

Mistaker or Sinner 7-8-07

Romans 3:23; 7:13; Matthew 18:24

We'll return to our journey through Genesis next week. There has been a message on my heart, one that I shared in India, that I have found difficult to express. It's not because it is unclear in my mind, but rather it is difficult to communicate to a culture that has abandoned the concept. I'm speaking of sin, but when I use the word, it fails to communicate anything to modern culture. The problem is not with the word, but with modern philosophy and cultural trends. Sin cannot be understood unless there is an understanding of the righteousness of God. (Romans 7:7) Unless we know what should be, what is expected, what is basic goodness, we can't understand what is evil, or sinful. Sin is everything contrary to the perfect nature of the only holy God/Creator. (Romans 3:23) Since the culture we live in promotes self as god (perhaps our greatest sin), there can be no concept of such a thing as sin. I'm never contrary to my own nature. So the first hurdle is to comprehend to some degree a righteous and holy God. (Jeremiah 4:22)

Part of taking the first step is to accept that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God to convey His nature and His relationship to man. If there is no God, there is no sin, for sin is a violation of the basic standards of the character of God. But if there is indeed a God, a God who is the giver of life, the Creator, then His standards are the only standards that are acceptable. If He is perfectly pure and holy, then everything that is contrary to who He is, is evil and vile and therefore must be justly dealt with. (Psalm 97:10) Evil will abhor and distance itself from what is holy, and what is holy will not compromise with evil. Light and darkness cannot co-exist in the same space. Separation from God, the giver and sustainer of life, is death. That is exactly what God told Adam and Eve the punishment for disobedience would be, death. (Genesis 2:17)

Many find it difficult to make this first step of faith, that there is a God who punishes evil. Think about this for a moment. Would you want a god who allowed evil to go unpunished? Would you be satisfied with a god who tolerated evil? One of our most common complaints is that life is not fair. We demand that God be fair with us, that those who abuse us are punished, that evil does not go unchallenged or unchecked. We complain about the guilty not getting their just deserts. We instinctively know that if God is good, then He must deal justly with what is evil. (Proverbs 11:21) We expect it, that is, unless it is in regards to the evil in us.

After all, we expect human judges to meet out punishments that fit the crime. If the judge is too lenient, and the criminal gets out to commit another crime, we want to hold the judge accountable for not protecting us by giving the criminal what he or she deserved. We want the books to balance. We want the evil punished and the good rewarded. So what do you deserve? What does God expect of man? (Genesis 17:1)

If we have a Biblical picture of what is acceptable, then we see goodness as the life of Jesus. He showed us what it meant to truly live a good life. (1John 2:6) He is the

Commented [notes1]: 7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." [

Commented [notes2]: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Commented [notes3]: 22 "My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good."

Commented [notes4]: 10 Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

Commented [notes5]: 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Commented [notes6]: 21 Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will go free.

Commented [notes7]: 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty ; walk before me and be blameless.

Commented [notes8]: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

standard. Anything less is unacceptable to a righteous and holy God. We'd like to water down our rebellion and just call it mistakes. We would like to blame our so-called mistakes on someone else. We say it was because of the way our parents raised us, or because of the stress we are under. Our sin against God is rationalized as merely a mistake or something beyond our control. In many minds, it is as if rebellion against all goodness is not a big deal, merely because it didn't physically injure someone. (1Samuel 15:23)

Commented [notes9]: 23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.

A man commits adultery and is caught. His marriage is in shambles. His children lose respect for him. His response? "I made a mistake." A student cheats on a final exam and is caught. He is thrown out of school. The money spent on trying to educate him toward a degree is wasted. His parents confront him. His response. "I made a mistake."

You see, a mistake is defined as something that was unintentional. It results from the lack of information or discernment. Because we don't have all the information, we simply err in judgment. It's not your fault. You just didn't have what you needed. So we conclude that we aren't sinners, we're just mistakers. It can't be that our heart is evil, can it? We don't want to admit that we are a sinner, a rebel against the goodness of God. Then we would be confessing our need of a Savior. It's much easier to just be a mistaker, one lacking in information. We don't think we need a Savior, just more information. That switches the problem from the heart to the head. And so we come to the unbiblical assertion that people are basically good. They just make mistakes. But the Bible says the heart of mankind is desperately evil. (Jeremiah 17:9) Yes, we do need our thoughts transformed, but that begins with a heart transformation.

Commented [notes10]: 9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Even worse, we blame our selfish destructive behavior on God. "God made me with these desires." It is an excuse we often hear. God didn't intend for you and I to be born with a sinful nature. We were born with it because we are descended from sinful man. When Adam sinned the human race was infected. Sin is not just what we do but who we are by nature. We are all born corrupt. (Psalm 51:5) There is nothing you can do about it. (Romans 8:3) Jesus came to deal with that fact.

Commented [notes11]: 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

To understand the enormity of sin we must try to comprehend three oceans of suffering, that of suffering humanity, the suffering of the cross, and suffering of eternal hell. They are all the consequence of sin. Try to grasp that much suffering and you will see why God sees sin as much more than a mistake. You will understand why God will not allow it in His presence. (Habakkuk 1:13a) You will see why He is quick and decisive in dealing with it, though He is often more patient than we would like. (2Peter 3:9)

Commented [notes12]: 3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,

Commented [notes13]: 13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.

