evil, but is it still a transgression; therefore, it is sin.

Evil comes into play when we intentionally sin, when we do anything we know we should not have done without being compelled to do it. Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology put it this way: *This kind of evil finds its roots in disobedience, whether deliberate or accidental, premeditated or unpremeditated, cultic or ethical, to the revealed will of God, and as such, becomes associated with generic sin and virtually synonymous with wickedness.*

It is the deliberate intention to rebel against what God has declared good. It is called disobedience. And it all starts with intentions: cruel, corrupt, morally bad, perverse, wrong, intending harm, giving the people an impression that you intend something bad for them, wickedness. The Bible calls these iniquities, and they are the most grievous type of sin because of the malicious intent.

This intent starts in our hearts. The Bible tells us that our hearts are corrupt and inclined to do evil.³

Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from telling lies
Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.⁴

But we are instructed to:

Turn from evil and do good;
then you will dwell in the land forever.⁵

There is a reason that Jesus gave us that line in the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We are not to let evil take root in our lives. Watch over your life today and judge your intentions.

To ponder:

- What seemingly good things have been enticing to you, only to find out later they were evil?
- Describe a time when you knew something was wrong but still went ahead and did it anyhow?
Why did you do it?
Late for an appointment?
Careless?
Inconvenient?
- Perhaps you need to seek forgiveness from this person. Go ahead, do it now!
- What is the worse act of disobedience you have ever done? What was in your heart at that time?
- If you are a parent how quickly do you judge your child's behavior with their intent? How do you handle their behavior knowing their intent?

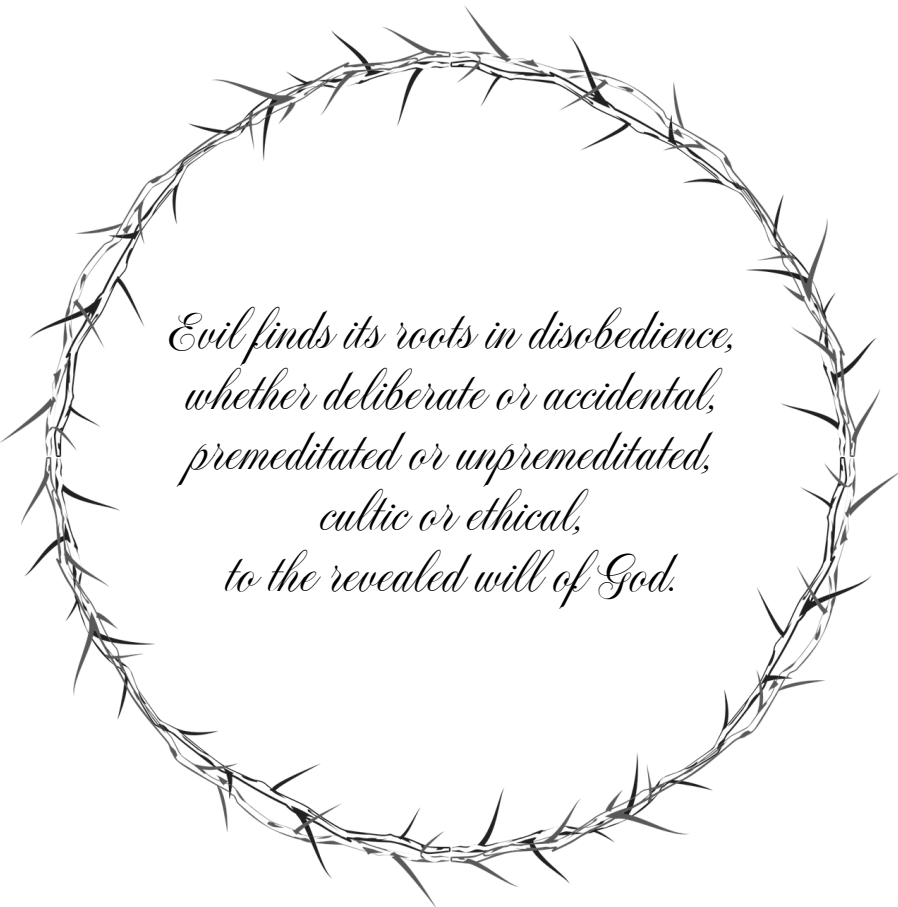
¹ ¹ Ecclesiastes 9:3 NIV

² Psalm 140:2

³ Ecclesiastes 9:3

⁴ Psalm 34:13-14

⁵ Psalm 37:27



*Evil finds its roots in disobedience,
whether deliberate or accidental,
premeditated or unpremeditated,
cultic or ethical,
to the revealed will of God.*

Omission

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’”¹

I grew up in the church. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard or read this story. The teacher would focus on a certain aspect of this passage. But I never heard anyone talk about the sin of the priest and the Levite. They would talk about how they went to the other side and neglected the man, but never the sin of neglect.

