

Reviving the Notion of Sin

Galatians 6:7, Isaiah 10:1-3, Luke 10, Romans 8:31-39

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I imagine you are familiar with the prelude to the story of the good Samaritan.

One day an expert in the law stood up to test Him. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" Jesus replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus said. "Do this and you will live."

Jesus appears to say eternal life is tied to the ability to love. To love God and to love others. This most certainly would be a righteous life.

If righteousness is pursued by love could we say when we are practicing sin? That's probably a bit of a stretch. While we can easily equate that loving is not sinful and loving God and each other is our primary discipleship, that's probably as far as we go and not find ourselves out on a theological limb.

If love is the chief sign of a disciple, then the lack of love would be a sign of a wayward disciple or a misguided soul at the very least. Thus sin is in close association with not doing the loving thing.

To cheat on a spouse is un-loving.

To envy the success of another is un-loving.

To spread gossip about another is un-loving.

To mislead people with lies to protect yourself or reward others hurts the people who trusted your words, and would be un-loving.

Maybe not in all occasions, but in a majority of cases sin is the unloving reaction, either accidentally or intentionally, that brings pain to others and likely to ourselves. Sin, may not always be the un-loving thing, but it always brings pain; pain to someone, eventually to ourselves.

There was a man. A father and husband. He lost his job. This happened because the owner was able to replace him with a contacted worker, who would work without needing insurance. So he found another job. But it wasn't too long before he lost this job, replaced by a machine. He took on a couple of part time jobs, without insurance. As long as everyone stayed healthy and the car did not need major repairs he still paid all the bills and could even treat the family to Applebee's a couple of times a month. You may be wondering about his wife. Well, she worked when the kids were in school. She worked about 27 hours a week as a parking lot attendant.

It wasn't the life of the Vanderbilts, but it was life. But it was fragile. A doctor's visit when the flu rolled through the family would set them back without insurance. When the car needed repair, they would put it on a credit card and then work to pay it down monthly. It was a tiring life. Not tiring like many of us have, where we work hard, and at the end of the month we can see it is paying off. But the tiring when you work hard, and at the end of the month you are still in the same place, like treading water, plenty of work but no movement.

Then it happened, the rent went up by \$25 and his wife was replaced by an automated coin machine. She was bringing in almost a \$1000 a month, so now they are down \$1025 a month. In a year, two or three times, they drop below the minimum balance in the checking account, and they are hit with fee and this month after losing a \$1025 that fee seemed like a punch in the stomach. But the icing on the cake was when he returned to his car one day to see a ticket on it. He was properly parked, while he was at work. Months before a rock had been tossed up in typical traffic one day and hit his windshield and a crack had developed. He did not carry comprehensive coverage so he knew he could not afford the repair, it was on the passenger side and did not interfere with his vision, so why bother? But now he had a fine for a cracked windshield, \$80.

All of this seemed too much. Not knowing where he was going to get the money and knowing he was running out of time to get the monthly rent. He was already two months behind on the power bill because he used the power money to pay the doctor's bill. He decided to do the unthinkable. He decided to rob a Circle K convenient store. He told himself it would only be this one time, but he couldn't miss the rent payment and end up on the street with a wife and a child.

He planned it with care. He decided to wait until after one in the morning when the store would be almost empty. He would wear padding to distort his body shape and a mask to hide the color of skin, and gloves as well. All of this to keep the camera from getting a good shot. He went to a different neighborhood from the one he lived in, and he parked blocks away, where there were no cameras.

Of course, he knew most people these days use credit cards, and there is a night safe that money is dumped into so he didn't have the highest hopes of what he might steal that evening. He had no gun, but he could threaten the use of a gun.

He surprised the tired and reluctant attendant who by one in the morning was not the most alert. Neither man wanted any real physical trouble. The attendant emptied the drawer and put the money in a bag. As soon as the robber left, the attendant hit the silent alarm, and the police came. But the robber was long gone and safely home.

For his troubles and the risk, he walked away with \$800. At least he can pay the rent and hope things change next month.

Now if I were to ask you to point to the sin in this story, I believe you would tell me robbing the store was the sin. It is. But it's not the only sin. When Bernie Madoff stole, he does so from pension plans and charity groups to afford a home on Long Island and another in Vail. When this poor guy steals, he does so to keep a roof over his families head. He gets \$800 and Bernie a bit more. While these may be equal under the law, I suspect God's judgment may be a bit different.