Jesus comes along and calls a spade a spade. He tells us heaven's perspective. He said that He is the one that came down from heaven. Here is John the Baptist's declaration about the words of Jesus. ³¹ *"The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all."* ³² *He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony.* Do you hear what John is

Commented [notes14]: 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

saying? He is telling us we need to hear the perspective of the One that came down from heaven. We need to hear the way heaven sees life, and the only One that can give us that perspective is Jesus.

We think our latest view is the enlightened one. Heaven's view is the only one that matters in the end. So what was Jesus' perspective on sin and judgment? Jesus said if you call someone a fool you are in danger of being thrown into the fire of hell. (Matthew 5:22) He taught that if you hate your brother you are guilty of murder. He said if you look at a woman to lust after her you have committed adultery. (Matthew 5:28) He said it was because you lacked something alright, righteousness, goodness, and most of all a relationship with a holy God! He saw the greed in the rich young ruler's heart. Anyone looking at the rich young ruler would say he was a good man. Jesus said he was lacking something without which he would not find eternal life. Then he told him how to find it. "Go and sell all you have, and come follow me." (Luke 18:22) He confronted the unseen greed in the man's heart.

Commented [notes15]: 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Commented [notes16]: 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Commented [notes17]: 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Contemporary man thinks God will let things like that slide. He says, "Surely a loving God will not condemn a person just because he likes money?" You see the watering down of righteousness in the very wording of his question. What if you worded the question the way God sees it. "Surely a loving God won't condemn His creation because he chooses to make wealth his god?" Jesus saw sin as such a serious thing that He suggested cutting of a limb or picking out your eye if it caused you to sin, and warned that if you didn't take it that seriously you were in danger of everlasting fire. (Matthew 18:8) That is heaven's perspective! Believe what you will. These are the words of the man that came down from heaven. His life validated His words. His life declares His opinion to be a thousand times more important than yours or mine or the current passing philosophical trend. (John 10:38)

Commented [notes18]: 8 If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.

Commented [notes19]: 38 But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

In Matthew 18, Jesus tells a story about the importance of forgiveness. The parable speaks a powerful truth that isn't really the main point of the story, but is a strong secondary point. The servant that was forgiven had an insurmountable debt, 10,000 talents (Matthew 18:24-27). That's like saying that he owed a trillion dollars. To put that in perspective, consider this, the queen of Sheba wanted to bless Solomon with a gift commensurate with his wisdom. The gifts included 120 talents of gold. (1Kings 10:10) That was considered an enormous gift, but it's merely a small fraction of 10,000 talents owed. The parable is presenting God as the king and mankind with a debt owed to Him that could never be paid in a million lifetimes.

Commented [notes20]: 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26 "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

Does this mean that God is a harsh, vengeful God because demands we pay what we owe? Recently there was a movie (*Breach*) based on the true story of a federal agent that had sold secrets to the Soviet Union resulting in the death of numerous double agents and endangering the lives of millions. The loss in terms of security to the United States was inestimable. He received a life sentence and is now serving out that time in prison. What is justice? Would it have been good to forgive and release him because he was sorry he'd been caught? If he gave back all his ill gotten gains, would that settle the score? Or, going to the other extreme, because his actions probably resulted in people being tortured and killed, should he be tortured to death? Such decisions are so hard for men to make because we are

Commented [notes21]: 10 And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

greedy too. We sympathize with evil because we know it could just as well have been us in their shoes. Who can say what is just? God alone can! The One who is pure and never unjust, whose judgment is not tainted by association, can look at all the details (as He is the only One that knows them all) and make the just judgment. (John 5:30)

Commented [notes22]: 30 By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

You might ask how our sins are anything like that agent's sin. He acted out of careless unconcern for others. He acted out of selfish greed. He lied and betrayed the trust of others. Oh, and you have never acted out of careless unconcern for others? Have you never acted out of selfish greed? Have you never betrayed another's trust? Tell me our hands are any less dirty before a holy God. There isn't one of us who hasn't done the same things. It wasn't on the same level, and may not have had the same disastrous consequences, but on the heart level it was the same.

There is hardly a moment when we don't sin against a holy and righteous God. It is not only about what we do but even about what we should do but neglect. We are often either ungrateful or omit doing what we ought because we are so self-centered. The standard is Jesus' life. (John 13:15) Put your life alongside His and you will see how far short you have fallen. (Romans 3:23) He gave Himself for us unconditionally, yet we have been a traitorous agent. God has made us for Himself, given us everything we have, and instead of being His grateful servant we conspired with the enemy and served him for what we thought was our own profit. What do a traitors like us deserve? What is justice? You and I have harmed God's children. What do we deserve?

