

Watch Your *Doctrine*

Session 3: Ruined by Sin with Pastor Colin Smith

We're looking today at how sin effects every part of our lives. This may sound to you like a gloomy subject but let me tell you that we're going to discover seven benefits of grasping the biblical doctrine of sin.

Let's begin with a question. What is the fundamental human problem? Why is it that in every culture, and in every generation, human beings come up short of the life God calls us to lead? Why are there so many people who do not worship, love, and obey God?

People have different views about the problem. Some people say that what we need is knowledge. People don't know the truth. And our job is to tell them. If we can tell people the truth in a clear and compelling way, they will come to believe.

Others have the idea that what we need is relationship. People are disconnected and our job is to invite them in. When people feel that they belong, they will come to believe. There are many people who believe that what we need most is love. People need to know that they are loved, and if we love people well, they will see a reflection of the love of Christ in us, and they will believe.

Truth, relationship, love. All of these are really important. But picture a father and mother who are trying to raise their children in the faith. They teach their children the truth. They get their children involved in a youth group at church. They pour love into the lives of their children. Then they find, to their absolute horror, that one or more of their children turns away from faith in Christ and pursues a life that breaks their hearts.

The parents can't understand how this has happened. "What did we do wrong? We taught them the Bible. We brought them to church. We loved them with all our hearts. How has this happened?" Why would a person who has been taught the truth, been raised in the church, and showered with love, turn away from God?

The answer is that the human problem goes deeper than a lack of knowledge, or relationship, or love. The Bible says, "...you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked" (Ephesians 2:1-2) Being dead in our sins means that by nature we were unresponsive to God. Even if we heard the truth, even if we had good Christian friends, even if we were deeply loved. By nature, we were unresponsive to God.

Clearly, being dead affects everything! And the Bible makes it clear that every part of our being has been corrupted by sin. By God's grace, none of us are as bad as we might be, but all of us are affected by sin in every area of our lives.

1. Six Effects of Sin

Sin has affected the function of our minds, our affections, our wills, our consciences, our memories, and our bodies.

a. The mind is darkened

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. (Ephesians 4:18)

...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Sin makes us blind to the truth. By nature, sinners don't see the glory of Christ. By nature, the things of the Spirit are folly to us. We don't understand them.

b. The affections are distorted

What we do arises from what we love, and sin distorts our affections by making us love the wrong things. Jesus said, *"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."* (John 3:19)

Paul says in 2 Timothy, *"...for people will be lovers of self, lovers of money... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."* (2 Timothy 3:2, 4)

c. The will is disabled

The human will is disabled in the sense that it does not have the full range of function. A person with a frozen shoulder can only lift their arm to a limited degree. Sin has limited the ability of the will. This is why Jesus said, *"everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin,"* (John 8:34). It is only if the Son sets you free that you will be free indeed (John 8:36). Sin makes us both unable and unwilling to seek after God. Jesus said, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"* (John 6:44).

If a person has a desire to come to Christ, it was put there by the Father. Without the Father drawing, Jesus says, *"no one can come."* Not only has sin made us unable to come to Christ, it has also made us unwilling. *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life"* (John 5:39-40).

There are three things to remember about the human will. First, we make real choices, and we make them freely. We are people, not puppets. We make choices, and the choices we make shape the course of our lives. We can make good choices and we can make bad choices. And God calls us to choose (Joshua 24:15). Second, we are responsible for the choices that we make. We can't blame God or the devil, or other people for the choices that we make (James 1:13-14).

And third, and most important, we will always choose according to our strongest desires. The human heart wants what it wants. And the problem with the desires of our hearts is that by nature, we love the wrong things. And that's why we choose the wrong things.

That's why, by nature, we don't love God with all of our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. We don't have the mind, heart, and strength to do it.

d. The conscience is disoriented

Conscience is a wonderful gift of God. It spurs us to do what is right, it holds us back from doing what is wrong and helps us to tell the difference. But conscience is not always a reliable guide. Paul warns Timothy about "*hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron*" (1 Timothy 4:2, NIV). A man of violence may commit terrible crimes and have no sense of remorse or responsibility at all. To work effectively, conscience needs to be trained by the Word of God.

e. The memory is defective

God's people were slaves in Egypt. They were oppressed, forced to make bricks without straw. But God delivered them and set them free. He brought them out of Egypt and fed them in the desert. But God's people were not happy. We read in the book of Numbers that they complained to Moses, "*you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey*" (Numbers 16:13). To describe Egypt where God's people were slaves as "a land flowing with milk and honey" is distorted memory to say the least!

