



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

SIN IS A BIG DEAL

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Introduction

1. "An old Chinese proverb declares, 'There are two good men – one is dead and the other is not yet born.'"¹
2. That shows that Christians are not the only ones who have noticed humanity's universal sin problem, as elaborated by Paul in Romans 1:18-3:20.
 - a. He moves from all humanity (1:18), to all who had not been given special revelation (1:19-32), to the "righteous person" including the Jew (2:1-16), then explicitly to the Jews who were so confident in their identity as a separated people (2:17-3:8).
 - b. He then summarized with proof from multiple OT texts (3:9-20).
3. We need to remember that sin controls (we are "under sin" - 3:9) and that Christian people can develop the same sort of self confidence in having the Bible and being relatively better than others as was displayed by the Jews whom Paul addressed. Why is sin such a problem?

BODY

- I. Sin's nature demands that we have help to overcome it.
 - A. The fundamental idea of sin (ἁμαρτία, *hamartia*) is similar in Hebrew and Greek.
 1. The word's basic meaning is "to miss the mark."
 - a) See Judges 20:16, where a form of the word is used of "700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and *not miss*."
 - b) In classical Greek, the term refers to failure to reach a particular goal, to miss a target, a road, a purpose, and so on.
 2. OT words for sin involved the ideas of failure, irregularity, or crookedness.
 - a) "In the old Israelite view of life, good actions are normal and must produce good results. Sinful actions are abnormal, preying on the positive forces of life. The righteous soul is upright; the sinful soul is crooked."²
 - b) In other words, man was less than he was supposed to be.

¹ Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 341.

² Kenneth Grayston, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1950), 227.

3. In classical Greek, ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*) conveyed the idea of a negative failure; NT writers expanded it to include positive transgression.
- B. These ideas come together in Paul's summary statement in Romans 3:23.
 1. The glory of God (which we are to share in Christ - 2 Cor. 3:18; [on "image" see also Col. 1:15]) is the starting point for understanding sin's nature and importance.
 2. Even the most diligent performer of good deeds must face the fact that he fails to measure up to the standard that is God.³
 - a) Often, our desires and actions overwhelm our intentions.
 - b) We also face the problem of technically *doing* the right thing, but from a *motive* that is not what it should be
 3. This raises the important question of who we *are* and whether we do good because we have taken on God's nature and *become* different people.
 4. Matthew 5:3-12, 17-48 illustrates the point and helps us learn why sin is such a force.
- II. Understanding sin's nature prepares us for humble submission in faith.
 - A. When we understand sin, we also understand how powerless we are against it, as Paul illustrates in Romans 7:14-24.
 - B. Fortunately, Paul knew the solution: humbly admitting the problem and submission to Jesus (Rom. 7:25-8:8).
 1. Jesus the Lord delivers from the slavery to and punishment of sin (7:25-8:3).
 2. The result is a restoration to the state we abandoned and are created for (8:4).
 3. But, this in no way violates our freedom, for, having been blessed with a clean slate, there must be a willingness to submit to God's way (8:5-8, esp. v. 7's use of ὑποτάσσω [*hypotassō*]; see also Lk. 2:51; Rom. 13:1; Eph. 1:22).
 - C. This idea of continual submission is what Paul intends to stress in his review of how they had been given new life (Rom. 6:1-11, esp. vv. 1-2).

Conclusion

1. Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, who saw evil as many have not, wrote: "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"⁴
2. Repenting of adultery and murder, David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:10). Thankfully, Jesus makes that possible. Will you submit?

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³ To illustrate Rom. 3:23, consider the story of two men who were fleeing the lava from a volcano's unexpected eruption. They found themselves cut off, needing to jump over a stream of hot lava about thirty feet across. One of the men was old, the other healthy and young. Both took a running start and tried to leap to safety. The younger man, with greater speed and strength, was able to jump much farther. However, he too fell short and perished. (Green, 331).

⁴ Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), in Green, 103.