But there is more, is it a sin for a municipality to place un-necessary burdens on its citizens, like fines for problems they did not create? A rock to the windshield

and you are fined \$80 for the municipalities negligence, after all, they are in charge of keeping the roads up?

Personal greed is sinful, but how about corporate greed? My question is—can businesses, organizations, and governments sin? We know it's sinful to steal from another person even a business, but there is more than one way to steal from someone. Sometimes you can steal more with a briefcase than you can with a gun. No matter what word we attach to it if it is taking something that belongs to another even if it is legal (like a fine for cracked windshield) this does not make it right, ethical, justified or the loving thing. Don't confuse legal with right and just.

Our definition of sin has for too long only been directed at the individual; maybe it is time to read our Bible's with both eyes open and expand not shrink our ideas concerning sin.

*Ah, you who make sinful decrees,
who write oppressive statutes,
to turn aside the needy from justice
and to rob the poor of my people of their right,
that widows may be your spoil,
and that you may make the orphans your prey!*

*What will you do on the day of punishment,
in the calamity that will come from far away?*

--Isaiah10:1-3

Sin is in abundance there is enough for the individual, and there is enough for society. God is grieved by all sin, what I do, what you do, and what we collectively accept. Further sin is self-propelling there will be a consequence—

For infidelity

For gossip

For ignoring the needy

For robbing people

If I or even you steal we call it sin, and we should. If either of us gossips about another this is also a sin. My point is when we do or have it done to us we recognize these destructive actions as sinful. But are there other things, which are sinful which we have labeled otherwise.

For instance, in recent months two men have made the news. Their actions widely reported, and we digest their actions as “news.” One was a comedian and entertainer, at one time “America’s favorite TV dad.” The news was that he had drugged and sexually violated 41 women. The other was a newsman; he was accused of making lewd comments and making unwanted sexual advancement on women, some he worked with others he did not. It was settled out of court for 13 million dollars. A settlement is not an admission of guilt. We hear all of this as news----drugging people and making unwanted advances, and we dismiss it as news. How do you think these behaviors are viewed by God? Here’s a quick way

to determine if it is a sin or just news, would you believe it was not sinful if these sort of things were done to your daughter or wife? That's what I thought.

In fact if you will listen carefully you will see that much reporting is about sin, not news. Every day BP paid Transocean \$500,000 for preparing the Deepwater Horizon. It was still not producing oil; its readiness to pump was over budget and behind schedule. So to protect the bottom line BP by-passed dropping the cement plug in the well which guaranteed more stability for unstable wells, which would slow the process by another 6 hours waiting on the cement to harden, and instead, they go forward with pumping mud into an oil well that was already unstable. When you cut corners for the sake of greed you get the Deepwater Horizon Explosion, which is more than news, it's a sin.

I know, I'm a preacher, and I see sin everywhere. I think that's the way we should listen to the news.

Sin is not without its consequences.

Galatians 6:7—Whatever a man sows that is what he will reap.

There are consequences; sin does grow its own garden of misery.

Make unwanted sexual advancements; you will be sued, sin has consequences.

Lie, people will remember and no longer believe you; sin has consequences. Take people's money and misuse it in a Ponzi scheme, it will catch up with you, sin has consequences, and not just for individuals.

Read the book of Jeremiah, chapters 46-51, and note the various nations that fell victim to divine justice; likewise, observe the sin indictments with which they

were charged, and the reasons precipitating their fall. When a nation becomes corrupt and decays, even the innocent can suffer. There are “national judgments”! We are never punished for our sin, but clearly, we are punished by it.

The final passage to consider this morning is *Romans 8*. Clearly, God believes that sin has finally been out played by God’s grace given thru Christ. Defeated and conquered it is good news to us. We can be forgiven.

Have an affair---you can be forgiven

Lie—you can be forgiven

Pass unjust laws----you can be forgiven

Be boastful----you can be forgiven.

But you cannot undo the lie or the abuse. You have done the un-loving thing; you have set the ripples in motion. When it comes to sin and what we read in Romans, we can be assured, when we sin the world is less loving and God’s message is further weakened. We can also be assured God is willing to forgive the sinner willing to humble themselves and walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

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