

Opening

Last week I began teaching on the building blocks of the Gospel. I am talking about some of the key words that make up the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. Unless those units of meaning are clear we will not really appreciate the message.

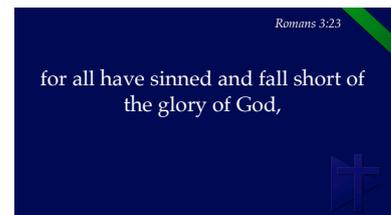
I began with the good news about God's love as grace. Today I will look at two more blocks that need to be clear. They are 'Sin' and 'Salvation'.

Sin

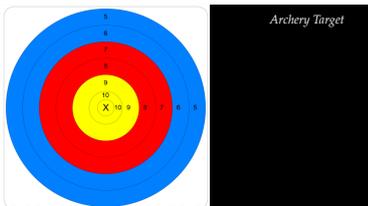
This word is familiar. It features in the Bible from the 3rd chapter of Genesis onwards. It is the one word description of the personal, global and cosmic problem. So let's get clear on what it is. What is sin?

I'll set it out from a key verse in Romans 3 v.23

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,



The Greek word for sin here is ἡμαρτία / *hamartia*. It denotes failure to hit the set mark or not being right, or true to requirements.



It was used in archery when someone missed the target. We might think of it as failing quality control.

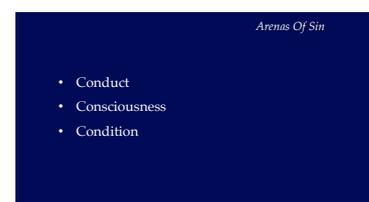
This can be heard in the second part of that verse as 'fall short of the glory of God'.

Paul is saying that everyone has failed in being a glorious child of God.

Back in Genesis, God created Man and Woman good and even very good.

But once the relationship between God and humanity was damaged, a destructive dynamic was released into the world which is the power of sin – a falling short of what God had provided and intended. This cascaded to block people from the glory intended for humanity.

I suggest [*therefore you should critique this*] there are three dimensions of sin to consider.



1. Conduct

We sin in what we do. Humans all do things that betray God as our creator and fall short of what is righteous.

How responsible we each are for this is a matter of judgement that we best avoid but all people fall short in conduct.

2. Consciousness

Our consciousness, individual and social, is less than what it was meant to be. In our minds, our culture, our awareness is dimmed and darkened.

This is a consequence of sin infecting our minds, human culture and all we are involved in.

We may be living in a period of history where this is increasingly evident as depraved minds publish all and claim to be OK no matter what. Sin corrodes the conscience.

3. Condition

Finally I suggest we fall short in our very being. Sin has so infected the human being that our spirit and even our DNA fall short of that they should be.

Many people today think that DNA cannot be wrong and deep-seated emotional convictions are self-justifying no matter what. I am suggesting that actually, the person shaped by nature or nurture to enjoy killing others is somehow inherently twisted and sinful in their makeup. Sinful condition does not justify sinful behaviour.¹

As a disciple of Jesus and a minister of the Gospel I take all three of these areas seriously. What I do, the life of my mind and heart along with my condition of being. Sin is an issue through all three of them.

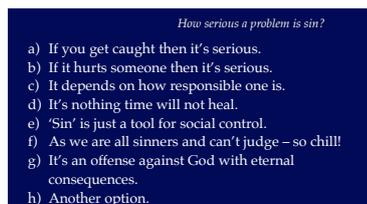
I am very aware that many people rank their concerns about sin in several ways. Firstly, conduct is prioritised over consciousness and condition. For many people it's focused on behaviour and doing bad things. I was like that until about age 17 when I became aware of sin as a dynamic power regardless of what I did or did not do.

A second way people rank sin is to focus on some areas of sin more than others. This is a bit culturally determined. What is a huge issue in one culture may not be such a big concern in another. So in English speaking or traditional Christianity, sexual sin is seen as very, very bad while drunkenness, faithlessness, idolatry or even fraud might not be so bad.

In Romans, Paul keeps us sober by saying there is nowhere to hide. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory expected and required of us.

So that's sin.

Now let's get personal and ask an important question:



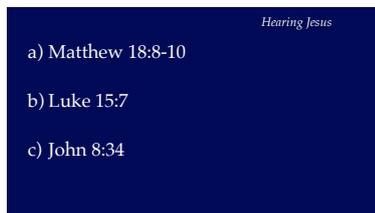
How serious a problem is sin?

