

The Nature of Sin

The Good Samaritan

In this message, we're going to consider the story of *The Good Samaritan* and what it tells us about the nature of sin.

We begin in **verse 25** of **Luke chapter 10**, when a legal expert tried to put Jesus on the spot!

'Teacher', he asked. 'What must I do to *inherit* eternal life?'

Now how was Christ going to answer this? After all, what a man *inherits* is his by *right* – it *belongs* to him. And in this context, *eternal life* is the reward and the goal of a perfect life on earth.

So Jesus gives the only possible answer to the way the question was worded.

He asks the legal expert what is written in the Law.

The man's answer is given in **verse 27**:

'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 replied. "Do this and you will live."

So then, if we want to *inherit* eternal life, the standard we must attain to is *perfect love* to God and Man. Jesus couldn't have answered the question any other way.

In **Romans 2:7**, the apostle Paul words the answer a little differently. He says this:

‘To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life’

So it’s quite clear! We *can* inherit eternal life – we *can* claim eternal life as our right -provided that we meet the criteria.

The problem for mankind is that this standard of doing good, which involves perfect love to God and to man, is not only unreachable by human beings, but we can’t even really understand it.

We think that *righteousness*, so-called, is simply *not* breaking the law; not hurting other people; not polluting one’s mind or body. If we do this, surely this will be good enough for God!

But God’s view of righteousness is very different.

Righteousness, or *rightness* before God, is man being all that he was created to be.

To be righteous is to be totally dependent upon God – totally obedient to God. It describes a man who glorifies God with every action he performs. Who loves both God and fellow-man completely. And if we think of those words in **Romans 2:7**

To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life,

we find that, for a fallen human being, all of this is quite literally out of the question. The very next chapter in **Romans, verses 10-12**, gives us the grim reality of the human condition:

**There is no one righteous, not even one;
There is no one who understands No
one who seeks God.
All have turned away,
They have together become worthless
There is no one who does good, Not
even one.**

In order to see sin in its proper perspective, look for a moment at the life of the only sinless man who ever lived – and let's see how *we* compare. The apostle Paul said that Jesus Christ **knew no sin**, Peter said he ***did no sin*** and John said that ***in Him is no sin***. Hebrews describes him as: ***holy and separate from sinners***.

So what made the Lord Jesus Christ sinless? What made his life perfect? Simply this! He lived his life as God had originally intended man to live – to glorify God. His whole existence was characterized by complete dependence on God, total obedience to God, and absolute love for God and for others. Listen to what Christ says about his own life:

John 5:19: ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his father doing because whatever the Father does, the Son also does.’

John 6:38 ‘For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me’

John 8:28 ‘I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me I always do what pleases Him!’

Christ never did what *he* wanted to do as man – He only and always did *God’s* will. His whole life – every waking moment – was devoted to God! His every thought, every word and every action were given over to pleasing God, and not himself. Every thought was one of absolute love for both God and man.

Everything that is *short* of this, or *different* from this, is what the Bible characterizes as *sin*.

So it seems that only a fool – or a Pharisee, could dream of *inheriting* eternal life.

The only *real* question is this:

Has God provided a way by which men who are *not* perfect – but *sinful* – can be saved and receive eternal life? And the answer to this question is hidden in the parable the Lord tells in order to silence the nit-picking of the legal expert.

Luke 10: 30-35

‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of 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 him, 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 on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two

silver coins 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.”

In this parable, the robbers speak to us of sin. Sin ruins us, and leaves us spiritually and morally lost, helpless and dying. In the story, the man lies there, bruised and bleeding. Unless someone comes along and helps him, he’s going to die!

And this is a description of each one of us in our sins. Jesus said in **John 8:24**, ‘I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will die in your sins.’ In **Ezekiel 18:20** we read that: **The soul who sins is the one who will die.** **Romans 6:23**: **The wages of sin is death....**

Do you want to know how God views the damage the robbers of sin have done to us?

He says in **Isaiah 1:6**: **From the soul of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness – only wounds and welts and open sores.**

Doesn’t this sound very much like the poor traveler in the story Jesus told?

But no doubt many people would be offended by this! Surely there are many good, kind and decent people around. Why would God judge us so harshly!

The problem here is that we don’t really understand what sin is in *God’s* eyes. *We* can only judge sin by outward actions. And we have our *fixed ideas* about what actions are *sinful* and what *aren’t*.

On the lowest level – we see sin as the equivalent to crime (robbery; murder etc). In some sections of society, this crime can be very specific things. In a Godfather setting for example, the only real sin is stealing from the mob or ratting on other criminals.

At a higher level, sin is regarded as equivalent to vice, drunkenness, deceitfulness, selfishness, impurity, or sexual immorality. Things that are not necessarily illegal but are what we call ‘immoral’.