Why is it that so often we remember things we wish we could forget and forget things we wish we could remember? The answer is that sin has affected the memory.

f. The body is dying

And of course, sin has affected even our bodies. After sin entered the world, God said to Adam, "*By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return*" (Genesis 3:19).

Sin affects every part of every person born into the world. The mind, the affections, the will, the conscience, the memory, and the body have all been corrupted. We are sinners because we sin. But it is also true that we sin because, by nature, we are sinners. Sin is in us. It inhabits us. It is woven into every part of our being.

Imagine that you are flying solo in an airplane. About an hour into your flight, you receive a message over the radio. The mechanics had not finished work on your plane, and you are alarmed to discover that the instruments in front of you are not reliable. Struggling to maintain your composure, you radio back to the air-traffic controller, "Do you mean to say that all of my instruments are giving me wrong readings?" "Oh no," he says calmly. "*Some of your instruments will be right some of the time.*"

You stare at the mass of dials in front of you and your head begins to spin. How are you supposed to know when the faulty instruments are right and when they are wrong? This isn't some theoretical exercise. Your life depends on it!

We need a fixed point of reference to know where our thoughts and feelings are in line with God's will and where they are not. That is why God has given us the Scriptures and this is why Christians are called to live not by our inclination, but by God's revelation.

Here are the six effects of sin. The mind is darkened, the affections are distorted, the will is disabled, the conscience is disoriented, the memory is defective, and the body is dying. This is a hard Bible truth, but grasping this hard truth will bring great benefits in your life and I want you to see seven benefits of grasping the biblical doctrine of sin.

2. Seven Benefits of Grasping the Doctrine of Sin

Grasping the doctrine of sin will...

a. Expand your understanding of salvation

Some Christians have the idea that Jesus opened a way of salvation, and now it is up to us to decide if we will walk through the door He has opened. But if Jesus had only made salvation possible, if He'd only opened a door, how many people who are dead in trespasses and sin do you think would go through it? The answer is none of us! Dead people don't go through open doors!

The good news is that God has done more than make salvation possible. He's done more for you than make it possible for you to be saved. He saved you! That's the language of the Bible. "*...when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit*" (Titus 3:4-5).

God does more than make salvation possible. God saves!

Grasping the doctrine of sin will...

b. Deepen experience of worship

This truth has given me a new level of gratitude, and it will do the same for you. *Lord, why did you save me?* Have you ever asked that question? Why did God save you? There will be other people in your family and in your circle of friends, people with similar background and experience. And today you are in Christ and they are not. Why is that?

You will never be able to explain why God should have shown mercy to you, drawn you to faith in Jesus and given you new life in Christ. To all eternity you will be lost in wonder, love and praise.

Grasping the doctrine of sin will...

c. Increase your motivation in prayer and evangelism

You may be asking, "Where does that leave the person who does not believe?" I have found this truth to be a marvelous motivation for prayer and evangelism. Here's why. God saves. He saves through the gospel and the gospel has been trusted to us. Since God saves through the gospel, we have every reason to share the gospel. We must share the gospel wherever we have opportunity, because God saves through the gospel. I expect you have someone in your life who you love, and you long for them to come to faith, but they show absolutely no interest in Jesus Christ whatsoever. Maybe it's been like this for years. And if it was down to their will, you wouldn't have any hope for them, because you know what their will is already. They have no desire for the things of God. They've made this perfectly clear.

But God is free to take the initiative. He is free to intercept a person who has no interest in

being saved and change that person's life. That's what happened to Saul of Tarsus. Saul had absolutely no interest in being a Christian. He hated Christians. He hated the Lord Jesus Christ. If God waited for Saul of Tarsus to respond to the gospel, he would never have been saved.

But Jesus Christ reached into his life. He laid hold of him by the scruff of the neck and turned him around. Saul came to faith in Jesus, his mind was opened, his affections were changed, his conscience was activated, and his heart was filled with a new desire to live a new and different life. His whole life was transformed.