Commented [notes23]: 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Commented [notes24]: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

This wasn't such a hard concept to grasp in the past. Consider Peter when Jesus called the fish into his net. His response was, "Go away from me. I'm a sinful man." He knew the One who commanded nature could see and should judge the wickedness of his heart. (Luke 5:8) When he denied knowing Jesus, after Jesus had invested 3 years into his life, after he promised to never deny Him, he wept bitterly. (Luke 22:62) Peter learned his human effort couldn't overcome his sinful nature. Paul still had to rebuke him for trying to fit in instead of standing up for the truth. (Galatians 2:11)

Commented [notes25]: 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

Commented [notes26]: 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Commented [notes27]: 11 When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.

But that doesn't mean Paul was perfect. Remember how his descriptions of himself grew more self-deprecating over time. First he called himself the least of the Apostles. (1Corinthians 15:9) Pretty humble remark for a man God was using so mightily, don't you think? But as he matured in Christ, he could see his soul more like God sees it. He then called himself the least of the saints. (Ephesians 3:8) By the end of his ministry, he probably had the clearest picture of his own heart. He was one of the greatest spiritual giants, offering us more New Testament theology than any other contributor. In one of his last letters, his description of himself came as close to reality as he would come. "I am the worst of sinners," he wrote. (1Timothy 1:15)

Commented [notes28]: 9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Commented [notes29]: 8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

Commented [notes30]: 15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst.

You see, as we mature, we see how heinous sin is. The Holy Spirit brings to light more and more from within us. The reason we think hell is unjust is because we

don't see how vile our own hearts are. The reason we think people are good, is because we can't see their motivation. Was the psalmist a liar when he wrote, "There is no one that does good, not even one"? (Psalm 14:3) Or are we so vain and hardened toward what sin truly is that we have glossed over how vile and destructive man is? If we saw how often the Holy Spirit moves upon man to restrain him from destructive acts, we would be amazed. If we saw how often he restrained us, we would be eternally grateful. (Genesis 20:6)

Commented [notes31]: 3 All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Even our attempts at righteousness are sinful. Isaiah wrote that all man's righteousness is like menstrual rags to God. (Isaiah 64:6) Our attempts at righteousness can be some of our ugliest moments. Consider the Pharisees. They were the ones Jesus had the harshest words for. The way they went about being "good" distorted the very concept of goodness. The culture believed them to be the holiest of all men. Jesus saw them as the wickedest.

Commented [notes32]: 6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her.

Commented [notes33]: 6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

In the story of the two at prayer, Jesus said the man that prayed about his great righteousness did not have God's ear. God heard the man that beat his chest and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:10-14)

Commented [notes34]: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

I'm sharing this with you not only to correct our distorted worldview of the condition of man and the justice of God, but that we might be useful for the kingdom of God. Jesus came preaching repentance. (Mark 1:14,15) That means a turning around in the way we think and live. But if we don't see the need, if we don't recognize how destructive our sinful hearts and attitudes are, why would we ever repent. Many come to church accepting only their own concept of Jesus. They refer to themselves as Christians, but they haven't accepted this most basic point of Jesus' teaching. They want to live like the world but have the loving fellowship of believers and a guarantee of heaven. Becoming a Christian begins with the recognition of how evil our heart is. You can't repent until you see that. If you think you are basically good, why repent?

11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Commented [notes35]: 14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Can you truly say you are born again if you were never bothered about your sin? If you never saw how evil you are, how can you repent and receive the good news? How would it be good news of deliverance from your old heart, if you think your old heart is good? Why would you go a different direction if your old direction wasn't evil? Jesus said that unless you repent you will perish. (Luke 13:3) He said you must be born again. (John 3:3) Do you believe Him?

Commented [notes36]: 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

Commented [notes37]: 3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. "

Until you repent and forsake your old heart and abhor the evil in it, you are of no use to God. He still loves you, but you make yourself unuseful. The Apostle Paul came to the place where he could say, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature." Romans 7:18a That is one reason he was so greatly used of God. When we know it is not in us, we are dependent on God. We give God all the credit. We are humble about accomplishments because we know they are God in and through us.

The good news of Jesus is only good to those who are willing to recognize their need. Compare your life with the life of Jesus. That is how we should live. Begin to

see how far you are from anything resembling righteousness. If you are willing to see that, then you can see why the cross was a necessity. God is not only a just God, but He is a loving God. On the cross, justice and love met. (Psalm 85:10)

Commented [notes38]: 10 Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

⁹ Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1Corinthians 6:9-12

You are either in the first part of these verses or the last. You are either not going to inherit the kingdom of God, or you have been washed, sanctified, and justified. Charles Finney wrote that, "Sin is the most expensive thing in the universe, pardoned or unforgiven." The cost of pardoning sin was the cross. The cost of rebellion against all that is good is eternity without God. Nothing is more costly than those two. If you refuse to repent and accept what Jesus paid, you will pay yourself. God cannot be unjust. He holds out an invitation to you to repent and receive the salvation He purchased for you on the cross.

Dare to see yourself as you really are! Then deal with it in the only way that results in eternal change, by accepting Jesus as your Master, by surrendering your life to Him. That is what it means to be a Christian, and nothing less will do. We can go only pretending we are god, but we only fool ourselves and play right into the hand of the enemy of our soul. Jesus came to give you life!