On a still higher level we sometimes see sin as blasphemy or godlessness.

And the very highest level, for some people, is betraying of one’s country – in other words - treason. Dante’s Inferno portrays the traitor as the greatest sinner, with Judas, the betrayer of the ultimate human being, languishing in the ultimate dungeon of Hell!

But all these perceptions are flawed! These things are sinful, of course – but what we fail to realize is that in God’s eyes, the most upright, moral and religious man can be the worst sinner on earth!

Does this sound hard to believe? Well, as I said before, most of us don’t really even understand what the problem *is*. And this is because we can’t read the real nature of the human heart. We can only judge people by their words and actions.

This, however, is not the case with God. With God, the truest test of a man is not his conduct - but his character. Not what a man *does* but what he *is*! The Bible says in **1 Samuel 16:7 that **man looks on the outward appearance but God looks upon the heart**. What we regard as important and impressive in human nature, is abomination in the sight of God. He looks upon the heart – and what He sees there isn’t pretty. According to **Jeremiah 17:9**, **The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure!****

And so this is the crux of the problem! Overt acts of violence, disloyalty, selfishness, greed, lust and so on, are not the crime - but *evidence* of the crime. It's the *heart* that's desperately wicked!

By why *are* our hearts so deceitful? Why can't we *help* sinning? Why is it *impossible* for us to inherit eternal life?

To answer this, we need to understand what really happened when man fell in the garden of Eden. God said to Adam and Eve in relation to the forbidden fruit in **Genesis 2:18**, '**When you eat of it, you will surely die**'.. And so they did! Not physically - straight away - but spiritually. They became separated from God, the source of all life.

The fall was a spiritual one – not a moral one – at least not in the beginning. Man died! His whole nature became estranged from God – and this is what's wrong with us today: we've inherited Adam's sinful nature! The Bible says in **Romans 5:12**, **Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.**

This is the reason we don't seek after God. This is the reason why a person's instinct is to ridicule Christ and to dismiss him as being of no relevance.

We can see how sin has warped our nature when we consider the definition that the Bible gives of sin in **1 John 3:4**. There it says that: *sin is lawlessness*.

Now *lawlessness* doesn't simply mean *breaking the law*. It doesn't mean that law is absent! It describes a *revolt against law*. . In a word – the essence of sin is *self-will*!

The Bible describes the sinful mind in Romans 8:7. It says that it is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

But this is where we become confused. We fail to realize that although the human heart doesn't submit to *God* - or isn't *capable* of doing so - this doesn't necessarily mean that we're immoral or depraved in our actions. Even though the Bible says in Romans 8:8 that: **those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God**, a person can still lead a clean, honest and honorable life. What the human mind does is to create its own law – and this can produce what we would call a *decent* and *upright* life!

The word 'cannot' – the real inability of man – refers to the *spiritual* area– not the legal or the moral. Because of the fall in Eden, man's nature is now like a warped window pane. It distorts God's truth just like a flawed window pane distorts light that falls on it. Romans 1:25 says that men have exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

Look at the theory of Evolution as an example. In spite of the evidence of a Designer in creation, even intelligent, brilliant men persist in excluding God from the equation.

Jesus said to the Pharisees on one occasion – “**because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.**” (John 8:45). Notice that! He didn't say: “In spite of the fact that I tell you the truth” but: *‘Because I tell the truth, you do not believe me’*”.

Man is capable of the most firm and unswerving faith in the world, in science, in himself and even in the devil. What he *can't* do is to believe *God*. He rejects the truth purely and simply because it's *God's* truth! That's what the fall in the Garden of Eden did to the nature of man!

And so, separated by sin from God, who the Bible says is the source of all life, each one of us is like that traveler: our natures distorted and depraved by sin, lying bruised and bleeding by the side of the road.

Now the parable goes on. The first person who comes along is a priest.

v.31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

The priest in the Lord's parable represents the *religious* life. Surely being religious – for us: going to church, reading our Bible - even praying earnestly, will qualify us for eternal life! But the awful reality becomes clear - religion could do nothing for the man! The priest passed by on the other side!

Religion says that a man must observe the right rituals: go to church; give a tithe; pray regularly; join in with church activities. But many people have gone to church all their lives, and still haven't accepted Christ. These people are just as lost and just as condemned as if they had never set foot in a Church! Although outwardly respectable, they're as much under God's judgment as the most loathsome of sinners.

Religion and the church can do nothing for the sinner, They can't mend the warping in our nature. They can't remove the wrongness – the depravity – from our nature. The man was left lying and dying on the road. - and the priest couldn't help!

Next a Levite comes along. Now the Levites were one of the tribes of Israel who looked after the Tabernacle: the tent of God in the wilderness. They were associated with the law given to the children of Israel – known as the Levitical law.