If God is free to step into the life of a sinner, there's hope for the friend or loved one you are praying for. When you pray, you can say, "Lord, You don't need his permission to start a saving work in his life! Lord, work in the heart of my son, my daughter, my brother, my sister, my mother, my father, my friend. Open their blind eyes, soften their hard heart, give them new desires."

Do you see how this motivates prayer? God is free. I like to put it this way: God has free will! God is in heaven, and He can do whatever He chooses. That's the greatest motivation to pray for unconverted friends and loved ones. And it's the greatest motivation for sharing the gospel.

Grasping the doctrine of sin will...

d. Strengthen your understanding of the gospel

Sin is much more than wrong things we do, and wrong choices we make. Sin is a power and a presence, as well as an offense. This is why, in Romans 1:16, Paul describes the Gospel as, "*the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*"

The spiritual condition of every person born into the world is that we are blind, and bound, and dead. So, we need more than forgiveness. We need an infusion of life. We need a spiritual restoration and that is what God gives us in the gospel.

Grasping the doctrine of sin will...

e. Expand your understanding of conversion

What happened when you came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Someone might say, 'I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and God forgave my sins.' That's wonderfully true, but there's so much more. You were dead in your trespasses and sins, and God made you alive in Jesus Christ.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:4–5)

God has begun a transforming work in you in which He has opened your blind eyes and redirected your affections so that you truly love Him and desire to obey Him. God is recalibrating your conscience, as He teaches you through His Word. He is cleansing your memory. He is renewing your soul and one day He will resurrect your body!

Grasping the doctrine of sin will...

f. Moderate your expectations of the Church

Always remember that Christians are sinners in a process of recovery. Sin has debilitating effects on the soul, and these are not put right instantly. We are all sinners in the process of recovery. We are all at different stages in that process, and only in heaven will our recovery be complete.

So, expect that you will experience disappointments from other Christians in your journey. There will be things that make you say, “How’s that possible? He’s a Christian! I can’t make sense of this!” Contradictions in the lives of Christian believers are genuinely distressing. But, understanding that we are all sinners in the process of recovery will help.

Grasping the doctrine of sin will...

e. Deepen your compassion for the lost

Imagine for a moment that you are responsible for parking at the Super Bowl. The cars are jammed in, bumper to bumper. When the game ends, your job is to clear the parking lot as quickly and as safely as possible. Your strategy is simple. As soon as the drivers in the first row of a section arrive at their cars, you begin moving them out so that others parked behind them can follow.

After the game, a flood of people make their way to the parking lot. You notice three drivers, seated in their cars in the front row of a section so you raise your flag and wave them forward. Nothing happens. You blow the whistle. You point to them and wave your flag again, but still nothing happens.

You go over to the first car, and bang on the windshield: “Get moving!” you say. The driver rolls down the window. “I don’t know what happened,” he says, “But when I got into my car, everything went dark. I can’t see. I’m blind!”

There’s nothing you can do about that. So you start flagging the person at the front of the next row. But he doesn’t move either. You go over and he shouts to you through his window: “I don’t know what’s happened. When I got into the car, someone was hiding in the back. They’ve slapped handcuffs on me. I can’t get free. I’m bound!”

There’s nothing you can do about that, so you move to the next row and see that the driver of that car is slumped over the steering wheel. He’s not breathing. He’s dead. Imagine the scene. Hundreds of cars are all backed up. People are standing on the back of pickup trucks, and they are shouting. Others are blaring their horns. Everyone is angry, but you have compassion because you know the problem. One person is blind, one person is bound, and one person is dead.

That is the effect of sin in human nature. By nature, we are blind, and bound, and dead. There is a certain kind of Christianity that is always angry with the world. It’s always shouting. But when you understand that by nature sinners are blind, and bound, and dead, you will have compassion. You will learn to pray, and you will have confidence in sharing the gospel because you know that God saves, and He does it through the gospel.

This session on the human problem is important because only when we understand the heart of the human problem will we be able to grasp the wonder of what God has done in Christ to save us.

Having looked at how we were ruined by sin, our next three sessions are: Regeneration by the Spirit, Justified by Faith, and Propitiation and Redemption.

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