Both the priest and the Levite grew up memorizing the law. They not only knew what it said, but they knew what it meant. They both chose to walk on by. Were they too busy? Did they not care? Did they have more important things to do? Were they just uncaring or indifferent to the situation? Whatever the reason, they knew that to neglect another human in trouble was a sin.

Sins of omission are usually unseen. It is doing nothing when something should be done. Or it could be failing to do the right thing. Omission isn’t just walking by someone in crisis. It is looking the other

way when you know of a sin that is being committed. A few years ago Joe Paterno, the beloved head football coach at Penn State, had covered up and not reported the sexual abuse of a minor committed by another coach within his program. He knew about it but overlooked it. Here is what ESPN wrote on their website: "More than six decades of achievement could not withstand the sin of omission in connection to a terrible scandal. And so it ends for Joe Paterno."²

The sin or omission is not speaking out when someone is being berated. It is leaving out information about a situation you were an eye-witness to - not telling the *entire* truth or "playing dumb." To withhold pertinent information from or regarding people involved who will be affected if it is found out. To continue a misrepresentation of a person's character or situation. Not standing up for what is right. Not telling the truth when we should. Not doing good to someone who deserves it when it is within our power to act.

Perhaps some of the sins of omission that many of us commit would be failing to pray regularly³, or engage in another spiritual discipline. Or failing to honor or love God. Failing to give thanks to God. Failing to fear God. Failing to forgive. Failing to trust God. The list goes on and on.

It is the sinful condition of our heart that inclines us to become uncaring or indifferent to injustices, needs, and the working of God all around us.

And it is the sin of omission that has the most devastating impact in our lives and the lives of others when compared to other sins. It is possible to be doing nothing wrong, and still be living in sin because of what we are not doing. James tells us to do the good we know, otherwise it is sin.⁴ The omission of good is the commission of evil.

"Sin is elusive – has no substance, no independent existence. It does not exist in the sense that love or justice do. It exists as a parasite of the good or good things. Sin creates nothing; it abuses, perverts, spoils, and destroys the good things God has made. It has no promise, no thesis; it only has an antithesis, an opposition. Sometimes wickedness is as senseless as a child who pulls the hair or punches the stomach of an-

other, then honestly confesses, “I don’t know why I did that.” In some ways sin is an absence rather than a presence; it fails to listen, walks past the needy and subsists in alienation rather than relation.”⁵

It is not enough to do no wrong. You must do right to be right with God.

To ponder:

- What are some sins of omission you committed that you knew were sins at the time?
- As you have matured, what other sins of omission have been brought to your attention that you did not know were sins at the time?
- What do you think is meant by phrase *the omission of good is the commission of evil*?
Do you agree or disagree?
Why?
- Are there some sins of omission that you have committed for which you need to seek forgiveness?

¹ Luke 10:30-35


² http://espn.go.com/college-football/story/_/id/7359173/told-joe-paterno-saw-jerry-sandusky-boy

³ 1 Samuel 12:23

⁴ James 4:17

⁵ Bakers Evangelical Dictionary

For further study: Matthew 5:16, 25:1-31-46; I John 3:17-18;
Luke 10:30-37; Galatians 6:9



*In some ways
sin is an absence rather than a presence;
it fails to listen,
walks past the needy
and subsists in alienation
rather than relation.*

Healing

Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool,
which in Aramaic is called Bethesda
and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.
Here a great number of disabled people used to lie –
the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

One who was there had been an invalid for thirty eight years.
When Jesus saw him lying there and learned
that he had been in this condition for a long time,
he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”¹

We live in a great time period where medicine is making incredible strides. People are living longer and better than ever before due to our medical breakthroughs. Have you ever considered that sickness may be linked to sin?

We know that in the Old Testament, illness was a form of punishment by God. (Disclaimer: while sin introduced sickness into this world, not all sickness is sin related.) We know that God brought upon the people plagues of illness, boils, diseases, and barrenness all as a form of punishment for their sins.