So – just as the Priest represents religion, the Levite represents the law. But in our story, it says that he also passed by on the other side. He

couldn't do anything for the man either! As with religion, keeping the law and living a good life, can do nothing for a ruined, dying sinner.

In **Galatians 2:21**, it says this: for if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

Galatians 2:16 says that: A man is not justified by observing the law.

In fact, all the law can do, is to highlight the fact that we are sinners, we've broken the law and that our situation is desperate. **Romans 3:20** tells us that: no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin.

So being religious and living a good life can't save us! The Priest and the Levite couldn't save the man. The sinner needs a Saviour and so a Samaritan is brought onto the scene.

But who *is* the Good Samaritan?

Well the first thing we learn from Scripture is that the Samaritans were a hated race. The Bible says that : 'The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.'

What had happened was this. The Assyrians had defeated the Northern kingdom of Israel and intermarried with them. The Samaritans were the mongrel offspring of the two races. They'd settled in Northern Palestine by the end of the 8th Century B.C. and practised a mixture (what we call a *syncretism*) of Judaism and heathen idolatry. A Jew would only accept help from that quarter as a last resort.

And this is why the Good Samaritan is such an effective picture of the Lord Jesus Christ? He too, according to **Isaiah 53:3**, was despised and

forsaken of men. **John 1:11** tells us that: **He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ was hated by men., rejected and despised. He came knocking at the door of the world he had created and found it slammed shut in his face. He had turned away from it to wander as an outcast in this world, followed only by a faithful few.

This is what sin does to us. We cannot receive God's truth. And the world rejected Christ. As we saw before: The sinful mind is hostile to God.

And so nothing but a sense of utter hopelessness and helplessness, will lead a sinner to throw himself at the feet of Christ. We have to see ourselves as bleeding, bruised and broken – like the man in the parable.

But surely then it's reasonable for a person to say: "If I'm a fallen sinner, then I can't help sinning" –and that's true! But in **Romans 1:20, the Word of God still declares that men are '**without excuse**'. But why? Surely God can't expect me to do anything but my best to be a good person. Why judge me for something I have no control over?**

And these protests would be valid but for the fact that the kind of life we live is really quite irrelevant: the greatest sin of all is not the breaking of any law!

Let's take the case of Saul of Tarsus, later known as the apostle Paul:

If we didn't have the Scriptural record, we might well have refused to believe that a human being lived a life as good as Paul's. As far as religion and the law were concerned, he was probably second only to the Lord Jesus Christ in his piousness and conduct.

In **Acts 23:1**, it says that Paul: looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, ‘**My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.**’

And with reference to his past life, he says in **Philippians 3:4-6**, ‘**If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the Church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.**’

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Yet this same man, in **1 Tim.1:15**, called himself: ‘**...the worst of sinners.**’

Was this piety? Was it false humility?

People like you and I would call Paul a quintessential saint – yet in God’s view, he was a quintessential sinner!

Why?? For one very important reason! Paul recognized that privilege increases responsibility and deepens guilt. For all his zeal for God and his fancied godliness, Paul had awoken to find he was a blasphemer. He had rejected Christ – the Son of God himself.

However good and pious his life, he was living by his own agenda. Jesus had said in **John 14:6**, that: ‘**I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes unto the father except through me.**’ And yet Paul, in spite of his great learning, had not only rejected Christ, but had persecuted him through his persecution of the Church, the Body of Christ on earth. Although sincere, he was sincerely wrong! He may have lived a more perfect life than you or I are capable of – but he was on his way to hell – in his own words, *the worst sinner of all*. Because until that fateful meeting with Christ on the road to Damascus, he was hostile to the only source of

eternal life – life which is found in Christ alone. **John 3: 36** says this: **Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.**

In fact, the reason life is only found in Christ is not because the Lord wants to be the only one dispensing eternal life – it’s because he himself *is* eternal life. The first epistle of John – in the first chapter - describes him as: **the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us’.** (**1 John 1:2**)

. It’s not a matter of morality, of good living or of religion. Rejecting *Christ* is the greatest sin because it’s rejecting the only source of life and calling God a liar. So, in the fifth chapter, John goes on to say - in **verses 10-12:**

Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe in the Son of God has made him out to be a liar because he has not believed the testimony God has given about His Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Paul, under the influence of his environment and natural inclination, took to religion as another man might take to vice. Religion was his specialty and the result was a splendid success. He really did ‘do his best’ and his *best* was a ‘record’ achievement. But even there he was doing what *he* wanted to do. It wasn’t what *God* wanted him to do.

And so, as we’ve said before: this was the essence of Paul’s sin? He didn’t *believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ. He *persecuted* Christ. Like the expert in the law who tried to *inherit* eternal life - Paul was also a man in revolt against the law of God.