- a) If you get caught then it's serious.
- b) If it hurts someone then it's serious.
- c) It depends on how responsible one is.
- d) It's nothing time will not heal.
- e) 'Sin' is just a tool for social control.
- f) As we are all sinners and can't judge we can't be too serious.

¹ This plays in contemporary debates around homosexuality. The Bible considers homosexual as conduct while contemporary social consciousness views it as a condition.

- g) It's an offense against God with eternal consequences.
- h) Another option?

Where are you in this today?



Listen to Jesus: What is his concern? How serious is it now and future?

Matthew 18:8-10

⁸And 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 crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

Luke 15:7

⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

John 8:34

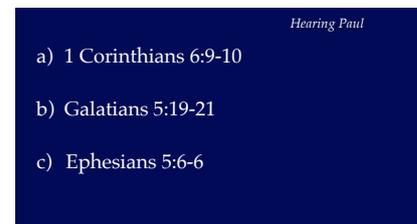
Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

The serious consequence of sin is that it has the power to enslave us now and eternally kill us.

It does this by separating us from God.

It holds us or parts of us captive and in effect dominated by symptoms of death - life is quenched.

Listen to the graphic teaching of Paul and ask again what is the issue with sin? Why might it be serious?



1 Corinthians 6:9-10

⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21

⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:5-6

For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

If I put all this together the message is that sin holds people captive from the freedom and the glory of being a child of God or life in His kingdom.

So long sin reigns in conduct, in condition or in consciousness, we are prevented from enjoying the Kingdom of God.

While we are slaves to sin we are not free to be slaves of God.
That is the issue in a nutshell.

It is so sad.

Paul says:

Romans 6:23

²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This slavery to sin actually involves hard work.

So long as someone is committed to sin in conduct, condition or consciousness, they are seeking to earn their death.

Illustration

I recently saw a Dutch news-clip about woman who had smoked all her adult life and now had terminal lung cancer. It was very sad. Her children said to her: “You have bought your own death.”² She was devastated.

Sin puts people in the position of working hard to earn one’s own death. It entraps us in guilt and shame, in pride and rebellion, in addiction and darkness to the extent we become blind cannot break free. It blocks our contact with God the source of our life and being and closes the horizon to eternity.

What would it take to break that hold?

What could break the hold of sin in conduct, consciousness and condition?

Last week I spoke about God’s love as grace.

Let’s now bring grace and sin together to lay a Gospel foundation.

I’ll make a statement of faith and then illustrate it with a story.

In the economy of God’ love, **so far as sin has gone, so does his loving grace go too.**

That is what led God to sending Jesus to save people from sin in all its manifestations.

As far as sin has gone, so must the loving grace of God go too.

As far as sin has gone, so must the loving grace of God go too.

² Heard as *Je hebt je eigen dood gekocht.*

A story that illustrates this emerged just a few years ago in England. A school class were hearing about Good Friday and Easter when someone asked: Where was Jesus between the Cross and Resurrection? Where was he on the Saturday? One child responded saying: "Jesus was looking for his friend Judas."

I think that child got the measure of God's grace for sinful people – just how much God so loved the world that he would go to where sin had taken it to win us back.

God's response in loving grace to the enormity of sin and its consequences was to take it upon himself in such a way that salvation became available to all who would receive it.

This is the Gospel Story but it only works if:

1. We take sin seriously as the life-soul destroying blight it is
2. We trust the loving grace of God with everything we are

If you diminish sin as being no big deal, then you will simply slip deeper into it and never know how blind you are.

If you do not trust the loving grace of God as real and enough to save, you will also stay blinded by sin.

This is what brought Paul to say:

Romans 1:18

¹⁶...I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed

What he means by 'righteousness' is the right-making power of God. When sinners in conduct, consciousness or condition come to God, loving grace flows and the right making power of God works.

- If people are living with guilt, then that power is experienced in forgiveness for bad things done.
- If people are living with shame, then that power is experienced in shame being lifted.
- If people are living with spiritual oppression then that power is experienced in deliverance.
- If people are living with brokenness then there is healing.
- If people are simply lost, God's loving grace leads them home.
- If people are living with hopelessness, grace brings hope.

This is possible because as we read in 2 Cor. 5:21

2 Corinthians 5:21

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

On the cross God's loving Grace dealt with all our sin in all its forms.

God took sin and its consequences for us so seriously that he took it upon himself. God's loving grace and the sin of the world – all of us- met on that cross.

Do you believe this?

Then take your own sin seriously and trust the loving grace of God in full measure. Sin is big, God's loving grace is bigger!