Is it possible that in our day and age, our medical advances have found ways to hide sin? I personally know of a couple who passed away several years ago believing that many of their ailments and sicknesses were brought upon them due to a major sin they covered up for many years. They had taken Paul’s words to heart about examining yourselves when you come to the Lord’s Table each week. If you partake of the cup and bread in an unworthy manner, you will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Jesus. Paul continues that without discerning, we drink judgment upon ourselves. “That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep [died].”²

When James writes about being sick, he says we are to call the elders of

the church who will anoint us with oil and pray for us. He concludes this part of his book with these words: "If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so you may be healed."³

Modern medical practices have come a long way in treating physical and mental disorders. Doctors today are able to diagnose and treat many well known problems. And they are accurate and successful...to a limited extent. For example: Antidepressants and cognitive therapy are great gifts from a merciful God. But they are primarily designed to treat physical and mental conditions, and therefore, often fail to consider our God-given spiritual nature. God created us as mental, physical, emotional **and** spiritual beings, so when we leave out any one component of our makeup, our treatment is incomplete at best; we still suffer the effects of sin and death.

But here is the greater danger: Because of our medically recognized diseases and illnesses, we can declare that it wasn't our fault. We end up dismissing the spiritual nature and the resulting physical effects of sin. We can come to the conclusion, "It's the disorder's fault. I never had a choice."

We know that the fear of our sin being found out can cause major stress that takes a toll on us. Symptoms can include stomach and intestinal issues from stomach pain, indigestion, ulcers, constipation or diarrhea, headaches, insomnia, and more. We know that desiring forgiveness but never receiving it causes us to have elevated anxiety, despair and heart palpitations, even depression. Trying to cover up sin in our lives can lead to paranoia. There are many other symptoms and conditions related to unreconciled sin, but I think you get the idea.

Dr. Simeon Zahl put it this way: "Naming 'sin' exclusively in psychological, medical or sociological terms erases our complicity and obscures the gravity of our condition."⁴

I want to reiterate: I don't believe all illnesses, diseases or mental states are a direct result of personal sin. But many are the direct result of our sin. Remember, our hearts are inclined toward evil, which is a power over us. Left on our own, we are doomed. We can't deal with sin our-

selves.

Jesus asks a simple yet powerfully profound question that is as relevant today as it was then: *Do you want to get well?* The man at the pool of Bethesda replies that it's not his fault that he is not well. Sin led to his being sick. Sin paralyzes us and leaves us powerless. It is a power over us because our union with God was broken and was replaced with our union with death. Therefore, sickness caused by sin is a condition from which we all suffer.

Do we want to get well? If sin opened the door for all forms of disease, physical and mental illness to enter the world, then the only way to deal with sickness is to deal with sin. Jesus came to earth and dealt with sin by stripping it of its power, of its sting.⁵ He could have destroyed death at that time, but then we would have been destroyed as well because of our union with death. So he came and stripped death of its power.

So Jesus comes into our powerless state and asks us if we want to get well. And because of his victory over death, it has no power over us. He is the only One who can save us from our sins.

And he does just that!

*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.*⁶

To ponder:

- In Psalm 6 the writer describes some symptoms of physical illness: *languishing, bones shaking with terror, moaning, weeping.* And he describes the depth of despair in his soul and the effect it has on his physical self: *My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes.* Have you ever felt like this?
- A colleague of Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon writes that many experiences and feelings are clues to the reality of sin. As we go through our lives, he says, we experience “genuine terror” and “end up in despair.” He talks about the “anxieties and the terrors of sin

and death.”

Have you ever felt this way?

Have you ever related it to sin in your life?

- “Do you want to get well?” Jesus asked.
He is still asking us the same question today.
How will you answer him?
- We know some ways people self medicate today: alcohol, drugs, shopping, etc.
What are they treating?
Where does this pain come from?
What would you say would be a better way to treat their “ailments”?

Join us at our Good Friday Service, April 2 at 6 pm.

¹ John 5:2-6

² 1 Corinthians 11:27-30

³ James 5:15b-16

⁴ Dr. Simeon Zahl, Hiding In Plain Sight: The Lost Doctrine of Sin, 2016 NYC Conference

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:55

⁶ Isaiah 53:4-5

EASTER SUNDAY

Join Us April 4 10:00 am





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