And not only this, but Paul further realized that he was the worst of sinners because his unrivalled proficiency in religion had raised him to the highest pinnacle of privilege and responsibility, and thus proved him to be the wickedest and the worst of men.

Paul's case illustrates the principle of Divine Judgment as proclaimed by the Lord Himself. The most terrible doom recorded in Old Testament History was that which engulfed the cities of the plain – Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet the Lord declared that an even worse doom awaited the cities which had been especially favored by his presence and ministry on earth. Cities such as Capernaum where the Lord grew up.

Now the sin of Sodom, we know. But what had Capernaum done? Religion flourished there. There was no suggestion of evil practices. It was, by human standards, a model community.

Yet Christ said in [Matthew 11:23-24](#),

'If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you'

So what had Capernaum done? As far as we know – nothing!! If there'd been flagrant immorality, the Lord wouldn't have made his home there. If there'd been aggressive unbelief in the city, the 'mighty works' which he performed would have been restrained. As far as we can ascertain, Capernaum was thoroughly respectable and religious.

But [verse 20](#) gives us the answer - they were denounced **because they did not repent.**

The fact that such people should have been judged guiltier than Sodom, the fact that the most religious and faultless man of his own age should rank as the worst sinner of any age – are both insoluble mysteries if we ignore fall in the garden of Eden – and the teaching of Scripture as to the essential character of sin.

The ultimate sin doesn't lie in being a sinner, because the Fall in the Garden warped our nature – making us incapable of pleasing God or doing good in God's eyes. The ultimate sin, committed by Paul, by Capernaum and by the expert in the law, is that of rejecting Christ!

John 3:19-20 gives us the bottom line. It says this: **This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.**

But it's not just that we can't see the light. It's not just that we don't recognize the truth. The fact is that we're blind. The sinfulness of our natures has made us incapable of obeying God or of pleasing God in any way!

John 1:10 says of Christ: **He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.'**

A blind man doesn't see things in a wrong light: he can't see them at all! And man, by nature, is spiritually blind. He cannot *see* the Kingdom of God' - much less enter it! His nature is warped by sin and he must be born again – as the Bible says. He must be given new life!

Jesus puts it this way when speaking to Nicodemus in **John chapter 3**: **'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.'**

So it comes down to this: we need to be born again! It's not a matter of improvement in our nature: it's a matter of a new nature altogether! If sin were merely a matter of wrong-doing - if it wasn't "in the blood" - if our very nature wasn't spiritually corrupt and depraved by it, then a new birth would be unnecessary!

But Christ said to Nicodemus in [John 3:3](#): 'No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'

So it's not a question of improvement in human nature. And this is especially urgent because sin not only depraves the sinner, it brings him under judgment. It leaves us dying on the roadside! There's guilt attached to it. It attracts the wrath of a Holy God. The Bible says in [Hebrews 9:27](#) that:man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.

Make no mistake about it! Without salvation, each one of us is standing right now on the brink of hell – separated from a lost eternity only by the beating of our hearts.

[2 Thessalonians 1:8](#) says this: He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Sin must be paid for and the Bible says in [Romans 6:23](#): ...the wages of sin is death. Salvation therefore must be through redemption and redemption can only be by blood: by death taking place.

I can only receive life if God judges me as having already paid for my sins. The Bible calls it being right with God – or righteous. But for me, this would mean an eternity in Hell! No opportunity to be born again with a new nature and eternal life!

I can therefore only receive life by someone else dying in my place – as my *representative!*

The Good Samaritan came to the beaten traveler, bound up his wounds, poured in oil and wine, put him on his donkey and took him to an inn.

The Bible says that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. The Son of God went to the Cross bearing my sin and there He died for me! My sin has been paid for and the Bible says that now I can be forgiven – and eternal life can be mine.

But not inherited!! Not worked for or deserved! We've seen that a fallen nature has made that impossible. So because we can't put anything towards it, we must receive it as a free gift from God – a gift made possible because Christ died on the Cross for our sins.

Romans 6:23, The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

This gift is received when we receive Christ - because he *is* eternal life!

Have your sins been forgiven? Have you been born again? Have you received Christ?

And receiving Christ means that you believe on him. Accept him for who he claims to be. Believe that He is the Son of God who left Heaven and came down to this earth to die for your sins on the cross. Believe that He

was buried and that He rose again from the dead on the third day. And believe that he's alive today – and that he is Lord.

Acknowledge your brokenness. Acknowledge that you are a lost, guilty sinner. Believe that he died for you and ask him to be your Saviour right now!

John 1: 12 says this: **To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.**

A free gift has to be accepted. The new birth has to be accepted as a free gift. Believing in who Christ is and what Christ has done is the way you accept the gift.

In Acts 2:21, Peter said: 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

May God bless His word to each one of us!